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Mémoire de Master 1

Département d'Études du Monde Anglophone

The Representation of Paganism in Modern Anglo-Saxon Popular Culture:

- Paganism in Movies and TV Series -

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<u>CONTENTS</u>

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Introduction

What is Paganism?

The word "paganism" comes from the Latin "paganus" meaning "country dweller". The Oxford dictionaries website defines paganism as "*a religion other than one of the main world religions, specifically a non-Christian or pre-Christian religion*" and also a "*modern religious movement incorporating beliefs or practices from outside the main world religions, especially nature worship*". In *Modern paganism in world cultures: comparative perspectives*, Michael F.Strmiska notes that " *modern dictionaries of the English language typically define Pagan with any or all of the following terms: "pantheist," "polytheist," "non-Christian," "non-Jew," "nonMuslim," "nonreligious person," "nonbeliever," "atheist," "hedonist," and "heathen.*" (p.13) and that most of the definitions are rather "*negative or pejorative*". The reason for this, according to him, can be found in "*earlier periods of religious wars and persecution in European history*", where one's life was at the mercy of the religious leaders at the time (p.14). This influence lived on until our contemporary time where the definition betrays the historical events which have surrounded it. "Paganism" is very much to be understood in relation to any of the religions of the Book, in the Bible for example, "pagan" is a synonym for idolator and it is quite an issue for the monotheist believers. Strmiska reminds the reader that Moses is said to have commanded the slaughter of 3,000 Hebrews who refused to forsake the cult of the Golden Calf, which he notes to be akin to cults from the "Near Eastern peoples" who were polytheists (p.14).

Let us just for a moment reflect upon what seems to be a distinction between "paganism" and "neopaganism". The stance I take here will be the same as the one taken by Strmiska, in the sense that in the book, he points out that there was this request from pagan believers "*not be classified as "Neo," which they see as derogatory and unnecessary. More than one Pagan believer interviewed for this book noted that modern Christians or Muslims are not called Neo-Christians or Neo-Muslims, despite demonstrable differences between the forms of Christianity or Islam practiced today and those of centuries past: why then, they asked, should Paganism be subjected to such labeling?"*(p.9). Thus, as a sign of respect, the term used will be "Paganism" for either period I might be dealing with.

Even though a vast majority of our societies are now officially evangelized with most of them being secular to some degree, paganism was never really gone. It has survived in popular culture through folklore stories and also in the various artistic domains such as literature, paintings or carvings for example. Furthermore, some rites and deities have survived by being assimilated with Judeo-Christian traditions. For example, some gods were turned into saints such as the goddess Brigid who became Saint Brigid. Interestingly, in English, all the days of the week are named after a Norse god, except for Saturday, named after the Roman god Saturn and Sunday, named after a pagan Roman holiday[1].

Also, many pagan figures have been used to dignify ideas and also used as models for allegories of countries such as Lady Britannia for Great Britain whom we can consider to have been very much modeled after the goddess Athena, with her shield and spear. We can also mention France's Marianne or even America's Lady Liberty who was modeled after the roman goddess Libertas and which is very pagan-heavy in terms of symbolism (The toga, the crown reminiscent to that of the god Helios for example). Nevertheless, even though some of the classical deities have been used to illustrate a set of values, they have been deprived of

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[1]http://www.pantheon.org/miscellaneous/origin_days.html

their religious aspects and godly essence, since they are no longer worshipped as deities and they are now merely only a source of inspiration to materialize secular ideas and values.

In a more contemporary setting, there is a general revival of the spirituality and religion in themselves. For example, Michel F.Strmiska notes that "*modern paganism is among the fastest growing religions in the USA[2]*" and in the British Isles, the most recent census showed that there is a growing number of people identifying as pagans, or any other alternate terms[3]. I will deal with this more in detail in the point about the influence of the cultural context in the representation of paganism. Now we could wonder if it is linked to the secularization of societies which leads to a more liberal view and behavior? A decline of the Judeo-Christian religions? Maybe it is all those phenomena which make paganism appealing for some of the contemporary and modern spirituality-seeking people. Indeed, some people might still feel the need for some spiritual connection but without the constraints of the monotheistic dogma-based faiths and this may be one of the reasons they tend to adopt a modernized version of those alternate faiths, practices and spiritualities which are more friendly in regards to timely issues concerning gender equality, sexual orientation or even our relationship with the environment.

This revival is arguably reflected in movies and TV series which feature paganism to some degree. But mentioning them without digging further in the way paganism is shown would not be enough because the way paganism is depicted influences the way the general audience think about that particular belief system. One can wonder if it is the general audience's and the filmmakers' general knowledge about paganism which influences the way it is depicted or if it is the obvious revival of paganism which influences their view about it.

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[2] Michael F.Strmiska, *Modern paganism in world cultures: comparative perspectives*, p10
[3] From Wikipedia's page on Neo-paganism in the UK: The overall numbers of people reporting Pagan or one of the other categories rose between 2001 and 2011. In 2001 about seven people per 10,000 UK respondents identified as pagan; in 2011 the number (based on the England and Wales population) was 14.3 people per 10,000 respondents

There is some veil of mystery around paganism which seems to fascinate. Nevertheless the general audience and filmmakers might be influenced by the existing stereotypes about paganism, due to a world in which the Judeo-Christian monotheism is largely dominating and thus participate in propagating, transforming or evolving these stereotypes and eventually one might wonder to what extent the representation of paganism is true to its actual reality.

In my research and through various observations, I realized that generally paganism is misrepresented, as Nicolas Bonnal wrote in his book *Le Paganisme au Cinéma*, paganism is, among other things, either "*a despised or neglected spirituality, demonized or ignored*"[4]. There is also a tendency to limit how it is represented in one way or the other when it comes to movies and TV series. For example, to some extent, we can argue that the representation of paganism is limited in terms of the genres in which it is featured. Why does it matter? I think it matters because of the cultural impact these genres are responsible for and this influences the way the audience sees paganism, the same way they do for many other issues such as the representation of people of colors, sexual minorities or gender equality. Nevertheless, I noticed there are various degrees of treatment when it comes to paganism in regards to where the movies or TV series come from, and in regards to the period in which they are released. Why so? This might be explained by the cultural context in which these movies and TV series are made and the actual status of pagan religions. I have observed that paganism is also limited in the narrative, with for example a tendency to isolate paganism in relation to the "open world". Furthermore, there is also a tendency to mostly apply negative stereotypes on it, which results in sometimes quite a negative representation onscreen. Indeed, this may affect to some extent the way the pagan figures and traditions are depicted, represented, which I will deal with in detail with relevant examples taken from both the cinematic universe and TV series.

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[4] personal translation from an extract page 13 from his book, *Le Paganisme au Cinéma, 2015*.

First I will develop the idea that paganism is restrained by focusing on the narrative representation of paganism and what kind of limitations are being applied to it, then I will deal with how the genres also do limit the representation of paganism. This will finally allow me to expose the influence of the cultural context on the representation of paganism, especially in popular culture with movies and TV series.

I. Paganism Restrained

The existence of paganism in popular culture is indeed acknowledged as we can see it featured in many movies and TV series. It is either featured as a whole or sometimes there are only aspects of it. What I observed is that there is a sense of timelessness when it comes to paganism. Indeed, it is often depicted as a practice which has never disappeared, but this timelessness is contrasted by isolation. This isolation is often illustrated by the remoteness of the place where it is practiced. Most of the time the range of the mystical influences of paganism does not exceed the boundaries of an island, a town or some pocket dimension and nature often has a predominant role as it serves as barrier which shields the pagan world from the outside world.

