

Chapter 5

The Goddess of Glastonbury

This chapter provides an ethnographic account of the Glastonbury Goddess religion. I began investigating this religiosity in August 2007. Living six miles from the town of Glastonbury, transportation and accessibility were never a problem. This research is based on a series of ‘day trips’ where casual visits, participation in events and ceremonies, as well as processions took place. Fieldwork ended the following year in August, 2008, but, as with the shrine of the Virgin, I frequently return to both Glastonbury and the temple.

This chapter begins with a survey of Glastonbury, its many identities, and how those identities have helped to create the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity that currently exists there. Following this, the chapter examines ‘Glastonbury Goddess materiality’, i.e. the material use, creation, expression and engagement that take place in accordance with Glastonbury Goddess devotion. Its ethnographic account reveals the materials used in the creation of Goddess ‘devotionals’, temple dressings, offerings and aesthetics. It also reveals the various ways in which statues of the Goddess and other images are created, treated and performed for. In essence, this ethnographic account attempts to ‘take a snapshot of’ and account for a form of religious materiality that is in a constant state of change, renovation and flux, and has provided the reader with an understanding of the myriad colorful forms of materiality in use within the Glastonbury Goddess religion. My interpretations of these observations are included in a final section of this chapter.

Glastonbury

Nestled in the rolling green hills of Somerset in the Southwest of England, Glastonbury is a small market town with a population of around 8,700 (Parish Population Statistics, 2001) inhabitants. Having had lived in Glastonbury for two years, I have encountered Glastonbury's many names: the 'Isle of Apples', the 'Isle of Glass', the 'Isle of the Dead', and 'Avalon' (Glastonbury's mystical and other worldly counterpart). Contemporarily, many claim Glastonbury as home to ancient mystery schools, the resting place of King Arthur and his Lady Guinevere, the burial place of the Holy Grail, and home to the ancient and contemporary Goddess of Glastonbury (Bowman, 2005: 165).

Glastonbury's 'identity' is volatile. It is home to a patchwork of religions, beliefs, mythologies, spiritualities, and ideals. It is a place where many faiths such as Paganism, Christianity, New Age beliefs, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and other religiosities cross paths, run parallel, conflict and collide. Although Glastonbury's 'sacredness' has deep, historical Christian roots, Bowman tells us another story of Glastonbury's 'sacredness' as it is experienced contemporarily. She writes

From the late 19th and early 20th centuries, influences from the Celtic revival, Theosophy and esotericism were felt in Glastonbury (Benham 1993), and from the 1970's it gained a media reputation as a centre for "hippies," "New Age travelers," and people seeking alternative lifestyles and spiritual experiences. Regarded as the epicenter of New Age in England, some see Glastonbury's significance in terms of leylines, as a node where leylines converge, a centre of earth energies. In global terms, Glastonbury is regarded as the "Heart Chakra" of planet earth (Bowman, 2003: 163).

Despite its current diversity of religiosities, two dominant historicities can be identified that run parallel to one another in Glastonbury, Pagan and Christian. I must add that both of these

historical and mythological streams have several variations, but for the sake of clarity, I will call them thus and will add that they both play vastly large roles in influencing Glastonbury's contemporary identities, especially Glastonbury's 'Celtic connection' (Bowman, 2007: 19).

Landscape

Glastonbury is famous both locally and worldwide for many things, but most notably is Glastonbury's inspiring surrounding landscape and Glastonbury's most iconic feature, the Glastonbury Tor. The Tor dominates the Somerset landscape and can be seen from as far as South Wales on a clear day. The Glastonbury Tor has served as a visible land marker for those making religious pilgrimages to Glastonbury and forms a large part of the religious materiality that is interacted with, reproduced through various art mediums, and circulated in Glastonbury.

Historically and contemporarily, Glastonbury's unique landscape plays a major role in Glastonbury's status as an axis point for Pagans and Christians alike (amongst the other religiosities encountered there). Bowman says

Some regard it [Glastonbury] as a significant prehistoric centre of Goddess worship, confirmed for present day devotees by figures of the Goddess they discern in the landscape and by the existence in the Christian era of strong devotion to Our Lady St Mary of Glastonbury and to St Bridget, both widely regarded as Christianized forms of the Goddess (Bowman, 2004: 273).

These myths surrounding Glastonbury's landscape are particularly responsible for inspiring the visions that have helped create the Glastonbury Goddess religion. Glastonbury's Christian mystical traditions and Anglican and Catholic Christians also have strong connections to Glastonbury. The story of the Holy Thorn that exists on Wearyall Hill supposedly placed there

by Joseph of Arimathea when he brought Jesus as a child to Glastonbury has given Christians a strong hold on Glastonbury's surrounding myths and landscape. According to Bowman's research, links with 'Celtic Christianity' and stories connected with St Bride play large roles in Glastonbury's diverse past and present (Bowman, 2007).

The Glastonbury Goddess Religion

The story of Bridget is foundational to the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity. The Christian version of St Bridget's story is as follows:

It is said that St Bridget visited Glastonbury 488 and spent time at Beckery or Bride's Mound, an area on the edge of Glastonbury where there seems to have been a chapel dedicated to St Mary Magdalene (Bowman, 2007: 24)

And,

In the late nineteenth century John Arthur Goodchild claimed that there had been in Glastonbury the survival of an ancient Irish cult venerating the female aspect of the deity which became attached to the figure of St Bride (Benham 1993) (Bowman, 2007: 25).

Kathy Jones (author, writer and resident of Glastonbury) along with a core group of other devotees adopted this idea of a surviving 'cult' dedicated to the feminine divine as the foundation upon which the contemporary Goddess movement in Glastonbury was created. According to Bowman, Jones claims, for example, 'Where we find St Bridget we know that the goddess Bridie was once honoured' (Bowman, 2004: 281, citing Jones 2000: 16). This forms a kind of Glastonbury Goddess religion mission statement which points toward the reclamation, restoration, and transformation of Glastonbury's history, legends and mythologies. The

restoration of the Goddess to Glastonbury by Jones and a woman called Tyna Redpath has its 'official' roots, according to Bowman (2007: 26), in the first Goddess conference held in 1996, and further, with the Goddess procession that took place accordingly. The ideas of both restoration and reclamation of the Goddess from an imposed Christianity forms major parts of both this religiosity and this chapter at relevant points. The 'restoration' and 'reterritorialisation' of the Goddess is done partly through the re-interpretation of history and myth, partly through their re-invention, and partly through material presence. That is the more materiality is created in relation to the Goddess and her temple, the more visible the Goddess religiosity becomes in Glastonbury. Jones says,

Together we are bringing the Goddess alive once again through our worship of Her, through spiritual practice, ceremonies, actions, creative expression, study, writing, artwork, music, dance and in our daily lives (2001: i).

In this way the presence of the Glastonbury Goddess religion is in no doubt in spite of what are understood to be past Christian attempts at suppression. Arguably, Goddess materiality is plentiful as well as bright, colorful, and attention catching for this very reason. The preference for the use of indigenous materials along with the claim to be the first indigenous temple dedicated to the Goddess in over 1,500 years adds to this religiosity's aim of what can be called 'reterritorialisation'. According to Kellie Jones,

Reterritorialisation includes recapturing one's (combined and various) history, much of which has been dismissed as an insignificant footnote to the dominant culture (Jones, 2007).

