

## Editorial Preface

*Like a snake, who bites its own tail, we shall sun ourselves in the warmth of what is to come.*

—K.S.

### Background

We are in the midst of a great reawakening—a reawakening the likes of which have not been seen since the height of the Germanic Revivals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the close of this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we bear witness to the power of the resurgent atavism that is Heathenry. With each passing year the pre-Christian religion of our Teutonic forefathers is strengthened and vivified by increases in the quantity and quality of Heathen folk, organizations and publications. From the initial phases of the revival to the current day, Heathenry has been the subject of dozens of periodicals. From the turn of the century with *Das Deutsche Buch* of the Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft or Guido von List's *Iduna* all the way to the gambit of contemporary magazines and journals, periodicals have served as nodes in the continuum of Heathen thought—focal points through which Heathen minds have sought to develop the ways we think about our religion and its place in the modern world.

Like all organisms, this journal has a genealogy, and it is from the origins of an entity that insight into its nature and the initial trajectory of its life-course can best be gained. Unlike most publications within the Heathen community, our journal springs not from an organization, but—like the journal from which ours drew its initial inspiration—from an idea. Although many of our contributors do belong to large Heathen groups such as the Odinic Rite or Ásatrú Folk Assembly, this journal is not an official organ or reflection of any of these. At its core, our publication is a response to the critiques leveled at the current state of Heathen thought in the journal *TYR: Myth—Culture—Tradition*. Although not specifically a Heathen publication,<sup>1</sup> *TYR*'s focus on Radical Traditionalism overlaps in quite a few instances with Heathenry. In its second volume, Stephen McNallen wrote that we are besieged by a “lack of philosophical depth.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to note that

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1 “*TYR* was never intended to be an 'Ásatrú' or 'Odinist' publication,” (Joshua Buckley and Michael Moynihan. “Editorial Preface.” *TYR: Myth—Culture—Tradition* 2 [2003-2004]: 9-10).

2 Stephen A. McNallen. “Three Decades of the Ásatrú Revival in America.” *TYR* 2: 217.

it is an error to think that we can simply pick up where we left off a thousand years ago. The Christian interregnum must be addressed using the intellectual tools that have developed in the intervening time—and this means examining our beliefs and expressing them in intellectually compelling ways.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, in volume three, Collin Cleary ventured that what Heathenry “seems to desperately need...is something like a theology...that would address...basic philosophical questions.”<sup>4</sup> And it is thus that *The Journal of Contemporary Heathen Thought* begins as a journal of profound discontent. We begin as a publication which is ultimately *untimely*—in that our focus is neither to recreate that which was, nor to propagate that which is, but rather to strive towards the actualization of that which is to come. What we seek to do is take steps towards rectifying the vast gap that separates the depth and sophistication of contemporary Heathen thought from that of the world's major religions. What is currently absent is the kind of systematic, multi-disciplinary, academic treatment that comprises Religious Studies.<sup>5</sup> What we lack, in other words, is a distinct discipline that could be called Heathen Studies.

## **Mission**

What then would this type of treatment of Heathenry entail? What disciplines and methodologies does the journal seek to promote? In what way is our mission distinct from those of other Heathen publications? To be sure, there are many books, dissertations and essays that have been written about the historical Heathenry by academics both within and without the Heathen community. Indeed, this branch of the Religious Studies tree seems to be practically *the only one* that has received the appropriate amount of attention! It is for that reason that this journal is decidedly not interested in gathering essays from researchers working within that sub-discipline. There are more than enough dedicated outlets that exist in connection with the Scandinavian Studies departments of various universities that the inclusion of such material here would be redundant. Within the other divisions of Religious Studies, however, the field is more or less wide open.

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3 Ibid., 218.

4 Collin Cleary. “Paganism Without Gods.” *TYR* 3 (2007-2008): 429.

5 The discipline of Religious Studies can be defined as the academic study of religion as informed by the methodologies of fields of study such as Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology, etc. The point of departure from Theology lies in the perspective from which the research is carried out. Religious Studies is generally carried out from an external, belief-neutral position, whereas theological work is done from within that religion's paradigm.