Paganism limited by natural boundaries

One of the most famous examples of paganism limited within the boundaries of an island is the movie *The Wicker Man.* To illustrate this, I will make a detailed analysis of the narrative tools used to limit and isolate paganism. I will deal with both versions of the movie since paganism seems to be tackled in a different way by the British filmmakers and the Americans. The movie is set in Scotland where a policeman, Sergeant Neil Howie, is lured into getting on an island where people still practice Celtic paganism. The people there needs a willing victim to be sacrificed so that their society might thrive again like before. This is the reason why they set a strategy to have the policeman visit the island.

The Wicker Man, Directed by Robin Hardy, British Lion Films, 1973 (UK)

The movie begins with some introductory credits that cut to a wooden carving of the face of some supposedly pagan deity which is being zoomed in at This is cut by an inter-title that sets the first scene of the movie in which we can see the protagonist, Police Sergeant Neil Howie singing a religious Christian song and then giving a speech in a Church. That scene supposedly happens in the regular Christian-dominated world but it is cut to a fade with other credits that are super-imposed on a scene of a plane taking off, with some folkloric music in the background which sets the tone of the rest of the movie yet to come. The folkloric music really contrasts with the music from the Church, and this sets up the cultural shock between Howie and the pagans he has yet to meet. Indeed, that plane is flying towards an Island which is ruled by some Lord Summerisle and inhabited by pagan people.

The remoteness of the island is implied by many shots showing vast places of water and uninhabited rocky islands before arriving to the main island the hugeness of which is shown thanks to large shots of mountains that makes the plane ridiculously small.

It is also important to notice that there seems to be some intended focus on the mountains that serve as a sort of barrier or rampart behind which the protagonist finds the first clues of civilization. The mountains in themselves are common in pagan lore since they are believed to be the home of the gods or at least a place where the mystical energies gather. The perspective is from the protagonist but there are also shots from an outer perspective that allows the viewer to see the setting.

We switch from a sky view on the island to that of a view from the ground, with low angle shots from a place that we, later on, understand to be a part of Lord Summerisle's place.

The emphasis on nature is shown through a succession of shots of the mountains first, and then the crops and finally some trees in blossom. This contrasts with previous shots where there was only water and green rocky uninhabited islands. The plane flies above some houses and finally lands on the water and we get a shot of the plane's tail that focuses on the "police" branding that is cut to a shot on a flag with the sun on it. On the foreground of that shot, we can see a blurred branch of a tree in blossom with the mountain in the background dominating the scene. All these elements give the impression that the protagonist arrived in some kind of alternate reality, with the remoteness of the main island suggested by the editing and the use of nature as a barrier which shields it from the outside world. The trip from the main world towards the pagans' island could remind us of a sort of initiatory travel, an *Odyssey* with a tragic twist, since in this story, the gods are not with the hero. Indeed, this protagonist's own protecting deity, the mighty Judeo-Christian god, seems to have no dominion over the pagan land upon which he sets foot. This is clearly shown when the officer prays to his god while being sacrificed among several animals in a giant burning wicker man. The difference also resides on the fact that in the *Odyssey*, the trip happens in the open world, whereas here, the protagonist's trip leads him from an open world into a secluded world in which he finds himself out of his comfort zone and lured into a culture that he cannot understand.

The Wicker Man, Directed by Neil Labute, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2006. (US)

In the 2006 American version, the opening sequence is longer and starts with shots of a very dry land that lead to the inside of a diner's with the protagonist. The development is also different but it is not the subject that needs to be dealt with here. The means for travelling up to the island is different as he takes the ferry first and then needs to take a plane. There seems to be less emphasis on nature because there are only 4 brief shots of the landscape here. Indeed, the first one is a long shot on a vast water body which surrounds some forest-covered and supposedly uninhabited islands. The second one is a view from the policeman which is suggested by a precedent shot of him looking out of the plane's window. That shot is interesting because the plane is slightly above the cumulus clouds beyond which we can see small islands. This shot is faded into a low angle shot on the policeman who gazes down, this shot again is faded to a shot on the ground where we can see hills separated by a fog. We understand that the plane is tilting down and that the characters are nearing their destination. The final shot of this series shows the plane from behind as it prepares for water-landing and we see a small island which seems to be linked to the main one by a narrow path of sand.

What is interesting here is that it is not the shots of the landscape that really suggest the remoteness of the island, but it's more implied by the use of the clouds which serve as a sort of barrier. Earlier in the movie, a colleague of his tells him that there is no means for communication on the island and this also adds to the remoteness of the place. Nevertheless, there is much less emphasis in the editing compared to the original version of the movie.
Indeed, in the original movie, the huge body water and the mountains serve as ramparts which shield the island from the outside world and in the remake, it's more ethereal since it is the clouds that seem to shield the island from the outside world which adds more mystery to the islands.

In spite of these differences, the pagan island is still remote, cut from the outside world in a way that isolates the outsider who is forced to live by the rules which hold the pagan society together. This isolation of the pagan world from the outside world could be seen as a testimony that, for at least a non-negligible part of the real world population, it is acceptable to stage paganism in a movie but only if it is restrained within its own boundaries. It's all the more obvious when it is featured in a horror movie, especially this one which performed moderately well in the box office at the time and was well received by the critics. It is still reviewed in a positive way by a large majority of our contemporary critics[5].

Man-made boundaries

Wake Wood, Directed by David Keating, Hammer Film Productions, 2011.

The range of the pagan mystical influence is sometimes also limited within the boundaries of a town, which is the case in the movie *Wake Wood.* In this movie, the daughter of the protagonists gets killed by a dog and shortly, after the parents move to Wake Wood to start a new life. They witness a pagan ceremony there, which allows the dead to come back to life for three days for a last goodbye, given that the death does not exceed one year and on the condition that the dead does not go beyond the boundaries of the town. The grieving couple is offered to participate in the ritual so that they can bring their daughter back to life; which they accept but they break the rules imposed by the locals.

They try to flee the town without regards to the warnings, thinking they would keep their daughter alive back to the outside world, but as soon as they drive past the town limit, their daughter's wounds start bleeding again and they eventually have to drive back into Wake Wood. The theme of transgression is really present in the movie and it adds to the restrained

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[5]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wicker_Man_(1973_film)#Reception:
The Wicker man currently holds a 90% "Fresh rating" at the Rotten Tomato website, reflecting the amount of positive reviews from critics, both from professional and everyday people.

aspect of paganism. Indeed, bringing back to life dead people is a transgression of the natural process and laws that seem not to apply fully in Wake Wood. And this resurrection is only temporary and can only happen when some criteria are met and for instance the death should not exceed one year, the temporary resurrected body shall stay within the limits of the town and the ritual requires the body of a recently deceased person.

Yet, another level of transgression is reached when the couple do not respect all the rules that surround the ritual of temporary resurrection. They first pay for the transgression in their attempt to flee the town thinking they could live the rest of their life with their daughter and the second transgression is the fact that they lied about the duration of their daughter's death which in fact exceeded a year. The price for these transgressions is really high, because Alice's humanity is gone and she is filled with violence and lust for blood which leads her to kill animals and finally to slaughter the villagers. This forces her mother to trick the little girl into reaching out of the town limits so that she would be out of its mystical influence so she can be killed back again. It is also important to note here that nature is omnipresent. The opening sequence consists of flashbacks intertwined in shots of the in-universe ongoing present of the protagonists getting to Wake Wood which allows the viewer to understand why they left their life in town to that of a peaceful village. Nature is more and more present as they leave their town to get to the village. A master shot of the village lets us know that it is very remote, with a vast forest which surrounds it.