An important part of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury is based on ‘reterritorialising’ or ‘reclaiming’ the land from male dominant, Christian, oppression where the Goddess was pushed aside and nearly forgotten. Kathy Jones writes,

The Lady of these islands who was lost in the mists of history is being rediscovered and brought back into the light of day, wearing new clothes, shining with renewed radiance. She is whispering in our ears, appearing in our visions, calling to us across time to remember Her and we are responding. All over Britain thousands of women and men now celebrate the Goddesses of this land in ways which probably haven’t happened for a thousand years or more (2001: i).

For the Goddess religion, a link to the past has been created that establishes a valid, authentic claim to Glastonbury where the Lady of Avalon can be championed and restored to her rightful place. This reclamation of the feminine satisfies the need to celebrate that which had been previously overlooked, forgotten and/or oppressed.

The Account

My research was mainly conducted in a series of one-day visits to Glastonbury that took place over four seasons. This is significant to the research because the Glastonbury Goddess religiosity works ‘cyclically’ within the cycles of nature, the materiality created and engaged being influenced thus. I made around 20 visits to the temple in the course of that year, including ceremonies and events, with additional visits to conduct interviews. The Glastonbury Goddess religion is a vernacular, local occurrence specific to the location, landscape and place that is Glastonbury. It shares common features with other contemporary forms of Goddess worship, and is ‘indigenous to the British isles’ (Jones, 2001: i). My main informant, Georgina Sirett-Hardie (a

Priestess of Avalon) served as my source and often as a contact point with other members of the religion. Apart from time spent visiting her in the temple I conducted four interviews with Georgina, one formal, two semi-formal, and one informal. Georgina's role within the Glastonbury Goddess religion is a significant one. She is heavily involved in the temple, its 'daily life' and major events. Other informants were the temple caretakers and others who I met at events and decorating during my 'work experience' in helping to paint and decorate the Goddess Hall.

From my experience, devotees are mostly female, range from between 18 to 80 years of age, and come from all social classes. There is a male presence in this religiosity, but it is eclipsed by the female one. During my research I did not visit other Goddess Temples, apart from the one that is also set up in Glastonbury, but as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, others do exist. The Glastonbury Goddess Temple can be considered the 'parent temple' to the ones affiliated in Holland, Belgium, Argentina, the United States and Australia as it has 'trained' many of the founding members of these temples, which might indicate similarities in terms of materiality, terminology, ethos, and social class among its members.

Time spent participating and observing in the daily life of the temple on my field visits and at events such as the temple dressings, oracular evenings, and processions, has shown that in the Glastonbury Goddess religion, there are several female deities understood to be connected both with different parts of Glastonbury's landscape and to other places in the British Isles. However, I was told that there is one Goddess that presides over the whole of Glastonbury (and Avalon). The Glastonbury Goddess 'herself' is elusive and not easy to pin down either in terms of her mystical and/or embodied self, or of the language and grammatical forms used in reference to her. Cynthia Eller writes,

One very real difficulty in writing about feminist spirituality is deciding whether to use the singular or the plural in referring to the divine (1995:133).

For the sake of simplicity, I refer to the Goddess as singular. This does not, however, exclude her other 'selves'. Further, the Goddess Temple is a source of continual change, renovation, innovation and devotion, whereby countless forms of volatile, votive expression can be found. The material practices of the temple are vibrantly centered around the altar, the painting of the Goddess and the willow wickerwork goddess statues that reside there. This is not, however, where Goddess centered materiality begins and ends. It is found, created, interacted with and used in the daily life of the temple, in offerings, ceremonies, processions, priestess training, healing events, and more. Indigeneity plays an important role in how materiality is created and engaged. (Indigeneity is used here to describe that which is indigenous to the land surrounding Glastonbury, or that which is honored as being from the body of the Goddess).

The Temple

The Glastonbury Goddess Temple is situated just off the Glastonbury High Street and is both an active point in the community as well as a point of Pagan pilgrimage for Goddess worshippers. First opened in 2002, the Glastonbury Goddess Temple is said to be the first indigenous temple dedicated to the Goddess in 1,500 years and it is the first of a network of temples that have been founded in different parts of Europe, the USA, Argentina, Maui and Australia (www.goddess temple.co.uk [Accessed 21/08/2011]).



5.1 The Glastonbury Goddess Temple. Outside view

The temple occupies the 1st floor of a courtyard building and is a large open space with lilac carpet and A-framed high ceilings. The temple is open six days a week and provides a place where people can meditate, enter into personal prayer, read, make offerings, stop and rest, and/or seek healing and/or oracular advice. In the January interview, Georgina said ‘When the temple was being painted and decorated before first opening, the Goddess was invoked and painted on the walls to create a space’ that would be ‘energetically protected’. After the Goddess’s many forms were painted onto the walls, all of the walls were then washed over with lilac paint, which is, according to Georgina, ‘the color of the Goddess’. Georgina told me that the Goddess, ‘Novala, Our Lady of Avalon, keeper of the mysteries; and Lady of the Mists of Avalon presides over the lands from which the Tor is visible to the naked eye’.

Inside the Goddess Temple the Goddess is worshipped in the forms of willow, wickerwork figures who sometimes occupy the main altar of the temple alongside a painting of the Lady of Avalon. The painting below illustrates the Goddess in her 'dark aspect'.



5.2 Wickerwork figure of the Goddess to the right

Present in the temple are also statue forms of the Nine Morgens (illustrated further on), important figures to the mythology and understanding of this religious complex.

On my visits to the temple, I have found that it is usually dimly lit and candles and incense create a mood of tranquility and calm. Devotional music dedicated to the Goddess is usually playing softly in the background. The website of Jones (different from the Goddess Temple website) describes the Goddess Temple as,

A place set aside for the Lady of Avalon. A place of beauty, love and welcoming joy. A place for those who love Her to meet each other. A place for celebrations, rituals, rites of

passage, for all seasons of the year and for all aspects of Goddess. Where we may laugh and cry, sing and weep in her loving embrace (2008).

Although I am not a Goddess devotee, I often visit the temple when I am in Glastonbury because of its calming, relaxing ambience.

I documented in my field notes that the materials used to decorate and facilitate the temple aesthetic often come from the land. The other objects present in the temple often come, according to Georgina, from the homes of devotees. Here one can see bones, feathers, stones, small clay and bronze goddess figures, such as the Venus of Willendorf. There are also plastics and artificial materials within the temple, despite the overall idea of that which resides within the temple must be indigenous to the land around Glastonbury. For example, according to Georgina in a formal interview that took place on the 2nd of January, 2008, ‘The willow used to make the goddess figures is indigenous to the Somerset levels’. She said that ‘indigenous materials’ are ‘preferred’. Offerings are also often made from local materials found there, i.e. in and around Glastonbury’s landscape. However, as will be discussed in detail in this chapter, the process of dressing the temple is where one can identify how materials are used and engaged by devotees.

