

witches & pagans

Earthwise Spirituality for Today

Singing is like Breathing

Author T. Thorn
Coyle interviews
Pagan blogger,
mystic, Druid
and musician
Teo Bishop.

the **MAGICK** *of* **WATER**

**Ochun: Lady of Fresh Water • The Magical Worlds of Alex Bledsoe
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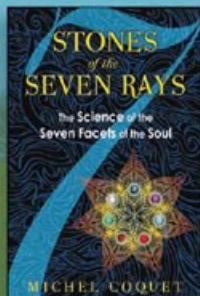
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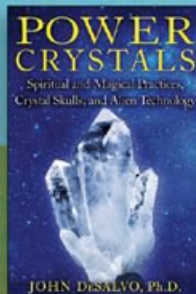
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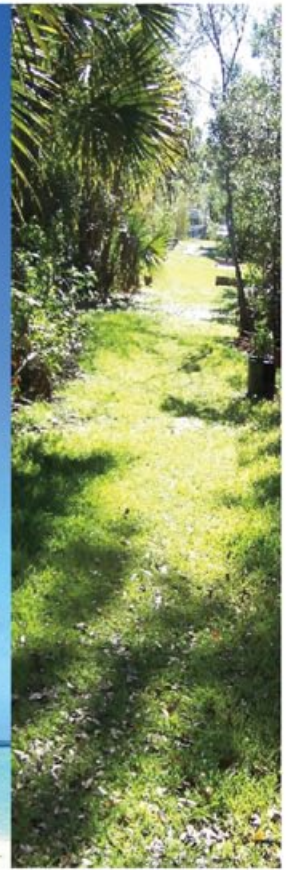
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The Ocean is in Motion...

When the waters get rough, we might be tempted to throw in the towel on Pagan unity. But what the fracas really means is that we are growing up enough to realize that we don't all think alike.

There's nothing like trying to be a peacemaker on the Web to give a person a first-rate migraine, and I'm just getting over a doozy. So please forgive me if I "share my pain" with all of you.

First, a bit of background: our *Witches&Pagans* website now hosts one of the largest Pagan blogospheres on the planet, PaganSquare.com. With over a hundred poets, mystics, pundits, prognosticators, and magicians all rubbing shoulders, there's bound to be a bit of friction.

But earlier this summer, things at PaganSquare got downright testy. It pained me, a Libra Sun Hufflepuff peacemaker, to see my friends going at it hammer-and-tongs in my own house (which is how I rather possessively saw the site). Looking back, I now realize how naive it was to assume that just because everyone on the site was fine with me that they would all get along just peachy with one another.

See, it turns out that there are really, *really* big differences in practice and belief in the wider umbrella of Pagan belief systems. This is partially due to our own success. Once (and not that long ago, either!) the word "Pagan" was a simple label that meant something like "I'm-not-Christian-and-I-worship-the-Goddess." But our movement has expanded (I'm tempted to say "exploded") in both scope and number to the point where the common ground between Pagans can get pretty thin.

Although I've discussed the various styles of Pagans ranging from the earliest anti-establishment types to the now-burgeoning groups of Tea Party Pagans (see my editorials in issues #23 and #24), I've now become conscious of a more fundamental rift: between Human-Centric and Deity-Centric Pagans.

For Human-Centric Pagans, the most important values are tolerance and independence. These Pagans don't usually give a care about Whom or What other Pagans worship, or how they go about it. Their attitude, by and large, is pragmatic: whether you have a shrine to Batman, Loki, Demeter, or the One Great Goddess, if that practice helps you to be a happy, humane person, good on you. Whether you follow the Wiccan Rede, or the Nine Noble virtues, or make up your own Seven Suggestions for Conscious Living, if you are basically humane, your practice works for them. Even if you don't believe that the Gods actually exist — or you consider them to be "archetypes" or human-created thought constructs

— it's no skin off their backs. Many Human-Centrics have assertively eclectic practices, make their rituals up from bits and pieces from various traditions (or invent new ones), invoke deities from many pantheons (or from pop culture), and think of their religion as a "do-it-yourself" affairs. The simple question "does this work for me?" is often their primary litmus test for evaluating their practice.

But to an increasing number of Pagans, this laissez-faire attitude sums up everything that's wrong with the Pagan community today. To these Pagans (who often term themselves "Hard Polytheists" or "Deity-Centric"), the Gods are Real-With-a-Capital-R. Their primary values are loyalty and devotion to the Gods. Deity-Centric Pagans use historical accounts, received tradition, divination and (sometimes) personal gnosis to understand the will of the Gods. The question, "Does this please my God/dess?" is at the center of their practice, and the concept that a fictional hero like Superman might be just as worthy of veneration as an ancestral deity like Zeus is irreverent to the point of blasphemy.

Of course, there are myriad variations on these themes; many Human-Centric Pagans have serious, disciplined spiritual practices, and lots of Hard Polytheists don't have a problem with you worshipping the Ostara bunny if that's what you are into. But mixing these two groups can be a wee bit like putting together nitric acid, sulfuric acid, and glycerine. One spark and — kablooeey!

That's what happened in June — bloggers who may not have previously rubbed elbows with their theological opposite numbers encountered attitudes they viewed as fundamentally unsound; soon they began publicly criticizing each other's practices and from there the accusations and insults began flying back and forth. Feelings became so inflamed that I felt compelled to step in and impose a 30-day cooling-off period between the parties. (It's a measure of the underlying goodwill on the site that not only was my request respected, but hostilities didn't immediately reignite after the month was up.)

Such battles can come as a shock, even a crisis of faith, especially to those who come to Paganism as refugees from fundamentalist forms of Christianity. Some may have innocently believed that Pagans are so tolerant that they will never question — let alone argue about — each other's beliefs.

However, history shows that internecine debates are far more common *within* spiritual communities than between religions; the fact that we Pagans are now arguing about how we approach the Gods (or don't) neatly demonstrates that we *do* consider ourselves members of the same group.

I believe that the label "Pagan" is currently useful primarily as an umbrella term, kind of the way "Queer" is now commonplace as shorthand for LGBTSQ, or like the banner of a large political party with many factions. Personally, I use the term "Pagan" because it nicely differentiates us from the both Abrahamic faiths and other recognized World Religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

Ours is a still and immature and inchoate movement; it's not yet possible to decipher how many religions and spiritualities find shelter under this Big Tent. If the history of most major religions serves as an example it will probably be another half-century or more before we sort ourselves out into various denominations and decide who's in and who's out. Hopefully, we won't have done a Gingham Dog and Calico Cat* trick in the meantime. ♠

*cf "The Duel" by Eugene Field

EDITORIAL NOTES

WELCOME JASON! I'm very excited to announce the addition of Jason Mankey to our team here at *Witches&Pagans*. Jason is a speaker, writer, and High Priest, and can often be found lecturing on the Pagan Festival circuit talking about The Horned God, Magickal History, and Heavy Metal. When not reading and researching Pagan history he likes to crank up the Led Zeppelin, do rituals in honor of Jim Morrison (of The Doors), and sing numerous praises to Pan, Dionysus, and Aphrodite. He lives in Sunnyvale, California with his wife Ari and two hyper-kinetic cats. Jason blogs at Raise the Horns, a part of the Patheos Pagan Channel, and will bring his good-humored wit, gimlet eye, and notorious tendency to leap in where other Pagan pundits fear to tread to *Witches&Pagans* with his new column "In the Orchard."

Featured in our cover interview for this issue, our new columnist **TEO BISHOP** is taking a break from his column in this edition. His column "Lessons from the Grove," will return in our next issue: "Element of Earth." ♠

ARTISTS & PHOTOGRAPHERS

Photographer **GREG HARDER** ("Singing is Like Breathing: Teo Bishop") exemplifies putting your beliefs into action. The former Public Information Officer for Covenant of the Goddess, Greg is involved with many organizations including the Bay area Pagan Newswire Collective. See his photos online at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rigphoto/>.



Illustrator, writer and polytheist for over a decade, **SHIRL SAZYNSKI** (painting for "A Slow Boat to China") paints icons and tells stories revolving around myth. She is a frequent contributor to the pagan literary magazine *Eternal Haunted Summer*. Her current projects include an illustrated book of



Norse Goddesses, and the blog "One-Eyed Cat" on PaganSquare.com. Find her work at <http://shirlsazyński.com>.

FEATURE WRITERS & INTERVIEWERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

SUSAN HARPER ("Sensing Water") is an eclectic solitary Feminist Witch from Irving, Texas and a professor of Anthropology, Sociology, and Women's Studies. When not making magick or fomenting social change, Susan is the head soap-maker, herbalist, and aromatherapist for Dreaming Priestess Creations. She shares her life with her partner, Stephanie, four cats, and two guinea pigs.



DEBORAH BLAKE ("Doorways into Magic: Alex Bledsoe") is the author of *Everyday Witch Book of Rituals*, *Witchcraft on a Shoestring*, as well as *The Everyday Witch A to Z Spellbook*. She lives in upstate New York with five cats who supervise all her activities, both magickal and mundane. Find her online at <http://deborahblake.blogspot.com>.



P. SUFENAS VIRIUS LUPUS ("Deification by Drowning") is a metagender, and one of the founding members of the Ekklesia Antinoou — a queer, Graeco-Roman-Egyptian syncretist reconstructionist polytheist group dedicated to Antinous, the deified lover of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. Lups is also a contributing member of Neos Alexandria and a practicing Celtic Reconstructionist pagan in the traditions of *gentlidecht* and *flidecht*. Lups's work has appeared in a number of *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* devotional volumes, as well as Ruby Sara's anthologies *Datura* (2010) and *Mandragora* (2012), Inanna Gabriel and C. Bryan Brown's *Etched Offerings* (2011), Lee Harrington's *Spirit of Desire: Personal Explorations of Sacred Kink* (2010), and Galina Krasskova's *When the Lion Roars* (2011). Lups has also written several books, including *The Phillippic Hymns* (2008), *The Syncretisms of Antinous* (2010), *Devotio Antinoos: The Doctor's Notes, Volume One* (2011), *All-Soul, All-Body, All-Love, All-Power: A TransMythology* (2012), *A Garland for Polydeukion* (2012), and *A Serpent Path Primer* (2012). Lups writes the "Queer I Stand" column at Patheos.com's Pagan Portal, the "Gentlidecht" blog at PaganSquare, and also blogs at Aedicula Antinoi (<http://aediculaantinoi.wordpress.com/>).



T. THORN COYLE ("Singing is Like Breathing: Teo Bishop") is a magic worker. Author of the *Make Magic of Your Life: Passion, Purpose, and the Power of Desire*, *Kissing the Limitless*, *Evolutionary Witchcraft* and *Crafting a Daily Practice*. She blogs on spirituality and politics for *Patheos* and *Huffington Post*, and at her own blog: *Know Thyself*. Thorn's work reaches people through spiritual direction, vibrant workshops, webcasts, and online classes. She has also produced several CDs of sacred music, been a professional dancer, and has had the honor of helping to serve the homeless of San Francisco for twenty years. Pagan, mystic, minister and social justice activist, she lives by the San Francisco Bay. For more information, join Thorn's monthly newsletter at <http://www.thorncoyle.com> or catch her on Twitter (@ThornCoyle), Google+, Facebook, or her YouTube channel.



SHARON PAICE MACLEOD aka Sharynne MacLeod NicMhacha ("Three Cauldrons: Water and Wisdom in Celtic Traditions") is a Celtic scholar, teacher and musician, and a druid / shaman-priestess of Scottish, Irish and Welsh ancestry, a direct descendant of "Fairy Clan" MacLeod. She trained in Celtic Studies through Harvard University and has presented research on Celtic religion at the University of Edinburgh, University College Cork, Ford Foundation Lecture Series, and the Harvard Study Group on Ancient Magic and Religion. Sharon is the author of *Celtic Myth and Religion: A Study of Traditional Belief* (McFarland) and *Queen of the Night* (Weiser) and a Celtic, medieval, and trance singer / instrumentalist for The Moors. She runs workshops, correspondence trainings, and apprenticeships, and is the founder of Senchas: Celtic Religious Studies Association and Immrama: Indigenous Celtic Shamanic Traditions.



LENI HESTER ("No One is an Enemy to Water: Ochun") is a Witch, writer and artist living near Denver, Co. She is a frequent contributor to *SageWoman* and *Witches&Pagans*, and writes a blog on Seasonal witchcraft on PaganSquare.com called "Season and Spirit."



Freelance writer and interviewer **HANK EDER** ("Tish Owen, a Woman of Abundance") lives in the mountains of Western North Carolina, near Asheville. A lifelong student of all things mystical, Hank is eclectic by nature, likening himself to the character in Hesse's "Siddhartha," who borrows a little from many paths to make his own way. Current projects include a novel about Indigo Children, a non-fiction book, "The Hero Within," and a web-based PR business, <http://hankeder.com>. Catch up with Hank at hank@hankeder.com.