These two examples of movies show how the effects of paganism are limited in their representation in terms of space which gives the impression that, indeed, the existence of paganism is acknowledged but it has to be restrained within geographical boundaries. It cannot be mixed with the outside world, supposedly dominated by the monotheistic faiths and

anyway, the laws that exist in the pagan world do not apply and do not work outside of it and vice and versa. Nevertheless, this limitation in terms of space does not affect time as the pagan population seems to be on the same level of technology with the presence of electricity, cars, boats etc...

Conclusion

The limitations in terms of space do affect the means for communication and in doing so isolate the outsiders who find themselves out of their comfort zone and in an unfamiliar environment. This is quite true in the case of the *Wicker Man* as the protagonist has no means to contact the outside world due to the absence of signal for his cell phone. This gives the impression that the pagan world, even though restrained within its boundaries, still has the last word when it comes to its survival. The reason for this is that the pagan world is as civilized as the outside world but it chooses what kind of limits it imposes on the influences from the outside. Thus, it is as if the pagans lived in their own pocket dimension with rites and customs which are almost impossible to understand from the perspective of an outsider, especially if one is from the actual dominant faith who views paganism as something evil, which is the case in the original *Wicker Man* movie.

These two movies serve as examples as to how paganism is limited in movies , as previously mentioned, it exists in the movies' own universe but its influence on the world is limited in terms of space. This limitation can still be found in modern contemporary movies, such as *Maleficent*, where the realm of the fairies and all the supernatural creatures, *The Moors*, is isolated by natural boundaries, with gigantic mountains and luxuriant forests. Even in some TV series such as *Once Upon A Time*, the supernatural world in which paganism is heavily

featured is limited within the boundaries of a town isolated from the outside world, *Story Brook*, which serves as a sort of nexus which leads to another world where all the fairy tales and myths coexist.

We could conclude this by saying that there really seems to be some tendency to try and isolate paganism one way or the other as if it were not allowed to coexist in the regular world and modern society. It is either as isolation to protect it from the outside world (in the case of *Maleficent*, *Once Upon a time*) or to keep its influences, which are shown to be mostly evil, at bay away from the outside world (in the case of the *Wicker man* movie). This is symptomatic of the way paganism is seen in the real world, with centuries of bad naming from the monotheist religious authorities and sometimes mockery from a portion of the secular world which reduces paganism to an element of fantasy or even just myths without regards of its actual status as a genuine religion.

The limitations in the representation of paganism are not only illustrated by creative and narrative choices in-universe. Indeed, we can apply the limitations of paganism to the cinematic genres and then reflect on how it is dealt with, because it is either tackled as such or sometimes some aspects are over exaggerate, and these aspects happen to be most of the time negative. Nevertheless I will also show that there is some evolution especially when we compare the depictions of paganism in the cinematic universe as opposed to TV series.

II. Paganism's representation dependent on the cinematic or TV series genres

The representation of paganism in popular culture is mostly defined by the genres in which it is featured, especially in movies and TV series which are medias with the widest range of audience. Paganism treated as such cannot be found in just any genres and it is first important to note a distinction between what we recognize as pure paganism featured as such and pagan themes or aspects of it used in the movies or TV series which might not be named as such. Many pagan elements can be found in contemporary movies and TV series, revolving mainly around the following genres: Fantasy, Sci-fi, Horror and Super-hero movies. But to a much lesser extent and in some of the most recent series which do not belong to the previously mentioned genres, mentions of paganism as a genuine and accepted practice can be found too. I shall start by dealing with movies and TV series in which paganism is featured but not named as such and then I will go on with the ones in which it is featured as such and highlight their characteristics.

Paganism namelessly featured

- The Fantasy genre:

Let us, for example, take a look at the Fantasy genre, since in terms of box office and TV ratings, a vast majority of the movies and TV series of that genre have performed quite well, thus guaranteeing a wide range of audience. To illustrate this, let us take a very well known example, the whole *Lord of the Rings* franchise and its spin-offs with the *Hobbit* franchise. Tolkien's universe is already a syncretism of various mythologies, with a pagano-christian

cosmogony. I will touch upon the syncretism of paganism and monotheism later on. Among the fantasy creatures we can find in those movies, the Elves are the most pagan of them all. Originally, elves are lesser gods of nature and fertility of the Celtic and Norse mythologies, nevertheless they have been reduced to being just another race of being, and even though they are superior to humans in terms of longevity and abilities, they no longer have their godly essence as they have in the pagan lore. We could see the original elves as the Norse and Celtic versions [6] of the Greek Nymphs who are also lesser deities of nature and fertility. Dwarves are also another type of pagan creatures taken form Norse mythologies, heavily featured in the franchise and they are very popular in other fantasy movies and TV series (*Once Upon a Time, Snow White and the Huntsman, Charmed)...* and also in video games such as *World of Warcraft* being one of the most popular.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia* franchise, we can see again another case of pagano-christian syncretism in which there are various creatures from Greek myths, with Fauns, nymphs, sirens, etc... but they all seem to be the subjects of the lion Aslan that most of critics found to be a representation for Jesus. In this case, the pagan creatures are subordinate to a Christian allegory in the character of Aslan, the lion, thus diminishing the importance of these pagan elements but without necessarily bad naming paganism. This statement can be backed by this quote from Wikipedia's page about "*Religion in The Chronicles of Narnia*", taken from *The Latin Letters of C. S. Lewis: C. S. Lewis and Don Giovanni Calabria,* which points out that

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[6] The idea that elves are akin to nymphs can be illustrated with linguistic explanations, as for example elves "are most often attested in Old English glosses which translate Latin words for nymphs" (Wikipedia) thus showing that for the scholars of the time, nymphs and elves were the same types of supernatural creatures; furthermore a semantic diagram of words for sentient beings in Old Norse, made by Alaric Hall, clearly shows that elves are akin to the Aesir, who is a type of god in Norse Mythology. Alaric Hall puts both the elves and the Aesir under the same title of "otherworldly beings"(*The Meaning of Elf and Elves in Medieval Engand*, a Phd Thesis by A. Hall, Chapter 2, p 41, Oct 2004) thus reinforcing the idea that an elf is indeed a type of deity the same way nymphs are a type of deity in the ancient Greek lore. From a historical perspective, both these cultures are Indo-european which is a concept which comes from the Kurgan Hypothesis formulated by Marija Gimbutas (A Lithuanian-American Archeologist) in the 1950's, so it is only natural that we find similarities and analogies between the various supernatural and spiritual beings from various indo-european cultures.

"Lewis himself believed that pagan mythology could act as a preparation for Christianity, both in history and in the imaginative life of an individual, and even suggested that modern man was in such a lamentable state that perhaps it was necessary "first to make people good pagans, and after that to make them Christians". Nevertheless, it is not so much about the rejection of paganism, but it is more about paganism being a gateway to adopting Christianity, and thus, paganism is not shown as a bad belief system. Nevertheless it can still somehow be seen as something inferior to Christianity. In the movie adaptation of the books, there is not any mention of "paganism" as such, as the supernatural creatures 'existence, some of which are heavily inspired by Greek and Celtic Mythologies, are taken for granted and there are no theological debate. We could argue that once again, pagan elements are used in order to serve a narrative agenda and thus, it somehow undermines the essence of what paganism really is.

