

John Michell, Radical Traditionalism, and the Emerging Politics of the Pagan New Right

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Abstract

Although the legacy and work of John Michell is frequently associated with a culturally liberal neo-tribalism, certain aspects of Michell's thought can be, and have been, interpreted as an esoteric extension of more explicitly right-wing political positions, ones which are currently convergent with the political subcultures surrounding the European New Right both in Europe and also among newly emerging right-wing groups in the US. This essay examines the ways in which the work of John Michell is resonant with many of the philosophies of the European New Right, and how in his final years and after his death new markets for his work are emerging in the various subcultures associated with right-wing Paganism.

The current Earth Mysteries movement in the United Kingdom has been popularly associated with neo-tribalism, New Age travelers, environmentalists, hippies, Pagans, and eccentrics. Many people would consider these groups to be broadly leftist in political orientation, and in fact, John Michell, the man responsible for popularizing British Earth Mysteries in the 1960s and 1970s has long been portrayed as the champion of the free-loving, free-thinking hippies.¹ However, upon closer look, many aspects of Michell's thought can be and have been interpreted as an esoteric extension of more explicitly right-wing political positions, ones which are currently convergent with the political subcultures surrounding the European New Right both in Europe and also among newly emerging right-wing groups in the United States. That this convergence should occur should not be a complete surprise, as some features of the British Earth Mysteries movement have a foun-

1. Paul Screeton, *John Michell: from Atlantis to Avalon* (England: Alternative Albion Press, 2010), 16, 68.

tion in the British² nationalist politics that intersect with British esoteric culture, particularly surrounding beliefs concerning Britain as the New Jerusalem, which was a favorite theme of Michell's. While a great deal of scholarly and popular attention has been paid to this connection in Germanic and Scandinavian countries, as well as among neo-Nazi and other right-wing organizations in the United States, there has been less attention paid to the ways in which these ideas emerge within a British esoteric context. I would hypothesize that this is in part due to a particular romantic attachment to the notion of the Celts and "Ancient Britons" which underpins many of the theories surrounding the development of British nativist esoterica. Additionally, the changing political and cultural climate of the twenty-first century in the United States and Europe has created new markets for right-wing and "third positionist" material. As many of John Michell's views are consistent with the philosophies of the European New Right, his work can now be reconsidered within the frameworks of emerging right-wing and third-positionist movements, which claim intellectual and political affinities with the European New Right. Proponents of this movement are working to try to gain adherents among Pagans through the branding of "Radical Traditionalism."

Defining Terms

Before discussing the work and readership of John Michell, it is important to provide a background to some of the terms used in this essay as they are contentious and frequently imprecisely used. The discussion of Michell's work here emerges from the development of the philosophical school known as Traditionalism.³ Traditionalism is a movement which emerged in the early twentieth century and which is frequently associated with a group of European esoteric philosophers including René Guénon and Julius Evola. Salient features of this movement include a critique of modernity, and a belief in a return to a "traditional" society based on spiritual principles which once guided the development and governing of ancient civilizations, and which was handed down through initiatory traditions. According to Traditionalists, the roots of this "Tradition" can be seen in some latter day faith systems, most notably those

2. Obviously the terms "British" and "English" are not interchangeable. Although at times Michell and his predecessors are more specifically focused on England, not the United Kingdom as a whole, for this paper I have chosen to use "British" rather than "English" because many of the tropes from which Michell and others draw are specifically British and not English.

3. See Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the 20th Century*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

of the East, in Hinduism or Islam or in Orthodox Christianity. Traditionalists critique modern society as deeply degraded, chaotic, and corrupt, and argue that only through a return to traditional social structures, values, and belief systems can the world be redeemed and returned to the state of divine order.

Traditionalism, however, has a number of different iterations; it is hardly monolithic. The philosophies of Guénon and Evola, for instance, diverge in terms of their political applications. Guénon, for example has been much more influential in the development of modern Islam, while Evola has provided many of the intellectual seeds for the European New Right and other more overtly fascist subcultures, probably as a result of his relationship to Historical Fascism in Italy and also Nazi ideologues in Germany. (“Historical Fascism” is defined as Italian Fascism – and sometimes German Nazism – of the 1930s and 1940s.) Guénon focused ultimately on the redemptive position of Catholicism for Europe and personally embraced Islam, while Evola’s work promotes a much older point of reconstruction for European culture, which would obviously be more influential for the Pagans supporting the European New Right, particularly those influenced by Alain de Benoist.

Much of the European New Right of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries has taken its theoretical and strategic cues from the work of Alain de Benoist and the French *Nouvelle Droite*, which emerged in the late 1960s as a response to the European Right’s apparent decay and lack of effectiveness in the face of left-wing protest.⁴ De Benoist has drawn from strategies and ideologies of both the Right and the Left to promote a vision of European regeneration based on antimodernism and Evolian Traditionalist beliefs about culture and society. The New Right ideal is one of radical regionalism where homogeneous cultural groupings reflect elitist “natural” Indo European social stratification and order. Political scientist Tamir Bar-On notes that the New Right has a list of negations shared with Historical Fascism, among them anti-modernism, anti-capitalism, anti-immigration, anti-materialism, anti-egalitarianism, and anti-Americanism.⁵ De Benoist sees the New Right as explicitly Pagan in orientation, encouraging polities to emerge around culture based deities.⁶ An important rhetorical feature of the New Right is the way in which it argues against multiculturalism and egalitarianism with recourse to discourses of diversity. Proponents of the New Right maintain that cultural separation increases diversity as do “natural” hierar-

4. Michael O’Meara, *New Culture New Right* (Bloomington:1st Books 2004), 17.

5. Tamir Bar-On, “Fascism to the Nouvelle Droite: The Dream of Pan-European Empire,” in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 16, no. 3 (2008): 331.

