

Response from Sarsen

Sarsen is a Faery initiate in the Hellbender line founded by Steven Hewell. She is a published author and a professional educator.

1. What do you think has caused the current split within Faery/Feri? Was there a precipitating recent event? How far back have the tensions causing the current split go?

2. What is your conception of the Faery Tradition? How do you feel about the very public teachers of Feri, and the large number of Feri students?

3. Do you think this seeming split is a permanent one? What do you think the future holds for your tradition?

I'm sort of answering them all at once as they are intertwined....

Faery is a unique animal...Hutton called it "a home-grown American strain of religious witchcraft." It isn't a *product* of the flowering of Pagan religion in the 1960s and 70s, but was one of the forces which helped create it. Both Gwydion Pendderwen and Starhawk (among other influential figures) are Faery initiates. Part of its character and genuineness stems from the fact that it is a real live initiatory tradition, transmitted person to person, one witch at a time.

I guess I can understand the impulse to share something so strange and precious with the whole world, but it's not actually possible to do that without altering it out of all recognition...any more than you can generalize how you feel about a lover to all of humanity. Love is universal, sure, but how you love each person is particular. The Craft is particular.

Some recent incidents highlighted the fact that some of the more public teachers really don't know their students very well (and vice versa), but it was really just the latest in a string of related issues, some of which reach back to the 1970s...teaching people without vetting them properly which can foster abuse, appropriation of other initiates' work, professionalization of the role of teacher. All of these cluster around the impulse to teach "more" rather than "better." That isn't to say that all of the public teachers are prone to the same issues, nor that the apprenticeship, person-to-person model is a guarantee that you will never have problems. However, I will say that, having abandoned the safeguards for both student and teacher built into the old model, most of the people teaching online, distance, and for pay haven't replaced them with anything workable yet. I also think the more egregious problems are driven by the attempt to turn an initiatory religious Witchcraft tradition into a public Pagan religion, a role to which Faery is particularly ill-suited. I recognize the need and desire for accessible teachers and to address the rapid expansion of Pagan religion; I just think that there are other traditions out there which were designed for that purpose, and

are frankly much better at it. Faery is intense, ecstatic, experiential...you cannot convey it adequately in words and I say that as a person who spends a lot of time expressing things with words. Likewise, the personal bond between teacher and student is much more like Shams and Rumi than how you relate to your math teacher.

When the classroom, teaching-for-pay model was first introduced into the tradition, some of the same issues immediately appeared, but on a much smaller scale. My initiator, Steven Hewell, saw how those practices were affecting the tradition adversely and that's part of why he left California and dissociated himself from most of the tradition then. The Internet and the increased popularity of Feri in recent years has increased the problem exponentially, and in the last few years members of the tradition have spend quite a bit of time and energy trying to resolve conflicts which appear irreconcilable. Part of our choice to diverge stems from the desire to turn our energy and attention elsewhere.

From Hellbender's point of view, the separation has been a fact for years, and the first attempt at reconciliation has already failed, although we did learn that many more people agree with us than we thought. As for what the future holds, who knows?