The Temple Complex – how it works

From information gathered, I have found that there are distinctions between those who care for the temple on a daily basis, the organizing Trust that looks after both the aesthetic and monetary affairs of the Goddess and her Temple, and those who ‘set the stage for devotion’. These roles often overlap and intermingle. To begin with, within the Goddess religion in Glastonbury there are people called ‘temple Melissas’. I am told by an informant that the word Melissa is Greek, meaning worker bee, and in this case refers to one who works for a queen bee, or the Goddess.

Melissas are volunteer Goddess devotees in charge of daily ‘stewarding’ at the Goddess Temple. Melissas are both male and female, but generally tend to be female. Some Melissas are both priestess and priests while being Melissas, while others are only Melissas and not specifically trained Goddess clergy. They are responsible for ritually calling the Goddess into the Temple on a daily basis when opening the Temple, and ‘letting her go’ of the evening when the temple is closed down, again through the use of ritual. Melissas are also responsible for informing temple visitors, for collecting money for sales of books and other temple/Goddess literature and cards, and for making sure that the temple and its daily affairs run smoothly. People also often come into the temple to get smudged: cleansed with sage and/or sweet grass. The Melissas are trained by the temple priestesses to do this work.

An informant told me that all are equal in the Glastonbury Goddess religion and that there is no high priestess or priest at the Goddess Temple. However, the founders of the Goddess Temple are the people who generally have the last word in terms of aesthetic, events, and organization. Although active Temple devotees are encouraged to express their devotion through the creation of Goddess centered materiality, if certain objects are not ‘agreeable’ to the founding members, then they will be removed from the temple and/or changed. The founding members also look after and control the Goddess Trust. This includes ensuring that associated charities are given their funds, that the annual ‘Goddess conference’ (a weeklong event filled with workshops and celebrations that ends with a statue of the Goddess being processed around Glastonbury) and other events are organized, and that donations find their way to the Trust: The Glastonbury Goddess Temple, Company Limited by guarantee is a non-profit organization.

Who is the Glastonbury Goddess? Who are the Nine Morgens?

The Goddess Temple is a place where the Goddess and goddesses who are indigenous to the British Isles and local to Glastonbury and the Isle of Avalon (Glastonbury's mystical counterpart) are celebrated. In the temple, the deities take the forms of willow wickerwork statues who are venerated, spoken with, petitioned, and said by Georgina (when I asked her about the 'presence' of the Goddess) to 'embody' the Goddess. However, in common with new, non-doctrinal religious movements that emphasize individuality, this is not widely agreed upon. While painting and decorating the Goddess Hall, I was working alongside two female devotees. I asked them how they 'see' the Goddess statues. They both said that the willow figures in the temple are *representations* of the Goddess. However, Georgina and the two mentioned above agreed that the Goddess transcendentally presides *over* and hovers *above* Glastonbury and its landscape while simultaneously being evidently present *in* the landscape.

The individual 'aspects' of the Goddess who are worshipped at Glastonbury, along with the Nine Morgens, are sourced from contemporary fiction, writings on myths and legends, and historical accounts. However, the main sources for 'who the Goddess is' within the Goddess religion at Glastonbury come from the key founding member, Kathy Jones. According to an online article from the BBC called 'Goddess Spirituality in Glastonbury' (BBC 2008), Jones says the main Goddesses worshipped are the Lady of Avalon (who is Morgen la Fey), the Nine Morgens, Brigit or Bridie of the Sacred Flame, Modron who is Great Mother of the lineage of Avallach, Our Lady Mary of Glastonbury, the Crone of Avalon, the Tor Goddess, Lady of the Hollow Hills, Lady of the Lake and the Lady of the Holy Springs and Wells. Here, the Nine Morgens are referred to goddesses yet in an interview with an informant they were referred to as not goddesses but as 'healers'. Jones has written several works based on the Glastonbury

Goddess, such as *The Ancient British Goddess* (2001). She acknowledges a few of her sources of inspiration such as Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, Marija Gimbutas' *Language of the Goddess* and *Civilisation of the Goddess*, Caitlin and John Matthews' *Ladies of the Lake*, and 'Michael Dames for his Goddess inspired views of landscape in *The Avebury Cycle* and *Silbury Treasure*' (2001:ii).

The figures of the Nine Morgens are permanent residents in the Goddess Temple. They are also willow wickerwork statues. The Nine Morgens form a protective circle around a small space in the temple that is, according to a conversation with one of the temple Melissas, dedicated to those who want or need healing. The roles of the Nine Morgens can be best described as healing Goddesses who are connected to different parts of the landscape around the town such as springs, mounds, and groves. Kathy Jones says that the Nine Morgens are a ninefold Sisterhood who 'rule over the Isle of Avalon surrounded by the Lake of Mysts' (2001: 213). Their names were recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the *Vita Merlini* in the twelfth century as Moronoe, Mazoe, Gliton ea, Gliten, Cliton, Tyrone, Thitis, Thetis and Morgen La Fey'. There were also nine legendary ladies of the lake named by John and Caitlin Matthews as 'Igraine, Guinevere, Morgan, Argant, Nimue or Vivienne, Enit, Kundry, Dindraine and Ragness, who derive their powers from the Otherworld (Jones, 2001: 213).



5.3 The Nine Morgens in the Goddess Temple

Georgina told me in an informal conversation that took place in the temple that sometimes one of the statues of the Nine Morgens takes a place on the main altar in the temple, and she is dressed to be the Goddess of that point in the ritual year. On a visit to the temple one afternoon, a male Melissa who appeared to be in his 50s told me that some of the people who look after the daily life of the temple have intimate relationships with the statues of the Morgens. Both Georgina and the Melissa said that the Morgens sometimes move, that their facial expressions change, and that ‘things’ occur around them. They also said that many people have also experienced ‘strange things’ in the presence of the Morgens.

The Glastonbury Goddess Wheel, Goddesses and Corresponding Materiality

The Glastonbury Goddess religion is based on cyclical renewals and transformations. At each of the eight points in the ritual year different aspects of the Goddess are worshipped on the Goddess Wheel of the year (based on the Wiccan Wheel), also known as the Medicine Wheel, or the

sacred Wheel of Britannia, or Ana, and the temple is dressed accordingly (Jones, 2001: 30).

These ‘points’ are the eight compass directions and are associated with the seasons of the calendar year. They are North, North-East, East, South-East, South, South-West, West, and North-West, and they are ‘represented’ through corresponding altars (in corresponding colors) within the temple. Further, a wicker Goddess that corresponds with each point in the year is displayed. I have attempted to simplify information about the goddesses worshipped at the eight points of the Goddess wheel of the year. The Goddess Temple website provides an overview of the ‘Medicine Wheel’ and the particular deities and correspondences. Here they are in table form:

Goddesses	Element	Sabbat	Color	Animal	Objects	Direction
Mother of Air: Danu, Anu, Arianrhod, Bone Woman, Stone Woman, Cailleach, Tyrone	Air	<i>Winter Solstice</i>	Violet, Silver	Wren, Eagle, Owl, Buzzard	Scepter, Sword, Feather, Fan	North
Maiden Goddess: Brigit, Bridie, Kernababy, Thitis		<i>Imbolc</i>	White	Swan, Snake, Wolf, Cow	Grael, Spindle, Wheel	North-East
Mother of Fire: Artha, Grainne, Sulis, Eostra, Cliton	Fire	<i>Spring Equinox</i>	Green, Gold	Bear, Hare, Hen, Cat	Wand/Rod	East

