

Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

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“Drawing on years of extensive field research that involved observation of pagan ceremonies and gatherings, daily heathen routines and activities,” begins author Mattias Gardell, “*Gods of the Blood* offers a unique introduction to the world of racist paganism. . . . In addition to introducing the thoughts, practices, and goals of racial pagans, this study aims at reconstructing the mental universes of the racial activists involved and gives an account of the social processes of which they are a product.” A big promise to the reader, and Gardell, a professor of comparative religions at Uppsala University in Sweden, comes through in fine fashion. This is a thoroughly researched investigation. In addition to his direct contacts, it seems Gardell has read everything. The book’s extensive bibliography, which includes the most obscure publications—at least up to 2000, when it appears this manuscript was completed—is a treasure lode for researchers.

Gardell brings a first rank intellect to bear on his subject. He demonstrates in this volume that he can deal effectively with nuance and qualification and press through to completeness of thought, welcome to this reader after enduring so much second rank (if that) literature in the white racial area. Gardell stays acceptably clear of the conformism, condescension, and finger-wagging characteristic of university academics on this topic. He points out that in *Gods of the Blood* the term “racist” is detached from moral connotations. White racists see races as differing not only physically but in mental and moral qualities as well. In their view, race goes beyond skin color and includes an inner essence that predisposes people to conduct their lives in certain ways. This racist perspective, Gardell notes, does not necessarily lead to the notion that the white race is inherently superior, although it often results in a belief in racial separation. That said, many white racists do hold to white racial superiority, especially with reference to blacks, and that can play out (from mild to strong) as disapproval, disdain, and contempt for other races, as well as animosity and both

non-violent and violent aggression. In this book Gardell helps readers avoid jumping to conclusions about racist whites as they have been taught to do; white racists come in many different stripes. With a few exceptions, Gardell doesn't use the term favored by some, "white racialism," and that works for him. He doesn't have to take the time to explain why he is using "racist" in one context and "racialist" in another, and can simply get on with the business of description, analysis, and meaning-making.

Though European, Gardell focuses on personalities and events in the United States. It takes him a good bit of time to get to his paganism topic, however, as he devotes the first two chapters, up to page 136 in very small type, to a history of American racial activism: "The Transforming Landscapes of American Racism," chapter one; and "The Smorgasbord of the Revolutionary White-Racist Counterculture," chapter two. This account is basically the standard "radical fringe" story, but Gardell does a good job with it, and to expect some other angle to be brought to this material is asking too much of anyone, on either side of the Atlantic, who came of age since World War II and was conditioned by the schools, media, politicians, and the rest. So we get Jim Crow and the Klan, Randy Weaver and Oklahoma City, "phony" Fred Leuchter scraping walls in Nazi death camps trying to find evidence that there really were gas chambers in those places, and "reactionary extremist" Pat Buchanan. And there's the anti-Jewish aspect: for example, white-revolutionary-now-convict David Lane's contention that Jewish intellectuals and activists have propagated "isms" such as humanism, communism, egalitarianism, and feminism to "distort the minds of gullible white masses." One character in this exposition whose in-your-face candor caught my eye was "Ryker," as he calls himself, who back in 1994 announced to the world, "We do NOT want the tired, the poor, the huddled masses. We want the hardy, the strong, the stout, the thinkers, the educated. . . . We want men like our forefathers."

The last few pages in chapter two presaged the consideration of white racial paganism that begins in earnest in chapter three with brief portraits of two individuals, who I happen to know were close friends, Ben Klassen and William Pierce. Iconoclast Klassen declared that Christianity is a "Jewish creation designed to unhinge and derange white gentiles and cause them to abandon their real responsibilities." He deemed it a compilation of "suicidal advice" to

whites to love their enemy and turn the other cheek. Christianity, he said, promotes “a completely perverted attitude toward life and nature.” It is a theology of “mass insanity,” based on “superstitious beliefs in spooks in the sky, including a head spook,” and “absurd theories about life beyond death.” Klassen rejected the ideas of gods, demons, spirits, souls, and heaven and hell, terming them “nonsense.” He wanted a rational religion for whites that “concentrates our thoughts and energies on living in the here and now, the only life we will ever experience.” He argued for a religion that supports the creation of “a sound mind in a sound body in a sound society in a sound environment.” He wanted people that “don’t worship anything or anybody” but rather ground their purposes and actions in the laws of nature and racial loyalty. He said whites need a religion that would “propagate, advance, and expand the white race.” Klassen’s “Golden Rule” came down to “Do unto the white race what is good for it.”

