



Owen, S. (2019). Is Druidry indigenous? the politics of pagan indigeneity discourse. *International journal for the study of new religions*, 9(2), 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.1558/ijsnr.37622>

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Is Druidry Indigenous? The Politics of Pagan Indigeneity Discourse

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Abstract: This article asks if ‘indigenous’, associated as it is with ‘colonised peoples’, is being employed strategically by Druids in Britain to support cultural or political aims. Prominent Druids make various claims to indigeneity, presenting Druidry as the pre-Christian religion of the British Isles and emphasising that it originated there. By ‘religion’ it also assumes Druidry was a culture equal to if not superior to Christianity – similar to views of antiquarians in earlier centuries who idealised a pre-Christian British culture as equal to that of ancient Greece. Although British Druids refute the nationalist tag, and make efforts to root out those tendencies, it can be argued that it is a love of the land rather than the country per se that drives indigeneity discourses in British Druidry.

Key Words: Indigenizing, Druids, Britain, Heritage, Native, Discourse

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4.1 Introduction

In a previous publication, ‘Druidry as an Indigenous Religion’ (Owen 2013: 86), I proposed an inclusive definition of ‘indigenous religion’ as a religion that relates to the land, the people (including other-than-human persons) and that which has gone before. While this avoids an ethnic criterion for ‘indigenous religion’ derived from colonialist classifications, as it applies to practices rooted in or honouring local places and people whoever the practitioner, it is ambiguous about the need for community recognition favoured by indigenous people themselves. Therefore, this article investigates to what extent contemporary Druidry may be considered rather an ‘indigenising movement’, following Johnson (2002), with the view that it is primarily the love of the land that drives indigeneity discourse in contemporary British Druidry.

A significant development was when The Druid Network, one of many Druid organisations in Britain, gained charity registration as a ‘religion’ in England and Wales on the 21st September 2010. In one response, BBC News (2010) quoted Arthur Pendragon, a renowned Druid activist, as saying ‘We are looking at the indigenous religion of these isles – it’s not a new religion but one of the oldest.’ Pendragon implies there was an unbroken tradition from pre-Roman Druids to today, though most contemporary Druids acknowledge that they are reinventing Druidry, drawing inspiration from sources such as the Welsh Mabinogion, and cultivating a relationship with nature and ancient sites. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the British Druid Order (BDO), founded by Philip Shallcrass, distributed a booklet entitled *Druidry: Native Spirituality in Britain*. Since then, Druids have often represented Druidry as the ‘native spirituality’ of Britain, which informs their engagements with the land and heritage.

It is difficult to determine a common element between the various groups of Druids today, though many contemporary Druids are familiar with *awen*, the ‘inspiration’ (from Welsh) of bards and Druids and have an interest in trees and tree lore. With the emphasis on inspiration, Druidry has many musicians, artists and storytellers, such as Robin Williamson, founder of the Incredible String Band and honorary bard of both the British Druid Order and the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. I have not heard better renditions than his of tales from the Mabinogion (Welsh) and the Battle of Moytura (Irish, which features the Dagda, a god-Druid

with a cauldron, staff and harp). *The Tale of Taliesin* (Welsh) is perhaps the most popular Druidic story and the one the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids have used for their training course. As for ritual practice, like other Pagan groups in Britain, many Druids celebrate the eight seasonal festivals (winter and summer solstice, spring and autumn equinox and the four 'fire' festivals: Beltane, Lammas, Samhain and Imbolc¹).

4.2 Ancient British Druidry

Many Druids assert that Druidry originated in Britain. For example, Shallcrass and Restall Orr (2001) wrote: 'What most modern Druids do believe is that Druidry originated in what we now call the British Isles' (2001: 5). This view is mainly based on a comment by Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE) about Druids in Gaul (covering an area that includes modern-day France): 'It is believed that the training for Druids was discovered in Britain and from there it was transferred to Gaul. And now those who wish to learn the matter carefully depart for Britain for the sake of learning' (Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* [Of the Gaulish Wars], trans. Lea, in Koch 2003: 21-22).