Lover/Virgin Goddess: (Ker) Rhiannon, Olwen, Elen, Blodeuwedd, Thetis		<i>Beltane</i>	Red	Mare, Horse, Dove, Swan	Comb, Mirror, Shell	South-East
Mother of Water: Domnu, Queen of the Deep, Lady of the Springs and Wells, Lady of the Lake, Gliten	Water	<i>Summer</i> <i>Solstice</i>	Blue, Turquoise	Dolphin, Whale, Salmon, Seal	Chalice, Shell	South
Mother Goddess: Ker, Grain Goddess, Madron, Glitonea		<i>Lammas</i>	Yellow	Horned Deer, Cattle, Sheep, Goats	Loom, Shuttle	South-West
Mother of Earth: Banbha, Brigantia, Gaia, Moronoe	Earth	<i>Autumn</i> <i>Equinox</i>	Brown, Orange	Boar, Badger, Fox;	Stone, Orb, Crystal	West
Crone Goddess: Dark Mother, Keridwen, Sheela na Gig; Mazoe		<i>Samhain</i>	Black	Sow, Toad,	Cauldron, Sickle,	North-West

5.4 Table of Goddess and materiality correspondences

Further, as will be demonstrated in the section titled ‘Offerings’, I have observed that materiality associated with that particular Goddess/season are brought to the temple and left in acts of veneration and devotion.

Dressing the Temple

Temple dressings are where devotees come together and a flurry of creative, collective and votive religious expression take place. This is where the decorations of the temple are taken down, and either boxed and put away, or reused in a new, creative way. The wicker Goddess figure at the altar is either, moved and replaced with another wicker figure, or re dressed to display colors corresponding with one of the eight points in the ritual year. The different altars throughout the temple (one at each of the eight compass directions) are also dismantled and rearranged and re-dressed. Goddess Temple dressing shares similarities to other vernacular practices such as arranging seasonal flowers in churches or preparing for Christmas by putting up decorations. It is, however, unique in that it is inspired by a particular form of relational aesthetic which inspires devotion to a Goddess who is particular to a specific point in the ritual year. Unlike Christmas decorations or church flower arranging, the temple dressing is not only about decorating in traditional ways, it is about inspiring and maintaining devotion to the Goddess.

From what Georgina told me and from I have witnessed, Temple dressings involve drawing on a collective pool of creative ideas and energies that comes from various devotees (but as mentioned before, a handful of them have the final say). No two temple dressings are the same. Although many of the same materials will be used in different cycles and different years, they are never used in exactly the same way. I was present during one of the temple dressings that took place in preparation for Imbolc (1st of February) in the middle of January, 2008 (just before

the fieldwork trip to Spain). In all, 26 people turned out to help dress the temple. There were two women directing the creativity, but within their directions there was space to move around and play with ideas and materials. Music dedicated to Goddess devotion was playing on a CD player and the mood was light and fun. The women and men split off into several groups at different points in the temple. Men were generally doing work such as climbing ladders, moving heavy pieces, and scraping old candle wax out of candle holders in preparation for new candles.

Women were more involved with the actual creativity and the aesthetic of the temple. One group was dedicated to dressing branches that hung from the ceiling beams with long green ribbons. These ribbons had bells and white feathers tied to the ends of them. I found that this is because green and white are the colors of Brigit, or Bridie, because Bridie is the youngest goddess who begins the quickening that brings spring in from winter. Bridie is also the swan, hence the feathers. Other groups were put onto the tasks of dressing the eight corners of the room using the colors that represent those directions and those deities. Another group was dedicated to dressing the actual wicker statue and the main altar dedicated to Bridie. One of the Nine Morgens was brought and placed to the right of the newly placed painting of the Lady of Avalon and became Bridie/Brigit. A veil was placed over her face and the body of the figure was draped and robed in white materials of different textures. The Goddess that had been there before was placed back in the ring of healing and resumed her status as one of the Nine Morgens. While I was there, the new painting of the Lady of Avalon was unveiled to sound of cheers, delight and adoration. I heard one devotee say ‘Isn’t she beautiful...oh, she’s just perfect’.

It was during the temple dressing that I realized how loose and spontaneous is the materiality used in the temple and by the Glastonbury Goddess religion. I found from climbing into the attic to retrieve the materials (as I was asked/sent to do) that the materials used to dress the temple are

stored mainly in lilac bags and small boxes. A priestess of Avalon said that this color has been chosen intentionally because it is the color of the Glastonbury Goddess, or the Lady of Avalon. Each bag is labeled in permanent black marker by the season for which it is used, for example, the bags say 'Winter Solstice', 'Imbolc', 'Samhain', 'Beltane', 'Summer Solstice', 'Spring Equinox', 'Autumn Equinox', 'Yule' and 'Lammas'. Then, once down from the attic, all the materials are taken from the bags and strewn across the floor. From here, people come and take pieces of material, mixing and matching and throwing back that which is not useful in that moment. The contents from the bags come from donations of devotees. They are colorful pieces of material, and different colored curtains. The lilac bags mainly contain materials of all corresponding goddess related and seasonal colors. Both in boxes that are stored and in newly brought in bags are feathers, bells, tinsel, beads and more. Caroline, who I had not formally met at this point, is responsible for the main altar dressing. At one stage I was helping her and she sent me on a mission for white material to be placed under one of the smaller goddess statues. When I returned with a netted fabric, she sharply said 'We don't want the kitchen curtain look for Bridie'. Instead, I was sent to find smooth, flowing material that better complimented the altar arrangement. During one of the dressings for the four corners, one woman was using black and white to represent the going from autumn into winter. Kathy Jones questioned her about this in a jovial way, and the woman replied that that is what she wants to do because that is how she sees it. After a moment's pause for consideration, Jones simply said 'okay' and moved on.

During the temple dressing I was both participating and observing. As I was hanging ribbons from the rafters (after I had put small bells and feathers on their tips), I noticed a woman crying and others gathered around her to hug her and give her support. At another point one of the devotees sprang some good news on everyone of something that was happening in her life at the

moment. Here support in the form of cheers and ‘well done!’ were given. Toward the end of the dressing all the volunteers began to clean up and the temple was put back into order. At one point they were rounded up and asked who would be kind enough to wash, dry and iron the materials that had just been taken down. One woman reluctantly volunteered. The others laughed. All in all, I found the temple dressing to be a joyous event of devotion, creativity and love and support for each other.

During an interview with Georgina that took place before I attended the temple dressing, she told me that ‘the altar is decorated with prayer and ritual. We have a private ceremony that activates the goddess’. In my experience of being present at a temple dressing I did not see either of those things take place. What I observed during the altar dressing can be best described as working, creative aestheticism, i.e. people work together to create a devotional Goddess aesthetic. As for ‘activating’ the newly placed Goddess of that season, although I did not see this happen, it could have easily happened either later that evening, another day, or not at all. The other temple dressings that take place throughout the year follow similar lines of material engagement, but, as mentioned before, no two dressings will be the same in terms of creativity.