There is another franchise which uses a lot of pagan elements without naming it as such, it is the *Harry Potter* saga, without diving too much into details, I will say that this franchise participates heavily in perpetuating two of the most popular stereotypes about paganism, magic and witchcraft. There are also lots of creatures taken from the pagan lore as well with the Phoenix, Pegasus-like creatures, sirens, etc... What is interesting about the *Harry Potter* case, is that it has raised some concerns from some Christian groups who believed it was the work of the Devil since it features magic and witchcraft. It is important to keep in mind that the *Harry Potter* movie franchise is adapted from a series of books written by a British woman, J.K Rowling, and in Great Britain, pagan religions such as Wicca and Celtic reconstructionism are common practices recognized by the state as official religions. I will come back to this further down in the point about the cultural context and the status of pagan religions in both the British Isles and the United States.

While being extremely popular, we could argue that the fantasy genre, even though featuring paganism in a neutral and sometimes even a rather positive way, does not really do justice to

it in the sense that it limits paganism in its representation. Indeed, the fantasy genre can feature paganism to some extent but it is reduced to its supernatural aspect and thus it is not really shown a genuine thing in the movie's actual world, even though fictional and can even misrepresent some of the pagan elements for the sake of story-telling.

- The Science-Fiction genre:

In some sci-fi movies, we can find traces of pagan elements, without being called so. Let us take a look at James Cameron's *Avatar* movie featuring an extra-terrestrial race, the Na'avi. In that movie, which also has elements of the fantasy genre, the Gaia theory served as the basis for the environment and the general mechanism which allows the planet to work as it does. Indeed, the Na'avi people worship a being they call Eiwa, who is the planet in itself with whom they can commune with by plugging themselves into a tree which roots connect with the planet. The general consensus in the movie is that all lives are linked and dependent on one another and that all living creatures and plants are children of Eiwa, who is just an analogy of Gaia, the primordial Earth Mother from Greek mythology. It's a pantheistic view of the world but in the shape of a female deity, a deity which is embodied physically in a planet. It is not a deity out of the world, the way the Judeo-Christian god is but a deity which is the planet in itself so inside the world..

Yet, I recognized the Gaia Theory because I already knew about it before seeing the movie, and it is not something the general audience might know out of the blue if they are not interested in the matter. The Gaia Theory is a hypothesis formulated by the chemist James Lovelock and co-developed by the microbiologist Lyn Margulis in the 1970's. They defend

the idea that "*organisms[7] interact with their inorganic surroundings on Earth to form a synergistic self-regulating, complex system that helps to maintain and perpetuate the conditions for life on the planet. Topics of interest include how the biosphere and the evolution of life forms affect the stability of global temperature, ocean salinity, oxygen in the atmosphere, the maintenance of a hydrosphere of liquid water and other environmental variables that affect the habitability of Earth*". In short, the planet would be a giant self-regulating organism. Of course, after being ignored, this theory has met some huge resistance and even mockery in the scientific world, but it is not the topic here. However, what concerns our topic is that this still limits the representation of this aspect of paganism, since only a portion of the viewers can recognize it.

Nicolas Bonnal has a very harsh position when it comes to post-modern paganism in the media, and he especially took the example of the movie *Avatar* to show the limits of such a representation. He says that "*Avatar has nothing to do with paganism or cinema, it certainly is a junk room where anyone can recognize anything, from the emerald forest, to the Bible or the Yggdrasil tree of the Germans or the Hindu gods. Let us not forget about the ecologic, anti-racist and anti-white message with an anti-imperialist flavor to it (one knows how little it has changed since then)[8]*". Indeed, on one hand this movie could be seen as a junk room where anyone can find things which are relatable for them, but on the other as a media, vulgarizing paganism might be a good way for the general audience to accept it as a genuine and common thing. It is also the role of art to make some issues accessible to the common people. Art can be used to teach, but only as long as its teaching remains accurate and that it does not betray the essence for the sake of story-telling, which, in the case of paganism, can distort its very essence. He also says something which is quite useful for this point, it is that

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[7] From Wikipedia's page on The Gaia Hypothesis: for a simpler explanation and since this is not a paper about chemistry and biology, I took the Wikipedia's vulgarized definition of the Gaia Hypothesis.
[8] Personal translation from page 142-143 from his book "*Le paganisme au Cinéma, 2015*".

even though pagan elements are used, it is "*no longer named as such*"(*Le Paganisme au Cinéma, p.143*)*.* This is quite problematic for the representation of paganism, because naming things gives them reality and so not naming them tends to keep them in the dark, as a thing which is almost impossible to understand and hardly recognizable as such.

-The Super-hero genre:

There is also a particular movie and TV series genre which features some pagan elements and it also a very popular genre at the moment, with billions of dollar at the box office, it is the super-hero genre. Indeed, this genre adapts stories from comic books in which the majority of super-heroes could be seen as reinterpretations of the ancient gods and heroes, and there are two main companies which rival one another, Marvel and DC Comics. There are also major differences in the way they handle the supernatural and mythological aspects. For example, Thor in the comics is shown as an actual god whereas in the movie adaptation, his divinity is downplayed and so is that of his whole race. Indeed, the Asgardians are just a superior and more technological advanced race, and all the magical aspect is downplayed in favor of the technological aspect. Even the character of Thor is somehow reduced to being just an almost stereotypical Viking and his godliness is being mocked by the very American and Christian Captain America[9]. Furthermore Loki, the trickster god, is being humbled by the mortal Hulk who effortlessly defeats him and we have an obvious quote from Odin himself who says that the Asgardians are not gods.

In this case, the pagan elements are reduced and deprived of their essence for the sake of story-telling and in order to make the characters more "grounded".

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[9] In the Avengers movie (2012), Captain America replies to Black Widow who warns him that Loki and Thor are basically gods by saying that "*There is only one god mam, and I'm pretty sure he doesn't dress like that*"

Things are a bit different with DC Comics, since they tend to stay close to the source material, and sometimes go further, for example with the movie *Catwoman*, the protagonist gets her powers from the goddess Bastet, through a gathering of cats which channel her powers into the character of Patience Philips, played by Halle Berry, who then has abilities beyond that of humans, but she also somehow loses part of her humanity. In this case, pagan elements are used, but reduced to the occult aspect and deprive the protagonist of a part of her human essence in favor of a more animalistic aspect. Nevertheless, there is also a very well known character, Wonder Woman, who is heavily influenced by Greek Mythology, and is even herself a product of a god, Zeus, and the Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta. It is important here to consider Greek Mythology on the same level as the mythology of the Bible. There are no reasons to consider one more serious than the other. She has made her first cinematic entrance in the *Batman V Superman* movie, in which she has a mystery role, but the producer Charles Roven confirmed they would go for the daughter of Zeus origin, thus ensuring some high level of representation of an aspect of paganism. Indeed, her race, the Amazons, is a creation of the Olympian gods and they still worship them. With Wonder Woman being half an Olympian goddess, it can only bring more awareness to an aspect of paganism with such a well known and popular character, who is getting a solo movie to be released on June 2 2017.

The movie *Hancock* also features super-heroes heavily inspired by deities, in the sense that Hancock, played by Will Smith is hinted to be Zeus and his ex-wife Mary played by Charlize Theron, is hinted to be Hera.