William Pierce developed what Gardell terms a “scientific religion” called Cosmotheism, which substitutes a this-world-centered religion of nature for other-worldly Christianity. Cosmotheism, Gardell writes, holds that

man is part of nature and subject to nature’s laws, principal of which is the law of inequality and survival of the fittest. Evolving through a succession of states, the purpose of man is to ascend into godhood. . . . Crowned by the superior white man, the different races are distributed on the ladder of evolution. History is a continuation of the broad evolutionary process and may be genuinely appreciated only from a racial standpoint.

For those interested in learning more about Pierce’s formulations, there’s the chapter “Cosmotheism” in the book I wrote on him, *The Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds*,¹ in which I place it in a pantheistic (in contrast to a monotheistic and humanistic) religious/philosophical frame.

Gardell ends chapter two, and sets up the rest of the book, by writing that pagans believe that “returning to pre-Christian pagan traditions [in northern Europe before 1000 A.D.] is an act of spiritual emancipation—a prelude to racial rebirth and the restoration of Aryan independence.” While these first two chapters held my interest, readers may wish to skim the introduction, skip

chapters one and two, and begin serious examination of the book with chapter three.

Chapter three to the end of *Gods of the Blood* considers the various contemporary manifestations of paganism and their Norse, Germanic, and Celtic roots. Among them are Asatrú, Odinism (also called by the Germanic term Wotanism), and Wicca. Wotanism has the connotation of what Gardell calls “the warpath of [white racial] revolutionary politics”; although it’s complicated, and again, it is important to stay clear of easy labeling. In contrast to Christianity, these are not universal religions but rather tribal and racial; they are religions of the blood. Their goals and practices stress the interdependence of man and nature and promote personal self-realization and racial and ethnic integrity and enhancement. They emphasize self-affirmation and expression rather than deference and self-denial, and accept sexuality and pleasure as good. Characteristically, these religions emphasize “hard” virtues in contrast to “soft” virtues such as compassion and caring for others. The “noble virtues” of Asatrú, for example, include courage, honor, truth, loyalty, discipline, industriousness, and self-reliance. Among the pagan practices Gardell lists, many of them exotic-sounding, are sejd, drum journeys, útsittning, and blot ceremonies. Among the less esoteric activities are sauna, studies of Norse history and folklore, handicrafts such as weaving and smith work, an organic diet, folk music, yoga, contemplation, and walks in the woods.

Paganism is replete with divinities and images that are viewed in various ways: as anthropomorphic gods, Jungian archetypes, forces of nature, philosophical principles, metaphors, and qualities within man that need to be identified and manifested. They are not inherently “good” or “evil,” but can be either, both, or neither depending on the context. They are not separate, above, superior, and unapproachable, to be worshiped, feared, and obeyed. Rather, they are here, with us, within us, imminent rather than transcendent. There is the one-eyed Odin, the god of magic, ecstasy, wisdom, writing, culture, poetry, and victory. There is Thor, the robust warrior, the personification of untamed strength. There is Frigg, the wife of Odin, goddess of motherhood, courage, dedication, sexuality, and female power. There are Njord, Frey, and Freya, gods of fertility, eroticism, sexuality, pleasure, and inner peace. There is Yggdrasil, the world tree, which represents nature, human life as

integral to the natural world, and the cycle of birth, death, and regeneration.

Gardell introduces the reader to scores of individuals in *Gods of the Blood*. Perhaps a good way to give a sense of these people is to profile two of them, several generations removed in age and differing markedly in outlook, Else Christiansen and Nathan Pett.

Else Christiansen (1913-2005) is known as the “Grand Mother” of racial Odinism. She was born in Denmark and, with her husband, immigrated to Canada following World War II. After her husband’s death, Christensen lived for many years in a small trailer in British Columbia. She is credited with popularizing a number of concepts adopted by Odinists and Asatrúers, including a Jungian reading of Norse gods as racial archetypes. Gardell writes that Christensen concluded that

by searching deep into the racial unconscious, below the deceptive surface of induced Christianity, you will find the wisdom of our pre-Christian forefathers which we today call Odinism, and which expresses the essence of our folk on the moral and religious plane. . . . The primary source of Odinism is biological; its genesis is in our race, its principles are encoded in our genes. As the instinctual religious impulse of our folk, Odinism embodies age-old realities, paramount among them inexorable change and the multifaceted struggle to defeat our enemies and fulfill our destiny.