The notion that there are three grades or specialisms associated with Druidry has its roots in antiquity, too. Strabo (Greek geographer, ca. 63 BCE-ca. 24 CE) wrote: 'As a rule, among all the Gallic peoples three sets of men are honoured above all others: the Bards, the *Vates* and the Druids. The bards are singers and poets, the *Vates* overseers of sacred rites and philosophers of nature, and the Druids, besides being natural philosophers, practice moral philosophy as well' (*Geography* 4.4.4, trans. Fortson, in Koch 2003: 18). He placed the Druids in Gaul, while Pliny the Elder (Roman naturalist, 23-79 CE) located them in both Gaul and Britain:

Gaul also possessed [magic] down to the time of our memory. Thus it was during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius that a decree was issued by the Senate against the [Gauls'] entire class of Druids, *Vates*, and physicians. Why do I comment on this craft that has spread beyond the ocean to the far reaches of the earth? Nowadays, Britain continues to be held spellbound by magic and conducts so much ritual that it would seem that it was Britain that had given magic to the Persians. (*Natural History* 30.13, trans. Freeman & Koch, in Koch 2003: 33)

Pliny the Elder also gave us the image of white robed Druids cutting mistletoe: 'A priest in white clothing climbs the tree and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, and it is caught in a white cloak' (*Natural History* 16.24, trans. Freeman & Koch, in Koch 2003: 32).

While the Greek and Roman sources provide much of what we think of as Druid – oak trees, mistletoe and the three divisions – stone monuments were not mentioned. It was later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that a nationalistic interest in Britain's ancient monuments led to speculation about the possibility that Britain once had a culture to rival the Greeks. Early antiquarians, including John Aubrey (1626-1697) and William Stukeley (1687-1765), suggested that it was Druids who built stone circles such as Avebury and Stonehenge, and this idea persisted until later archaeologists dated these monuments to the late Neolithic (ca 3000 to 2300 BCE) and thought it unlikely Druids existed that far back. However, many Druids speculate, as Kris Hughes does, that they 'have always existed here in the British Isle from the Neolithic era through to today... The Druids of the Iron Age were simply an extension of an older priesthood' (2007: 17-18).

¹ Some of these festivals are known by other names, e.g. Lughnasadh for Lammas.

The Druid fraternities that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, detailed in Ronald Hutton's *Blood and Mistletoe* (2009), considered themselves 'revivals' of ancient Druid groups. Hutton attributes to Stukeley the idea that Aubrey revived the fourteenth century Mount Haemus Grove, itself said to have been reformed from remnants of earlier Druids (Hutton 2006: 6-7). A plaque on the King's Arms pub in London says the Ancient Order of Druids were 'revived' in 1781, also making a direct link to earlier Druids. Another figure, Edward Williams (1747-1826), who took the bardic name Iolo Morganwg, claimed to have found ancient Druid manuscripts. He also founded the Gorsedd (gathering of bards), which still exists today. His 'Druid's Prayer' is still chanted at the Gorsedd and other Druid gatherings, though Pagan Druids replace references to God with Spirit or Goddess.² Williams also depicted the symbol for *awen* (inspiration of bards) as three rays: /|\, widely used to symbolise Druidry today.

Despite the unreliability of the Greek and Roman sources (with most based on second-hand reports), and the speculative and dubious nature of the antiquarian sources, the figure of the white-robed Druid emerged, blended with Arthurian romance tales of Merlin, and portrayed as a bearded wizard meddling in politics and urging on armies of Britons against invaders. As Ronald Hutton observed: 'The process of selection made to compose the result is more or less an arbitrary one, determined by the instincts, attitudes, context and loyalties of the person engaged in it' (2009: 48), in this case Celtic revivalism with nationalistic overtones.

While contemporary Druids accept Hutton's historical analysis that Druidry is, for the most part, a modern invention, it doesn't prevent them from voicing opinions about how to manage ancient sites and care for any human remains found therein. It is interesting that some site managers appear to have accepted Druids and Pagans as representing the ancient Britons in some way. Blain and Wallis have noted that heritage managers, in England at least, have co-opted the term 'sacred site' from Pagans, who in turn co-opted it from indigenous archaeology discourse (Blain & Wallis 2007: 1). The authors provide several examples of this, such as one from The English Heritage World Heritage Site Management Plan for Avebury: 'Paganism may well be the fastest growing religion in Britain and this is linked with the increasing interest in the mystical significance of Avebury as a "sacred" place' (quoting Pomeroy, 1998); and, on the *Time Team* (TV programme), archaeologist Francis Prior said: 'I think what I have learnt, largely due to our pagan friends, is that as an archaeologist I'm too analytical and I'm too removed from [Seahenge]... I've learnt to get back to treating it as a religious site, as a religious thing.'