I AND MY CO-AUTHOR, CAROL GARR, VERY MUCH APPRECIATE THE REVIEW of *Enchantment Encumbered* by Jerrie Hildebrand in Issue 26 — so I'd like to address the "serious flaw" she pointed out: that the book does not discuss the RLUIPA or the RFRA. We wrote the book as priestesses of Mother Earth Ministries, and MEM's mission is to provide accurate information about Wicca (and some other Neo-Pagan and Heathen religions), so that inmates can practice their faith effectively in prison. The terms of our affiliation with the ATC are that we don't advocate or assist inmates in lawsuits; we're none of us lawyers, so we can't provide legal advice or interpretation, either. The decision not to thoroughly discuss the RLUIPA or RFRA was carefully taken. We get enough inquiries about the RLUIPA now that we've recently printed a brochure setting forth its text. The RFRA applies only to federal prisons, and though we do hear from quite a few federal inmates, we don't get enough questions about the RFRA to have a brochure or flyer about it. Our focus is on the practice of Wicca (and to a lesser extent, Druidry and Ásastrú) behind bars. We'd love to be able to refer inmates to a handbook about the RLUIPA and the RFRA — but it's beyond the scope of Mother Earth Ministries to publish one. (We do refer inmates to the LLL, though many have reported not hearing back from them.) We'd also love to hear from other Pagan prison ministries, to whom we can refer the many inmates who are looking for sponsors to lead ritual for them. In the meantime, we do what we can, and thank Ms. Hildebrand and *Witches & Pagans* for bringing *Enchantment* to people's attention.

Ashleen O'Gaea

WHEN I WAS 10 YEARS OLD, I BECAME CAPTIVATED BY THE BLUE TONGUES OF FLAME that danced off our vacation campfire. I've always had a hands-on "need to know" curiosity, and fire was a mystery I could behold in real time. I was mesmerized with its process of transformation. It could take a substance like black charcoal and change it into a powdery white ash. It wasn't the charcoal or the ash, they were dead and inert. It was the flame, the heat, the color of light, and the life process of fire that I loved.

My desire to know how this alchemy worked always returned similar responses; "fire burns, kid" was something even a ten-year-old could understand. I needed more, so I would delve into

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this mystery the only way I knew how. One day, I went behind our garage taking with me the tools of the fire trade. I would build my version of Pandora's box using paper and sticks from an old willow growing nearby. Pandora was given the admonition to never open that box, but still lifted the lid looking into magic. I too was told never to play with fire, but would strike a match anyway expecting fire to reveal its secrets to me.

The secrets would be for another day. For this first fire was going to impart a painful lesson, one that should have cost me my life. With no contingency plan, and setting it too close to a garage built of wood and clad in cedar shake shingles, this fire and my fate became inextricably linked. The garage quickly caught fire. I panicked, and without thinking threw myself into the fire in a desperate attempt to stamp it out. I began to burn, being consumed by fire, and fear. My memory fades quickly after that. I was rushed to the hospital with burns to my legs, arms, hands, and face. Thankful to be alive, 37 years would pass before fire would once again inform my life with a meaningful encounter.

There are Shamans in the world that celebrate the promise within every sunrise. They understand the intimate connections between us and the fundamental forces of nature. The energies of earth, wind, water, and fire have sacramental status. What we assume, abuse, and make daily demands of, they honor with the knowledge that nothing stands apart. Four elemental forces begin simply with a drop of water, a wisp of wind, a plot of land, and the spark of fire; Scientifically well understood, and yet still mysterious partners in our creation of a conscious earth.

Mystery has always been a welcome companion in my life, and one of life's enduring mysteries has to do with people we meet on our journey. Fatefully, people seem to enter life at critical moments for precise and intentional reasons. They are predestined prophets who possess the unique insights you may unknowingly seek. Their knowledge, freely offered, is the privileged gift of their wisdom. Mystery may still remain, it may even deepen, but you've been given something beautifully intangible, the wonder of their insight. Often it's only after they're gone that you begin



to realize how magical your encounter was.

When students of mine began showing an interest in fire, I began to feel the weight of fate starting to press in on me. I knew fire and I were on a path, but how would we meet again? Wrathfully, or mystically? Would fire once again

prove to be a cruel master, or the inspired teacher? It would all come to pass with a serendipitous encounter at Beaver Meadow Audubon center.

Denise is a naturalist, a wilderness skills expert, but more importantly, a wisdom keeper of nature and spirit. She knows primitive fire is something never to be taken lightly. It is intimately linked with human cultures that date back tens of thousands of years, and if one honors these traditions with reverence, fire will respond with wonder. Fire the creator, fire the destroyer, fire our imagination, forever primal always sublime.

The wisdom keepers know there are about 9 ancient ways to create fire. They are all based on the knowledge that turning the right objects against one another will generate heat. Enough heat will produce a tiny glowing coal that when lovingly cradled in a tinder bundle and breathed into, responds by bringing life to itself. My first attempt making and using a primitive hand drill ended painfully. My hands became blistered and ready to bleed. The memory of that distant fire so painful in my childhood, again revisits me in my futile attempt to call forth fire.

There is a saying: "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." My mentor, in a mindful and deliberate way, demonstrated proper fire technique, but even more important was the power of my intention to transform substances. The wisdom keepers know the universe was birthed in fire. All the elements in the universe were created out of fire, and you amongst all living things carry that fire of life within you. Make it your intention to move the fire in your being into the fiber of your tinder, with gratitude.

With renewed hope and healing hands, that tiny glowing coal was made manifest. Placing it into my tinder bundle while gently rolling up the sides, I began to breathe life into it. Smoke is the spirit of fire, a good sign as you continue to nurse it out of its infancy. Then, almost without warning, this tinder flashes over. You have birthed fire! Instantly you feel it come to life, it must be released to exist in its numinous state.

We sing:

*Fire fire burning bright
Take our hopes up in this night
Earth, wind, water, and fire
Bind us as one!*

Our history with fire has roots that trace back to the beginning of time. Humans probably discovered it accidentally from a natural source like lightning. What was initially an emotion of fear was quickly replaced with curiosity. We watched and saw fire repelling living things and destroying living things. Yet we were drawn into participating in the mystery, becoming fire's acolytes. As our partnership grew and secrets slowly revealed, fire's power unleashed mankind's creative genius, or with our evil intentions, mankind's creative cruelty.

25,000 years ago in what is now Montignac, France, the caves of Lascaux became a focal point for a prehistoric flourishing of cave art. The masterpieces on the walls are breath-taking, and fire was the critical element needed to make this happen. It provided the light so the artist could see his "canvas." The products of fire became the pigments used in the images to tell their story, while the very fire itself may have been used to burnish the images onto stone.

The human spirit knows fire's greatest gifts were received many years before the cave art was created. The romance of hearth fires brought us together in places to provide warmth and light. We saw one another, and shared our adventures when the fire in the sky dipped below the horizon. We looked to the future and reminisced by fire. As I sit and write, I am watching my teenage son stare into a large LCD-TV. He's playing a video game. The photons are jumping off the screen. The electrons are racing around at the speed of light on printed circuit boards while lasers read digitally encoded information on the DVD he popped in. Next to him is a fire burning bright in our fireplace just a few feet away. He is enchanted with the game and oblivious to the fire.

Mary Lynn Acee

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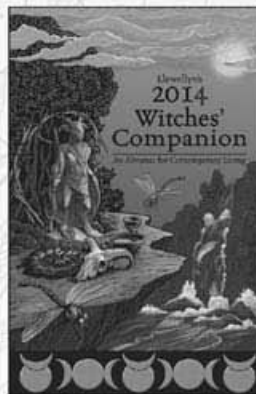
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I HATE THE QUESTION "WHY ARE YOU A WITCH?" AND I THINK MOST PAGANS DO TOO.

No one ever asks why someone is Catholic or Muslim or atheist, but any time I get asked what I believe, the first response is always "why?" I wanted to believe that this was merely coincidence, but after reading Eric Weiner's *Geography of Bliss*, I found that this is par for the course.

Weiner's book chronicles his journey to the happiest places on earth. The book is a good read and the author is open-minded, but when he visited Iceland and found a strong pagan culture there he felt the need to ask these people if they really believed in "the hidden people" of local lore. This surprised me because in an earlier chapter, the author visited Bhutan where he did not bat an eye at the native belief in animism. So what is the difference? Why is there a sense of incredulity in one case where there is none in the other?

If comedian and actor David Cross is to be believed, it is because most pagans choose their path later in life. In his essay "Woodstock" from *Drink For A Reason*, Cross explains that although he is atheist and finds all religions to be invalid, he has a particular distaste for pagan. He says that he can "give a pass" to those who "have been brainwashed since birth" to believe in God or Jesus but that those who believe in magic(k) are just looking to be unique. What he believes, and what I suspect those who ask "why" believe, is that a rational thinking adult would not choose to be pagan without an ulterior motive.

Ok, I can accept that opinion. There are people (mostly teens) who briefly become pagan for reasons that have little to do with the religion, but that is not everyone. This theory would explain why in a poor isolated country like Bhutan no one would question why the locals believe that everything has a spirit, the idea being that the Bhutanese do not know any better. It is condescending, but it makes sense. This would also explain why in a educated Westernized country like Iceland, it is shocking to find people who still believe in elves. Again, the idea being that Icelanders should know better.

It is not just atheists who ask "why" though. People who do believe in a God ask why someone would want to be philosophically or religiously pagan. This, although, is probably from a lack of understanding more than anything else.

Most people have an inaccurate mental image of what paganism is, often associating it with

devil worshiping or the film *The Craft* (the TV series *Charmed* as well). Others believe that pagans are deluding themselves into believing they are Harry Potter, broomstick and all. But what all those people do not realize is that paganism means different things to different people. The word pagan can apply to any believer of a polytheistic religion. Even then, the polytheistic part is arguable.

I think this is why I hate the question of "why" so much. I feel that it is such a personal question and one that is almost intrusive to ask. What is more unsettling is often times when "why" is asked, the person asking just wants the pagan to either realize they are wrong or seek validation. But it does not matter if my answer does not jive with the person asking "why" because I do not need their validation and the only person effected if I am wrong is me. So the real question is not "why am I a pagan?" but rather "why do people care and what can we do to change that?" cause really what's Gods got to do with it?

Kali Hoke

I REALIZE YOU HEAR FROM A LOT OF PEOPLE IN YOUR WORK, but we have communicated before. Perhaps it is just me, but I love a book that gives me information that I can actually use. The book that I hold in my hand, dear seeker, holds the practical secrets of geometry.

Don't run away. Don't be afraid of that ole Pythagorean bogeyman who haunts your grade school memories. This is a different type of book than your algebraic texts. This book is fun! It is also practical. Have you ever wanted to draw a pentagram and found it frustrating? How about a perfect hexagram or, gods forbid, a septagram, the seven pointed star of Venus?

Ruler and Compass by Andrew Suttan gives you instructions that are so simple even an adult can do it! The complete process for making a perfect pentagram in a circle is six easy steps and you use only a straight edge and a compass.

Every pagan has at one time or another needed a pentagram. Most of the time it seems like so much work, we will cut one out of a book or trace one or go to our trusty computer to "generate" one.

Please trust me when I say, there is nothing more fulfilling than making one by hand. There is a feeling of connectedness to those computer less mages of long ago who constructed perfect geometric images by simple instruments alone.

This small book (6"x7") is a treasure. At the very heart of our systems are the symbols of sacred geometry. The stars, the circles, the triangles, the quarters, all bear witness to the correlation between nature and man. This volume, in its 58 pages, packs more information on the creation of these symbols than any other book I've read. There are no unending tirades or useless expansions on meaning. Everything is here and at the finger tips of the reader.

Oh, what can be done with this book! Just a few of the figures that can be created should get your blood flowing: an equal-sided triangle in three steps, a circle in a square in 3 steps, a triangle around a circle in 3 steps. If this isn't enough for you, consider making a perfect spiral in 6 steps or beautiful designs created by linking geometric patterns into mandalas.

So many of our spells and workings begin, or involve geometric symbolism that learning how to create these ourselves will allow entire covens and lodges to benefit from our knowledge. For the small price of \$12 is not only a great value, but something that actually unveils the truths that it promises.

One more remark before I end. *The Ruler and the Compass* is published by Wooden Books from Walker & Company, a division of Bloomsbury USA, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA. Wooden Books has a fascinating catalog of books listed on the dust jacket of this book including *The Alchemists Kitchen*, *Sacred Geometry*, and *The Golden Section* among almost two dozen other titles. If all the books are as useful as this, I look forward to reading more Wooden Books.
L.V.X.

Robert Flynn

I WANTED TO TELL YOU THE STORY OF MY REDISCOVERING MY PAGAN FAITH.