Christiansen argued for a decentralized society based on voluntary cooperation among free Aryan individuals. “Man is capable of self-realization,” she contended, “only within a community of racial and ethnic kin.” To Christensen, Odinism, is not dependent on notions of white supremacy but rather acknowledges the diversity of nature, including the variations in human beings, and harmonizes people with the forces of the cosmos and Mother Earth. Gardell notes that, in contrast to Christensen’s more circumspect outlook, most contemporary Odinists openly subscribe to white supremacy in intelligence, accomplishment, and honorable behavior. They desire to remain apart from other races in order to avoid the diminishment they believe accompanies emersion among other races.

Christiansen emphasized ecological awareness and a back-to-the-earth approach to counteract what she viewed as rampant

materialism, consumerism, and exploitation of the natural environment and animals. Our Nordic forefathers, she offered, integrated with nature, which includes other living beings, and honored it, which starkly contrasts with the alienation from nature and mutilation of the earth and abuse of animals prevalent in our time. The image emerging from Christensen's thought is of a pure racial organism with a pure mind and pure body living with an equally pure partner in intimate connection to a pure, unpolluted ecological system.

Nathan Pett, born in the 1970s, represents what might be called the raging side of modern paganism. He holds up the ideal of Fenris. In Norse mythology Fenris is the beastly child of Loki, the foster-brother of Odin. Fenris is symbolized as a wolf. Fenris breaks the chains forged by dwarves that fettered it and becomes the manifestation of unrestrained strength and rage. To Pett, Fenris represents racially pure barbaric hate unchained: "I see the burning eyes of Fenris in many people around me."

American whites, argues Pett, must reclaim their birthright. Our ancestors thrived on this soil, he says, and left it to us to maintain their claim: "The land from Alaska's arctic tundra to the tip of Nova Scotia, from the sunny climate of southern California to the tip of southern Florida is our homeland." Pett calls for an uncompromising war on the American establishment. A tactic in that war is the creation of small settlements of whites living separate from the destructive effects of society and raising "healthy pagan children in natural environments free of pollution and public schools."

I don't know about how many white people are prepared to give up our jobs and lives in the city and live in a rural area with their racial kinsmen, although more than a few may be prepared to withdraw in place, as it were. They may be ready, right where they are, in small and big ways, to stop going along with the program that is diminishing their race and start doing things, whatever they can think of, that contribute to it—with regard to schooling, connection to the media, politically, in personal relationships, work, their home surroundings, in every aspect of their lives.

And I think more than a few whites in our time can relate to the part of Pett's argument having to do with rage. Currently in schools and colleges across America, young white men and women are being trained, per the doctrines of "multiculturalism" and

“diversity,” to be racially self-disdainful, guilt-ridden, deferring, and servile. So far they have passively acquiesced to their emasculation and bondage. One wonders, however, if there will come the day when the Fenris wolves suddenly break free and rip their chattering trainers to pieces.

Gardell’s presentation in *Gods of the Blood* challenges the idea that Christianity is to be equated with the Western heritage, and that it is the most natural and uplifting religious expression for whites. I’m reminded of a chapter in *The Fame of a Dead Man’s Deeds* about William Gayley Simpson.² Those of European heritage, Simpson asserted, need a religion of their own, one consonant with what is best in their past and the exigencies of their present. He called for a religion that is “really our own,” one that will “burst forth a new comprehension of life, a new faith, a new discipline for every side of our life, personal and social, for man and woman and child, from top to bottom, for the lowest to the highest. He envisioned a bible that

holds up our ideals and traditions, the record of our supreme achievements and triumphs, the story of our saints and heroes, the admonitions of our great and wise men and guides, the vision of our hopes and dreams and purposes pushed deep into a distant future. It will be a Book of Life not of the poor and weak or the meek, a book of the strong and the masterful, who by their mastery over themselves will shape their lives into something more beautiful in soul and body. . . . It will be their cradle-song and their battle song, the mirror of their soul soaring over vast abysses and the eagle eye studying far horizons. It will be the supremely yea-saying book of a people resolved at all costs to live to the heights, to be themselves; and that would rather perish than give way to any other, to serve his will.

Why, asks Simpson, cannot Aristotle be our Moses, Homer or some of the Icelandic sagas our Exodus and Judges? Why cannot Dante or Goethe take the place of Job? Why cannot Blake supplant the Revelation of St. John and Shakespeare replace Ecclesiastes? And why cannot the Psalms be superceded by the record of some ones of us, in the past or yet to come, whose lives are most inspiring to our collective soul?

Why indeed.

Robert S. Griffin's latest book is *Living White: Writings on Race, 2000-2005*.

1. Robert S. Griffin, *The Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds: An Up-Close Portrait of White Nationalist William Pierce* (Bloomington, IN: FirstBooks Library, 2001), pp. 184-204.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 252-265.