The super-hero genre can be tricky in terms of representation of minorities, since there needs to be a detailed analysis of how these minorities are being portrayed before making any judgments, which is not the topic of this paper, but it is interesting in our reflection about the representation of paganism. Indeed it is a very popular genre which performs successfully in the box office, and thus it participates in the spreading of stereotypes. This also naturally

influences people's view about any kind of issues those movies deal with. Nevertheless, there can be some hope regarding the representation of paganism (along with other minorities), especially with the DC Comics company and the Warner Bros. studio which owns it. Indeed the filmmakers and especially Zack Snyder have expressed their will to stay really close to the source material out of respect for the fans and the essence of the characters, and thus this will ensure a better and maybe more accurate representation of paganism, with at least the character of Wonder Woman, who is extremely popular due to everything she represents, but she is not the topic here.

As a conclusion, we could wonder if the fact that paganism is namelessly featured is a good or a bad thing in terms of representation. On one hand, not necessarily naming it as such would make it appear as something which existence is granted and commonly accepted, but it can also limit its representation as a portion of the audience might not recognize what elements are taken from paganism and they might stick to the already existing and mostly negative stereotypes about it which are commonly attributed to paganism. On the other hand, as Jacques Lacan wrote "*C'est par la nomination que l'homme fait subsister les objets dans une certaine consistance[10]*", and thus not naming paganism as such might deny it from its existence over the long term.

Let us see now how this compares to the genres, and to some extent the types of media in which paganism is featured as such.

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[10] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre II, Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse, Seuil, p.202*

- The Horror Genre:

The first two movies I have reflected upon earlier do feature paganism heavily, but they do also belong to a cinematic genre which does not really help in improving the negative stereotypes about it: horror movies. Indeed, most of the time and in the common people's mind, there is a veil of mystery about paganism and sometimes it is associated with evil.

This is the case for the *Wicker Man* in which the pagans need to sacrifice a human for their civilization to thrive, and to a lesser extent, it is also the case for the *Wake Wood* movie, even if the pagans are not evil in this one, quite the contrary but the general atmosphere of these movies is not really flattering for paganism. *The Exorcist* movie franchise features paganism in a bad way in contrast to Christianity. Indeed, it is an Assyrian-Babylonian god, Pazuzu, who is portrayed as an evil demon possessing a child. *In Exorcist: The beginning* and its alternate version *Dominion: a prequel to the Exorcist* , there is a mention of a pagan temple dedicated to Pazuzu upon which a Christian Church was built in order to seal the Evil away. In the pagan temple, there is a statue of Pazuzu and clues that human sacrifices were made to honor him.

This sense of horror can also be found in some long lasting TV series, especially in *Supernatural* which is already at its 11th season. It has featured pagan gods and creatures regularly, but most of the time, these pagan gods have something monstrous about them, they need to kill and consume human flesh in order to sustain their powers. A pagan god has also appeared in the *American Horror Story show,* in the character of "Papa Legba" from the Voodoo tradition, he made the character Marie Laveau immortal but the price is terrible. She had to give up her first born to the voodoo god. Voodoo in itself is a religion which is already

surrounded by lots of stereotypes and shows like this one, which are very popular, really help in perpetuating those stereotypes which again, are most of the time quite negative.

- The Science-fiction genre in TV series:

There seems to be a difference in the way Science-fiction depicts paganism in the cinema as opposed to the way it is depicted in TV-Series. For example, let us take *Stargate SG-1* (granted, it was originally a movie, *Stargate*, which spawned the TV series) and *BattleStar Galactica*, which feature it in a different way. In the *Stargate* universe, the gods are revealed to be aliens inhabiting human bodies, granting them exceptional abilities, but they are mostly evil and it falls in line of the "ancient aliens" theory, which defends the idea that all the gods that humanity ever worshiped are just aliens visiting us, to make us evolve into something better. And in that case, the alien-gods just want to subjugate the humans for their needs.

So this takes away all the seriousness and spirituality of the actual pagan religions, something which can be found in *Battle Star Galactica*, where the humans are all polytheists, divided in twelve colonies worshiping Greek Gods. What is interesting is that the humans have created a race of cyborgs called the Cylons, who rebelled against their creators and who are monotheists, something which starts spreading even to the humans. Nevertheless, it can be argued that, indeed, paganism is allowed to be shown as an actual and respectable practice, but only within the boundaries of a genre, here, sci-fi, and it can also be argued that paganism is just only a tool to tell a story and that at the end of the day, it is the judeo-Christian elements which prevail since the twelve colonies simply represent the twelve apostles of the Mormon Church and the cradle of humanity, Kobol, is just an anagram of Kolob which is the closest star to God in the Mormon writings of the book of Abraham.

-The Peplum genre:

One cannot reflect on paganism in the movies and TV series without talking a little bit about the peplum genre, especially when there are remakes, with for example the very successful British-American movie *Clash Of the Titans* directed by Desmond Davis and produced by Ray Harryhausen and Charles H.Schneer. Indeed this movie features the Greek gods as quite benevolent beings, which is not really the case in the all American remake directed by Louis Deterrier in 2010 where the gods are essentially shown as petty creatures and with a very American authority-defiant hero. These gods are also very Christianized in the sense that there is a real dichotomy between Olympus and the Underworld, with Hades shown as a Satan-like being, which is not the case in the mythology and not even in the ancient Greek religion in itself. The problem with peplum and the representation of paganism is that it stages a world in which paganism exists but it is a world which temporally is far away from us, it is an era which no longer exists and the audience cannot really relate to it. It is a desynchronized representation of paganism and the remakes sometimes denature it for the sake of story-telling and audience identification. For instance, in the Deterrier remake, the themes and plot are mostly centered around the male characters, almost entirely downplaying the female ones. Indeed, the female deities have no more than one line and they do not bring much to the plot. This loss in the essence of paganism in some of the modern day peplums such as *Clash of the Titans* or even *Troy* has also been noticed by Nicolas Bonnal who talks of an "*American falsification*" when it comes to paganism in the American Cinema[11]. Even though we may not completely agree with all of his statements regarding post-modern paganism in popular culture, we could share his harsh position about what he calls "*American falsification*" when it comes to paganism.

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[11] *Le Paganisme au Cinéma, p53.*

Conclusion and afterthoughts

Nicolas Bonnal makes a distinction between cinema with "*pagan connotations*" which can be applied to the Western cultures as opposed to cinema with "*pagan intentions*" which would be applied to cultures like Japan or Russia[12]. So, the movies and TV series produced in our Western cultures have pagan connotations to them, meaning that there are supposedly no real intentions of portraying paganism for what it is since it is mostly only a narrative tool. We could agree with many of his statements in his book, *Le Paganisme au Cinéma*, but he has quite an elitist view on paganism which somehow can, in a way, contradict the essence of paganism which needs to be accessible to be understood. It seems to choose to dwell only on some aspects of it, completely ignoring the cultural context which might have a huge influence on the representation of paganism in popular culture. It is what I am trying to do in my humble endeavor, attempting to understand why paganism is represented the way it is and trying to link the said representation to the actual status of the pagan religions in the real world.

It is safe to say that there really are some limitations to how paganism is represented on many levels, with for example the fact that it is not dealt the same way regarding the cinematic genres, where it is prominently featured as such in horror movies where as only parts of it are featured in other genres but without mentions of it as "pagan".