4.3 Indigenous or indigenising?

The question remains, though, on whether Druidry can be considered an indigenous religion, even if it had originated in Britain (whether 2500 years ago or 50). This is because Druidry does not fit usual definitions of 'indigenous religion'. Its practitioners are not indigenous people, at least not according to definitions accepted by the United Nations or most anthropologists (see Owen 2013: 82-3). Despite animist rhetoric in more recent forms of Druidry, neither are they kinship-based, meaning based on maintaining relations among extended family groups, accepted as a criterion for 'indigenous religion' by scholars such as James Cox (2007: 69), who gives his 'minimum definition' of indigenous religions as 'bound

² The most common form of the 'Druid's Prayer' by Iolo Morganwg begins with 'Grant, O God, Thy protection' (Williams, ed. 2004: 363, from *The Barddas*, originally published in 1862), rephrased as 'Grant, O Spirit [or Goddess], Thy protection.'

to a location’, sharing a ‘kinship-based worldview in which attention is directed towards ancestor spirits as the central figures in religious life and practice.’ That these elements exist in all recognised indigenous religions is debatable, but Druidry is neither bound to a specific location nor practised only among closely related individuals, and only vaguely refers to ancestors, which may be connected to a place, Druids who have passed on, or times in a ritual when each individual contemplates their own ancestry rather than that of the group’s.

Nor is Druidry in Britain strictly an ‘indigenizing movement’ in the sense outlined by Paul Johnson (2002), although it does reconstruct pre- and early-Christian practices and borrows from or is inspired by the practices of indigenous peoples. Since it is possible that Druidry originated in Britain, or at least was part of a pre-Roman culture in Europe, can it be said to be indigenising? However, what they are indigenising is the rhetoric derived from Native American campaigns, including the practice of acknowledging the local often unnamed ‘spirits of place’.

Johnson (2002: 302) views indigenising as the opposite of globalising, yet modern Druidry does both – one could say it is globalising what it is indigenising. Johnson does recognise that this is a spectrum and not either/or, but more of an emphasis, but this is difficult to generalise one way or the other with British Druidry, which includes the whole spectrum, with some close-knit localised independent Druid groups to global enterprises such as the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD). In this sense, Druidry is also extending: described by Johnson (2002: 312) as ‘the lowering of social boundaries, the circulation of religious knowledge and symbols into wider availability, and the overt assimilation of new forms acknowledged to be from outside.’ That is, practitioners in other parts of the world are encouraged to adapt Druidry to their own local seasons and flora and fauna.

4.4 Indigeneity discourse

Whilst indigenous discourses are in part a product of displacement either in territory or culture, modern Druids might develop a grudge against Romans or Christians in the romantic sense of an imagined loss of ethnic British culture, identity or religion, but cannot claim to be ‘colonised’, which fuels much indigeneity discourse (e.g. as described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 7). There are cases among indigenous groups where the boundaries between colonised and coloniser, a binary which may have had historical relevance, has been blurred. This is so not only in cases where indigenous people claim mixed heritage, such as the Metis, or where boundaries were always ambiguous, such as in India and in some areas of Africa.

While Dakota scholar Vine Deloria (1973; also see Owen 2013) urged Europeans in North America to look to Druidry rather than Native American traditions to engage in their own native spirituality, it is not clear how much he understood Druidry. If, following common Pagan Druid practice, they would learn the seasons, plants and animals of their region. It would then be difficult to avoid overlapping with Native American cultural practices and accusations of appropriation. As far as I can determine, they only fall foul of this if they misrepresent themselves or practices as ‘Native American’ or employ virtually identical practices and profiteering from them. They also create conflict when conducting ceremonies on sites associated with Native American groups (e.g., Mount Shasta in California; see Albanese 1990).

Harvey (2007: 232) alludes to these tensions, saying: ‘Even if some Pagans romanticise native peoples as “close to nature”, and may even appropriate indigenous practices, few are actively engaged, or even concerned, with what activates and constrains indigenous well-

being today.’ Likewise, Armin Geertz (2004: 62) argues that the generally positive primitivism which romanticises indigenous cultures tends to ‘keep real indigenous peoples out of the picture just as effectively as the scientific racism of the nineteenth century’ as it does not address the varied situations indigenous people are in today. However, there are a few Druids who do engage with indigenous communities, such as Philip Shallcrass of the British Druid Order (more on this below).