I had converted to Buddhism a few months ago and was quite content. Then one day I was watching one of my favorite "witchy" TV shows, *Charmed*. The sun was shining, and there was a warm breeze blowing through the open window carrying with it the scents of Summer. It was then I realized I could both worship The Goddess and follow the teachings of the Buddha. I can't tell you what a good feeling it is to be home again! So now, which path or tradition of Paganism do I adhere to? I am eclectic. I worship The Great Mother and also incorporate the teachings of Compassion, Loving-Kindness, Understanding and Non-Violence into my faith. Thanks for allowing me to tell my story. Great magazine!

Blessed Be!

Charles Cox, Clinton, AR

I TOTALLY AGREE WITH YOUR EDITORIAL IN W&P #26 "When it comes to passion, we've got it. Common sense, not so much." It is very well expressed. If I take a stereotypical portrayal of Pagans personally, I'm pretty clearly admitting that I recognize myself in it! Much better to take the attitude, "No skin off my nose; it doesn't describe anybody I know."

In like vein, I appreciated Annika Mongan's piece, "Rebelling against Christianity?" Her Christian co-workers are true exemplars of the divine humanism possessed by all the great masters and inherently at the heart of every great Faith. Whenever I hear a Pagan carrying-on in outrage, I want to point out that the way for present-day Pagans to impress society favorably will not be to display hatred and resentment, but to be beacons of understanding and forgiveness — and to thereby out-Christianize the Christians!

Ted Czukur

I WANTED TO COMMENT on the editorial in issue #26. It was amazing. You stated with firm kindness something that desperately needed to be said. Thank you for being brave and trying to guide Pagans to, for lack of a better word, a better way of handling the little silly stuff! We have come too far to backslide over movies and pop culture!

Julie Opskar

I'M NEW TO THE CRAFT AND I LOVE EVERYTHING ABOUT IT, and your magazine helps me to know that I am not alone.

After telling my mom and dad [about being Pagan] they told me I was out of my mind, and that I wasn't welcome in their house. That hurt.

But I believed that in time, they would accept me and now, a few months later, they have told me they no longer have a problem with my religion. Thanks for helping me be patient and not despair. I am trying to start a penpal list for incarcerated Pagans. To find out more, send an SASE to me:

John Taylor #485505, BCCX/Site 2, Unit 15.
1045 Horsehead Rd., Pikeville, TN 37367.

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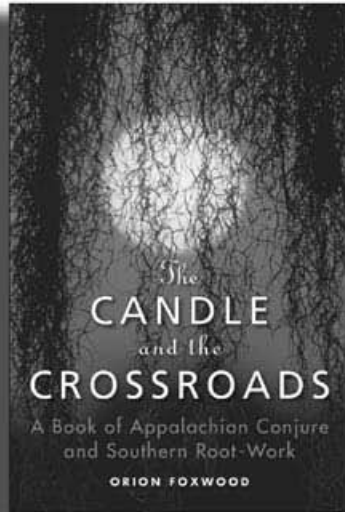
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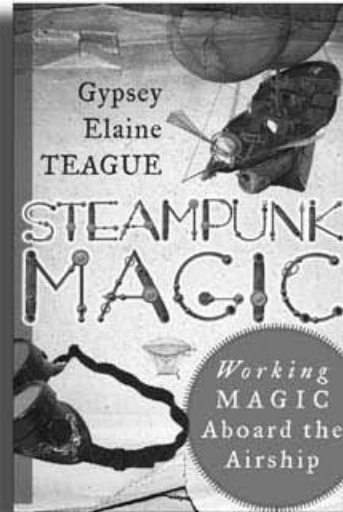
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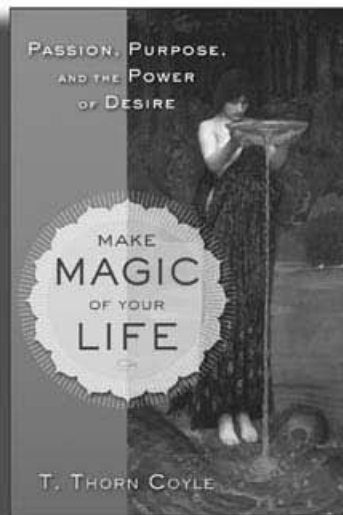
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Lake Titicaca, Love in the Astral Slippery Elm

Here in the purple dark waters
by the tall endless reeds enshrouding
I can scry myself and my lover
in a rich boat woven of grass.

We lie on the royal reed mattress
while our spirits become as white birds,
glad mouths full of fish,
rainbow spray upon feather.

SLIPPERY ELM is a Witch, poet, and hip hop emcee hailing from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. He performs his poetry in the street and at venues, festivals, and political actions across the Pacific Northwest. He finds power in spontaneity and explores Filidecht, the ancient Irish tradition of seer-poets. His work has appeared in many publications including Circle Magazine, the Reclaiming Quarterly, and most recently in Mandragora: Further Explorations in Esoteric Poesies. As a member of jazz/hip-hop trio Elekwent Folk, he has released five albums, and Nazza, his first book of poetry, was published in 2011 on the Summer Solstice. He haunts bookstores and wild places. Visit him online at www.freestylegrove.com

Inside the Canopy

John Gosslee

I learned to hold my breath
for days and surrendered
to the ocean, stingrays accompanied,
a dolphin flanked my left, a shark my starboard,
with an octopus behind me
a thousand sea horses lead.

We coursed through volcanic vents—
where tube worms massaged and a school of glow fish
magnified by clear minnows
reminded us to continue; quickening
songs from mammoth whales,
knots away, below boat sails and oil ship spills,
broad-sided submarines and coral,
awakened beaked-squid and eels
that wanted to hold us in their bellies.

Crabs piled sand onto my feet
and fish swam through seaweed
and I was their pearl and they were my oyster
as the sun rippled through the waves above us.

JOHN GOSSLEE rides a motorcycle almost everyday of the year and lives in Virginia at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He is the editor of Fjords Review and his second book, Blitzkrieg (Rain Mountain Press, 2013) features illustrations by Yumi Sakugawa and paintings by Scott Kirschner. Read about the project at www.blitzkrieghq.com.

The Cycle

Emily Veinglory

Like flagstones outside the fishmonger's,
clean — scrubbed with oily suds
at closing every day.

Like a child drinking a glass of milk,
innocent — not expected to understand
what a calf gave up for his nourishment.

Like a riptide that takes the careless bather,
swift — but answerable only to the moon,
following its own indifferent orbit.

Anger seeks an answer; a sink for blame,
conscience, absence, myths of romantic love,
the world being — unforgiven, just as it is.

Flowing like water toward a thirsty drain,
awaiting the sun to free it — to feel its lightness,
consolation in the form of clouds, and rain.

I endure an ebb of faith — beginning the cycle,
once again.

EMILY VEINGLORY is a New Zealand-born writer of poetry, erotic romance, dark fantasy, and gay fiction. Her poetry has appeared in *Illuminations* (published by Celestial Arts) and zines including *Dark Animus* and *Night 2 Dawn*.

River Song

Alicia Cole

Water took us, early: trembling
on the banks of the Nile, our
mouths swelling with prayer,

mother's milk, ibis pacing the
rushes while we strained the dirt
from clothes, chants to Tawaret,

Ammit rattling dry throats.

Now, mouth Danu: calved, she
feeds us, minor tributaries of the
arterial course, mirror water of her

womb. Mother's milk, lapping,
the great whirl of time; stars' eternal
spirals echoing the river's edge:

jewelweed, virgin's bower, singing.

ALICIA COLE is an educator and writer who lives in Lawrenceville, GA with her photographer husband, their cat Hatshepsut, and two schools of fish. Her poetry has appeared in *Abramelin: the Journal of Poetry and Magick* and *Eternal Haunted Summer*, among other publications.

For Hank, the last quarter mile to the Guilin dock was as bad as Beijing and Xi'an had been. He and Megan squeezed through a riverside gantlet of beggars and vendors. Hank was sure half of them were really pickpockets.

The beggars were stooped and shriveled with age. Most of their teeth were missing. Megan winced at the sight of their frailty. She couldn't understand their Mandarin cries as they thrust out rice bowls and tapped them in the center to emphasize how empty they were. Tap-tap. Tap-tap.

Hank watched Megan sort through her coin purse. He'd learned how to tell a *jiao* from a five-*fen* piece. Why couldn't she? He gripped her arm and steered her toward the cruise boat.

The peddlers knew some English. Every offering of jewelry, scarves or embroidered purses began with, "Hello. Very pretty. Only 50 yuan."

"Very pretty," Megan said as she smiled and tried to push past them.

"C'mon, Meg, stop encouraging them."

"Just for you today, 40 yuan."

"*Bu shi*," Hank said to end the encounter. This was as close as Mandarin came to a simple "no."

They'd both watched a DVD of Mandarin phrases before the trip. Megan often used the words for "hello," "goodbye," "please," "thank you," and "excuse me." Hank's favorites meant "I want ...," "I don't like ...," and "too expensive."

They were still fending off vendors when the Li River tour boat, ready to leave, blared its horn. Hank shoved the hawkers aside. The gangplank rattled under his feet.



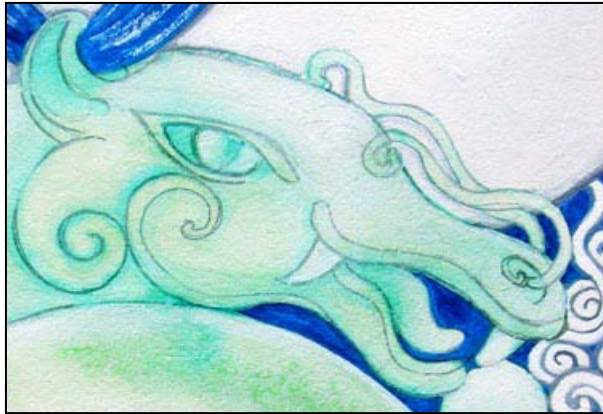
They settled into their seats in the second deck's lounge. Hank said, "I should never have let you talk me into this."

"The Li River is supposed to be one of the most beautiful places in China," Megan replied. "Remember the misty peaks in all those old paintings?"

She poured tea into the two cups on their table. At least Hank would be glad that the tea was included in the ticket price.

"No, I mean this whole idiotic trip. All the crowds of relentless street vendors. The water that's not safe to drink. The air that's almost too polluted to breathe."

"Of course China has problems," Megan said. "The country's trying to pull itself into the modern world by its bootstraps. They're trying to deal with overpopulation and an economy that's lurched from one philosophy to another again and again for the last century."



A Slow Boat in China

short fiction by Cathy Humble

artwork by Shirl Sazynski

Hank's face took on the pinched look that meant her words were only annoying him. She'd hoped this trip would turn into a second honeymoon; he'd seemed so wonderfully intense on the first one. But after eight years, that intensity just felt like anger. Could she soften his harshness even a little?

Now was not the time to spout a lecture on political economy. Better to enjoy the passing

scenes of river life. This narrow ribbon of water seemed to be part of every activity. Villagers squatted at the water's edge, scrubbing their laundry on the rocks. Other rocks held piles of sliced persimmons, drying in the October sunlight. Water buffalo waded in the shallows. The river tied the whole countryside together.



Hank ignored the sights along the river. He was deep in the financial pages of *China Daily*. The Shanghai stock market had just soared again. "I need to get a piece of that," he said to nobody in particular.

Megan looked confused. "A piece of what?"

Hank folded the newspaper so she could read the headline and thumped on it for emphasis.

The arrival of the first vendor prevented any further explanation. This tray was filled with carved wooden toys. "Hello. Very pretty. Only five yuan."

Hank smacked the table, and the vendor scurried away. "They're on the damn boat, too! How long did you say this cruise is?"

Megan winced. "Five hours."



She tried to entertain him with more scenes along the ever-changing river. "Hank, there's a woman plucking a chicken and throwing the feathers into the river. And see the women washing their hair in the stream? Look, there's another bamboo raft, over on the left side."

Most of the Li River rafts were made of five thick bamboo stems tied together. Some were just a raft, with a person poling it along. Some also carried a basket of persimmons or green pomelos as big as footballs.

Hank would have none of it. He got up abruptly and clanked up the stairs. Megan figured he was probably prowling around the open upper deck to make the time go faster. Maybe that would settle down his irritation. No such luck, since he got back to the table just as a new vendor approached it with a pile of silk purses. More than four hours to go.

For Megan, the time unwound like a scrolled painting of China old and new. The constant was the skyline of pointed mountains. They stood bolt upright against a beige, smoggy sky — not the misty blue of the classic paintings.

The foreground kept evolving, especially the rafts. After the first hour, some of the rafts had a fisherman, several cormorants to catch fish, and a basket. The cormorants were as black as crows but bigger — almost the size of turkeys. It surprised Megan that such powerful birds stayed so tamely on their rafts between dives. The neck of each bird was tied so that it could swallow only small fish. The fisherman retrieved the larger fish from the birds' beaks and stored them in the basket.