Nevertheless, there seems to be a tendency for improvement, as in some series, there are mentions of pagan religions, with for example in *Orange is the new black*, in season 1 episode 5 *"The Chickening",* the character of Pennsatucky, a Christian believer, complains to Chaplain Royce because she is not allowed to put a huge cross she made herself on the wall saying:

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[12] *Le Paganisme au Cinéma, p.13*

- Pennsatucky : You know what? You're treating everybody here better than me. Even those witch ladies.

- Chaplain Royce: Also not true.

Pennsatucky: Not, it is true. You let...You take them for walks and you...

- Chaplain Royce: As I would take you if your faith required communion with nature.

Also, in season 3 episode 1 *"Mother's day",* the character of Gina Murphy is shown leading a group of Wiccan worshippers performing a ceremony under the full moon. They are not explicitly named as Wiccan, but as witches, which is not a derogatory term since it is an aspect of the Wiccan religion. Indeed there are enough hints to ensure that the audience would recognize this practice as being Wiccan. There is the mention of communion with nature and the gathering of worshippers in circle under a full moon. The fact that it is shown as a genuine and normal practice, on the same level as any other religions, is a positive representation of paganism and there are no sign of demonizing it or the practitioners. Even the character of Gina Murphy is not shown as being any worse than the other inmates, which strengthens the positive or at least neutral representation of paganism. This is interesting, because it reflects a reality in which this pagan branch really is considered as an actual religion.

In another recent TV series, *Grace and Frankie*, the character of Frankie, a hippy, is also shown to be a pagan-friendly woman, since she mentions praying to several deities and especially Frigg, a Norse goddess, and every now and then she calls upon "Goddess" instead of "God". Nevertheless, there is not actually a focus on a particular pagan religion, but the mentions of pagan gods on an everyday moment makes it powerful in the sense that it is not shown as being an issue, especially in an exchange where Frankie offers her roommate,

Grace, a Christian, to introduce her to Frigg, should she ever need to commune with the divine, without Grace having an anti-pagan reaction.

These two examples of TV series cannot really be taken as real beacon of hope regarding a general positive and genuine representation of paganism because they belong to a network which does not have the same wide range of audience as the mainstream networks. Indeed, both *Orange is the new black* and *Grace and Frankie* can only be (legally) watched on Netflix which requires a subscription, and even though it is a popular network, not everyone has access to it.

Interestingly, there seems to be some difference in the way paganism is shown from a British and American perspective, as shown in the difference of treatment of the pagan elements in for example the original Clash of the Titans and its remake. Could it be that the cultural context influences the way the filmmakers use paganism? It is no wonder that the British would feature it in a more positive way than the Americans, since there is an obvious rise or return to the old religions in an official way in the UK. In the United States, there clearly is a dichotomy between the conservatives and the progressives and it is especially the case in the religion domain, since the Constitution is supposed to ensure freedom of religion to all citizens and thus it is clearly reflected in the medias, with the examples of the series *Orange is the new black* and *Grace and Frankie*, which mention paganism as a genuine and positive thing whereas in the *Supernatural* show, it has a more negative representation.

Nevertheless, the representation of paganism suffers from some mostly negative clichés and stereotypes ,especially through the popularity of TV shows and movies which take lots of liberties for the sake of story-telling. These creative choices can sometimes falsify the essence of paganism since it can either be reduced to its folkloric aspect, with all the supernatural

elements or it can be reduced to only some of the negative aspects mixed with cheap syncretism with Christian lore which end up in some misunderstanding about this particular system of belief. Paganism is not something to be taken lightly and it indeed has a very important place in the popular culture, and not only movies and TV series, since it is the source for many modern stories, with myths being retold over and over again. Nicolas Bonnal defends the idea that everything originated from paganism with the heroes, the myths, the initiatory trip, the link to the cosmos, and beauty being an important concept.

He also fervently defends the idea that these elements can only serve the purpose of cinema, since paganism is also the source of the popular literature of adventures and thus, cinema too[13]. Nevertheless, in his book, he mainly focuses on movies that "*those under 20 might have never heard about*", pointing out the fact that the movies featured heavily pagan themes up to the seventies, and that in the modern and contemporary movies, paganism cannot really be found as such.

Even though we could agree with him on the idea that paganism is a great creative source and a spiritual adventure, we might want to distance ourselves from his view on paganism as being something for elitists, because it would mean that only a handful of people can really grasp its essence, and I think it is not the purpose of art to only serve a handful of people. He also bashes on the contemporary Hollywoodian take on paganism, which we could agree with in a way, because of the many liberties filmmakers have taken when using pagan elements in their movies which betrays the very essence of paganism in a way. Nevertheless, on the other hand, as a modern movie-goer who does not only passively watch a movie or a TV series, I personally have noticed some evolution and improvement in the way paganism is represented (along with other minorities), and I tend to believe that it is greatly influenced by the way

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[13] In an interview with Breizh, Nicolas Bonnal explained some of his creative process: http://www.breizh-info.com/2015/08/22/30040/le-paganisme-au-cinema-de-nicolas-bonnal (last visit on 18/06/2016).

paganism, as a belief system, is starting to gain a wider official recognition, and thus also starting to be equally reflected in the medias.

This leads me to reflect upon the cultural context which surrounds the making of the movies and TV series in which paganism is featured, how can one influence the other and also the other way around.

Part III: The influence of the cultural context on the representation of Paganism

Contemporary Context

To understand how paganism is reflected the way it is in popular culture, we need to look at things from a sociological and historical perspective. Indeed, the phenomenon of the rise of paganism is undeniable as there are many examples throughout Europe and North America which prove it. We could wonder if we should talk of "*rise*" instead of "*revival*" but we could argue that it is not so much about a *revival* of paganism per se since it was never really gone. Thus, it would be more about how paganism has gained more and more recognition to the point of having the same religious status as the main world religions. Of course, this official recognition has brought more visibility to that particular belief system. In Europe, we can take the examples of Greece where, in May 2006, a court granted official recognition to the cult of the Olympian gods[14] and thus ending a long lasting ban, or Asatru, a religion centered around the worship of the Norse gods in Iceland, which gained official recognition in 1973[15].

In the British Isles

In the British Isles, Wicca, Druidism and Heathenry (a pagan branch centered around the worship of Germanic deities) are the most popular branches of paganism. Richard Suchet, a Sky news reporter, wrote an article[16] on the occasion of the 2015 Winter Solstice in which he notes that "*The number of Pagans in England and Wales grew by more than 90% between*

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[14] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6285397.stm
[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81satr%C3%BAarf%C3%A9lagi%C3%B0
[16] http://news.sky.com/story/1610390/thousands-celebrating-winter-solstice

2001 and 2011, from 42,533 to 80,998 and anecdotal evidence suggests those figures continue to swell. The census of 2011 also showed the number of Christians decreased by 4.1 million between 2001 and 2011, from 72% of the population to 59%.". Thus, there seems to be a correlation between the increase in pagan practitioners and the decrease in the number of Christians It is interesting to see that phenomenon in Great Britain where being "British" means being Christian, yet the figures show that there is a switch with the decline of practicers that tend to atheistic and for those who needs to fulfill spiritual needs, they tend to choose alternative types of religions such as paganism which resonates on a cultural and historical level as demonstrated earlier.

Interestingly, this switch might have led the Anglican Church to rethink their position when in 2013 they thought about creating a "Pagan Church" in order to centralize all the alternative religions in the UK under the banner of Christianity[17], which might seem to be a strange idea from the perspective of another culture, such as in France. But the truth might be found in the fact that the Anglican Church is in need of retaining congregation members and then tries to slow the decline of members by any means since there is around 1.000 churches which could be shut down due to the lack of attendees[18]. Nevertheless, we are three years after they expressed the idea and we are yet to see any pagan church officially created. This could be explained by the arrival of immigrants from Christian Country such as Poland and some parts of Africa who reinvigorated the Anglican Church[19].