Excepting treatments of the following subjects *as historical phenomena* (relegating such works, ultimately, to the History of Religion), the remaining subdivisions of Religious Studies as it pertains to Heathenry are all but untapped. The explanation for this dearth may lie in a phenomenological concept that appears to be unique to Neopaganism: unverified (or unverifiable) personal gnosis (UPG). If this term is unfamiliar to those who have studied philosophy or religion in an academic setting, there is a good reason for it. UPG is an idea unique to reconstructionist streams of Neopaganism. As it is not a part of any formal terminology, there is no standard definition, but the general meaning refers to any knowledge (*gnosis*) gained from sources other than archaeological investigation and textual exegesis.<sup>6</sup> While it seems to have been originally formulated to act as a bulwark against the inclusion of personal theophanies in religious canon—a function it has performed quite well—it has also had the side-effect of stifling forays into any non-exegetically grounded thought from reaching print or gaining widespread acceptance.

Now, this is not to say that we intend on publishing the type of material that the UPG concept *specifically* is designed to inhibit; what we *are* interested in are the ideas that have been *incidentally* obfuscated as a result of the prominence of the UPG construct. What this means specifically is that we seek to encourage the development and assist in the promulgation of rational inquiry into Heathenry as expressed in the domains of Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, and other disciplines generally included under the umbrella of Religious Studies.

One point should be immediately clarified, lest potential contributors be put off by the seeming academic specialization of the aforementioned disciplines. The Psychology of Religion, for example, is *not* Psychology proper, and is not a topic that is generally covered by psychologists. Religious Studies in general, and the coming Heathen Studies, is not a domain restricted to professionals in specified fields of study; it is within the grasp of any thoughtful, educated—formally or otherwise—individual with a thorough understanding of Heathenry who is willing to engage in penetrating research on a specific topic. At this time there are no universities or professors who teach Heathen Studies as there are with many other large religions; that means it is up to us as Heathens to develop this on our own. We cannot wait for it to be formulated by outsiders, but must spearhead this with the tenacity and erudition the subject deserves.

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6 Exegesis, the critical examination and analysis of an historical—particularly religious—text, often utilizing linguistic and archaeological data.

That being said, what manners of questions, one might ask, would be pertinent to Heathenry in this field? As so little has been published outside of works on the History of Heathenry, mythographical studies and introductory expositions, there are a plethora of possible topics for consideration. Within Anthropology of Religion and its related sub-fields, we have the ethnobotanical works of Christian Räscher<sup>7</sup> and Stephen Flowers' semiotic work on the Runes,<sup>8</sup> but not much else. What do we make of Ludwig Feuerbach and Émile Durkheim's theories on religion as a societal projection, or Max Müller and Ernst Cassirer's ideas about the linguistic roots of myth? Contributions tackling such questions are exactly the kind of material we hope to receive for our future volumes.

In Sociology of Religion we have a myriad of texts that amount to historical studies of the subject,<sup>9</sup> but what of Heathen societies today? Mattias Gardell's study, *Gods of the Blood*, is perhaps the first full-scale sociological text on Heathenry, but is geared towards the sensationalism of fringe elements and the politics of certain Heathen groups. What of the rest? How do our ideas of the *innangarð* and *útangarð* relate to Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities? What sociological comparisons can be drawn between us and extant polytheistic cultures? In Psychology of Religion the field is even more open, with no major published texts. How do we respond to the theories of religion put forth by evolutionary psychologists such as John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, or to the critiques of authoritarianism leveled by the Frankfurt School? What do we think of Richard Dawkins' memetic explanation of the transmission of religious ideas?

Works in Philosophy of Religion and Theology are similarly scarce. Alain de Benoist's *On Being a Pagan* and Collin Cleary's works on phenomenology<sup>10</sup> and Hegelianism<sup>11</sup> are excellent starting points, but, given the breadth of these two fields, this is not even the tip of the iceberg. We have articulated *what* our ethical platform is, but have failed to provide a philosophically coherent explanation of *why* it is so; are our ethics grounded in relativism, deontology, constructivism or

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7 *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Ethnopharmacology and Its Applications*. (South Paris, ME: Park Street Press, 2005).