For Meg, the time unwound like a scrolled painting of China old and new. The constant was the skyline of pointed mountains. They stood bolt upright against a beige, smoggy sky — not the misty blue of the classic paintings.

By the second hour, they'd left the cormorants behind and the rafts now had passengers, sitting in bamboo chairs as they were poled along the river. By the third hour, some had two passengers, two bamboo chairs and a sunshade. Later, an occasional raft was made of green plastic pipe, the same size and shape as the bamboo stems.

The vendors on the tour boat also became more modern and sophisticated. At first their wares were crafts, then postcards of the river, and ultimately DVDs of the whole cruise. Soon they never got beyond "hello" before Hank barked "bu shi!"

Megan took photos until her camera's battery charge was drained. Then she sat quietly, watching the river and thinking about her life with Hank. She couldn't keep yielding to the threat of his anger. But what would happen if she asserted herself, even left him? Or if he left her? Was it the river breeze that suddenly made her feel cold or the blankness of trying to imagine life without Hank?

Lunch arrived at their table. It was the basic lunch, covered by the ticket price. As soon as they started eating, a vendor showed up with fried fish, crabs and shrimp, all freshly caught — and all available at an additional charge. Megan thumbed through her phrasebook until she'd strung together, "Who made this food?"

The vendor led her to the lounge door and pointed down the stairs. A barefoot cook squatted on the open stern of the first deck. His wok added smoke to the smoggy air but also the perfume of scallions and ginger. His scrawny arms waved like a conductor leading an orchestra as he chopped vegetables, tossed them into the wok and stirred them. But there

were no musicians — and no helpers. This one man must have cooked everything for the whole boatload of people.

The sizzle and scents from the wok made her hungry for some crab. But Hank had already banished the vendor before Megan got back to her seat.

To round off lunch, two peddlers toted a gallon glass jug of snake wine around: featuring three spotted dead snakes curled up in the middle. Megan had no trouble turning that down.



After lunch, Hank closed his eyes and tried to sleep. Thoughts about Megan kept getting in the way. Nothing ever seemed to be enough for her. She didn't appreciate his hard work and what it produced, including this trip. He wanted to be at the top of the heap, but she would have to stop questioning his every move. Not that she said much to stop him. It was mostly that sad, droopy look she managed with her whole face.

His mind kept churning and sleep never came.



Megan didn't want to disturb his nap, no matter how restless it seemed. When he sat up and stretched about an hour before the landing, she poured more tea for both of them. "Hank," she said, "we need to talk. We can't go on like this."

Hank knew they'd put off this conversation long enough. "Like what?"

"You seeing other people only as a barrier. A nuisance. You keep deciding for me and speaking for me about even the simplest things. I know — I've gone along with it. So we both need to change."

Megan got up without a word. She leaned over the rail and watched the clear water glide along like silk. For the first time in years her head felt as clear as that water. She could see through to other ways of living just as well as she could see the rocks on the bottom of the Li.

She kept stirring her tea long after the sugar had dissolved. The words were hard to get out, and she wanted to stall as long as possible. Then she forced herself to continue. "I need to buy fried crabs or help a beggar, no matter what you think I should do. I need to learn how to say 'no,' not just 'yes.' And you need to say 'yes' sometimes, because you sure have 'no' down pat. If we can't do these things, then the right word to say is 'goodbye.'"

Now it was his turn, so she took a sip of her tea.

"What are you going on about? I make good money and I give you everything you could possibly want. We have a good life because of what I decide and what I do. That's all we need. So I say what goes, and I should be able to do that without backtalk from you."

Megan got up without a word. The stairs to the lower deck clanked as she ran down them. She leaned over the rail and watched the clear water glide along like silk. For the first time in years her head felt as clear as that water. She could see through to other ways of living just as well as she could see the rocks on the bottom of the Li.



She felt a touch on her arm, and turned. Megan hadn't noticed the tall, striking woman appear. She looked radiant, dressed in green and blue silk that shimmered like sun on water. On her chest, a carved dragon pendant seemed to glow and quiver.

"Megan," said the woman. "I offer you a whole new life. Its cost is not tangible; instead, you must leave behind dependence and submission. You must take on the strength of a woman who knows her own mind and follows her own decisions. Are you willing to pay that price?"

"Yes," said Megan, letting go of the rail and standing very straight. "Absolutely."

The glimmer of the mysterious woman seemed to be fading. In fact, the air around her had become misty. Megan glanced down for a second at the river water that had been so clear a few minutes earlier. She could barely see it now for the rising wisps of fog. When she turned back, the silky woman had vanished.



Hank didn't try to follow his wife to the lower deck. He was sure she'd be back, looking sheepish. He tried to read another article in the paper — on how many Chinese are millionaires. Every time he put it down, he had trouble finding where he'd left off. Megan sure knew how to twist his mind into knots.

"Hello," said a new voice. "Just for you. A whole new life. Usually costs many *yuan*. Special today. No money, just a change of heart."

What was this? After five hours on this wretched boat he must be hearing things. This vendor even spoke more passable English than the others. He looked up. She had no tray of things to sell. Instead of jeans, her clothes looked ancient and rich. Around her neck hung a silk cord; fastened to that was a jade pendant. Hank knew such a clear, brilliant green color meant it was the expensive kind. It was carved in the shape of a dragon. As he watched it, the shimmering curves of the dragon began to uncoil.

He dropped his eyes from the pendant and her calm, expressionless face.

Hank was barely able to whisper, "What's happening?"

"You can have a second chance. Your wife is willing to change. If you change too, you can both live well together. If no change — bad for you, Hank."

"Change how?"

"Harness your anger. Value things besides what you can own. Accept and embrace many kinds of people. You pay that price?"

He felt as though his whole world was dropping away. He tried to reach out and clutch it back, but his arms just hung at his sides. When he willed himself to stand up and leave, his legs went numb. His vision dimmed; even the next table looked gray and misty.

"Just for you. Special today."

His head felt hot. The veins stood out on his arms. With all the breath he could summon, Hank yelled, "*Bu shi!*"



In the sudden fog, the tour boat bumped hard against the Yangshuo dock. Hank steadied himself against the rail in the stern. His bare feet were thick with calluses. He squatted to rinse a rag in the

"You can have a second chance. Your wife is willing to change. If you change too, you can both live well together. If you are not willing to change — bad for you, Hank."

river. He'd just finished cleaning his utensils and hanging the wok on the side of the cabin to dry.

It had been another day of hungry tourists and an impatient boss. Hank had a cobwebby memory of something else happening, but that vanished when he tried to grasp it.

No matter.

Maybe one of the tourists had left an unfinished pack of cigarettes he could raid. He'd scout around the boat and see, just as soon as he'd wrung out the rag.



Megan sat down at a delicate, lacquered table. The silk of her gown rustled as she moved. Part of its pattern was green, part ruby red and the rest as blue as the sky. No yellow though. That was reserved for the emperor to wear. He'd be home soon. True, she had to share him with the other women, but she let no one forget that she was his chief concubine.

The others might be more skilled at playing the *ruan* or *pipa*, but she was the only one in the women's quarters who had learned to interpret the imperial maps. Megan had also learned the name, strengths and weaknesses of every member of the imperial household. She always knew the yield of the latest rice crop and the current manpower of the army. In the

long winter evenings, she would murmur ideas in the emperor's ear as well as songs.

The dowager empress could easily have seen Megan as a rival influence on her son. Instead, she treated her as an ally. Megan ran her hand over the gift the empress had brought her just today. It was a jade pendant, carved in the shape of a dragon. She slipped its silk cord over her head to look again at the way the dragon's coils seemed to glow and move in the late afternoon light.

Before sunset, she needed to finish a different gift. She would greet the emperor with a new poem. Megan bent over the rice paper and ink and began making the delicate brushstrokes:

*The river winds
like a blue silk ribbon,
While the hills stand
like green jade hairpins.*

Her mind felt misty, like the blurred mountains along the Li River. She tried to clear the odd sensation by shaking her head, but the memory just grew hazier.

No matter.

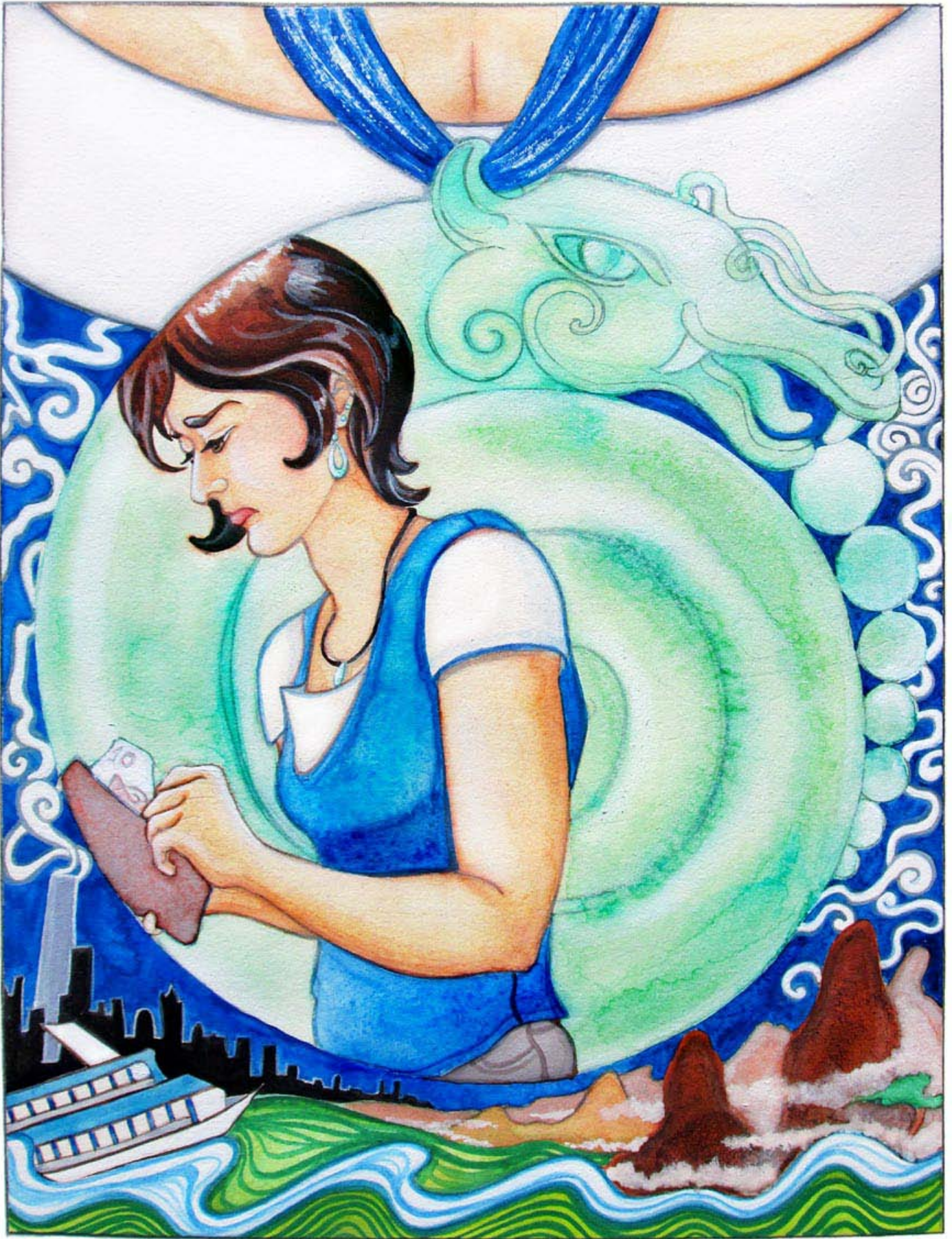
Soon the emperor would be looking for her — as eager for her words as for her touch. ♠



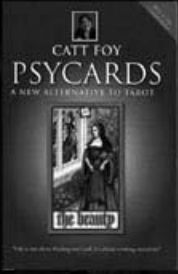
CATHY HUMBLE

wrote for Kaiser Permanente while raising three kids on an acre of willows and herons in Portland, Oregon.

Now retired, she and her husband are traveling the world, including China, where she drafted "A Slow Boat in China" on a rickety bus. She's written twenty-eight short stories so far, and counting.