6. Alain de Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*. (Atlanta: Ultra Press, 2004).

chies. In this way the New Right distinguishes itself from the racism and anti-Semitism associated with Historical Fascism. The focus on ethno-regionalism also distinguishes the New Right from right-wing organizations such as the British National Front which are more concerned with protecting the cultural integrity of the nation.

There is continuing and heated debate regarding the relationship of Evola, Traditionalism, and the New Right to fascism, particularly Historical Fascism. Historians of fascism Roger Griffin and Tamir Bar-On both make very cogent arguments that Evola, de Benoist, and the philosophies of the New Right absolutely reflect the key ideological underpinnings of fascism and that they also promote a fascist agenda.⁷ However, proponents of the New Right in Europe and elsewhere reject any association with fascism, particularly with centralized or authoritarian beliefs and racism (although this is quite a debated topic as well), and many, although not all, adherents to the New Right also resoundingly reject the label "fascist." Many of these emergent, fascist, "third positionist" (self-ascribed neither Right nor Left) ideals are not reminiscent of and do not reflect what people popularly conceive of as fascist in that they do not always include an anti-Semitic element or a racial supremacist element. Rather the elitism is couched in terms of "natural" spiritual development, which is reproduced at a local or tribal level through hierarchical structures similar to sacred kingship. In fact, the rhetorical emphasis on maintaining cultural diversity initially appears very leftist, and hardly fascist at all. Cultural diversity is to be promoted and cherished, as long as racial purity is maintained.⁸ This, of course, is the perfect rhetorical breeding ground for sophisticated identitarian politics, which are centered on maintaining and promoting homogenous cultural identities.

It might be argued, as it has been, that the cultural focus and "metapolitics" of the New Right may not be direct descendants of Historical Fascism, but that they do incorporate a number of ideological precedents of fascism such as the myth of a Golden Age, anti-democratic positions, anti-modernism, identitarian politics, and other features which will be discussed below. However, it is beyond doubt that despite the sophisticated rhetoric of the New Right and the attempts by some Traditionalists to distance themselves from overtly racist and racially based separatist

7. Roger Griffin, "Between Metapolitics and *Apoleitia*: The Nouvelle Droite's strategy for conserving fascist politics in the 'interregnum'" in *Modern & Contemporary France* 8, no. 1, (2000): 35-53. See also Bar-On, "Fascism to the Nouvelle Droite," 329.

8. See "National Anarchist Movement No. 5: Racial Separatism September 18, 2010" for a coherent articulation of diversity in a New Right context, <http://www.national-anarchist.net/2010/09/part-5-racial-separatism.html>.

movements, that much more overtly militant, right-wing, and supremacist groups are providing a growing market for Traditionalist media and culture, and that the distance may be closing in. For example, one of the most articulate and widely read accounts of the European New Right for an American readership is Michael O'Meara's *New Culture New Right* and that same author in late 2010 released his collection of essays *Toward a White Republic* which has a much more overt white-separatist political message.

Despite the more militant strains which are emerging within this movement, it is important to stress that there are many Traditionalists (and maybe even Radical Traditionalists) who are not at all interested in right-wing politics; nevertheless, there is still a discernable overlap in values and interests with those who are. While Traditionalism has proponents on both the Right and the Left, here I am specifically interested in the ways in which the ideologies of Traditionalism are employed within very particular nationalistic and nativist frameworks promoted within the writings of John Michell, and in exploring the implications of many of these ideas within his writings in particular for this new wave of political movements in Europe and the United States.

John Michell

John Michell was born in 1933 and was educated at the most elite of British institutions, Eton and Cambridge. He did not seem to have a standard career trajectory, although he worked as a translator in Russian and German during his period of mandatory National Service. After he lost most of his inheritance in the 1960s, he developed an interest in and fascination with Glastonbury and with UFOs. His first work was published in 1967, titled *The Flying Saucer Vision: The Holy Grail Restored*, which suggested that UFOs were not necessarily the result of aliens, but were visions linked to sacred sites, perhaps similar to the narratives of experiences of fairies and elves in older times. Michell's work emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the context of romantic re-imaginings of Britain, and the new cultural focus on the magical and the pastoral. It was at this time that the counterculture started taking up the work of Tolkien in earnest, and found new inspiration in a uniquely mythic British narrative. It is with this cultural backdrop that his 1969 book *View Over Atlantis* regarding sacred sites became a smash countercultural success, giving Michell the reputation of a modern antiquarian in the vein of Aubrey or Stuckley. From there he became known as an expert on "Fortean" phenomena with his emphasis on phenomena which cannot be rationally explained, and he was quite a proponent of "alternative" archeology

and an intuitive, spiritual approach to scientific matters. In fact, he was very opposed to the notions of Darwinian evolution and wider notions of progress. Michell was also a Fellow of the *Temenos* Academy founded by poet and Platonist Kathleen Raine in 1990, which was a broadly Traditionalist enterprise devoted to the development of the spirit and the universal tradition.⁹ John Michell died in 2009 leaving a rich legacy of publications and cultural influence.