8 Stephen E. Flowers. "A Semiotic Theory of Rune Magic." *Studia Germanica*, vol. I (Smithville, TX: Rûna-Raven, 2000), 9-27.

9 Georges Dumézil's trifunctional hypothesis of early Indo-European cultures being a prime example.

10 "Knowing the Gods" (*TYR* 1 [2002]: 23-40) and "Summoning the Gods: The Phenomenology of Divine Presence" (*TYR* 2: 25-64).

11 "Philosophical Notes on the Runes," parts one and two in vols. 21 and 22 of *Rûna Magazine*.

something else? We have Anthony Winterbourne<sup>12</sup> and Paul Bauschatz's<sup>13</sup> works on temporality, but Bauschatz fails to articulate his ideas in the vocabulary of contemporary philosophy and Winterbourne is an avowed Kantian; what of Martin Heidegger's, Alfred North Whitehead's or even John McTaggart's ontologies<sup>14</sup> of time—might they be appropriate for Heathen Philosophy? What manner of hermeneutics<sup>15</sup> might rightfully be applied to our primary sources? What modes of epistemology<sup>16</sup> explain our knowledge of the Gods? All of these and *so many more* are the kinds of questions that this journal is interested in answering. The doors of inquiry are already open—we need only to enter.

## Submissions

Regarding guidelines for submissions, there are several points that bear mention. First, we would like to emphasize that, in spite of the seeming scholasticism of the above outline of Religious Studies as it applies to Heathenry, we are not solely interested in soliciting essays and dissertations of an academic nature. The Heathen community is not comprised entirely of scholars, and nor is Heathen thought uniformly scholastic in nature. Within Heathendom and within the pages of this journal there is ample room for short essays, poems and art whose function is neither didactic nor dialectic, but is meant to inspire, provoke and enthuse. Secondly, we seek to collect review essays of material pertinent to the journal's mission and interviews with prominent Heathens. Thirdly, beginning with volume two, we hope for the journal to host a “letters” section, where comments and constructive critiques of the journal's form and content can be aired. It is our hope that some of the more philosophically oriented pieces presented in the journal will elicit formal response essays of comparable depth and quality to the original work—thus allowing the journal to function as something similar to an online discussion forum, albeit in a more rigorous and penetrating manner.

It is worth mentioning that more than a few of the authors featured in this volume have spent the last few years debating the ideas at the core of their respective works on various internet discussion forums. Thus, in the interest of furthering the very mode of discourse responsible for some of the journal's central themes,

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12 *When the Norns Have Spoken: Time and Fate in Germanic Paganism*. (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2004).

13 *The Well and the Tree: World and Time in Early Germanic Culture*. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

14 Ontology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of being.

15 Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation—particularly as applied to religious texts.

16 Epistemology, the philosophical study of the nature and limits of knowledge.

we are pleased to host an online forum<sup>17</sup> wherein similar dialectic idea building may occur. Being a journal of ideas, it ought also be noted that *The Journal of Contemporary Heathen Thought* is not an ideological journal. There is no litmus test that submissions must pass in order to be considered for publication. Any well researched and articulated essay that falls within the domains discussed above will be given due consideration regardless of the particular ideas in question or the association of the individual contributor (or lack thereof) with any Heathen organizations. The journal is also apolitical and will not be pushing *any* political agenda. We recognize that one's political outlook is oftentimes just as central to one's *Weltanschauung* as is religion, but submissions that overtly politicize their topics will not be recommended by the review panel for publication.

With all of this in mind, if you are a thinker, poet or artist that would like to join us and submit material for consideration, please contact the staff. We are accepting essays, dissertations, poems, artwork, reviews and interviews on a continual basis. Inquiries regarding the suitability of a topic can be addressed via email or our internet discussion forum. If our work resonates with you, please, join us. *Wæs þu hæl!*

—The Editors  
Spring, 2010

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17 Accessible with registration at: <http://www.heathenjournal.com/forum/>