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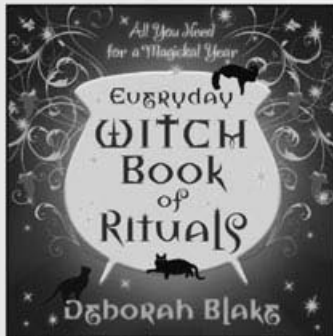
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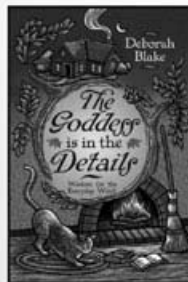
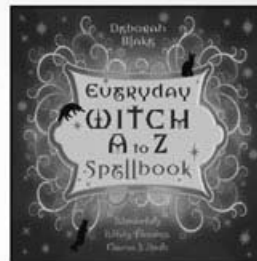
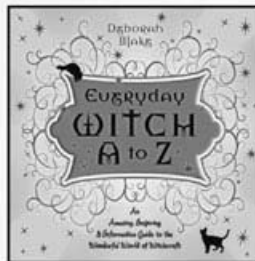
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Many Pagans seem to have a certain element that they relate to best. For me, that element is water. Whether it is the ocean, a lake, waterfall, or even a creek, when I gaze upon a body of water, I immediately relax, and something within me whispers "Ahhhhh!" In fact, one of my favorite songs is "Cool Change" by the Little River Band, which begins with the lyrics:

"I was born in the sign of Water
And it's there that I feel my best
The albatross and the whale,
They are my brothers."

My affinity with water is not new; I was born in the sign of Pisces in a California hospital located near the ocean and spent the next seven years going to sleep listening to the distant sound of foghorns and pounding surf. My mother, a water lover herself, smartly took me to swimming lessons early, which I excelled at. We took frequent walks to the beach, where I felt so at home that I would nearly have to be physically dragged away when it was time to leave.

Then one day our family decided to move over a hundred miles to the desert. At first, I was devastated, but eventually I adapted, and have spent the greater part of my life in the desert ever since. Even to the present day, however, I still long to hear the pounding of the waves and smell the briny air.

Trying to stay attuned with water while living here in the desert is no easy feat, but it is possible. Like me, many desert residents crave a cool refuge from the oppressive summer heat; as a result there are plenty of water features here from public fountains to water parks. Even the natural world seems to understand this craving for water; when we first moved here, my parents would take me hiking in one of the local canyons on the Native American reservations nearby. In the years following good winter snowfalls, the canyons would be full of beautiful waterfalls flowing into clear, cold springs.

Though these canyons were closed to visitors by the time my own children were born, I tried to continue the tradition by taking them to a small lake at the entrance to one of the many country clubs in our area. We would feed the swans and ducks and catch some minnows to bring back home to our fishbowl. For me, it was a special treat to just sit by the lake and listen to the wildlife and the sounds of the water.

For nearly a year, I was able to move close to the ocean once again in an old house in a beach community near Los Angeles. What a delight it was for me to actually see the ocean from my living room window, and introduce my children to the joys of the beach! We were not able to stay permanently, but I will always fondly remember our time there.

A few years later, we moved to a lake side community in a neighboring state. While life near a lake is definitely different from living near the ocean, I enjoy once again seeing the water from my backyard. I have also been able to connect with the lake in a way that has not only changed my outlook on life but gave me the inspiration to continue my magickal studies and practice.

On my very first visit to my soon-to-be permanent home, I packed up the kids and a cooler and headed down to the beach. It was one of the hottest days in the middle of summer, and the water temperature was somewhere around 90° but from the first moment I walked into the water, I felt very much at home, enjoying the feeling of *déjà vu* from my days of swimming in the ocean.

I resolved that once we completed our move, I would make a point of visiting the beach as often as possible, an idea which my children found most agreeable. In the years that followed, we kept our

word and enjoyed many happy hours in, on, and near the water. Sometimes the opportunity arose to ride along on friends' boats, and I loved the exhilarating feeling of cruising along and breathing in the tang of the water in the breeze. The day finally came when we decided to invest in a boat ourselves and chose a pontoon style that would comfortably accommodate both our family and friends.

Finally being able to relax and attune with the water without having to feel pressed for time or having to follow someone else's agenda did wonders for my physical and mental health but also played an important role in my spiritual progress. We spent hours boating, swimming and camping on the shores of the lake. I meditated as I floated face-up near the shore and sometimes a school of small fish would nibble my toes and swim around my legs. When we camped, I woke up at sunrise and hiked to the top of a nearby hill to greet the day. Once, a raven accompanied me as I walked and waited quietly until I was finished. This had special meaning for me since my primary totem animal has always been the raven.

A Water Witch in the Desert

by Morgan Ravenwood

I knew at that moment that I could not ignore such a powerful sign. Having been rather idle in my Wiccan practice for a while, I had been considering becoming more active. Was the Raven's appearance a message of approval?

I started doing a lot of meditation in and near the water, and one day as I did so while floating on my back in a shallow area, I felt a strong, approving feminine presence flow into and through me. When I rose from the water, I felt renewed, as some say they do after a baptism. I call this my personal "epiphany," and my life has never quite been the same since then.

Shortly after that, I joined an online Pagan group that conducted monthly virtual Full Moon rituals, done in real time. Each participant selected a part, and mine was usually calling the spirits of the Quarter of Water and the West. Eventually I wrote and led a few of those rituals, setting one entirely upon my favorite island on the lake. Afterwards, I sent a few seashells I had collected on a camping trip to the island to some of the members.

This experience inspired me to consider trying to get some kind of Pagan study group together in my local area. When I meditated on this as I sat on the beach one day, I felt the same loving, gentle presence that had come to me before. I interpreted this as a definite sign of approval, so I decided to go ahead and try it, even though I hadn't organized a group before.

Our first meeting was held on — where else? — the beach, and I was amazed at how many people attended. We kept the group going for a couple of years but life changes among our members caused the group to fade. I still miss that camaraderie and someday hope to resurrect the group.

Our family doesn't get down to the lake as often as we used to, but I still manage to continue to spend as much time around water as I can. Water has an almost miraculous healing and re-energizing effect on me; when I am ill, I will stand under the shower or even soak in a tub if possible.

In the summer, as I sit under the natural ceiling of greenery from the arbor that partially covers my patio garden, and listen to the trickle of an outdoor fountain we placed there I can almost forget that I live in one of the hottest places in the nation.

I keep a large poster of a beautiful Oregon waterfall on my office wall as well as a small fountain on my desk, and listening to it helps keep me centered on tough days. Other ways I bring water symbols into my desert world include seashells, pictures of dolphins, fish and even a few pirate relics that are scattered throughout my home. Mermaids are my special favorites and artistic representations of them claim a good bit of wall space. In my personal devotions, I have addressed many salutations to Poseidon, Aphrodite, Melusine and Mannanan.

Rain — something so common that so many people take for granted — is uniquely

magical here in the desert. Rainy days are few and far between, which makes them all the more welcome when they do occur. I have always loved rainstorms and will sometimes stand out in the warm rain of a summer storm and feel it caress my face. I also take practical advantage of rainstorms by putting out special bowls to catch the precious rainwater, which I then strain and bottle to keep on hand for ritual work and consecrations. Rainwater just seems to me to be closer to Nature than ordinary tap water or even bottled water.

The intense heat of desert summers can be quite daunting to a water person like me. Not being one of the lucky ones who have an in-ground swimming pool, I decided that the next best thing would be a backyard above-ground pool that was just big enough for me float around in on my little lounge. This turned out to be a great idea, and now I look forward to summer because I treasure my private time in my little pool. This year, as soon as the thermometer starts hitting 100°, I will be out in the back yard, floating as I meditate on the cloud formations as they make their way across the sky. Maybe I will see a mermaid! ♠



MORGAN RAVENWOOD has been an eclectic Wiccan and writer for over forty years. Morgan was the facilitator of the first Pagan group in her area, *Desert Moon Circle*. She lives in Arizona with her husband and their "menagerie" that includes four "rescue" dogs. Some of her previous articles have appeared in *The Wiccan-Pagan Times* and *the Witches' Voice*.

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Sensing Water

Five Senses, One Journey

We interact with Water in many daily rituals. What would it be like to consider these daily activities as sacred attempts to connect and commune with Water?



Water. When I first began working with the Elements, I started with Fire, the Element I feel the most affinity with. Over the years, I have steadily deepened my relationships with Air and Earth as well. But when it came to Water work, I always found myself resistant — doing the mental and emotional equivalent of handing off that seashell.

It was not until I spent an afternoon in the Pacific Ocean

There is a story that the priestess of my first circle liked to tell about me that perfectly sums up my relationship with the Element of Water. She and I were each taking ritual items out to our backyard circle. I was holding the large seashell that served as our ritual chalice, while my priestess carried the athame and candle holder that adorned our Fire altar. As we went to exit the front door, another circlemate was coming in. A complicated bit of dancing around happened. When it was done — perhaps 30 seconds later — I found myself holding the Fire items while the shell was in my priestess's hands. "See!" she laughed. "Susan's such a Fire spirit that she can't even carry the Water tools!"

Perhaps it was growing up in the landlocked Dakotas, or having my first experience of an ocean beach the same summer that *Jaws* came out, but I've never had a particularly strong connection with

off Waikiki Beach that I began to overcome my resistance to Water. Ocean Water has always held a particular terror for me. The idea of not being able to touch the bottom, of carnivorous creatures coming up from the deep to snack on me, of riptides carrying me helplessly out to my demise; all of these thoughts haunted me. But that afternoon, floating (with the aid of an inflatable ring) in the turquoise waves, I distinctly heard something tell me to *let go*, to *be one with the ebb and the flow*, to *trust the Water*. And so I did; and while working with Water is still challenging for me, it no longer holds fear. I hope the following explorations of Water will introduce you to new aspects of this Element, whether you are a mermaid at heart or are just dipping a cautious toe into the cosmic sea.

Water is the essence of life. We spend the first nine months of our lives floating in Water, and we enter the world on waves. Water is essential for all life — so essential that our bodies are composed predominantly of this Element. The *Tao Te Ching* says that Water is the most powerful of all Elements — everything will eventually be worn away by its persistence and gentle strength. Water brings its persistence,

healing, intuition, and its ability to cleanse and give life to every circle in which we welcome it. When we seek to go within, when we journey across the veils, when we want to cleanse or give re/birth, we turn to Water: in oceans, in lakes, in candlelit bathtubs, in a chalice of the purest spring Water. Water flows through each of us, in our blood, in our tears of joy and sorrow.

We interact with Water in so many daily rituals – the morning shower, the long cool drink of Water on a hot day, the perfectly brewed cup of coffee after dinner, the soothing Waters of a hot bath. What would it be like to consider these daily activities as sacred attempts to connect and commune with Water? The following exercises invite you to experience Water through your five senses, and in so doing, to deepen your relationship with the Element.

Dip a Toe As with the exercises in “Sensing Fire,” you may engage in the exercises below in any order that you wish. Take as long as you need, and feel free to revisit an exercise if you wish. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to take this journey through the Elements and senses. Feel free to adapt any of the exercises if you need to. If you have a sensory difference, mobility difference, or anything else that makes any part of these exercises too difficult or dangerous for you, please modify or skip those activities.



You may wish to build a Water altar as you work through these exercises. Include any ritual tools you associate with Water: some pretty bowls or chalices, seashells, or even bottles of Water from places special to you, God/Goddess images – anything you find inspires you to think Watery thoughts. My own Water altar contains a handmade pottery bowl given to me as a gift many years ago, some shells from various beaches I have visited, and a small glass pitcher I inherited from my grandmother.

When you undertake these exercises, find a time and a place where you will not be disturbed. If you cannot be alone during these experiences, that's ok – simply cultivate some quiet around yourself and focus your attention on your breath and the activity. Some of my students who have completed the entire Five Elements through Five Senses course have found it useful to journal about their experiences, while others have not. Follow your intuition at every step of the way – your inner voice will tell you what is best for you.

Sight. In this exercise, we will experience Water through Sight. Depending on where you live, natural bodies of Water may be something you see every day, or almost never encounter. We see Water in rain, in our daily rituals of shower or bath, in Water features and fountains, and pouring seemingly by magick from our faucets. However, taking the time to see Water in our environment makes us more aware of this Element.

Choose one or more representations of Water to observe. Focus on your chosen representation and really see Water. You might:

- Fill a glass chalice, cup, or bowl with Water and gaze into the liquid.
- Spend time by lake, pond, river, stream, or ocean, paying attention to the Water.
- Sit by a fountain or Water feature and watch the Water move.
- Boil a pot of Water and watch the bubbles rise.
- Watch rain on your window.
- Fill variously colored glasses with Water and watch how the sun plays on the Water and the colors.

After you've observed your representation(s) of Water, answer these questions, in your journal or just in your mind: What was it like to experience Water through sight? What was difficult about it? What was easy or fun? Was one way of seeing Water easier or more pleasant? How did this exercise make you feel? Where did you feel these sights in your body? What emotions or memories came up for you?

Touch. Water is more pleasant to Touch than the other Elements, and we touch Water every day as we shower, wash hands, prepare food, and eat and drink. This sense of Water being ordinary can make it challenging to bring awareness to our experience of touching Water.

For this exercise, choose one or more representations of Water to touch. You might choose to:

- Wade or swim in a body of Water – natural or artificial.
- Dance in the rain!
- Take a long bath or shower and luxuriate in the feel of the Water on your skin.
- Run through a sprinkler.