Michell as Radical Traditionalist

Although the British Earth Mysteries movement existed in some fashion before John Michell came onto the scene, Michell functioned in a synthetic fashion by bringing together and popularizing several different strands of esoteric belief relating to sacred Britain, and in the late 1960s he found a new market hungry for publications on such topics. Michell coalesced a number of popular ideas about sacred geometry, Druids, sacred landscapes, earth energies, Atlantis, and UFOs, and through these promoted England as a site of spiritual redemption in the New Age. Michell occasionally referred to the notion of “mystic nationalism,” and he situated his own work within the philosophies of William Blake and Lewis Spence in interpreting the land of Britain as sacred, and promoting a British nativist spirituality. Despite this, Michell was not always exactly clear about what his platform for a realized British mystical nationalism would be, especially since he was perfectly aware that many of his ideals were in no way practical, nor acceptable. However, there are a number of themes in Michell’s body of work which resonate with the social commentaries and political platforms found in a variety of Traditionalist writings, particularly those which have become more recently associated with the European New Right, even if this was not a label to which Michell would himself have ascribed.¹⁰ These themes include

- The belief in a perennial, universal, traditional society and religion
- The belief in a Golden Age to which we have the ability to return
- A dislike of capitalism
- A critique of the modern condition
- A distrust of rational thought

9. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 214–15.

10. See Griffin, “Between Metapolitics and *Apoleitia*,” 37, for a further articulation of these specific themes in connection with the development of the New Right.

- A belief in the restoration of “natural” social hierarchies and cultural or racial division
- A belief in virile, masculine, leadership.
- Advocates divine right of kings and theocracy
- Authoritarian
- A dislike of multiculturalism

As historian Nicholas Goodrich-Clarke has outlined in his work on Esoteric Nazism, there are also a number of mythological and legendary motifs with which Traditionalism is frequently concerned, which are also a focus of Michell’s writing.¹¹ These include the Grail quest, UFOs, telluric earth currents, Atlantis as the primordial homeland of Traditional society, and the notion that the leader is the earthly representation of a solar deity. That these themes might also be consistent with the works of Julius Evola is no coincidence. Michell took great interest in his work, and wholeheartedly agreed with the sentiments expressed in *Revolt Against the Modern World*.¹² In fact, you can see Evola’s influence in Michell’s philosophies ranging from the nature of leadership to traditional gender roles. Michell wrote that he believed it was most unfortunate that Evola was consistently identified with fascist politics, because as he was well aware, Evola disagreed with many of the precepts of Italian fascism¹³. However, Michell believed deeply in the eternal and spiritual truths that Evola’s writing seemed to convey.

Like other Traditionalists, Michell felt that humans truly desire a life of extreme order. Much of his work is a critique of the modern age, arguing that it has brought about the degradation of the land, chaos, and a spiritual degradation of the peoples of the world.¹⁴ He truly believed that a New Age was coming, and that it would be brought about by renouncing modern society and returning to the universal perennial tradition which had dictated human behavior in times past. He adopted the Traditionalist idea that the perennial tradition was mediated and passed on by a priesthood operating in accordance with divine will, and that when humans return to the natural order, it will usher in a new Golden Age. In the British context, Michell was an advocate of the Divine Right

11. Specifically Nicholas Goodrich-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*. (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

12. John Michell “A Radical Englishman and an Italian,” in John Michell, *Confessions of a Radical Traditionalist: Essays by John Michell*, ed. Joscelyn Godwin (Vermont: Dominion Press, 2005) 146–48.

13. *Ibid.*

14. A good articulation of this is in the introduction to John Michell and Christine Rhone, *Twelve Tribe Nations and the Science of Enchanting the Landscape*. (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991) 7–10.

of Kings, and was also for the most part against democracy, although he believed that it could only be successful in small groups where every person knew personally who was being elected. He certainly felt that Britain needs a strong, authoritarian ruler, who acts as the will of the people, and as an intermediary to the divine, and he was of the opinion that Queen Elizabeth was far too easily led by the House of Commons and needed to regain her proper status as divine ruler of Britain.¹⁵

Michell had an interesting view of the role of cultural diversity in precipitating the New Age. He felt that all indigenous cultures are the inheritors of the primordial tradition. In *New View Over Atlantis* he cited universal examples of the cultures of the world tapping into and utilizing the magnetic forces of the earth in the situating of their sacred sites.¹⁶ He clearly believed that the sacred geometry is based on universal principles, revealed to people through their own priests acting in accordance with divine law.¹⁷ However, Michell also felt that each race has its own characteristic traits and areas where they excel, and that it is important to the restoration of divine law that each group of people is situated within their homeland, because it is their indigenous quality that connects them to their particular sacred landscape.¹⁸ As far as Britain is concerned, Michell admitted that he perceived multiculturalism as a far-from-ideal social model, and that within England different ethnic groups should remain segregated and geographically separate, which would replicate Britain's village level diversity from the pre-Reformation period.¹⁹ He seems to justify this by arguing that if various groups of people are allowed to remain together that their traditions will remain vibrant, however he also states that it is crucial for the indigenous majority, in this case the British, to enforce the rule of law.²⁰ Ultimately, each group of people with their own biologically determined gifts has a role to play in precipitating the coming rule of divine order, however the coming of the New Age is tied to each group being settled in their rightful place, in their divinely ordained territories in order to maintain and nurture their special connection with the energies of the land.

Michell seemed to know, however, that if he were to write essays supporting minority repatriation, segregation, and eugenics that he might

15. Michell, "A Rad Trad Englishman and an Italian," 128-130.

16. John Michell, *New View over Atlantis*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 11-104.

17. Michell and Rhone, *Twelve Tribe Nations*, 11.

18. Michell sometimes uses Plato's model of the dodecahedron to describe the physical segmentation of the world into twelve perfect sections. *Ibid.*, 80.