This "open minded" aspect of the Anglican Church towards paganism and other alternative religions is not shared by everyone though.

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[17]http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10133906/Church-of-England-creating-pagan-church-to-recruit-members.html

[18]http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/595398/Demise-Christianity-1000-churches-shut-across-Britain-congregations-shrink

[19] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/church-attendance-propped-immigrants-study

Indeed, after the shootings that happened in Paris in November 2015, Scottish evangelists were quick to react by bashing Islam and its most radical aspect but they also feared the rise of paganism that they deem to be one of the "biggest threats to the western civilization"[20]. This was also in reaction to a "Witchfest" that occurred in Croydon and organized by "The Children of Artemis" who claimed that there is "*an unprecedented interest' in its events with ticket sales up 150%, while its event on Wicca at Glastonbury Festival next summer is already sold out*".

All these elements prove that the rise of pagan religions in the UK is not to be ignored and can be seen as a proof that the Anglo-Saxon landscape is evolving. On a side note, a study conducted by Ronald Hutton in his book *"The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft, 2001"* showed that the numbers of people identifying as pagans, around 250,000 people, represented half the population of Hindus at the time (around 559,000), which is important to note since there is a huge Hindu community in the UK due to the colonial history that links the UK to India.[21]

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[20] http://www.secularism.org.uk/blog/2015/11/scottish-evangelists-identify-paganism-as-one-of-the-biggest-threats-to-western-civilisation (last visit on 07/14/2016)

[21] R. Gale and C. Peach, Muslims*, Hindus, and Sikhs in the New Religious Landscape of England*, Geographical Review, 93/4 (2003), pp. 469-490

In the United States, let us leave aside the Native's paganism, which was already there before the first Christian Europeans ever set foot on the continent. European paganism was imported by the European pagans in the 1970's. The Seventies belong to this particular era in the US which saw the rise of many movements concerning Civil rights, ranging from issues about race, feminism to religion, among other things. This might have allowed the introduction of modern European paganism in the US the impact of which cannot be ignored. Indeed this phenomenon has made its way up to the Supreme Court when for, example[22], five inmates fought in order to have the right to practice minority religions. Among these inmates, two of were Asatru practitioners, one was Wiccan, one Satanist and another one was a minister of the White Supremacist of Jesus Christ-Christian. It is the *Cutter v Wilkinson* case, in 2005, which guaranteed that freedom for the inmates since the Supreme Court held that "*under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act*[23] *(RLUIPA), facilities that accept federal funds cannot deny prisoners accommodations that are necessary to engage in activities for the practice of their own religious belief*s"[24]. Michael F.Strmiska, in *Modern paganism in world cultures: comparative perspectives* wrote that " *According to the American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS) carried out by sociologists at the City University of New York in 2001, an estimated 307,000 Americans identify their religious affiliation as "Wicca, Pagan, or Druid," making this one of the twenty largest religious categories in the United States, anticipated at the time of the survey to grow to some 433,000 by 2004. A similar survey carried out in 1990 did not even mention Wiccans, Pagans, or Druids, which underlines how fast modern Paganism, in its different forms, has been growing in recent*

[22] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neopaganism_in_the_United_States
[23] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_Land_Use_and_Institutionalized_Persons_Ac
[24] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cutter_v._Wilkinson

years. (See Adherents.com Top Twenty Religions in the United States, 2001.)[25]Even though the number is quite small in comparison to the whole population of the USA, the rise is not negligible and it is a testimony to how the cultural landscape is altered and thus, this naturally influences the representation of paganism in popular culture. Nevertheless, in the US it is a belief system which is quite marginal, since the very first pioneers were Christians and so to some, the historical religion of the Americans is supposed to be Christianity, and the rise of other faiths such as Islam is not welcomed by a significant portion of the population. Nevertheless, Islam is still part of the same monotheistic system as Christianity, contrary to Paganism which has always been antagonized by the Church which has worked hard in order to ensure that Paganism would remain in the past. We could also mention other cultures such as South American cultures or even some Asian cultures to show how paganism has never disappeared and which current state is a result from centuries and centuries of cultural syncretism, but it is not our topic here. Thus, the focus will be on Western cultures and more precisely on the British Isles and North America. The aim of this part is to show how the cultural context greatly influenced the way paganism is represented in contemporary popular culture, and especially in movies and TV series. Indeed, today's portrayal of paganism is a result from hundreds of years of evolution, sometimes molded by political intentions and to some extent touched upon the prestige of a cultural identity. Could it be that today's representation of paganism is still in line with the question of cultural identity?

For this, I will focus on paganism in art, with the British example, by using mostly works from Sam Smiles who wrote a very interesting essay on the *Image of the Druid in British Art* Indeed, we need to go back to the early representations of Paganism in order to find pertinent explanations as to why paganism is represented the way it is nowadays.

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[25]Michael F.Strmiska, *Modern Paganism in world cultures*, p10

Paganism in Art: A British example

The image of the Druid in British Art

Let us talk about the early representations of the Druid because it is one of the most recognizable pagan figures from the Celtic religion since it was the most widespread religion in the pre-Christian Era. This will put in the light, thanks to the context of the time, on how the Britons behaved when it came to their past and what it means in regards to this particular aspect of their identity. By doing so, it will help give a pertinent explanation as to how paganism can be on the rise in our contemporary world, especially in the British Isles.

Indeed some scholars such as Sam Smiles, a professor of History of art in the university of Plymouth, argued that people have had a very ambiguous relationship with the pagan past. In his essay "*The image of the druid in British Art*"[26], Sam Smiles defends the idea that the Britons have been cut in two halves: on one hand there were those who embraced a dignified pre-Christian world as part of their National Identity, something which would set them apart from the rest of the world. Those ones also defend the rupture of the Anglican Church from Rome. On the other hand there were those who had disdain for the barbaric pre-Christian world and somehow blamed the Anglican Church for stepping too far away from the original Christian teachings and traditions. Through the study of the imagery of the druid in British Art, Sam Smiles shows the evolution of an aspect of the British identity, its very roots and pagan essence, an aspect that has something to do with a glorified past blended with modernity and which might have very much helped shape the Great Britain of today. The interest for pre-Christian traditions in post-conversion Great Britain society can indeed be traced back to the 17th century , with the first engravings and mentions of the druids and their Celtic religion in literature.

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[26] Sam Smiles, *The image of the druid in British Art*, Pré-actes, colloque du Collège de France, Juillet 2006

Sam Smiles found that there were two traditions in depicting the druids. One depicts the druids as a savage and bloodthirsty pagan and the other one has a more positive depiction of the druid as a sage and erudite pagan. He mentions Stuart Piggott who classified the first tradition as the "Posidonian" tradition, based on recollections in the book 23 of Posidonus and the other one is the Alexandrian tradition, based on more speculative yet dignifying process about the druid. This classification can well be interpreted as an illustration of the way the Britons behaved when it came to their pre-Christian world, something which might have been perpetuated in art to the point of being unconsciously printed in the collective minds. This might have been one of the reasons why paganism is represented the way it is nowadays.