Creation of Goddess centered objects/materiality

Failing to contact the woman who creates the willow wicker figures of the Goddess, as mentioned before, on a visit to the Temple in June, 2010 I encountered the artist, called Caroline, who created the central altar painting in the temple. This encounter took place during a casual shopping visit to Glastonbury. As is sometimes my custom, I stop into the Goddess Temple to rest. Because I was not expecting to meet a potential informant (this was clumsy on my part), I did not have paper, pen, or other recording equipment with me. I did, however, rush from the encounter to a shop where I bought a notepad and pen. I quickly wrote down what I discovered

from the conversation. When Caroline begins a painting of the Goddess (in whichever of her aspects), she first starts consciously drawing then goes into a trance-like state where she channels the Goddess to come through in whatever way she [the Goddess] wishes. Commenting on the exhaustion this process brings, she said it is an incredible process carried out in love and devotion. Caroline said it was a 'space' from which she did not want to leave as it was far more appealing living in the world and landscape of the Goddess than in reality. On a second encounter with Caroline, she went into further detail about her processes. The year leading up to doing the painting was spent doing the priestess training in Glastonbury run by Kathy Jones. All of that year, according to Caroline, the priestesses in the training were told to focus on the Goddess. They had to spend hours focusing on and conjuring images of the Goddess, which was led by Jones's interpretation of what the Goddess should look like or what she should present 'energetically'. Caroline said that during that time, there was a black cat around; hence she painted a black cat into the painting of the Lady of Avalon.



5.5 Lady of Avalon and black cat in right hand corner

Interestingly, Caroline told me that it took roughly three days after the painting was finished for the Goddess to ‘settle in’ (her words) to the image. She said that during this time, ‘a relationship between us [her and the Goddess] grows’. The day that I saw her in the temple, we both stood in front of the painting, and she told me how when she looks up and into the eyes of the painting, she sees the Goddess’s eyes well up with tears of empathy for whatever it is that she is feeling or going through. Here we have a creator of a divine image who sees that image as containing and embodying the Goddess. She then began to muse over whether or not the image would gain memory of all of the people, love and devotion that have stood before her, and that would make the painting of the Goddess more powerful with years to come. Caroline then mused over her own death and said that this thing she created, which really wasn’t from her, but through her, would be there long after she is dead. Then she said that she is amazed that people instantly relate and have relationship with the painting; that’s it is amazing to see people fall down in tears before the altar and venerate and/or pray to the Goddess.

Offerings

As indicated from the Goddess Wheel of the Year, the eight points in the year are ‘represented through eight altars in the temple. These altars occupy their corresponding directions, and the materiality found at each one is also correspondent. At the main altar of the Goddess Temple (that occupies the largest and most central space), many objects and things are visible. Candles are there to be lit, and pieces of paper with pencils are in a basket in the floor next to the altar. There is another basket where notes are left, and there is a little donation plate where devotees leave money. Objects of natural materials are generally offered at the temple. On the altar, stones, feathers, acorns, hazelnuts, shells, plants, and flowers are quite commonly seen. Sometimes they are arranged in patterns, sometimes not. Stones such as crystals and rose quartz

are often seen, as well as pieces of bone, antler, wooden statues of goddesses, and sea shells can be seen in arrangements on the different altars around the temple. These natural objects are often, but not limited to being, indigenous to the Somerset levels. Ribbons, clouts, candles, hand-made ornaments, and/or jewelry (earrings, necklaces) are sometimes tied to or hung on the wicker goddess on display at that time.



5.6 Woman pinning a ribbon onto the Goddess figure after procession, 2008

Offerings also consist of items such as money, paintings, drawings, jewelry of sentimental or other value, or photographs of loved ones who are either ill or passed away. However, the point of time on the wheel of the year dictates the types of offerings made to the Goddess on display in the temple and the materials of which those offerings consist. For example, snowdrops will be offered to Bridie, or Brigit, during and around the time of Imbolc (1 February).



5.7 Yule offerings

Around the spring equinox, blown eggs and pink quartz are often left in honor of the Goddess Eostra or Cliton. At Lammas (around the first of August), bread is left as an offering on the altar in the temple, as are Bridie, or corn dollies.



5.8 Temple at Lammass and offerings

Ivy will be offered to Keridwen during Her time in the temple around Samhain (31st of October/ 1st of November).

In the autumn months, apples, fruits and nuts are left along with photographs of the deceased as memorials where they are either left on the altar or pinned/tied to the wicker statue during the time when ancestors are remembered. These photos often accompany a message such as, for example, ‘you are loved and missed’. I did not feel it was appropriate or respectful to photograph the images of the dead that hung on the Goddess figures or sat on the altar at this time of year. I did, however, document them. One was a photograph of a baby wrapped in a white blanket with tubes attached to its nose, and the other was a photograph of a young man who appeared to be in his early 20s. Georgina told me that during the time of Keridwen, a cow skull was offered to the Temple from a female devotee’s herd. The cow died naturally, so the skull was intact. The

devotee brought it to the temple to be adorned and dedicated to the bone goddess Danu, the goddess of death, during her time in the temple around the winter solstice.



5.9 Cow skull offering, Winter Solstice

I have observed how the skull is used and re used often in temple dressings. According to Georgina, other forms of offerings are also made to the Goddess Temple, such as the volunteered time of devotees in service to the temple and monetary donations.

Healing and the Goddess

On a visit to the temple one day in the spring of 2008, Georgina told me that the Goddess is petitioned for many reasons. This often happens in times of hardship and need, in thanks, or in simple celebration of her. As in the case of the Virgin of Alcala, pledges and promises are sometimes made using the exemplifying phrase ‘If you do this for me, I will buy you the grounds

on which to build a new temple'. She also said in the same conversation 'Bartering with the Goddess is tricky business'.

From informal interviews with two temple Melissas I also found that the Goddess is often petitioned for help with problems such as economic hardship, infertility, or asked to aid in healing spiritual, physical or psychological damage or difficulties encountered by either devotee or a loved one. The Glastonbury Goddess, for example, is said to perform 'miracles'. In an interview with Georgina, an account was given to me about a woman visiting Glastonbury who had a mild heart attack while she was in town. She was taken by her friends to the Goddess Temple where she said she was made better by the Goddess, and now the woman does anything she can to be of service to the Temple. Georgina said that she is known as 'Stitchwitch' and that she makes many of the banners and flags used in the yearly Goddess processions.



5.10 Examples of banners and flags made by 'Stitchwitch' devotee

As I sat in the temple and observed one day, those who appear to be familiar with the temple go directly and sit in the circle of the Nine Morgens. Those who have not visited the temple before are shown what to do by the temple Melissas. On two occasions I have been sitting in the temple and I have watched people create a queue outside the circle of the Morgens.



5.11 Woman lying in the center of the Morgens in the temple

After suffering a knee injury, I was conducting a fieldwork visit to the temple. The ‘Melissa’ on duty that day, after watching me limp up the steps to the temple from the window, insisted that I sit inside the Morgens circle for about half an hour, that doing so should make me feel better. I can report that I did not heal particularly quickly. In any case, as stated above, the mode with which pledges and promises are made share characteristics with those found both in Catholic devotion, particularly with devotion to the Virgin of Alcala.