19. Michell, "A Rad Trad Englishman and an Italian," 242-47.

20. *Ibid.*, 246.

be viewed negatively, so his actual views on such topics seems somewhat vague at times. He produced a sketch of the life of the founder of eugenics, Sir Francis Galton, in his collection of essays, *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions*. In this piece Michell praises eugenics as a worthy concept buttressed by statistics, but also comments on its historical misuse and states that it should not be part of any actual program of social engineering.²¹ He was quick to assert that any suggestions he may put forward for any sort of segregation are not derived from a notion of racial superiority, because every distinct group has its own role to play, but that ideally people need to be in their homeland. Although Michell probably would not have considered his views to be racist, much of his writing seems to indicate a “separate but equal” philosophy, much more in line with the ethnopluralist politics of de Benoist and other thinkers of the New Right who advocate the separation and geographical bounding of distinct cultures, such as anarcho-nationalists.²² He argued that multiculturalism was indicative of a trend toward cultural uniformity and cultural assimilation, and that it was to the benefit of each distinct race to keep their individual traits and gifts. However, this may have been a rhetorical strategy Michell used to avoid having an explicit discussion about racial purity.

John Michell’s view of the physical and spiritual world can be described as very strictly and literally Platonic. While he describes the way in which he believes the divine world is ordered in a number of texts, the clearest articulation of his beliefs probably comes in *The Sacred Center*, a version of his 1994 text *At The Center of the World*, released in the year of his death in 2009. According to Michell, sacred geometry reflects a universal scheme based on the heavens and that the ideal social structure of societies recapitulates the physical structure in which the tribal unit was originally formulated. For instance, he explains that the universal traditional tribal space was organized around an *omphalos*, or center pole, which was the physical and symbolic center of tribal life and which connected the sacred and the earthly.²³ The polity itself was divided around the center pole into twelve sections each representing a sign of the zodiac. This twelve-fold division, he claims, is repeated in clan structure, ruling deities, musical scales and in the twelve tribes of the earth from Biblical lore, which is replicated in the description of the

21. John Michell, *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 107-115.

22. De Benoist, *On Being a Pagan*, and O’Meara, *New Culture New Right*.

23. John Michell, *The Sacred Center: The Ancient art of Locating Sanctuaries*. (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2009)

Holy City in Revelation, chapter 21.²⁴ Many of Michell's works are dedicated to the near obsessive task of describing the way in which certain sacred landscapes are divided, sometimes with ley lines representing energy currents, sometimes through locating the central axis of a landscape.²⁵ Michell notes that this traditional physical structure, which was most likely adopted within the two millennia before the birth of Christ, is the basis of the Platonic model of the ideal city and is also the physical plan for the New Jerusalem. He does not restrict his explorations of the ideal sacred landscape to the Indo-European framework, however, as he also believed this model to be reflected in Chinese, African, and South American landscapes.²⁶

Michell's Traditionalist notion of ideal leadership broadly follows a Frazerian and also the Platonic framework of sacred philosopher kingship, rather than the kingship of the warrior class suggested by Evola.²⁷ Leadership of the tribe focused around a single individual who would serve as the bridge between the people and the divine, in the same way that the central axis of the sacred landscape connects the earth with the heavens. For Michell, as with many Traditionalists, the ruler is seen as the embodiment of specifically a solar deity (he considered King Arthur to be in this line), and therefore must be seen to be powerful and virile, suited to the prospect of divine marriage²⁸. Michell's describes his view of the ideal social order as broadly anti-democratic. Although he believes that the leader of the tribe should be chosen "by a group of freedmen," he dismisses the idea of a populist democracy and generally supports a monarchical and oligarchical system. Although he is not as explicit as, say, Evola or members of the European New Right about advocating the return to a caste system, Michell parallels this structure in his support of an oligarchy. In most New Right thought inspired by Traditionalism, the natural social order is reflected by a social caste system or hierarchy, which, as Guénon argues, is the best way for the individual to reach their natural potential.²⁹ Actual rulership must be authoritarian and inspired by the connection with the divine in the particular locality in which a given people operates.³⁰ Although Michell may not have argued for the

24. See also John Michell, *The Temple at Jerusalem: A Revelation* (York Beach, Me.: Samuel Weiser Press, 2000 [1990]).

25. These ideas are developed in both *New View over Atlantis* and *Twelve-Tribe Nations*.

26. Michell, *New View over Atlantis*, 59-97.

27. Michell and Rhone, *Twelve-Tribe Nations*, 7, 11.

28. *Ibid.*, 36.

29. René Guénon *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrine*. (Hillsdale, N.Y.: Sophia Perennis, 2004 [1921]), 153.

30. See Julius Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World*. (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Tradi-

predominance of a racial caste in a universal sense, he most certainly would have argued that the aristocratic classes were such because of their connection with the divine, and that a hierarchical system of that nature reflects divine order.