Indeed, with several examples of carvings and paintings, Sam Smiles gathered clues which illustrate this idea, he uses Art as a witness and a reflection of the cultural mentality of the time and it is very obvious when we see how the representation of the Druid evolved. For example, the Druid would first be represented as a figure of knowledge, wisdom with objects which highlight these aspects. Indeed, the Druid would often be portrayed with a long beard, holding a book and would have a body language reminiscent of classical statues. In some works of art, scenes would stage druids next to Christians and depending on the artist, the druids would more or less have a central position and the confrontation would be mostly peaceful. It is the case with en engraving made by Simon François Ravenet after Francis Hayman, entitled *The Druids or The Conversion of the Britons to Christianity* (1752) which Sam Smiles describes to be an engraving "*depicting the pseudo-historical tradition of the mission of Bishop Aristobalus, sent by St Paul in AD 56 (...)Hayman shows the Druids interrupted in their ritual practices as described by Pliny, gathering mistletoe and sacrificing a white steer, as the Bishop approaches from the left. With the exception of the sacrifice, it is*

a scene of complete tranquility, pagan certainly but no more primitive than its Greek equivalent. And this, of course, is the point. What Bishop Aristobalus is encountering is a civilisation, in which a dignified priesthood goes about its business in a peaceful culture marked by learning" (p.5). Nevertheless, there were artists who would focus more on the negative aspects of the Druid and the Celtic religion, with for example the likes of William Blake and William Geller to whom "*Human sacrifice, necromancy and other dark arts(p.9)*" were appealing. Sam Smiles notes that in the 18th century, the "*more positive idea of the philosopher-priest, so typical of much eighteenth-century writing, began to be displaced by a darker image (p.9)*" and thus this greatly affected the overall representation of the Druid, and by extension, paganism, in British Art. There is also an interesting fact that he defends, with an analysis (p.8) of Vincent Waldré *St Patrick lighting the Paschal Fire on the Hill of Slane* (c. 1787-1801), painted in the Dublin Castle's ceilings, in which the pagan druids seem to give way to St Patrick and thus Christianity. Indeed, contrary to the engraving cited earlier, the confrontation between the Pagans and the Christians is not peaceful and Sam Smiles notes that " *the difference in interpretation is not so much an argument about the nature of the Druids, but is more to do with the manipulation of the record to construct different national histories"* (p.7). This is an illustration of the very complex historical context in the British Isles of the time, with a long history of conflicts in identity, to which Paganism seems to have had a non negligible role, at least in art, which was used to some extent for political means. This is important to note, because it gives us an insight on the evolution of paganism in the British Isles, and how it is reflected in popular culture.

We can argue that this distinction between the Posidonian and Alexandrian traditions that Stuart Pigott theorized regarding the druids, can be applied to the representation of Paganism

in our contemporary popular culture, because it seems to have survived the technological progress and to be part of the collective consciousness. And as developed with a few examples earlier, modern Movies and TV series either portray paganism from a positive or a negative perspective, yet the difference might reside in the fact that the cultural contemporary context is much different than in the 18th century. Added to that, we may mention the democratization of modern technologies, with knowledge easily shared through the various movements of people bringing their cultural identities with them, which, among other things, can explain the late arrival of modern European paganism in the US, for example.

Conclusion

From Sam Smiles' essay, we were able to have a historical panoramic view on the evolution of the representation of the Druid in art, and through the Druid we also get to have the evolution of the representation of paganism in itself. Even through the various iterations greatly influenced by a conflicting behavior towards some elements of the past, the image of the Druid has remained mostly unchanged. Indeed, the image of the Druid as depicted in the 17th seems to have survived. It appears that the most popular fantasy movies and TV series tend to stand by the Alexandrian aspect of this pagan figure. We can take the example of the *Lord of the Rings* franchise with the character of *Gandalf the Grey,* who is very much shaped after the traditional Alexandrian druid but there also seems to be some inspiration from the Norse god Odin. In the *Harry Potter* franchise *Dumbledore*, who is a magician, also has the features of a druid, both in his clothes and in his behavior. Thus this aspect of paganism has a more positive depiction in popular culture, but paganism as a whole seems to have carried with itself both the Posidonian and Alexandrian traditions depending on the genre. The Posidonian tradition in movies and TV series tends to anchor paganism in the horror genre

(with movies like *The Wicker Man*, *Wake Wood* and TV series like *Supernatural* or *American Horror Story*) while the Alexandrian tradition keeps paganism in the fantasy, superhero or sci-fi genre (*Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Once Upon a Time,...*) with all the subtleties I tried to develop in the previous part. We could say that today's representation of Paganism in Anglo-Saxon popular culture is a legacy from the British representation of Paganism in itself, since most of the pagan elements used in those movies and TV series generated from Northern European cultures, especially from the British culture which seems to have had very interesting positions towards paganism, if we take into account various works from scholars such as Sam Smiles for example. It is a representation which is in constant evolution, since the cultural context is far different from then and paganism as such is somehow coming back to being an officially active belief system and seems to have an impact on the way it is represented in the artistic medias such as movies and TV series, among other things.

General Conclusion

When asked about how Paganism is represented in our contemporary popular culture, it would be hard to just give a brief answer, because it is more complex than that. We first need to accept the fact that Paganism is to be considered on the same level as the dominant monotheistic religions. We have to accept to consider paganism as genuine belief system as worthy of study as the dominant monotheistic religions.

Indeed, whether we want it or not, paganism constantly surrounds us, but most of us don't know it, because we haven't been taught how to see it or maybe we have forgotten. We could argue that Paganism has been mostly saved by art, giving a sense of elitism which could be seen as detrimental to it. And we can also add that not everyone who knows about paganism is pagan-friendly, and History has many examples which can back it up. Paganism has never disappeared, it has survived through the centuries. It remains a mystery to the majority of the population and yet its features can still be appealing to modern audiences. Nevertheless, not everybody can point which themes or elements are pagan-inspired or not, and this also can be detrimental to paganism, because that is how bad stereotypes can take the best of its representation and thus can perpetuate the Posidonian tradition over the Alexandrian. Nevertheless, there is some evolution which seems to come hand in hand with how paganism has evolved in the past years, and thus seems to be more and more accepted as a genuine belief system by the general population and as mentioned earlier, it is reflected in the medias and popular culture.

Now, having talked about the limitations of the representation of paganism in the narrative, how the genres feature it and finally how the cultural context influences its representation, it would be very interesting to dig further in the characteristics of paganism in popular culture.

We could develop the stereotypes and clichés, reflect on the syncretisms, amalgams and cultural reappropriation, among other things, but this would be part of my next research project I plan to do for my second-year master.

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Path to the Gods: Anglo-Saxon Paganism for Beginners. Swain Wodening. 4.1 out of 5 stars 19. Â I've also read Norse-oriented literature; both Norse & Anglo-Saxon Heathenry come under the umbrella of Germanic Heathenry, & there are differences between the two. This book presents VERY detailed & thorough information that shows those differences (& the similarities): the pantheon of deities, customs for funerals & other ceremonies such as blot & symbel, holy tides of the year, the soul & the afterlife, lesser deities & wights, the multiverse, etc. Modern Paganism, also known as Contemporary Paganism and Neopaganism, is a collective term for new religious movements influenced by or derived from the various historical pagan beliefs of pre-modern Europe, North Africa and the Near East. Although they share similarities, contemporary Pagan religious movements are diverse, and no single set of beliefs, practices or texts is shared by them all. Most academics studying the phenomenon have treated it as a movement of different religions, whereas a