

## **Contradictory Views on Radical Faerie Thought**

Mitch Walker

From *White Crane Journal*, [Fall 1997 \(#34\): FAIRIES](#)

*The following was reworked by the editor from an article written at the Spring Equinox 1994, titled: "Origins and Purpose of the Radical Faerie Movement: A Fifteenth Anniversary Commemoration."*

*From his analysis in Jungian publications in the mid-1970s of the archetype of the Double as a uniquely gay configuration of psyche and his book *Visionary Love* in 1980, one of the very first articulations in contemporary gay culture of the mystical aspects of gay love, Mitch Walker is undoubtedly one of the forefathers of the gay spirituality movement. He's known for being staunchly gay-centered and, with his book, *Men Loving Men*, enthusiastically sex-positive. He has recently completed a new manuscript, *The Uranian Soul: Studies in Gay-Centered Jungian Psychology for a New Era of Gay Liberation*.*

In early 1979, Harry Hay, his longtime companion John Burnside, Don Kilhefner and I issued a public Call for a Spiritual Conference of Radical Faeries that unexpectedly drew hundreds of gay seekers to a remote desert retreat over the Labor Day weekend. We had modestly expected 50-75 guys to respond for this meeting on Gay Spirit, but the way-overflow crowd was so enthusiastic and the resulting weekend so fabulous that we immediately resolved from then on to foster Radical Faerie gatherings and circles wherever possible. At our second national gathering in the Rockies the next summer, even more queer men responded, and the resulting week-long effort had an even more smashing impact building on the first. And thus a grassroots social movement was born, the Radical Faerie Movement. Since then, Faerie circles and gatherings have spontaneously sprouted

all over, nationally and overseas, and have become an ongoing feature of gay community life for over fifteen years.

Not only is the Faerie movement a significant part of contemporary gay life, but it is a uniquely influential one. It is the first indigenous spiritual tradition created and sustained by the gay male community in modern times. By "indigenous" I mean gay-centered and gay-engendered, in contrast to the various gay synagogues, churches, covens etc. In the latter groups, gayness is incidental or additional to the tradition espoused, while in the former it is central and causal. Radical Faeries celebrate and explore the Gay Spirit, which is itself the source of spiritual existence, wisdom and initiation. Because of its indigenous, gay-centered nature, the Radical Faerie movement pioneers a new seriousness about gayness, its depth and potential, thereby heralding a new stage in the meaning of Gay Liberation.

Over the years two strands of thought have developed about what the Faerie Movement was and should be -- and some significant animosity between them. These strands can be identified by two charismatic characters in recent gay cultural history: Arthur Evans and Harry Hay.

Arthur Evans was a homosexual graduate student in philosophy at Columbia University who was politicized by the student uprisings that rocked Columbia during the spring of 1968. After the Stonewall Riots the next year he became involved with Manhattan's fledgling Gay Liberation Front, and he helped establish the Gay Activist Alliance to supercede GLF. Then in the early 70s, Evans moved to San Francisco and, still the scholar, in 1973 began publishing articles on his own researched, philosophized and radicalized vision of gay history. In 1975 he and some friends formed a small pagan-inspired ritual group called "the Faery Circle" to act out the ecstatic pansexual revels he believed he had uncovered in the hidden past of Western Europe. In 1976 Evans gave a series of public lectures on his

research, and in 1978 published his influential book *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*.

According to Evans, a pagan-influenced counterculture had long survived in Europe after the triumph of Christianity, featuring ecstatic sexual worship of nature, the Great Mother and a horned consort god typified by figures like Dionysos, Pan and Cernunnos, and a salient feature of this pagan counterculture was that its leaders were often women and gay men. It was this non-conforming counterculture that the Christian Church persecuted as "witches." Famous from this argument is the notion that the epithet "faggot" derives from the use of homosexuals as tinder for the bonfires that burned witches and heretics.