British Nativist Spirituality and the New Jerusalem

Michell's writings exist in a wider context of British nativist spirituality, including neo-Druidry and to some lesser degree Wicca, which developed most richly and rapidly in the twentieth century. Most certainly Michell's work supports and reinforces many contemporary British Pagan views about the sacrality of the British landscape and the ways in which ancient sites can provide some form of continuity with Britain's spiritual past. By the 1990s, it made a certain sense that the expressions of Michell's very particular type of Blake-inspired British mystic nationalism, with its focus on the connection between people and land, would become more firmly aligned with a growing interest in Traditionalism as a philosophical movement. Within the next decade these views would influence a variety of other political and cultural movements including the Neofolk movement, Identitarian, Radical Green, anarcho-monarchists, and several others for whom cultural affiliation, sacred landscapes, and heritage are key features. Whether Michell would have affiliated with any of these groups is still an open question.

Michell was both a universalist and a particularist. While he believed that the restoration of divine order must take place on a universal scale, he was quite confident that Britain has a particular role in this restoration as the Holy Land of Europe. Michell's idealized England is the one that existed prior to the Reformation, and most certainly prior to the rise of cities and industrialism, which he abhorred. He espoused a romanticized view of a decentralized rural villages where people's lives were organized around festival cycles, which in turn were organized around the agricultural year and astronomy.³¹ Michell did not agree with the inclusion of Britain into the European Union and argued vehemently against the metric standard, believing that it was erasing not only a uniquely British measure, but also one of the few remaining links to the traditional measures which were related to the divine order and sacred kingship.

Michell took a certain amount of inspiration from the Scottish folklorist Lewis Spence (1874-1955), a Scottish nationalist with a deep interest

tions, 1995 [1969]), 68–69.

31. Michell, *Confessions of a Radical Traditionalist* 46-51.

in the revival of Druidry, particularly the *Barddas* texts composed by Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ultimately compiled by the Rev. John Williams in 1862³². In the very early part of the twentieth century, Spence issued a call for British mystics to embrace their native traditions and to actively reject the Eastern material being promoted by the Theosophists. Spence believed that Britain had its own traditions that should be drawn upon to enrich the spiritual lives of the British people because they would be the most appropriate to their spiritual development.³³ It is worth noting that Spence, like others of his time, believed that Druidic religions were related to, although not specifically derived from, Egyptian tradition and represented a very ancient form of solar worship based on a cult of the dead, which would have clearly resonated with Michell's beliefs about the importance of solar deities. Spence also became known for his writings on Atlantis, another topic of interest to Michell, and also on the use of esoteric and Pagan religion by the Nazis (Spence was strongly anti-Nazi), as well as the general spiritual regeneration of Europe. For Spence, like other Anglican antiquarians before him, Druidry served as a proto-Anglicanism, free from either Rome or the Protestant Reformation. In this vein, Michell believed that the Druids were the inheritors of the Primordial Tradition, and that under their watch, British society flourished. Early Celtic Christianity, he felt, was less Roman, more orthodox and aligned to the Primordial Tradition, which allowed for a smoother transition from Pagan to Christian society. By his own admission, the legends of Christ being taught by the Druids were influential on Michell's thought, and while he admitted he did not necessarily believe in their literal truth, he did believe the tales conveyed spiritual truths about the relationship between Jesus, the Primordial Tradition, and the source of its transmission.³⁴

A key feature of Michell's work, which links him thematically to a specific narrative within British mystic nationalism, Traditionalism, and politically to New Right, Third Positionist, and fascist movements, is his millennialism, specifically the notion that Britain will be reborn as the New Jerusalem and spiritual leader of a degraded Europe. Griffin calls this particular brand of millennialism "palingenetic ultra-nationalism" and recognizes it as the primary defining element within fascist movements.³⁵ Griffin's characterization of this ideology is the belief that

32. Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain*. (New Haven, Yale University Press 2009), 266.

33. Lewis Spence, *The Mysteries of Britain: The Secret Rites and Traditions of Ancient Britain Restored* (Van Nuys: Newcastle Publishing, 1993 [1905]), 47.

34. Screeton. *John Michell*, 47.

35. Roger Griffin "The Palingenetic Core of Generic Fascist Ideology," in *Che cos'è*

the nation (organically defined, of course) will emerge from the crisis of modernity into a new, utopian order derived from the ancient or traditional principles which guided society in a Golden Age, and that this new beginning will be essentially mythic and heroic.³⁶

Michell follows a number of British esoteric thinkers in believing that Glastonbury is the New Jerusalem and that the establishment of the New Age is nigh, but it is difficult to figure out exactly where to situate him in regards to other Anglo-Israelites. While some esotericists, especially those with a Druidic or Pagan bent and interested in earth mysteries, interpret the idea of the New Jerusalem as metaphoric, Michell, inspired by mystical nationalist interpretations of the work of William Blake, believes that the restoration of Glastonbury as a site of spiritual significance is part of the key to establishing the New Jerusalem on earth, and that the British people are literally the people of Israel, that they are "the chosen ones"³⁷ and William Blake was a prophet of the British New Age.

A brief detour into the work of William Blake might be useful here, as his writings laid the groundwork for many of Michell's conclusions not only about the sacrality of the British countryside, but specifically that within England lies the New Jerusalem of Revelation. Blake was both informed by and informed popular beliefs about an essential national spirit of Britain linked with Israel and redemption, which later infused British Christianity and also British new religious movements. Most notably influential here were the legends of Joseph of Aramathea and the idea that Jesus visited Britain as a youth, which establishes a direct line between Britain and Jesus, providing a nativist reading of the development of Christianity in Britain that circumvents Roman Catholicism and thus establishes the authority of Anglicanism. Most of Blake's esoteric work, which comes from the early nineteenth century, embodies a complex and idiosyncratic mythology which has served a variety of modern perspectives about British spiritual and national identity. The two most relevant references to the redeemed Britain in his work are the 1804 poem now known as the anthem "Jerusalem," which was actually the preface to *Milton: A Poem*, and the longer work *Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, composed from 1804 to 1820. Both the poem of that name and the figure of the daughter of Albion in other works, refers to the stories of Joseph of Aramathea bringing Jesus to Britain

il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerche, ed. Alessandro Campi (Rome: Ideazione editrice 2003), 97-122.