4.5 Native versus Indigenous

The difference between ‘native’ and ‘indigenous’ is more in how the terms are employed. The most common application of ‘indigenous’ is to a group of people based on an ethno-political category identifying only those who have experienced colonization. Indigeneity, as an identity formation, is prominent in discourses distinguishing between the culturally or genetically threatened ‘us’ (the indigenous) from the polluting, controlling or otherwise threatening foreign ‘them’ (the coloniser), contrasting themselves with those they construct as their alterity.

In British Druid publicity, including websites, ‘native’ is the more common term over ‘indigenous’ (with some exceptions), possibly because it has a wider application and can mean ‘coming from’ or ‘belonging to’ a place in non-ethnic terms, such as being a ‘native of New York’, and, in Druidry, includes making physical and imaginative connections to a place, which is regarded as the more appropriate use of the term for many of those identifying with ‘native spirituality’.

Rarely do British Druids refer to themselves as native or indigenous as a personal identity. However, they do cite connections between Druidry and Native American ‘ways’, as seen in this example from the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids:

Yes, they have much in common: sacred circles, the honouring of the directions, a deep reverence for the natural world, a belief in animal guides, and an abiding sense that the land itself is sacred. There is even evidence that the Druids worked in sweat-lodges and we know that birds’ feathers were used in ceremonial clothing and headdress....³

This is followed by a statement exempting Druidry from accusations of ‘appropriation’ by implying that Druids are not taking from Native American traditions but have commonality.

However, several prominent Druids have had direct contact with Native American groups – Of those personally known to me, Philip Shallcrass (BDO) has visited the Quileute in Washington State and the late David Morgan Brown (Druids of Albion) spent time with the Dakota in Midwest USA. Philip Shallcrass, known as Greywolf, published a blog post recently about Druidry as an indigenous tradition (Shallcrass 2019).⁴ In this piece, Shallcrass addresses criticisms about the claim first by quoting Julius Caesar on Druid learning coming from Britain (see above). Although they may have been indigenous to Britain two thousand years ago, Shallcrass states that ‘endeavouring to reconstruct it as a spirituality indigenous to

³ Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD), ‘About us’, date unknown. <http://www.druidry.org/about-us/frequently-asked-questions> [accessed 04.04.2015].

⁴ Shallcrass, Philip, ‘Indigeneity and Celtic Druidry’, British Druid Order Blog, 31 January 2019. <https://britishdruidorder.wordpress.com/2019/01/31/indigeneity-and-celtic-druidry/?fbclid=IwAR0cKaYaQLR72zWe40-Oq6MjefSk9cfU2QhpdnM1h9EreZvQZr0zIznDytM> [accessed 20.02.19]

those regions seems perfectly valid' and that this is further justifiable because 'Native Americans encourage people of European descent to find their own ancestral tradition, rather than steal theirs.' As elsewhere, he follows this by rejecting nationalism and racism and ends his post by saying the British Druid Order is open to all.

Some Druids have also been inspired by Saami people, Australian aborigines and other indigenous peoples. The drum in particular is more akin to those found in sub-arctic shamanism or Plains Indian traditions than the Irish bodhran, perhaps, though other Druids have reconstructed old north European folk instruments out of deer antler, animal hide, etc. Philip Shallcrass and friends have re-created an iron-age roundhouse, with others trying their hand at iron-age jewellery, wool-craft, brewing mead – all more or less engaging in their own experimental archaeology. Modern Druids, if put together, could constitute a reasonably productive late iron-age village. In this way, these contemporary Druids might observe what other indigenous peoples are doing, in supporting native crafts and produce, and then look for something similar within their own cultures and histories.

4.6 Native faith?

How does Druidry compare to Native Faith traditions and their nationalistic tones? Some forms of Druidry may be characterized in this way but the majority of Orders in Britain largely avoid this through openness to non-British participants and encouragement to those in other cultures to adapt Druidry to their own landscape, mythology and heritage, just as many British Druids have substituted Native American flora and animal symbols with British ones.