After you have experienced your representation(s) of Water, answer these questions: What was it like to experience Water through touch. What was difficult about it? What was easy or fun? Was one way of seeing Water easier or more pleasant? Where did you feel Water in your body? How did this exercise make you feel? What emotions or memories came up for you?



Make Your Own Waters of Life

Water Associations

Direction: West

Energy: Receptive, intuitive, healing, transformative

Color: Blue, aquamarine, sea green, silver

Scents: Gardenia, rose, lavender, benzoin, sandalwood, lemon balm, palmarosa, lily

Stones: Sea glass, blue lace agate, sea shells, coral, amethyst

Magickal Tool: Cup, chalice, cauldron

Magick: Transformations, divination, healing, birth and rebirth, cycles, psychism.

Holy Waters

Here are a few to try:

Full Moon Water

Fill a bowl or chalice (or any vessel) with spring water or distilled water. Place where the Full Moon can shine on it for three nights. Use as a general blessing water or in Moon rituals.

Holy Water #1

Fill a chalice, bowl, or other vessel with water. (Spring, distilled, lake/river, even tap if it's what you've got!) Add a pinch or two of sea salt and several drops of Rose oil. Use as a general blessing water in ritual or magickal practices.

Holy Water #2 (Basic Florida Water)

Fill a chalice, bowl, or bottle with water. Add several drops sweet orange oil, rose oil, and lily of the valley, magnolia, or gardenia. Use as a general blessing or cleansing. You may also add this to mop water or other cleaning waters to spiritually cleanse your house, or add to the bath in order to cleanse yourself. Also appropriate for Goddess rituals and work.

Water Anointing Oils

Water Oil #1

5 drops Palmarosa

3 drops Rose

3 drops Lavender

Pinch sea salt

Carrier oil (olive, sweet almond)

Gently warm the carrier oil and then add the salt and the essentials. Stir and add oils until you achieve the scent you desire. Use in Water blessings and rituals.

Water Oil #2

5 drops Lemon Balm

2 drops Lemongrass

2 drops Lavender

Mix together as described above ♠

SUSAN HARPER

Smell. In choosing how to “Smell Water,” you can either smell Water itself (say, at the ocean or during a rainstorm) or let Water act as a carrier of scent. Try one or more of these options as you work on experiencing Water by following your nose. You might choose to:

- Spend time near a natural body of Water and inhale the many scents that arise.
- Inhale the scent of various kinds of Water: from your kitchen tap, from a bottle, the rain.
- You may also experience smelling Water through essential oils and herbs that are associated with it. Some good ones: palmarosa; sandalwood, lily, fern, benzoin, lavender, gardenia, or rose.

You can inhale these scents directly from a jar or bottle, or you may place some herb or oil on your skin and sniff. You might also burn some in your censer or simmer them in a warming pot or on the stove. Inhale these scents and notice how your nose feels. What feelings and memories do these scents invoke?

When you’ve completed your smelling exercise, reflect on these questions: What was it like to experience Water through smell? What was difficult about it? What was easy or fun? Was one way of smelling Water easier or more pleasant? What different notes did you notice in the aromas? How did these smells make you feel? Where did you feel these smells in your body?

Taste. We Taste Water throughout our day as we drink it or eat vegetables and other foods with lots of Water in them. Many people say that Water has no taste, but if we pay attention there are subtle notes in even the purest distilled Water.

For this exercise, you should choose one or more representations of Water to taste. If you want to be literal about it, you can certainly simply drink some Water and immerse yourself in the experience. If you want to experience the taste of Water in other ways, you can:

- Drink different types of Water: tap, bottled, carbonated, mineral. Notice the taste differences.
- Create a lettuce salad, perhaps with different lettuces, and savor them.
- Enjoy seafood or fish and taste the Watery notes in the flesh.
- Try different sea vegetables such as nori.
- Combine lots of Watery tastes with sushi!
- Place a touch of sea salt on your tongue and let it slowly dissolve.
- Have a shot of a “Watery” liquor such as aqua vitae, Bacardi 151, or vodka. (Adults only!)

Prepare your Water representations in any way you like; keeping seasonings simple will allow you to enjoy the taste of the items in their purest form. Take the time to really focus on what you are eating/drinking/ tasting. Do not do anything else while you eat or drink: be fully present in the moment, whether you are tasting a pinch of sea salt or a tuna roll. As you eat, focus on the flavor, texture, and sensation of each representation of Water. When you have completed your exploration, answer these questions:

What did you choose to taste for Water? What did Water taste like? If you used several representations, did they taste different? What was pleasant? What was unpleasant? What feelings or emotions did this exercise bring up for you? What other ways can you taste Water? What did tasting Water feel like in your body? Where did you feel it?

Hear. Water can provide some of the most soothing sounds in the world – the sound of rain, thunderstorms, waves crashing on the beach or a brook softly tinkling. This exercise challenges us to tune into the sounds of Water, which can be mighty or gentle.

There are many ways to hear Water. You might:

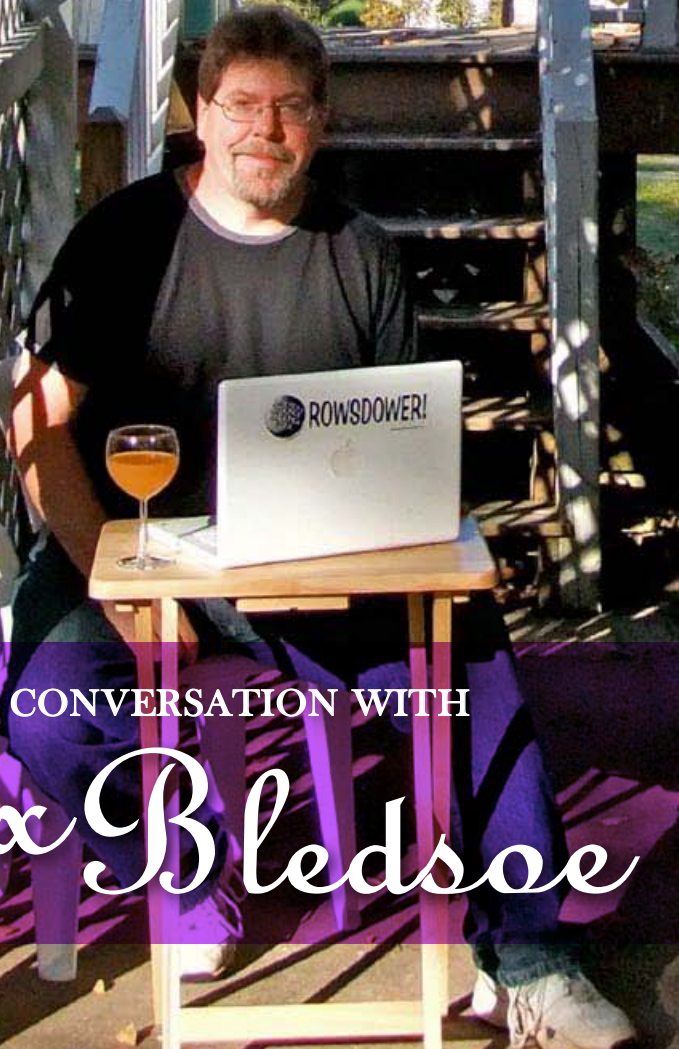
- Spend time near a body of Water listening to it move – waves crashing, Waterfalls roaring, or simply a stream of Water moving over rocks.
- Listen to recordings of nature sounds such as waves or rainfall. You may be able to find many different recordings online.
- Boil Water and listen to it bubble.
- Listen to music you associate with Water. This could be sounds that remind you of Water, or songs that actually mention Water, waves, etc. Some sounds associated with Water may be flutes, chimes, zither, or strings (violins, cellos).

When you’ve taken the time to listen, reflect on these questions: What was it like to listen to Water? What was difficult about this exercise? What was easy or fun? What sounds did you hear? What surprised you? What emotions or memories did this exercise evoke? What other ways can you think of to listen to Water? What are “Watery” sounds to you?

Reflect. After you have worked through all the sensory exercises, take time to reflect. What was it like to work with Water in this way? Has your relationship with the Element of Water changed? How? What did you learn? What surprised you? You may wish to perform a ritual to thank Water for being with you on your journey. ♦

INTERVIEW BY
DEBORAH BLAKE

Doorways into Magick



A CONVERSATION WITH

Alex Bledsoe

A CONSUMMATE PAGAN
STORYTELLER SHARES
HIS OWN STORY OF WRITING
AND WITCHCRAFT.

Many years ago, I took part in a contest put on by BBI Media (the lovely folks that bring you *Witches & Pagans Magazine*, among other things) and Llewellyn Worldwide, the largest publisher of Pagan, Witchcraft, and New Age books. Together, they were going to create something completely new and different: a collection of short stories written by and for Pagans. To find the stories, they held a contest, which I entered. The best stories would be included in *The Pagan Anthology of Short Fiction: 13 Prize Winning Tales*.



I came in third, in case you were wondering. And the collection turned out to be amazing; full of diverse and entertaining stories across a huge range of topics. One of my favorites was called “Draw Down,” and featured a witch in the Old West. “Holy crap,” I said to myself. “I would never have thought to do that!” And I’ve been saying that—with glee and appreciation—about Alex Bledsoe’s writing ever since.

Alex Bledsoe grew up in west Tennessee an hour north of Graceland. He spent time as a reporter, editor, photographer, and (briefly) a door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman. These days, he lives in a Wisconsin town famous for trolls, writes before six in the morning, and is a stay-at-home dad for his three children. He is also the highly successful author of the *Eddie LaCrosse* series, which combines high fantasy with hardboiled noir detective mysteries (I would never have thought to do that!), two dark and bloody novels about vampires in 1975 Memphis, and the haunting *Tufa* novels, which include *The Hum* and *the Shiver and Wisp of a Thing*.

Way back when, Alex wrote short stories. A lot of short stories. Some of them, the “*Firefly Witch*” series, were featured in the pages of *PanGaia* (the predecessor of this magazine.) Much to the delight of his Pagan fans, who were there from the beginning, Alex is now putting some of these earlier stories in eBook collections, and writing new ones to add to the series. Which made me think it was the perfect time to sit down with Alex over a steaming cup of virtual coffee and have a chat about writing, raising children, witchcraft, and how he creates magic both on and off the page. DEBORAH BLAKE.

W Which came first, the Pagan path or the writing one? And how do they affect each other, if at all? Does your Pagan background influence your mundane writing?

Alex I discovered Paganism as a direct result of writing. In college during the 80s I first heard about Wicca, but it was tied in with a very radical feminist perspective at the time, so I did not feel exactly welcome. You have to remember, too, this was the Reagan era, when the Moral Majority first flexed its muscles, and it was in the South, at that. So I don’t blame them for being exclusive and putting on a front that discouraged dilettantes. But just knowing it existed, that scary “witchcraft” was in fact a religion that had nothing to do with Christianity, stuck with me. Later, it emerged as the idea of writing about a witch in a modern context, because at the time (early-to-mid 1990s), I was aware of no one else really doing that. “Urban fantasy” and “paranormal romance” didn’t yet exist as genres. Since I also wanted to have her “powers” be more organic than the typical lightning-throwing wizards and sorceresses, I investigated Paganism, and Wicca specifically. I still remember going into my first “New Age” store in Mobile, Alabama. I was genuinely afraid I would be found out as not “real,” and be kicked out — or worse!

As I started reading, though (my first books were *Positive Magic* by Marion Weinstein, followed by Scott Cunningham’s *The Truth About Witchcraft Today*), I realized that the basic tenets were things I already believed: that something was out-of-kilter in a religion that had only a male deity, that the natural world should be considered sacred, and that we influenced our own reality. The emphasis on balance and personal responsibility resonated with my own thoughts on how the universe worked. This was unexpected, and I found myself reading more and more for myself, and not just for research.

Of course, I did put a lot of these discoveries into the original *Firefly Witch* stories. I was criticized by a few folks for not keeping a traditional grimoire, but everything I learned was there in those stories. You can chart my progress from neophyte to second degree if you know what you’re looking for. When I went back to revise them for these new editions, I was surprised, and rather delighted, with the simplicity of the beliefs depicted in them. Now, nearly twenty years later, I no longer see things quite the same way, or with quite the same sharp-edged clarity. But it was fun to revisit my initial rush of revelation and enthusiasm.



You use a lot of magical or otherworldly themes in your writing. What draws you to these kinds of stories, and what is it that you hope to share with your readers?

Alex I think the use of magical themes can help provide relief from the clutter and haze of the real world. Not only is it fun to visit other realities, but it also provides contrast for the dilemmas in our own lives. That said, *every* author, even a writer who tells gritty stories of contemporary life, is creating his or her own reality, “world building” just as much as a fantasy author might. The trick, and to me what makes it meaningful, is when the reader can empathize with the characters, no matter what the background, and see their own concerns reflected in the characters. It’s unrealistic to say we can also show them a way out, but if we can even get them thinking about the possibility in their own lives, then that’s done some good.