36. Ibid .

37. Michell, *Eccentric Lives*, 163-77; John Michell, *The Temple at Jerusalem: A Revelation*. (York Beach, Me.: Sam Weiser 2000).

and suggests that a spiritual and moral rebirth of the country is needed through expunging the land of its “dark satanic mills.” Only in this way can Britain regain its purity. Jerusalem is the perfected and completed Albion which will be reached only by enlightenment. Here, not only do we have an identification of Britain with Israel, but also a vision of it existing in an edenic state after redemption, which are themes that emerge continually throughout the nativist mysticism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which are central to Michell’s conclusions about the fate of Britain in the coming age.

In the mid-nineteenth century the notion that Britain was, indeed, Israel was gaining in popularity. In 1840, John Wilson, one of the early promoters of British Israel, published a series of influential lectures arguing that the European races were all of Hebrew origin, and that according to the Bible, Britain was actually Israel, and the restoration of Britain/Israel as told in Revelation would be the ultimate fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.³⁸ The idea that the British were related to the Hebrews was clearly not new, but it was at this point that British Israelism was infused with Biblical prophecy and a millennialist religious agenda. Although Wilson himself was specifically focused on creating a Lost Tribes pedigree for the Anglo-Saxons, British Israelites such as Edward Hine, who in 1871 wrote the influential *Forty-Seven Identifications of the British Nation With Lost Israel*, believed that the Lost Tribe in question included both Anglo-Saxon and Celtic stock. British Israelites advocated and still believe that Britain, in a very real sense, is Israel, that it has been the true Israel since the crucifixion because Joseph of Aramathea brought both Jesus and the Holy Grail to England, and that the British (and their diasporic descendants) are the Chosen People and one of the twelve (or ten, depending on the source) tribes of Israel. A radical version of British Israelism is found in Christian Identity theory which states that the successes of the British Empire and the modern ascendancy of the United States is evidence of the racial superiority that comes with being God’s Chosen People.

From a more esoteric perspective in the twentieth century, Wellesley Tudor Pole and Dion Fortune also supported Blake’s “prophecy” and argued for the restoration of Glastonbury as the center of British spiritual renewal framed in terms of the New Jerusalem. It is in this space that we see the interplay between British Christian and emerging Pagan nativism, as ultimately expressed in the continuity of the unique sacrality of the British landscape from pre-Christian (imagined Pagan) times through Christianity. Thus the Christian metaphor of the New Jerusalem becomes subsumed in wider narratives of sacred Britain, which become

38. J. Wilson. *Our Israelitish Origin*. (London: James Nisbet and Co.) 1840. p. 45.

key features of New Right philosophy. As Michell's precursors, Fortune, and Tudor Pole too exhibited a nationalist millennialism in their views about Britain. Fortune in the 1930s expressed the idea that Britain had to spearhead a spiritual reawakening based at Glastonbury, and in the 1950s Tudor Pole promoted pilgrimages to sacred sites, especially those associated with the archangel Michael, to help regenerate Britain's spiritual power so that it could shine a light in Europe after the dark days of World War II.³⁹ By the 1960s, Glastonbury was recognized as a major site of pilgrimage for a variety of religious groups, including but not limited to Orthodox Christians, Celtic Christians, practitioners of Goddess spirituality, and Pagans. Michell's views about the meaning of Britain's sacred geography and the prophecy encoded within them are really situated within this wider context of beliefs concerning the nature and role of sacred Britain. While Michell did not evidently share the White supremacist sentiment of many contemporary Anglo-Israelites, he did feel that the British are the chosen people and, echoing Tudor Pole, that Britain (with particular emphasis on Glastonbury) is the spiritual center of Europe if not the world, which he gives as a justification for remaining separate from the emerging European "superstate."⁴⁰

Michell's "Radical Traditionalism" and the branding of a Pagan New Right

Michell's work is emblematic of a pivot point in the attempts of New Right activists to market to and to cultivate a Pagan base. Many aspects of his work as depicted above are consonant with the interests and values of many Pagans: Earth Mysteries and the focus on sacred sites, the relationship between people and land, anti-modernism, and the general interest in folk tradition and festivals⁴¹. Unsurprisingly, within British Paganism in particular his influence is strongly felt, and many British Pagans are familiar with his work and writings. Although de Benoist's *Nouvelle Droite* writings call for his small, independent polities to be Pagan, his politics are not specifically religious or prescriptive in nature. However, in the past decade or so, the New Right has been marketed specifically by and for Pagans in a religious context under the phrase "Radical Traditionalism," primarily to Heathens but also to Reconstructionists and

39. Wellesley Tudor Pole, "Preparing the Way for the New Age," in *Michael Prince of Heaven*. (Marazion: Worden and Sons, n.d.), 26.

40. Michell, *Confessions of a Radical Traditionalist*, 260.

41. The broader category of "Earth Mysteries" — with its focus on ley lines, sacred sites, and telluric currents — is not equivalent with British Paganism, but British Pagans, who generally articulate a strong ancestral connection to the landscape through ritual at ancient sites, are frequently interested in Earth Mysteries.