Some of the rituals I've attended in England in particular have striven to be apolitical in terms of national identities. They have tended to articulate 'native spirituality' as inclusive of all the British Isles and removing distinctly Irish, Welsh and Scots political identities, perceiving that the land, or rather group of islands, has no borders. In Scotland, I have come across both pan-British and Scottish nationalist (including Gaelic) identifications, depending on the group, though none that I know of have excluded participants based on ethnicity or nationality. The only incident I have witnessed was in 1989 when Kaledon Naddair, a Scottish Druid, charged up Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh to criticise a Mexican Indian conducting a non-native (to Scotland) ceremony. This ended peacefully when it was admitted he had a point and that the ceremony was conducted with respect to the land. Naddair himself has made the claim that 'Pictish and Keltic shamanism is the native initiatory system practised by the ancient Druids' (Naddair 1990: 94, quoted in Wallis 2003: 84).

The Druidry that regards itself as 'native spirituality' also tends to refer to Spirit or spirits in their rituals, as mentioned before, rather than specific deities from Irish, Welsh or other sources. And they are certainly not 'reviving' ancient Druidry, whatever it was, though some have made that claim in the past (e.g. the Ancient Order of Druids). According to Graham Harvey (2007: 231): 'The claim that Pagans are reviving ancient pre-Christian religious practices and cultures is less common than it once was, but can still be encountered....' In any case, more recently, Harvey (ibid.) says, 'To be indigenous is to know where one is in relation to a place and an ancestry that are both conceived of in ways distinguishable from racially centred, individualistically consumed modernity.'

It is this that brings me to argue that British Druidry is more concerned about respectful relations to the land and heritage than to nationalistic interests. When the Druid Network applied for charitable status in England and Wales, its application stated that 'Druidry is based on the reverential, sacred and honourable relationship between people and the land'

(Charity Commission for England and Wales 2010: Annex 1). Ancestral dimensions do play a part for some – especially those with strong connections to Irish, Welsh or Scottish ancestry. Few people claim to be hereditary Druids, and more likely those who live outside of Britain (perhaps to bolster their legitimacy). It is unlikely a Welsh Druid within Wales would make such a claim. Kris Hughes spoke about this at a Druid Camp I attended. He said that, although he was taught by an older relative, he would not claim hereditary status.

Does Druidry escape nationalism? Most Druid group leaders and individuals root out these tendencies, calling out those who post anything discriminatory on group forums and promoting respectful, internationalist, liberal and inclusive attitudes. The British Druid Order ‘pinned post’ on Facebook by Adam Sargant says: ‘Our membership is international & we welcome friends from all cultures’ (dated 26 August 2016).

4.7 Romantic Druidry

Indigeneity is an act of the imagination combining ideas of emplacement, the past and personal identity. Johnson (2002: 327) recognises this, too:

When understood as an imagined community, as a processual term, and as an ideal type never fully manifested in history, the indigenous can yet prove an important category for the comparative study of religion, both to understand those “on the land” as well as those for whom the homeland is an idea, an image, and a memory.

Blain and Wallis (2007: 10) ‘proposed the term “new-indigenes” to describe those pagans whose re-enchantment practices involve perceiving nature as animate – alive with spirits [*etc.*] and who identify with pagan Iron Age and Early Mediaeval ancestors’ from ancient Europe, finding resonance with earlier prehistoric cultures and indigenous “tribal” societies elsewhere, particularly those whose “religion” is animist and/or “shamanistic”.’ Yet, they also say ‘lineage and authenticity *vis-à-vis* the ancient pagan past... is less of an issue’ than making pagan practices relevant in the contemporary world.

It is this romantic quality, not too far from that of the nineteenth century romantics, that imbues Druidry with a special emphasis on nature that is shared with many earlier romantics from Goethe to Morris. Blain and Wallis (2007: xiv) also recognised this, saying Pagan interest in heritage is not new, referring to romanticism. They describe Paganism as having a ‘focus on direct engagements with “nature” as deified, sacred or otherwise animated by “spirit” or forming a living community of “spirits”’ (Blain & Wallis 2007: xiv).

Likewise, Harvey (2007: 232) says: ‘That Paganisms offer re-enchantment of the world is a common theme among academic discussions... Pagans can evidence a romantic (and, thus, still modernist) view of their relation to “nature”.’ Thus, Druid interest in nature and heritage is more akin to the romanticism of the Arts and Craft Movement of William Morris.