As a multi-published novelist, you are much more visible than you used to be. Are you open about your Pagan beliefs, or do you try to keep that part of your life separate from your public persona?

Alex I was raised a Christian in the South, and I still carry the knowledge of that around with me, as I’m sure the people who taught me intended. Paganism, and specifically Wicca, have shown me that I’m not dependent on anyone or anything else to “deliver” me, a realization that freed me from a lot of that weight. That said, I don’t believe in advertising my beliefs for any purpose; my job is to tell a story the best that I can in a way that’s accessible to anyone. The stories may reflect or embody my beliefs, but only if they’re in actual service to the story. A story about a Wiccan priestess, for example, will obviously contain a lot of information about Wicca, just as the Harry Potter books tell you a great deal about Hogwarts. And that’s not a facile description, either, because while one may be a “real” religion and the other fictional, in the service of their stories they both carry the same weight, and have the same task: to further the tale. If they don’t, they shouldn’t be included.



EVERY *author – even a writer who tells gritty stories of contemporary life – is creating his or her own reality just as much as a fantasy author might. The trick is when the reader can empathize with the characters and see their own concerns reflected there.”*

If there’s any direct influence on my writing, it’s that I feel open to the reality of any spiritual practice within a given story, whether it’s the moon priestesses of my Eddie LaCrosse books (you can probably guess what inspired them), or the heroic Methodist minister in *The Hum and the Shiver*. If they feel real to the reader, then I’ve done my job, and in that sense, Paganism influences my writing.



A few years ago, you made an incredibly brave decision – to quit your “day job” and become a stay-at-home father while also trying to write full time. A lot of people never manage to take the big leap and follow their dreams. How did you find the courage to do so, and how is it working out?

Alex It wasn’t just courage; economics played a big part. I didn’t earn enough at my day job editing legal forms to cover putting my then-newborn son in day care. My first novel had just come out and I’d been contracted for two more, so it seemed my writing was about to take off. I’d wanted to be a full-time writer my entire life, and this was my chance.

It’s worked out better than I ever hoped. Publishers keep letting me write more books, and I’ve gotten to see my kids grow up in more detail than I ever would have otherwise. There are moments when the two responsibilities clash, but so far it hasn’t been anything that can’t be worked out with a bit of compromise.

W Has your life changed since you've become more successful? Do you ever miss the days of sitting unknown in a corner writing short stories without deadlines?

Alex Well, "success" for me means that I'm able to keep writing. That's a far, far cry from the kind of "success" that includes fame and on-the-street recognition. Truthfully, I can still sit in the corner and be unnoticed; the regulars at the local coffee shop know that I write, but they also respect it. It's one reason I love the town we live in.

W I always loved the "Firefly Witch" stories; Tanna and her husband Ry are two of my favorite fictional characters.

For those folks who haven't read this series yet, can you tell us a little bit about the stories, and what made you decide to go back to writing them?

Alex Tanna Tully is a third-degree Wiccan priestess known as Lady Firefly. She's also a tenured professor of psychology, with an expertise in parapsychology. She's biologically blind, but when fireflies are out, they boost her psychic abilities so that she can actually see. She's married to Ry, the editor of the town newspaper, who's totally mundane. And they have adventures.

I went back to them at the urging of my agent, Marlene Stringer. She's always loved the characters, and as e-books become more and more common, she prompted me to revisit the stories, brush them up and put them out in small, three- and four-story collections.

W I am always amazed by the unusual combinations you come up with, like in your Eddie LaCrosse books, which mix classic sword and sorcery and gritty detective stories. How do you come up with such original ideas, and what can we expect from you next?

Alex It's never a deliberate "let's mash unrelated things together" decision, and each story is different. I chose a detective-novel voice for Eddie LaCrosse because, after trying to tell the story a bunch of different ways, that turned out to be the one that worked. I put vampires in 1975 because

I wanted to write about them before *Interview with a Vampire* changed the way the world saw vampires. I put faeries in Appalachia in *The Hum and the Shiver* because they were originally inspired by a real group of people who lived there. And Tanna Tully lives in a college town in west Tennessee because it was a locale I knew very well, and thought would be an interesting place to drop a genuine Wiccan priestess.



As for what's next; well, now that the second Tufa novel *Wisp of a Thing* has published (in June 2013) I'm looking forward to a third Tufa novel in 2015 called *Long Black Curl*. There will be a fifth Eddie LaCrosse novel titled, *He Drank, and Saw the Spider* in 2014 and I'll have a few short stories in various anthologies, and of course there will be more *Firefly Witch* stories.

W What would you like people to know about you that I haven't asked about? Any final thoughts?

Alex I'd like to encourage anyone who's a fan of Eddie LaCrosse to consider buying an Angelina's Tavern t-shirt from the good folks at Novel Tees. <http://www.10ap.com/servlet/the-34/Alex-Bledsoe-Eddie-LaCrosse/Detail>. All proceeds go to PROTECT, an organization that lobbies for stronger laws to stop child abuse and exploitation. It's a great cause, and the shirt looks awesome.

I'd also like to give a genuine, heart-felt "thank you" to everyone who's read my work over the years, especially the readers of the original Firefly Witch stories in *PanGaia*. I still can't believe I'm lucky enough to be doing this for a living, and I'm truly thankful for everyone whose interest and support makes it possible.

W Where can people find you and your work online? (Especially the "Firefly Witch" stories, which I know that our readers are going to absolutely love!)

Alex There are links to all my writing, including my books and my blog, on my page, alexbledsoe.com. There, you can download the first chapter of most of my books for free. The *Firefly Witch* e-book chapbooks are available through Amazon and Barnes and Noble. ♠



Deification by Drowning

the dangerous splendors of the element of water

Of the four classical elements, perhaps none is more associated with the transition from human and mortal existence to a state of divinity than the element of water. In vestigial ways, it is even part of the spiritual vocabulary and technology of traditional Christianity, in which the sacrament of baptism opens the possibility of salvation to those who partake of it. But the ability of water — and even of drowning — to assist in the apotheosis of humans is a long-established tradition in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian cultures that predates the sacrament of baptism by millennia.

While examples of deification by drowning could be multiplied considerably, I will briefly treat this theme at present with reference to three sets of examples: the family of Athamas from Greek myth, Tiberinus from Roman myth, and the phenomenon of those drowning in the Nile becoming gods in Egyptian traditions.

Greek and Roman mythical drownings

Greek myths tell us that the Boeitian king Athamas had two wives: Nephele and Ino. Athamas had twin children with Nephele, a goddess/nymph whose name means “cloud.” But Athamas’ second wife Ino was insanely jealous and conspired to have Nephele’s children killed. She secretly parched the grain of the local farmers so that it would not sprout and conspired to create a false oracle which stated that the only way to lift the famine was to sacrifice Phrixos (the son) to Zeus. Athamas reluctantly agreed, and was about to sacrifice Phrixos when a flying golden-fleeced ram (sent by their mother Nephele) rescued both children. While they were flying over the stretch of sea between Europe and Asia, the sister, Helle was thrown off the ram into the sea and drowned; the Hellespont (“sea of Helle”) was thus named after her. Poseidon changed Helle into a goddess and she eventually bore children by him.¹



Ino's madness (or desperation) led to her drowning and her eventual adoption into Roman myth as Leukothea as shown in this fresco from 4th century C.E. Sicily.

But the story of Ino was far from over. Though Greek myth never states as much, it seems likely that the eventual fates of Ino and her children might have been a case of poetic justice. Or Ino's Theban line of descent could be seen as simply doomed from the start, since her three sisters were Semele – the mother of Dionysos who died before giving birth to the god; Autonoe – the mother of Aktaion who was turned into a deer by Artemis and torn apart by his own hounds; and Agave – the mother of Pentheus who slew her own son in a maenadic frenzy after Pentheus had earlier rejected the divinity of Dionysos.²

Ino and Athamas became the guardians of the infant Dionysos, but perhaps due to the god's own madness-inducing tendencies, or as the result of a curse laid on them by a vengeful Hera, Athamas went mad and killed their son Learchos. He was also about to kill Ino's other son Melikertes when Ino desperately grabbed her child and jumped into the sea. (Or, in an even more overwrought version, Ino herself became mad, boiled Melikertes in a cauldron, and then jumped with his corpse into the sea.) Zeus took pity upon the pair and turned both of them into deities: Ino into the sea-goddess Leukothea (literally "White Goddess") and Melikertes into Palaimon, a child-god often shown riding on a dolphin. Palaimon's body was said to have been washed ashore with the aid of dolphins at Corinth, where the Isthmian Games – one of the four pan-Hellenic athletic festivals – were celebrated in his honor.³

Ino/Leukothea appears in Homer's *Odyssey*, where she helps Odysseus by giving him her veil so that he will not drown in the sea.⁴ Roman tradition adopted the mother-son duo and syncretized Leukothea to Mater Matuta and Palaimon to Portunus, the god of harbors.⁵ Dolphins in general have a Dionysian connection, and similar tales of youthful deities astride dolphins occur elsewhere, including in Italy with the god Taras, a son of Poseidon associated with the city of Tarentum (modern Taranto).⁶

A further Italian god associated with the motif of deification after drowning is Tiberinus, the god of the Tiber River that runs through the city of Rome. Some traditions hold that Tiberinus, like most of the great rivers of the world, was one of the many children of the primordial sea deities Okeanos and Tethys, and in such a form he appeared to Aeneas

in Book VIII of the *Aeneid* to give him much-needed advice.⁷ But other Roman myths give another possibility. In Titus Livius' *Ab Urbe Condita*, it is stated that Tiberinus was an Alban king descended from Aeneas who



Tiberinus, the god of the Tiber River may have been a (deified) drowned king or a child of the primordial sea.

died while trying to cross the river Albula. From then on, the river bore his name, Tiberinus.⁸ The Roman tendency to mythologize their history, and to often euhemerize deities – making them humans in origin – is illustrated by this treatment of Tiberinus in Livy's account. Whether Tiberinus was simply the deified river and was always associated with inclusion amongst the Okeanids, or whether the story of the drowned king named Tiberinus was the original is impossible to say.

In Egypt, it's all about the Nile

Sometimes the transformations of humans into gods by drowning occur because of the nature of the body of water itself. In the case of the Nile (itself considered holy) coming into close contact with the river – even if it results in death – is seen as a divinizing process. The divine precedent for this is no less a figure than the god Osiris himself, who was understood to have died by drowning in the Nile.⁹ The 15th century BCE Egyptian text the *Amduat* features twelve hours of night while the sun passes through the lower world, during which the sun god Horus himself rescues the drowned from their watery deaths in the Tenth Hour.¹⁰ As early as the 5th century BCE, the Greeks were aware of these Egyptian traditions of treating the Nile-drowned as more-than-human after their deaths, as recorded in Herodotus' *Histories*, Book II.90:

*If anyone – it makes no difference whether he is a native Egyptian or a foreigner – has been carried off by a crocodile or has obviously been killed by the river, it is up to the people in the community where the body is washed ashore to embalm him, fit him out as handsomely as possible, and bury him in a sanctified tomb. Not even any of his relatives or friends is allowed to touch him: the corpse is something more than human, so only the actual priests of the Nile can lay hands on him and bury him.*¹¹

We have records of several such individuals who died by drowning in the Nile and received some form of cultus afterwards. Two brothers named Petesi and Paher died in this fashion sometime during the 26th Dynasty. The temple of Dendur, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was built for them as a result; dating from the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus.¹² A young woman named Isidora likewise succumbed to drowning in the Nile, afterwards was seen in a divine dream vision in which she revealed to her parents that she was drowned by nymphs. Isidora was worshipped as a nymph thereafter.¹³ Isidora's death took place sometime in the second century CE, in the vicinity of the city of Hermopolis Magna. It is in that same vicinity, in the early 2nd century CE, that the most famous historical instance of human deification



Antinous of Bithynia, lover of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, was deified after drowning in the Nile under mysterious circumstances.

by drowning took place.

Antinous of Bithynia was the youthful lover of the Roman Emperor Hadrian (who ruled from 117-138 CE). In 128 CE, during a trip to the eastern Roman Empire, Hadrian toured Egypt and traveled up the Nile with Antinous in his company. Near Hermopolis Magna, Antinous drowned in the Nile under mysterious circumstances.