Daily life of the temple

One day I participated in the opening and closing of the Temple. Each day the temple is opened by the Melissas. First, the lights come on, then candles and incense are lit, and music begins to play. Then the lights go off and the mood is set. Depending on the ritual skill and experience of who is on ‘Melissa joy’, the temple is opened through a ceremony of invocation where the Goddess is invited into her temple. If the Melissa is not very experienced in his or her ceremonial skills of ‘calling in the Goddess’, then a more experienced priestess or Melissa will come and help aid in the ceremony. The day of my attendance, the Melissa in charge was not skilled enough to ritually invoke the Goddess and we had to wait for a trained Priestess to come and help.

The Goddess is called into the temple at the beginning of temple opening hours through a ceremony that calls each and every name of the Goddess (see table of correspondences). The temple is closed in the same way, but using the words, ‘Good night [whoever the goddess of that time is] and bide well in your temple’. When I asked the Melissa on duty why they say this, she said that it ‘closes down the energy’ allowing the Goddess(s) ‘to take a rest from people’s needs’. When I later asked Georgina about this, she looked slightly confused. She then confirmed that the Goddess and the Nine Morgens rest in the evening when the temple is closed. As mentioned in the final part of Chapter 4, this is similar to that which takes place surrounding the Hindu *murti*: the curtains remain closed after their private meal and the gods have a period of rest. I then asked how that is possible, especially if people continued to make prayers to her outside the temple and beyond (many of the Glastonbury Goddess devotees are not local residents), thinking (not saying) that prayers might ‘technically activate’ the Goddess in the temple. She then said ‘The Goddess is everywhere, all the time’.

In examining the daily life of the temple, I found that intimate, day to day, relationships with the Goddess figures and the Nine Morgens can take on ‘real’ interactions. During one of my visits to the temple Georgina told me that the faces of the Nine Morgens sometimes change. Georgina literally ‘introduced’ me to the statue figures of the ‘Morgens of Avalon’. Here, she told me each of their names and then told them my name. She said that they have distinct personalities and the ability to heal. I took note that their faces are made from a type of cast alabaster plaster that has been placed on wicker/willow femininely shaped figures. She then proceeded to tell me that ‘sometimes they look pissy or serious, and sometimes they look happy and pleased’. Georgina told me that when the Melissas are smudging the temple as part of their daily routine, they ‘must smudge inside the Nine Morgens circle or else they’ll [the Morgens] get pissy’. I assume from this last the Morgens enjoy being smudged. As mentioned before, interviews with the male Melissa and Georgina found that the Morgens have also been known to make things move and to make sounds in the Temple. Georgina told me the story of how she was in the temple alone one evening, and ‘when I was closing the door to leave for the night, the gong in temple sounded on its own and it gave me a right fright’. Upon being asked if the statues were ‘representations’ of the Morgens or ‘embodied’ (I used the exact words ‘representations’ and ‘embodied’), after a moment’s pause for consideration, Georgina responded with one word: ‘embodied’. Then she said: ‘the statues *are* the Morgens’.

On a daily basis, people come from long and short distances to see the temple, to venerate the Goddess and to pray there. One day while visiting the temple, a woman came in, took her shoes off (which is required of all comers), went straight to the altar, placed some money on the altar, put a crystal on top of it, stood in front of the image of the Goddess, and put her hands together in prayer position at her lips. Then she got down on her knees and did the same, where she sat

kneeling in front of the altar, eyes closed, for quite some time. Then she got up, put her hands in prayer position in front of lips again before turning around, put her shoes back on and went out the door. She was probably there for an estimated 8 minutes. One of the priestesses was on Melissa duty ('Melissa joy' they correct me) and she told me that that woman comes once a month from far up north, puts money on the altar and leaves again.

While the daily opening and closing ceremonies are usually the same or at least similar in the temple, the eight annual ceremonies are always different. In an interview, Georgina said 'They [ceremonies] are arranged by two different priestesses every time'. She said that the two priestesses prepare for ceremony 'by spending a day together in a kind of meditation'. I was given this example: 'At 11am, we meet for lunch, share ideas and feelings, and connect with the part of the land that corresponds with that Goddess. We create poetry, tell stories, and make up our own aromatherapy oils to dab on everyone so that we can usher in a new energy'. From here, new rituals and ceremonies are devised.

The Goddess in Procession

I attended my first Goddess procession in August 2008; the year when the aspect of the Goddess called the 'Wild Maiden' was being celebrated.



5.12 The Goddess and devotees in procession at Chilkwell Street, Glastonbury

Bowman writes,

each year in rotation a model of the goddess in one of her three aspects – maiden, mother or crone – was made and then displayed in the most public aspect of the event, the procession on the last day of the [Goddess] conference’ (Bowman 2004: 282).

A joyful, colorful and celebratory event, the procession involves the use of hundreds of flags and banners (as exemplified by those created by the ‘Stitchwitch devotee), costumes, candles, singing, and shouting to express devotion to the Glastonbury Goddess. On the whole, the number of female attendants are far more numerous than that of male. In support of this, Bowman writes

The Goddess Procession has its serious moments, but on the whole it is far more ludic than either of the Christian events, with the overwhelmingly female participants often flamboyantly dressed and performing Goddess changes and songs with gusto en route’ (2004: 282).

The Goddess is processed up Glastonbury High Street, to Chalice Well, on the road toward the White Spring, through the White Spring building which has been recently converted into another Goddess temple (although not directly affiliated with the Glastonbury Goddess Temple) with different corridors that correspond to different aspects of the Goddess (and even a God – portrayed as Herne the Hunter), then up the hill to Glastonbury Tor, then back down again. Bowman says that the procession is

now, in effect, a mirror image of the Christian Pilgrimage processions, in particular the Catholic version that starts from the Tor and proceeds to the Abbey (2004: 283).

Having also attended Christian processions in Glastonbury, I can verify that this is true. However, the Goddess procession is far more colorful, vibrant, passionate and less reserved than the Anglican and Catholic processions. The passion and ‘gusto’ as Bowman calls it, which is found in the Goddess procession closely resembles that which is encountered when the Virgin of Alcala is processed around her territory and in the village in Spain.

The Goddess, on this particular year of my attendance, was sat in a kneeling position holding a bowl, again all created out of wicker, was dressed in leopard print materials and had a wild, unkempt, loosely curled red wig on its head. The ‘Wild Maiden’ Goddess was no larger than a normal sized ten year old girl kneeling in a similar position.



5.13 'Energy buffers' of the Goddess

This statue figure was quite small in comparison to others I have seen which are usually larger, or more 'adult-like' in stature.



5.14 The 2010 Goddess Statue

After the procession stopped, I questioned the two men (illustrated above) who are designated to carry the figure through procession. They told me that they have to be trained for quite some

time in how to deal with all the energy being projected at the figure for two main reasons: the first is because the men have to serve as a kind of ‘energy buffer’ who are capable of stopping the wild maiden from getting out of control; and secondly, so that they (the two men) do not get thrown off balance energetically and suffer.

When the statue was placed at the pool of water at Chalice Well (the longest stop en route to the top of the Tor), a more solemn mood took over. Singing becomes soft and doleful. Here I observed people touching the wig hair of the wicker figure and kneeling next to her in contemplation and meditation.