Pagans with a strong interest in folk traditions, radical environmentalism, and antimodernism. In fact, the term “Radical Traditionalist” appears to have been coined by John Michell in the 1970s,⁴² and has been promoted by a loose network of Evola and New Right supporters working to establish the New Right within Paganism and other groups in the United States and elsewhere. In the American context, musician Michael Moynihan and his publishing partner, Joshua Buckley, who published Michell’s 2005 *Confessions of a Radical Traditionalist*, have been key figures in promoting the use of the term “Radical Traditionalist” to an emerging right-wing market. In fact, Michell’s 2005 collection of essays, *Confessions of a Radical Traditionalist*, were assembled and edited by Joscelyn Godwin in conjunction with Michell specifically for ULTRA Press, which specializes in promoting the philosophies of European New Right activists, including Alain de Benoist and Julius Evola.⁴³ Godwin and Michell had previously both contributed to an edition of Evola’s *Men Among the Ruins*, published by Michael Moynihan’s Dominion Press in 2002, so it is possible that Michell was taking more of an interest in an explicitly New Right agenda in his final decade. ULTRA’s journal, *Tyr: Myth, Culture and Tradition*, is labeled a Radical Traditionalist journal, and they use the phrase in the subtitle of their printing of Julius Evola’s *Men Among the Ruins: Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*,⁴⁴ which may actually suggest an exercise in Pagan branding, also indicated by the fact that the website of ULTRA Press is at www.radicaltraditionalist.com. Moynihan and Buckley also have worked closely with figures such as Germanic Pagan Stephen Flowers (Edred Thorsson), who has also been a promoter and publisher of de Benoist’s work under Runa Raven Press and who has openly expressed the importance of promoting the New Right among Pagans in the United States.⁴⁵

Since 2010, the New Right has become more active in courting Pagans with the establishment of publishing houses and journals that frequently

42. Screeton, *John Michell*, 89.

43. It may also be worth noting that the Southern Poverty Law Center has reported about the business partnership between ULTRA publisher Joshua Buckley and prominent Atlanta-based white supremacist and activist Sam Dickson, noting Buckley’s past involvement with American Neo-Nazis. SPLC Intelligence Report, Fall 2006 “How Sam Dickson Got Rich” <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2006/fall/how-sam-dickson-got-rich?page=0,2>.

44. See the website for Ultra Press, www.radicaltraditionalist.com, founded by Joshua Buckley and Michael Moynihan for their mission statement. Moynihan’s Dominion Press also publishes works by Stephen Flowers and Joscelyn Godwin.

45. See Stephen Flowers’ introductions to de Benoist’s *On Being a Pagan* and to Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier *Manifesto for a European Renaissance* (Texas: Runa Raven Press 2010).

contain a blend of Traditionalism, New Right, esoteric, and other Pagan themes, and more explicitly Pagan works are emerging from these publishers, suggesting a further attempt to integrate New Right thought with Paganism. Writers like Collin Cleary, who was initially an editor at *Tyr*, are articulating a clearer theology within emerging Radical Traditionalism, with books like *Summoning the Gods*, which purports to provide a deeper Traditionalist basis for experiencing Norse divinity.⁴⁶ Although most of the Pagan emphasis of the Pagan New Right is Germanic and Scandinavian, *Tyr* has featured a number of Pagan authors (who may or may not have been aware of the publications' political leanings), including Nigel Pennick and John Matthews, writing more broadly on myth and folk traditions. The journal *Hex*, which has editorial and thematic connections with the New Right⁴⁷, is primarily Heathen in content, but also features pieces on other Reconstructionist traditions.

Esoteric publishing house Arktos, formerly Integral Traditions, rebranded itself in 2010 to reach an overtly radically culturally separatist and New Right readership. Arktos has a specific focus on publishing the works of Evola, and their catalogue includes works by de Benoist, Edred Thorsson, British National Anarchist Troy Southgate, and also John Michell's 2005 *Confessions of a Radical Traditionalist*. Additionally, Arktos publishes a Traditionalist journal, *The Initiate*, features a Neofolk music section, and, interestingly, markets books on survivalist techniques, guerilla warfare, and armed resistance for those who are practically minded. Counter-Currents publishing, based in San Francisco, aims at both a New Right and also an explicitly White separatist market. They feature a number of titles of potential interest to Pagans, including *Tyr*, books on Pagan spirituality by Collin Cleary, and books on Indo-European scholarship. Notably, one of Counter-Current's editors in chief, Greg Johnson, is also a leading white-separatist blogger, using the rhetoric of the New Right's positions on diversity to advocate separate white polities, a position he shares with British National Anarchist and esoteric publisher Troy Southgate.

Thus, with targeted promotion and publishing campaigns, John Michell's work is finding its way to a new audience, and it can be hypothesized that Michell himself was part of this program toward the end of his life. Although Michell is popularly associated with left-

46. Collin Cleary, *Summoning the Gods*. (San Francisco: Counter Currents Press, 2011).

47. For details on the relationship of *Hex* and the New Right, see "Rose City Anti-Fascists: Austrian Far Right Musical Project on West Coast Tour" in *Who Makes the Nazis*, <http://www.whomakesthenazis.com/2010/12/rose-city-anti-fascists-austrian.html>.

