

Wicca: Spirituality and Consumerism

By Vivianne Dambeck

Samhain is upon us. At this point in the year, the veil is thin. We invite ghosts and monsters into our minds though our stories and movies. On our special, unholy night, we dress up, conjuring their form that they might bring about their haunting.

I'm writing the essay because I want to write about the triple moon rolling tray at spirit Halloween.

Several days ago I drove a friend to the specter who haunts the strip malls of the dying economy, by which of course I mean Spirit Halloween. We went, of course, to get a costume, but we did the usual antics of trying on the masks, playing with the prop swords, and appreciating pocket sized items. While in the decor section, one shelf in particular caught my attention. On the shelf were some pop witchcraft books, and the titular rolling tray with a triple moon symbol.

The question I want to explore is: how does Wicca culture react and intermingle with consumer culture.

Wicca is a neopagan religion. It is very diverse, especially since it's

spread on the internet, however members, including founder Gerald Gardner, claim that it can trace its origin to ancient European witchcraft. In short, this is hog wash. Gerald Gardner took Golden Dawn and Thelemic practices, the smallest amount of folk practice, and an earnestly admirable amount of creativity to start Wicca. Wicca is decidedly new age.

It did of course strike me as strange to see a religious symbol being used to advertise a rolling tray. If there was a rolling tray with a cross or an om, it would stick out too, but why was the Wiccan one here, and not them. Wicca carries with it a spooky ookie aesthetic. Spirit Halloween is catering not only to children, and tired parents, but also to people who fancy themselves a spooky ookie. I am in fact one of the spooky ookies, window shopping for another Halloween themed item to add to my year round wardrobe.

Is it weird or unjust that Wicca is being appropriated to sell products? Maybe, but I'm sure cross and om rolling trays exist, just not in Spirit Halloween. The more I've thought about it, the more it felt like the Target pride merch. Like it's late-stage capitalism consumer nonsense, but not really worth doing anything about.

However I think Wicca has a larger consumer problem.

Wicca has a tendency to be packaged and sold to us. Look no farther than on the next shelf, were there were books promising introductions to witchcraft. (looked like shit BTW... maybe don't get your spiritual texts from Spirit Halloween (or do I'm not your priestess (yet))). There is a large market for introductory copy paste page filler new age fluff. Crystals, when genuine, are sold along side aggrandized lists of correspondences and effects. We're sold the wisdom of the ancients along side a bundle of white sage. This phenomenon has been going on for years. Even Renaissance magicians, the ones that influenced the Golden Dawn that influenced Gardner, had intricate wands, golden cups, and lion skin belts.

So what the purpose of religious and spiritual items? What are the for? How can we authentically live in spite of the forces of consumerism?

There are four categories of religious item.

1. purely decorative items. These are your "local witch" posters, your astrology tapestries, and other purely ornamental items.

2. Functional but decorated items. These are your triple moon rolling trays, endless t-shirt designs, and ordinary items with a religious or spiritual aesthetic.

3. Spiritually functional items. These are your censors, your grimions, and lion skin belts.

4. Junk items. these are your fake crystals, your fifth novelty tarot deck, your mass produced trash sold to you at a "discount".

The first and second categories are that of self expression. We like self expression. It makes something about our monkey brain light up. However, as any marketing agent can tell you, we can be sold personas to express. Designer brands, micro trends, aesthetic drop shippers, mass produced punk items, buying the communist manifesto on amazon. Sodas are advertised with pictures of happy friend groups. Pills are advertised by healthy people. It is critical to reflect, and catch whether we have a genuine desire or whether we are the victim of a cooperate disinformation campaign. For my own part, I bought a pointy witch hat, and its one of my most worn. My crystals however, mostly sit in jar collecting the ambient vibrations of my drawer. So I'm hit and miss. (Don't ask me about my books)

This works fine generally, but in the digital age, there's a new and unique intersection of technology and spirit. Specifically, the advertising on social media, through aesthetic trends and unpaid, unwitting advertisers. People with a cupboard full of jars and bugs pinned to their walls look like better witches. They might be better, but only better at getting clicks. Someone with a cupboard full of jars was talking about how they enjoyed Llewellyn's Complete Book of Ceremonial Magick and so I bought Llewellyn's Complete Book of Ceremonial Magick (BTW, it gives a very wide basis in the historical context, but contains very very little of practical value, and is still missing some pretty big areas. I liked Brandy Williams essay _The Future of Ceremonial Magick_ tho). The cupboard haver however wasn't a salesman, nor a representative of Llewellyn Publications. That is to say that despite being a private, random, person, they still ended up being advertising for a book company.

This brings us back to the rolling tray. The aesthetic of witch is something being sold to us. Less by marketing departments, but by social media. Tech companies have made websites that keep us watching videos all day. To that end, they incentivize us to create engaging aesthetics, and

to envelope ourselves in the aesthetic. Now based on the trajectory of this essay, you may be expecting me to decry this rampant consumerism. Actually, aesthetics are powerful. You ever go out in a goth outfit? do you know first hand the unchecked, brooding, vampire confidence that going out with a popped collar, messy hair, and excessive eye shadow? (for maximum effect, go to a place you don't normally go, with a new group of people you don't already know, and a different name)

The infamous lion skin belt is developing the power of aesthetic for the renaissance magician; that's why it's a functional item. Imagine the power one feels wearing the belt made out of something exotic and as powerful as a lion. If you've been to a zoo, you've seen up close the size and grandeur of a particularly tame and sleepy lion. That king of the jungle has been slaughtered, skinned, tanned, and made into a belt. Whose going to command more respect from the demons: the teenager whose circle is printed at the library, or the magus with a lion skin belt?

Now if witchcraft teaches us anything, its that you don't need lion skin belts to be powerful. Power can come from anywhere. It can come from local plants and loose nails. It can

come from hand embroidering an item. It can come from a thrift store goth outfit and some black lipstick. There is a degree of personal exploration which we all need to do, to understand what makes us tick. What actually makes us feel good? Can we make it ourselves? Can we thrift or reuse something? Is there an alternative? Who is selling this to us? Who benefits from us acting this way? Am I actually practicing witchcrafts, or does a triple moon rolling tray just make me feel spooky ookie?

Blessed Be. Happy Halloween. Express that shadow self as loud as you can.