Evans argued that by following this pagan-descended, goddess-centered, pansexual bacchanalian spiritual tradition, gay people today could integrate a sense of gay pride, love of nature, and spiritual power into an ongoing experiential synthesis. This historical tradition, he said, was the basis of what has come to be called the Radical Faerie Movement. The other strain of thought can be identified with Harry Hay, co-founder of the Mattachine Society in 1951, and perhaps the pivotal figure in the creation of the modern gay movement. Hay was an idealist, non-conformist, and Marxist in the 1930s; he taught music history at the Southern California Labor School, and even as early as 1948 was trying to organize his homosexual friends into a political movement for social change. Important to Hay's development is that his first homosexual experience had been with someone who had known a member of the short-lived Chicago-based Society for Human Rights in the 1920s that had been modeled on the earlier homosexual rights efforts in Germany by such men as Magnus Hirschfeld. Through that homosexual bonding, Hay was connected to a history, and a succession, of homosexual identification. Indeed, already by 1950 Harry Hay, building on earlier gay-centered thinkers, like Edward Carpenter and Karl Ulrichs, was defining gays as a separate people with our own characteristics

and dimensions. And by 1970 he was articulating a magical "gay window" on reality entirely "other than" and alien to nongay thinking. In the early 70s he established a "circle of loving companions" to purposely live and explore these insights in gay consciousness. Hay's fundamental concept is that what we today call a Gay People can be found in all times and places, such as the "third gender" people of tribal societies, or in European tradition, such as the original Mattachine brotherhood of free-thinking, liberated troubadours during the Middle Ages. These Mattachines were not simply homosexuals among groups of pagans. These were consciously homosexual people, and if they were attracted to paganism it is because, as homosexuals, they were opposed to the oppressiveness of mainstream culture, and were not "sexually liberated" because they were worshippers of Pan, but because they were queer (see Harry Hay, *Radically Gay*).

Harry Hay and Arthur Evans make for a fascinating contrast. Here were two gay men, each basically unknown to the other, promulgating similarly magical visions of gayness with parallel theories of sacred gay roles in past societies. Yet their visions went in diametrical directions. Arthur's led to pansexual ecstatic revels infused by a man-and-woman-loving horned god and his mother, whereas Harry's vision led to a reunion with one's lost original Lover in concert with others through "subject-Subject consciousness" to thereby attain a homosexual cosmic wholeness that unlocks spiritual and creative treasures.

I became involved with these issues because of my own inquiry into gay psychology in the early 70s. By 1974, unaware as yet of either Hay's or Evans's work, I had begun writing about "gay archetypes" in the deep psyche possessed of their own origins and truth. I dedicated my efforts to exploring and honoring these archetypes. By 1976, when I attended Arthur's lectures and met Harry Hay, I was writing of a homosexual gnosis arising from "the magickal gay spirit power" I called ROIKA. During this time I was a fulltime activist inhabitant of the gay

"underground" scene in San Francisco. I was friends with Arthur Evans and various members of his Faery Circle. Yet I was disturbed by his theories. In contrast, as soon as I met Harry (oddly enough through a person I met while attending one of Arthur's lectures) I instantly saw he was coming from a gay archetypal view and felt deeply drawn to work with him in fomenting Gay Spirit realization.

Harry, myself and the other founders -- holding to the viewpoint of a Gay People -- only came to use the word "faerie" as a title for a "movement" late in our thought process (this was a collective effort) and then as a reference to the "other" world of the Little People in Celtic lore, not to the outlaw worshippers -- of all sexes and orientations -- of the "old religion" of medieval Europe. In our view, faeries are the supernatural denizens of a homosexual world both feared and revered by the ordinary folk. The original faeries were so-called not because they worshipped the Three Fates, as Evans says about the fey leaders of pagan traditions, but because to encounter them was always highly fateful. In my opinion, Arthur Evans's pansexual Dionysian vision is not actually gay-centered. The Faerie movement is "Radical" not because it is anti-Establishment but because it makes a revolutionary shift to homodeity itself as source of spiritual truth, rather than to alien sources -- whether the breeder God of Christians or the bisexual Bacchus of Arthur Evans. Evans is, not surprisingly, a constructionist on gay orientation, claiming that the "dichotomy of homosexual vs. heterosexual is itself a modern cultural construct and that it fails to apply to the pan-sexualism of many ancient societies." In contrast, Harry Hay and I are essentialists who feel there is a unique Gay Spirit separate and different from other sexual truths, occurring in all times and places. When we called the Faerie gathering in 1979, we were aiming to reclaim and explore the magical homosexual universe known by queer wisepeople in all cultural traditions. The tradition of gay radical essentialism expressed in the 1979

Call marks a historic break with the earlier-70s efforts at repossession of stigmatized gay labels: the Sissies, Faggots, Faeries, etc. of that era. These earlier efforts sought to theoretically desegregate then-current movements such as the counterculture, feminism, and socialism to include homosexuality, in effect subsuming gayness toward other agendas. Such efforts reflect a political position that minimizes group differences. In contrast, the Radical Faerie movement successfully arose on the ashes of these earlier efforts precisely because of its source in a different, gay nationalist tradition.