wing culture, in fact he was known to be quite right-wing in many of his views; and his biographer Paul Screeton noted that in the last years of his life Michell actively worked to shed his countercultural reputation.⁴⁸ Joscelyn Godwin refers to Michell's work as transcending the Right/Left distinction and belonging to a "third dimension, above," which he uses to stress the spiritual underpinnings of Michell's work.⁴⁹ It may be, though, that Godwin was subtly characterizing Michell's work as "Third Position," which would also be apt, and which describes a particular brand of fascist thought which is both anti-capitalist, and socialist but not Marxist. It is thus within the extension of Michell's beliefs about tribalism, sacred landscapes, ecology, anti modernism, and conservation—all themes which underpin the values of many Pagans—that we see this fascinating convergence of right-wing and left-wing politics. The public face of John Michell was that of an advocate of the hippies, the anarchists, the misfits, and the New Age travelers, those who oppose modernism and capitalism. He championed the Stonehenge revelers at the Battle of the Beanfield and supported the decriminalization of marijuana. However, many of these positions have been now been embraced by varying segments of New Right, Neo-tribalist, anarcho-fascist, and radical environmental activists, and it is most likely, upon reevaluation, within the more recent development of these movements that Mitchell's work now sits most comfortably.

There are probably a number of reasons why the writings of John Michell have not been thus far associated with the philosophies of the emerging Right. The first is probably because the German and Nordic Pagan and esoteric links to right-wing politics are extremely well-known and are under quite a bit of constant scrutiny.⁵⁰ British mystic nationalism, however, has not been as well explored in this regard, and its political manifestations have not been quite as explicit. Although we can chart the influence of British mystic nationalism and the Anglo-Israelites movement on white-supremacist groups—Christian Identity, for example—we generally do not associate British or Celtic esoteric traditions with right-wing or fascist political movements, as we do Germanic or Scandinavian Pagan traditions. However, the rise of esoterically minded British Nationalist Anarchist writers such as Troy Southgate

48. Screeton 2010, 67.

49. Godwyn in Michell, *Confessions of a Radical Traditionalist*, 2005, xx.

50. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazis and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002) and Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

and his right-wing esoteric journal projects such as *Helios* and *Synthesis* is changing this situation rapidly.

There may also be a general tendency to perceive motifs associated with a Celtic past as being rather charming and non-threatening. While we see assertions of Germanic cultural purity as nefarious, the rhetoric of Celtic “cultural purity,” in the twentieth century anyway, has been frequently associated with resistance movements and Scottish, Welsh, Irish, and Cornish ethnonationalism. The Celts have been the romantically constructed underdog, so Michell’s references to ancient Celtic traditions, the Druidic priesthood transmitting the primordial tradition, or King Arthur as the manifestation of a solar sacred kingship do not generally register as having very direct legendary analogs with Historical Fascism or Nazi esoteric traditions, although they certainly do ideologically and even thematically. Historically the Celts have served as a critique of modernity, and they have emerged as the romanticized heroes of the ancient world⁵¹. The ways in which Celtic culture and society have been constructed and characterized – both within popular culture and also in the academy by the field of Celtic Studies, with its focus on philology and the tripartite social structure promoted by noted Indo-European scholar Georges Dumézil⁵² – actually provide a perfect framework for Celtic, Evola-inspired, right-wing Neo-tribalism.

However, it is really the ascendance of Radical Traditionalism and the concerted efforts to promote it within very specific Pagan and political contexts since 2000 that are now bringing the writings of John Michell to a whole new audience, where his writings have a surprisingly different sort of relevance. The ideologies espoused by Evola and Michell in many ways do transcend the Right/Left divide, and, as Godwin suggests, do occupy a “third position” for contemporary New Right activists. In addition to the more Pagan friendly topics within Michell’s corpus such as the emphasis on small, rural, decentered polities, crafts, anti-capitalism, and conservation, Michell also embraced traditional hierarchical and gender divisions and elitist theocracies. All of these positions are consonant with anarcho-fascism or anarcho-monarchism, which are two potential political frameworks supported by New Right philosophy.

51. For a controversial yet still definitive discussion of the construction of the Celt as western “Other” see Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: Construction of a Myth* (London: Macmillan 1992).

52. The writing of Indo-European scholar Georges Dumézil are frequently used by New Right groups and followers of de Benoist in support of the concept of an entrenched and unchanging Indo-European hierarchical social structure. The reproduction of the 1978 interview between de Benoist and Dumézil by the Radical Traditionalist journal *Tyr* 1 (2002): 41–50 is an example of the current distribution of this idea through New Right channels.

The latter would probably be a good description of Michell's perspectives, as demonstrated in his proposal of the restoration of a symbolic High King to Ireland, who would serve as a symbolic rallying point for the four distinct political divisions of the island, each of which would be locally governed. Although the idea of anarcho-monarchism seems amazingly contradictory, proponents argue that if sacred kingship is carried out in accordance with divine law, then the leadership is not technically coercive as it is replicating a natural and universal harmony. Furthermore, anarcho-monarchism is an anti-capitalist position aiming to reorder the wealth by placing it into rightful hands, rather than that of corporations.

Although Michell explored many themes which at this date may be consonant with fascist and New Right positions throughout his over 40 years as a writer, it may be that the social and cultural conditions emerging in Britain in the decade before his death were causing a crystallization of his politics. Nevertheless, for the moment he is remembered as a charming British eccentric and champion of the outsider. What is actually called for is a rethinking of the history and trajectory of the wider British Traditionalist movement, particularly with respect to esoteric culture. As we are seeing more consolidated efforts to promote New Right positions and political action within Pagan and other esoteric subcultures, it is important that we understand the contexts of production and consumption of the texts which inspire these movements, support them, and articulate their values.

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