4.8 Druidry as Nature Spirituality

Examples from contemporary Druid authors that illustrate this engagement with nature and heritage are numerous. Taking a selection of books by well-known British Druids, all the covers show trees. The association of Druids with trees stems from ancient sources associating them with carrying out rituals in groves, cutting mistletoe, and the word itself is understood by many Druids to come from a Welsh word for oak, *derw*, combined with *wid*, Indo-European root for knowledge. The path these Druid authors describe is based on a personal experience of nature:

The blurb on the back of *Living Druidry* (2004) by Emma Restall Orr (once of the British Druid Order and founder of the Druid Network) says: this ‘book guides you to find your own vision, and your own deep, ecstatic relationship with nature.... so that each moment is enriched with nature’s power and beauty.’ In the first chapter, Restall Orr likens her message to that of an indigenous woman, while also addressing romantic notions of such:

... many might well find it easier to accept what I have to say if I were writing from the context of a rainforest in Central America, southern Africa or south-east Asia, where the women trancing to the drumbeat she hears in her soul is dark skinned, barefoot, dressed in nothing but a strip of cloth, beads and feathers, with wild black eyes – or even if she were some European apprentice to a ‘native shaman’ in the American desert. (Restall Orr 2004: 4-5)

In other words, someone in Britain need not search for a native spirituality in another continent under the tutelage of an indigenous teacher but can find it on their doorstep: ‘the spiritual tradition that offers me the language with which I understand the world I see... is the tradition of our own ancestral heritage, the native nature religion of the British Isles: Druidry’ (Restall Orr 2004: 5). And it can be found in ‘the themes and visions of children’s tales, in folklore, ale songs, superstitions and mythologies’ and, where there are gaps, we can ‘study the archaeology’ (2004: 22). In the same year her book was published, Restall Orr set up Honouring the Ancient Dead (HAD) to dialogue with archaeologists and museums over the treatment of ancient human remains. Druids therefore claim a similar role as indigenous people acting as cultural representatives when calling for the repatriation of indigenous remains held in museums where there are no known direct descendants.

A Druid who is actually Welsh and speaks the language is Kristoffer Hughes of the Anglesey Druid Order. The back-page to his *Natural Druidry* (2007), after quoting Taliesen ‘The Awen I sing, from the deep I bring it,’ says that the book ‘is a deeply personal account of one man’s journey through the dappled groves of culture and tradition.’ At the end of the blurb it says: ‘Journey with Kris into the magic of the past and the present, deep into the vast cauldron of spiritual enlightenment that sings from the land, that whispers to us upon the breeze as the breath of our ancestors.’ Although Hughes draws heavily on his Welsh heritage and landscape, he claims ‘I am no one particularly special; I have no direct lineage to the ancient Druids, no secret or ancient manuscript that only I will ever see’ (2007: 8) – he is reaching out to everyone to say his Druidry is for all. Like Restall Orr, his book tells a personal story to encourage others to be inspired by the land.

In the final example, the blurb on the back of *The Path of Druidry* (2011) by Penny Billington of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids reads: ‘Listen to the call of spirit and seek truth in wild groves, the shifting seasons, and the beauty of the Old Ways.’ The ‘exercises will help you internalize these truths, develop a spiritual awareness rooted in nature....’ This leaves the reader in no doubt that this is a ‘nature spirituality’ that is accessible to all who follow the path laid out by Billington based on her years of experience of running workshops and rituals. It is not an imaginary nature she refers to but urges the reader to walk in a green space (2011: 28), even if a city park. The content is structured around the Four Branches of the Mabinogion, lending contemporary Druidry an air of authenticity as a continuation and adaptation of an older tradition.

Druidry by these accounts is thus a nature-based native spirituality lived within Northern European landscapes, seasons and myths. All three emphasise Druidry’s contemporary

relevance and universality, quite far removed from the Druids encountered by Romans two thousand years ago, though for any tradition to be a living one it must be as thus.

4.9 Conclusion

The stumbling block for Druids, still, is that indigenous religions are usually defined as the religions of indigenous people (as does Johnson 2002: 308), which has always struck me as odd, considering many indigenous people are Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or whatever. Johnson adds that indigenous religion, like the French term *les autochtones*, ‘connotes the religion of peoples that is the natural growth of a particular land, an organic, biological relation between a group and a place’ (2002: 309). But nothing actually springs from the land in terms of human culture – it is what humans make of the land and imagine it to be. Yet, being born in a place where your ancestors have been buried is a special quality that has been threatened by modernity let alone colonisation. People in Britain have had to move for education and work, or because they can and want to explore somewhere else. It is this response to modernity that leads Druids to yearn for a connection to place they believe is possessed by indigenous people; but they too have experienced its loss. Thus ‘indigeneity’ becomes conscious when threatened.

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