I have no dispute with Arthur claiming the justly pioneering nature of his work. His efforts have been influential in their own right, and often at Faerie gatherings aspects and adherents of his views will be heard and welcomed. Celebrating paganism, feminism, free love and revolution is always welcome. But, in my opinion, Harry Hay's strand of essentialist Gay Spirit is far more accurate to history and, in being experienced, vastly more fundamental and encompassing.

In practice, the contradictory nature of these strands of thought has resulted in acrimony and ill-will. Not least of these was the publication of an article by Arthur Evans, "Where the Faeries Came From," in White Crane Newsletter in 1992 in which Evans, demonizing Hay and myself angrily demanded that it was he and his 1975 Faery Circle group that should be seen as the founding of the Radical Faerie Movement and not the 1979 Call and the subsequent mind-blowing Gathering. Yet at the same time, Harry Hay is also notorious for his bullying and domineering style. Faerie Gatherings themselves have sometimes turned out to be occasions for argument and disagreement, and I too at times have been disagreeable as well. There is a lesson here: Psyche is actually the appropriate locale for exploring questions of Gay Spirit. In my view, Arthur's issue and Harry's issue and that of each and every one of us which provokes an encounter with one's own Shadow is really about "unfinished business" in one's own unconscious. And I recommend

taking responsibility for these issues rather than projecting them onto others. The challenge is to conceive of homodeity and its ensoulfulness in the terms and terrain of psyche, to combine gay-centered thinking and psychological awareness into a new synthesis.

Since Gay Spirit arises and lives in the psyche, one must face one's psyche in an actual and full way to truly reach a fuller partnership with Gay Spirit. In practice this means a thorough encounter with one's Gay Shadow, with what is most disturbing and most resisted against inside one's own feelings. It is, I believe, the failure of such encounters and the subsequent projection onto other people that is responsible for the acrimony we've seen at times even in the most idealistic of gay groups and individuals.

In taking this step to psyche, we come to the edge of a next stage in Gay Liberation, a politics of the homosexual mind, its oppression and fulfillment. As shown by the spread of the Radical Faerie movement, gay men today long for authentic awakening to our inner roots, source of the numinous, of gay eros and wholeness, of those magic initiations and liberation that come only from there. Sacred Spirit is not to be found "outside," in groups or leaders, but in relation to one's own unconscious.

Therefore further developments in Gay Spirit unfoldment must be sought "within," in a terrain left entirely uncultivated by Arthur Evans or Harry Hay -- indeed by almost every gay thinker today. We are forever being pushed to the limits by our connection to Gay Spirit, pushed to transcend ourselves and our familiar ways of perceiving the world. Intrapsychic theories of gay liberation and initiation are needed, a radical essentialist psychology, a modern re-invention of ancient gay-wisdom traditions. The technology for such a step has been the focus of my own contributions these past two decades, and I believe it is in this direction that further

development of "faerie" as concept and reality lies.

There are gay men today trying to explore and fulfill an authentic Gay Spirit tradition like that espoused at the origin of the Radical Faerie movement, a tradition going back before Plato which will likewise stretch into the distant future. It is the tradition of gay-centered Spirit, that is, honoring and practicing the self-realization of the "god-ness" within gayness itself, its progenitor, its mysterium. It is this Spirit that creates homosexual love as a magnetic center of inner value, compelling our sexual orientation and identity. Out of this instinctual Spirit comes a sensibility and a procreativity of stunning importance not only to us but for all humanity. To not only participate in but also wake up to this Gay Spirit self-consciously, to seek its knowledge and wisdom in ever more purposeful and actualizing ways, is to join with our mystical forebears to fulfill the evolutionary promise of our gayness and thereby help usher humanity through its current crisis to a more humane and mature form of social life. This is the way of Faerie consciousness, the path of ROIKA, of Gay Spirit Self-realization.

Mitch Walker lives in Los Angeles