Some people kneeled in devotion, and many people took water from the pool at the well and placed it on their faces.



5.15 Devotees at Chalice Well pool with Goddess

After a few words from the founding members and much singing, the crowd broke out into a huge cheer with lots of laughter, and the figure was hoisted back onto the shoulders of her guardians and carriers and taken to the White Spring where she encountered other paintings,

statues and aspects of the Goddess, including one black Madonna. The singing (mainly women) took on a choir like acoustic sound in the White Spring, which was lit with only candles with the sound of running water coming from all directions. The ambience was soft, dark, moist and soothing. All of the devotees in the procession were lined up and walking slowly after the statue through the White Spring.



5.16 Devotee venerating altar in the White Spring during procession

From the White Spring, the statue was processed up the hill to the Tor. I did not go up the Tor due to previously mentioned knee injury; however, I waited for the return of the Goddess in the Goddess Conference headquarters. I had observed that nobody tried particularly hard to touch the Goddess figure while she was in procession, yet when she was returned to the town hall rooms and placed on the floor, that changed significantly. Here, several women at different times went to where the statue sat, pinned and hung things on it such as earrings and clouts, placed pictures and other objects such as stones, feathers and seashells in her bowl, and kneeled in front of her.

Some people kissed their own fingers and transferred the kiss to the statue. This type of devotion and veneration went on all afternoon in varying and similar forms.

Demise

Unlike the cedar statue discussed in the case study of the Virgin of Alcala where the wood is of the best quality due to it needing be durable and more time resistant, the Goddess religion creates its statues out of untreated willow. This is because central to the beliefs of the Glastonbury Goddess religion are renewal, transformation and change, not preservation. Georgina said that this is why when a wicker statue starts to deteriorate it is ceremoniously burned along with the offerings that were left on them. She told me that many women find this ceremonial burning difficult because it reminds them of ‘the burning times’, i.e. the times when the devotees felt they had been burned as witches in past lives. Because of this a workshop was created after the last goddess statue burning because it ‘brought up emotional stuff’ for those women.

The Goddess Hall

In addition to the Goddess Temple, there is now also the Goddess Hall in Glastonbury. It was dedicated on the 2nd of November, 2008, after I had done the majority of my fieldwork with the temple. In essence, the Goddess Hall is another temple, yet the Goddess Temple is foundational in the growth and workings of the Glastonbury Goddess religion. The hall is located in another part of the town and serves as a larger venue for ceremonies, rituals, dance, and meditation classes. In the Hall, the eight corners are identified with altars and images of the goddesses who correspond accordingly. What once was a stage in this ex-community center serves as the main altar of the Goddess. Where the wicker figure goddesses in the temple stand between six and seven feet in stature, a larger wicker work figure sits cross legged on the stage/altar in the

Goddess Hall. Herein venerations and devotions also take place, offerings are made and the Goddess is celebrated. The hall is not open daily as is the Goddess Temple. Its main function is to provide a larger space to the Goddess community than the temple previously provided where the public are invited to participate in rituals, dance, ceremonies, healing events, Kundalini yoga classes, and other events.

The opening of the Goddess Hall in 2008 has changed the ‘goings on’ of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury. The hall was mortgaged and opened to accommodate the growing number of adherents and Goddess devotees in both the town and those who travel in. Now the Goddess Temple off Glastonbury High Street serves as a walk in temple where daily interactions at the altar and with the Goddess figures and the Nine Morgens take place. Instead of the wickerwork willow figures, the painting of the Lady of Avalon now ‘holds court’ at the center of the altar in the Goddess Temple. The wicker goddess figures stand to the right of the painting. The largest wicker Goddess figure that was once resident in the temple is now resident in the hall. These changes have inspired new and innovative ways of interacting with the Goddess, such as the creation of more workshops many more healing events. These ‘new’ events also serve as ways to bring more money into the hall and temple. The fact that the Glastonbury Goddess founders now have a mortgage to pay has influenced the amount of paid events that they sponsor in Glastonbury.

Participant Observation/My experience in ceremony

At Imbolc (1st of February, 2009), I attended the ceremony at the Goddess Hall to participate and observe and see how the materiality in the Temple/Hall is used and engaged. A table had been placed in the middle of the Hall and a clear space had been created around it where many

cushions and sheep skins were on the floor for sitting more comfortably. The table had been divided into eight pie shaped sections and there were doll-like figures dressed as each of the goddesses of the eight points on the Goddess Wheel standing in a circle, backs to each other, at the center of the table. Each doll goddess was facing her particular corresponding direction, and facing the larger images of herself in the Hall. Then I noticed an adorned wooden throne-like chair that had been placed under the direction of Northeast, where Brigit, the Maiden, resides.

Practically all of the attendees were dressed in white, the color of Brigit, including me. There were also seats lined against the walls. When I went to take a seat, I found myself sitting next to an older, long grey haired and bearded man who turned out to be called Electric Gypsy. I then noticed that Electric Gypsy had a doll on his lap. He proceeded to tell me that the doll, a Bridie doll, was a gift from the universe, and he called her 'Love'. As it turns out, he had found the doll on the steps outside the hall. He then insisted on putting the doll on my lap so that I could share in the 'Love'. He then kept calling me goddess, thanking me over and over again for all the good things I had done. This distracted me from fully participating and observing in the ceremony, i.e. although he was harmless, I was on edge and guarded. Then after the fourth hug, and when I was going to try to put some distance between me and him for the sake of my research, the ceremony began.

The opening ceremony began with everyone facing the current direction, then turning clockwise toward the center of the room. All of the people had their hands open to receive the 'energy' of the goddess and the act of turning served to bring it to center of the room where the altar on the round table was set up. The ceremony lasted for over an hour. It included singing, chanting, and group interactions. Mostly, I observed, the Goddess figures and altars were there as

visual stimulus. But as it turns out, according to one of the women I met there (a devotee in her mid-twenties), the statues are there to ‘hold the space’.

On another occasion in March, 2008, I had been interviewing Georgina before one of the ‘New Moon Oracle’ evenings was about to begin in the temple. When I asked if I could be present when the Temple was being set up for oracular use, I was told ‘definitely not’. She said that she wanted me to ‘experience the magic of the temple’. I gathered that this meant that I was only to see the temple when it was set up and glamorized with candle light and incense, and once the priest and priestess had put on their oracular robes. On this particular instance, I went inside the temple, left five pounds as an offering, and went to hear what the oracle would tell me. During this session, the temple was set up differently and completely changed. A black material partition had been created whereby any oracle seekers had to crawl through a hole in the material where he or she would then sit in the floor between two seated masked people/figures who spoke with strange and altered voices. One of the women’s voices had been changed to sound like a kind of cackling crow woman. The masks were white with long pointy noses on (similar to the types of medical masks that would have been worn in times of 18th century European bubonic plague), and both people were cloaked from head to toe in black robes. When I sat between them, I was trying not to, but I recognized both figures from time spent in and around the temple. Trying not to let this spoil the occasion, I listened intently to what they said while examining the situation and the how the materiality was used to facilitate the oracular evening, i.e. to create a glamorous air of awe and mystery conducive to oracular ‘goings on’. The robes, the ambience and the general atmosphere of the temple changed the temple’s function along with more normal function of the priests and priestesses.

Interpretation of Observations

Polytheism or Monotheism?

The differences in accounts of ‘where to find’ the Goddess and how to approach her with regards to the temple has continually baffled me throughout this case study. For example, when the statues of the Goddess are referred to as being *representations* of the Goddess, I observe myself thinking (rightly or wrongly) that the underlying structure of the Goddess religion in Glastonbury is constructed and based upon a type of Protestant cultural discourse found in United Kingdom where the transcendent is prized above that which is non-transcendent. This is symptomatic of modernist thought and it is the same culturally modernist yet religious construct that underpins western New Age discourses.

From my own experience in paganism (although I was never part of the Goddess religion), I have always imagined that the Goddess could be understood and/or imagined as monotheistic and/or polytheistic; yet I have become increasingly surprised throughout this research how predominantly monotheistic, and to use Naomi Goldenburg’s term ‘theological’ (1979: 96) the Glastonbury Goddess religion is. In an interview given to by the BBC and reported online, Jones says, ‘I think there is one goddess, and she has ten thousand faces’ (BBC 2008). Here the deities local to Glastonbury’s springs, groves, wells and other parts of the landscape are named and celebrated as separate deities yet they are understood to be ‘aspects’ of the ‘one’. Where one might expect to find clear cases of vernacular polytheism, a form of feminist monotheism is there instead. The ten thousand faces of the one Goddess referred to by Jones are not polytheistic. According to Eller,

In feminist spirituality, this type of polytheism is very unusual [the type that believes that different goddesses who occupy different spaces are no more related than strangers

passing in the street]. Almost all spiritual feminists believe that the relationship between various deities is closer and more significant than this. Many more spiritual feminists collect at the opposite end of the spectrum, where the goddess is worshiped in many aspects and invoked by many names, but in front of the practitioner's consciousness is the conviction that the goddess is truly one (Eller, 1995: 133).

It can be suggested that when one refers to 'the Goddess' in Glastonbury, either one is referring to all of them as one, a particular 'face' of the Goddess that 'resonates' with an individual devotee, or with the goddess that is being celebrated at that particular point in the wheel of the year. For example, one of my informants – Georgina - told me that her favorite deity is Keridwen, the dark mother, and that she feels 'more connected to the Goddess during that season', which is late autumn around the 31st of October. This informant says she 'resonates' with Keridwen. On another occasion Kathy Jones said she 'resonates' with Rhiannon. This type of 'resonation' with different aspects of the Goddess is very common in the Goddess complex.

My urge as a researcher here is to say that although they claim to be more or less monotheistic, their actions, behaviors and relational resonances with particular deities implies a religion of a more polytheistic nature. This is because the individual goddesses are connected with varying parts of Glastonbury's surrounding landscape that are strongly defined as having real senses of place, i.e. where the numinous (Otto, 1958) is said to be experienced by many people from many traditions. However, for the sake of taking the stories told by informants seriously, I will resist the urge to cite unreflective assumptions, but will, rather, take what informants say about their own religion as true to how it really is for them. Frustrating that it is for me as a researcher, I have concluded that as the stories surrounding the mythology of Glastonbury (both old and newly created) interweave and overlap, discrepancies will arise. They

do not, however appear to burden devotees. I imagine that the response to my probing for details might be ‘But it’s all the Goddess’. This last demonstrates the complexity and the diversity of this case study.

Georgina’s phrase ‘Bartering with the Goddess is tricky business’ implies that there is respect and almost fear of the power of the Goddess. This also suggests that the Glastonbury Goddess religion shares similar characteristics with other monotheistic faiths. However, entering into negotiations with her seems permissible, especially when, but not limited to, things of a practical value to the temple are being offered. But one of the main reasons the Goddess is made offerings to and called upon is for acts of aid in healing. This is an important aspect and focus of not only the Glastonbury Goddess religion, but in feminist spirituality in general. Eller says,

In spiritual feminist thought, it is a given that all women need healing: if not from specific illnesses or infirmities, then from the pains suffered as a result of growing up female in a patriarchal world. Spiritual feminists aspire to healing themselves and their sisters through a variety of less than medically and psychotherapeutically orthodox techniques, including homeopathy, chakra balancing, massage, Bach flower remedies, acupuncture, and so on (Eller, 1995: 1096).

Exemplifying this, I received a circular email promoting the

Ceremonial Goddess Healing Day where three to four people work together with one patient. We begin by calling in the presence of the Goddess, as well as healing angels, guides and guardians, to help heal the person. We then lay healing hands on the aura or the body, and sound with the breath to help clear blockages and resistances. We also work with drums, rattles, gong, singing bowls and bells. This short, but very effective

healing experience has benefited many people who have enjoyed being bathed in the Goddess's healing energies. On this special Ceremonial day all those in need of healing will be lead first of all through a cleansing process, so that they can come into the body, open their hearts and prepare themselves to receive the healing that they need. Patients will be cleansed/smudged with healing incenses, then blessed with fire and water, and ceremonially prepared to receive deep energetic healing from Temple Healers, Priestesses and Melissas, who are giving their time freely on this healing day (Jones, K., accessed 23 March 2009).

The emphasis found on healing within the Goddess religion shares many characteristics with both the New Age and with Catholic Mary devotion. As there is no doctrine or particular way to 'do' the Goddess religion, it can be done in just about any way the devotee pleases. This begs the question: What are the limits, and if there are any, how are they imposed? Whereas founders such as Kathy Jones come along and create texts that are used as guides to the Glastonbury Goddess religion, the answer is that this religiosity is subjective and experiential as would be expected from a new religious movement such as this.

Interpretation of Offerings

Relationships with the Goddess are solidified and made physical through the acts of making offerings, caring for the temple, and having daily interactions with the goddesses and the materiality found within the temple. These acts root devotees further into a more personal relationship with the divine and facilitate reciprocity at the altar. The figures of the Goddess become relational objects that are treated as *subjects* (instead of objects) as indicated by the cyclical and reciprocal processes fostered by devotee, offering, and the deity of devotion.

Offerings given to the Goddess, or left at the altar of the temple, vary as much in materials as they do in creativity, and it can be suggested that an overall rubric is followed that is reflected by the aesthetics and arrangement of objects on the Goddesses and the altar found in the temple. Within the creativity of offerings to the Goddess, there are limits dictated by the appreciation and value for those things that are either found in nature (acorns, hazelnuts, pine cones, wild flowers, berries, etc.), created from natural materials of and generally of non-economic value (generally wood), or are indigenous to the land around Glastonbury. I am suggesting that offerings are also inspired by what can be considered normative forms of Goddess Pagan materiality (goddess statues, crystals, etc), or are personal (jewelry worn by a devotee, photos of loved ones ill or deceased). Georgina said that certain objects left as offerings are ‘politely removed, especially if they are weird things’. I was given the example of a hair dresser’s mannequin head that was left on the altar at one stage and how she and Jones decided to remove it. Offerings are important to this research because they express the relationships, hopes, and expectations shared between both devotees and deities. Through offerings, negotiations take place at the altars of the Goddess which indicate the types of relationships had. These observations form an important part of Chapter 7 and my conclusions.