By Egyptian tradition, Antinous would have at least received a minor local cultus in the vicinity of his place of death. Instead on October 30, 130 CE, Hadrian founded the city of Antinoöpolis on the eastern bank


of the River Nile, across from Hermopolis Magna, with Antinous as the eponymous hero-founder of the city. Antinous' cultus rapidly spread throughout the Empire due to the Emperor's influence, spawning athletic games in his honor which lasted into the fifth century CE as well as a Mystery tradition celebrated at several locations in Egypt, Asia Minor, and Greece. Though the Roman Emperors and their wives were thought of as *Divi* and *Divae* after their deaths (a kind of junior hero in the Graeco-Roman divine hierarchy), Antinous was honored as a hero or a god (*theos*) everywhere in which his cultus is attested. His first syncretism was to Osiris in Egypt, and a *phyla* in the city of Antinoöpolis is named for him in this syncretism: Oseirantinoeioi. On the Obelisk of Antinous, it is said of him "the semen of god is truly in his body," which could literally refer to the fact that his divinity was a result of his being filled with the sacred waters of the Nile during his death.¹⁴

Water Giveth, and Water Taketh Away

Of the various deified drowned in the Greek family of Athamas, Palaimon did especially well, with his games and his hero-shrine being active through the end of antiquity. Tiberinus was celebrated with a festival at his Tiber Island shrine in Rome on December 8th in antiquity as well.¹⁵ Antinous' is the clear winner in the category of the deified drowned: his cultus is recorded in almost every Roman province after his death, with festivals, games, mysteries, and temples all dedicated to him. Due to the fascination with his image that persisted well after Christianity became the dominant religion, one particular art enthusiast of the late eighteenth century, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, went on to found the discipline of art history as we know it today.¹⁶

Water is a dangerous and unstable element, but it is also the source of all life on earth, and is essential to the continuation of life as we know it. It is associated with qualities that we value highly, with events which can inform our spiritual lives, and with an event which can end life quickly and unexpectedly: depths, dreams, and drowning.

For the ancients, who recognized divinity as inherent in many objects and elements, and in the features of the land itself, the phenomenon of unexpected death by drowning in seas or rivers—which were often themselves understood to be



the very bodies of goddesses and gods, nymphs, or other types of nature spirit – was a close and costly encounter with the powers of both death and divinity. Water’s power to cleanse us of our impurities extends, thus, even to cleansing us of our own lives. In antiquity it was believed that in such a death there is nothing left but divinity, whether that divinity is imparted by the water itself, or was simply already present and obscured by all which defiled us before. Water’s many powers, including divinization, is yet another reason to respect the element, to honor it and thank the powers that dwell within it in our local watersheds for the continuation of our lives, and for how they can likewise illuminate divine possibilities for us and for the gods themselves.◆

Endnotes

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Teo

Singing is like breathing

Bishop

Teo Bishop emerged quietly into the Pagan spotlight; blogging as a way to process his experiences as a novice Druid. Soon his blog – Bishop in the Grove – became a popular meeting place, drawing people into conversation about their own spiritual processes. Many are drawn to Teo's intense honesty as he walks, runs, and sometimes stumbles along his spiritual path.

Two years into his blog project, Bishop came out as singer Matt Morris – a name linked to Britney Spears, Ryan Gosling and Christina Aguilera – whose performance of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" with Justin Timberlake reached #1 on iTunes and #13 on Billboard's Hot 100. Son of a country music star and member of the 1990s Mickey Mouse Club, Morris has forged a successful musical career, performing his own works and writing for a host of well-known performers.

In December of 2012, Bishop launched the ambitious "Solitary Druid Fellowship" to help serve people living isolated from Ár nDraíocht Féin Groves. Six months later, he announced his departure from ADF, and turned over leadership of the SDF to Kristin McFarland.

I met with Teo during the winter of 2012 as well as corresponded with him during the spring of 2013 via email. This interview is the happy result.

Thorn: What drew you toward Paganism?

Teo: [*Buffy* character] Willow and her superpowers, of course. I was sold the minute her eyes turned black and she levitated! She was a wicked Witch! (And I mean that as a true compliment.)

Seriously though, I came to Paganism in a roundabout way.

I've always been drawn toward mysticism. I was brought up in the Episcopal church, and as a kid I served as an acolyte. I loved the ceremony, the layered meanings of ordinary things, and the sense that beneath it all was the presence of some unseen, mysterious, and profoundly creative force.

As I grew into adulthood, my sense of mysticism developed into a more reflective, more discerning inquiry into the nature of that unseen force. I was still a practicing Christian, so much of my inquiry at that time was framed within a monotheistic cosmology.

Then I traveled to Ireland on a spiritual pilgrimage, and things changed. While the purpose of the trip was to trace back some of the Episcopal Church's Celtic roots, what ended up happening for me was a subtle awakening to the power of Brigid, the magic manifest in the Irish landscape, and the sense that I was connected to all of that somehow. At the time, I didn't really understand what that meant.

Several years later, after a falling out with the Church over its policies around LGBTQ people, I discovered Druidry through OBOD (The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids). I found the emphasis the Order placed on personal expression inspiring, and their willingness to encourage members to conceive of divinity in whatever way made sense to them was a revelation. There need not be that one mysterious, creative force; there could be many.

But it wasn't until I found ADF (Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship) that I began to think of myself as a Pagan.



Brigid has been a powerful ally for me for many, many years. I worked with her intensively in my twenties and have returned to a deeper relationship with her again in the last year or two. She is important to me as a writer and singer, as well as in my justice work. The forge is a powerful metaphor for me, pointing to the process of changing culture. As a musician and Druid, what is your current sense of Brigid and her role in the world today?

Brigid reminds me that transformation takes effort, that creation sometimes requires a refinement process, and that creativity, itself, is a birthright. I feel that by working at refining my own spiritual practice, as well as at honing my skills as a writer and musician, I am honoring her.

How does music inform your spirituality?

For me, singing is like breathing.

Spirituality and religion can become dominated by all kinds of rules and restrictions, and so can music for that matter. But the breath and the voice can operate independently of those rules. To sing can be to abide by one's own rules, to re-write them, or to abandon structure altogether.

Music, and especially singing, is egalitarian. If we can speak, we can sing; and if we can't speak we can still bang on things, shake things, make a good noise.

I've been fascinated lately by this idea of switching up the traditional dirge-ish Pagan chant into something more playful, more nursery rhyme-like. I'm also into the idea of taking one form of music – say, African-American spirituals – and using that song-structure and melodic scale to tell folk stories and myths of the Welsh, the Irish, or even myths about modern-day life in America.

I think spirituality should be a living thing, connected to a living practice. So should music.

I agree that adhering to too many rules can box us in. However, as a musician, you also know that structure is important. Without structure, there is nothing to build from, nothing to return to. Sometimes people give up the container too soon, before they have been held long enough for roots to deepen. I think that takes away from the beauty of both music and religious or spiritual observance. True simplicity is often a sign that one has mastered the complex. I'd like to hear more of your thoughts on this.

I grew up in a liturgical church. Liturgy provided for me a way of framing my worship experience so that my attention could be focused in a specific direction. I really appreciated that. So, a structured ritual makes a lot of sense to me. It takes a very charismatic person to lead ritual without any kind of liturgical structure, and even then I would imagine that this person has, like you, a deep background of study and practice to inform her or his work.

It's like learning scales for a jazz player, you know? You really do need a grasp of the basics before you go taking off on a 16-bar solo.

As for my music, structure plays a huge part in my writing process. When I sit down to write a song, I try to build a structure within which to work. You could think of it as a kind music-based liturgy, if you will. The verses lead to the chorus, the chorus may have a turn around, and then the process repeats. The bridge provides resolution (or withholds it), and then the message of the chorus is delivered again, perhaps this time with a completely new spin. I may spend ten, twenty minutes in silence, inspecting the structure, the theme, the individual words and lines before ever bringing a melody to my lips.

I think spirituality should be a living thing, connected to a living practice. So should music.

Coming out as Pagan to my (Matt Morris) fans meant a lot to the Pagan community. Once you start coming out, you really can't stop. As soon as you testify to the truth in your life you have to keep doing it, again and again. The truth is relentless that way.

Your song "Eternity" is my favorite from When Everything Breaks Open. It reminds me of the Celtic Song of Amergin. Were you aware of this when you wrote it? It feels like a transitional piece in your repertoire, moving from Christian to Pagan. What was your internal process in writing that song?

I was not aware of the "Song of Amergin" when I wrote "Eternity", although I can see the parallels. Thank you for that compliment.

Many people mistook "Eternity" to be a Christian song on account of the references to God, Jesus and biblical imagery. But if you listen closer, it's more complicated than that. That said, the song preceded my transition from Christianity to Paganism by a few years.

Before writing "Eternity," I wrote a song called, "You're Everything," which I never recorded. The idea was to take a standard love song and make it epic. It went something like:

*You are a secret
written in Sanskrit;
You are a love note
lost in a sunken ship;
You're an awkward end of the evening
good night kiss;
You're my first thought
and my last wish.*

It went on to describe this person in as many complementary, sometimes contradictory ways as I could fit into four minutes.

With "Eternity" I took a similar approach, but I put it in the first person voice. All of a sudden, *I* was the subject. The song came quickly, and with a fierceness.

*Through the ages
we have lived and died.
Kings made war, and sages prophesied.
Somewhere between
the first creation and tonight
was a million incarnations of me,
myself, and I.*

As the song unfolded, I became more things: the savior, a tyrant, a mother, a shaman. The chorus says,

*I'm carrying
the memory
of these things
inside of me.*

A friend told me once that he thought "Eternity" was a song about the collective unconscious, and I kind of like that take on it.

I was always taught that your melodies should be memorable, your lyrics conversational, and your song more universal than your individual experience. The same thing applies to good liturgy: you want it to be easy to internalize, easy to relate to, and relevant to the life you're actually living.

"Eternity" feels like it was written by a mystic. This makes me wonder, what most connects you to the mystical flow, as someone the ancients would have named a bard?

I wrote "Eternity" while living in the middle of the mountains of Southern Colorado. It was kind of a monastic time, and being that close to the land, the sky, the river, the moon really made an mark on me. It was during this time that I first experienced a deep, visceral connection to the land and the sky. I think that being in such a remote environment provided me with the space and stillness I needed to go inward, and I spent a lot of time doing that.

"Eternity" came out so quickly, so effortlessly, that it felt less like I was writing the song, and more like I was delivering it. That's when I know I'm working in tandem with something sacred. I listen for that sacred thing, and sometimes I search it out through study or prayer. But then there are times when it feels as though something completely holy is being offered to me, without any effort on my part. Christians might call that grace, and I don't have a problem with that word.

Last year, to use your words, you came “out of the Woods.” You let Pagans know you were Matt Morris and you let fans of Matt Morris know you were Pagan. What has the response been like? Did you feel any parallels to coming out as gay?

When I told the audience of “Bishop in the Grove” that I was also Matt Morris, a “semi-famous” recording artist, the reaction was one of surprise. Shock, even. But overwhelmingly, my readership was supportive and encouraging, and many expressed respect for me coming out so publicly.

When I told my music fans that I was Pagan, there were some interesting responses. By and large, people didn’t care. I got a lot of, “Great, now when are you putting out another album?” There were a few “I’ll pray for you,” which was to be expected. I have a lot of Christian fans, many of which are a part of conservative denominations.

Looking at it now, I think it was coming out to my music fans that meant more to the Pagan community. Several people told me that they were holding their breath to see if I’d go ahead and be transparent from all directions.

There were some parallels to coming out as gay, mostly that once you start coming out you really can’t stop. As soon as you testify to the truth in your life you have to keep doing it, again and again. The truth is relentless in that way.

Speaking of being a public person: I studied for more than twenty years before publishing my first book, most of it in the days before everyone had a web presence.

In contrast, you’ve spent your time in the Pagan world under public scrutiny. How have you found this to be helpful or difficult? What caused you to choose this route as opposed to a more private path?



Photos ©2013 Greg Harder

Teo and Thorn enjoy a laugh together.

I have a connection to audience that permeates my life. It’s been this way since I was a little kid, really. This isn’t to say that everything I do is to appease an audience; I just mean that engagement and interaction — whether while singing on stage or writing on my blog — feels intrinsically rewarding to me.

Blogging about my spiritual life takes that to another level: the audience becomes both a sounding board for my own process and also a kind of mass-witness to the various ways of being human. Teachers step forward and offer me their insights, and my solitary processing becomes the catalyst for inquiry, introspection, and dialogue.

There are challenges, of course; it can become difficult to be faced with comments from people who believe that they have a clear picture of all of who I am. You can’t control the way people read you, and sometimes people project themselves onto me and read their own biases, hang-ups, and issues into my writing. Other times, the dissenting voices call me into a deeper

awareness of ideas embedded into my perspective that I had not yet acknowledged. So even when it gets messy, it can be instructive.

Ultimately, I think that the practice of revealing one’s self and one’s process to others — whether that be from behind a pulpit, in circle, or on a website like Bishop in the Grove — can be a transformative act. I wish more Pagans would consider homilies as valuable spiritual tools in our communities.

In 2012, you launched an ambitious project called the Solitary Druid Fellowship to provide liturgy to those working solo. Then earlier this year, you announced that you were stepping back from both Ar nDraiocht Fein and your work with the SDF. What changed?

I listened to my heart, really.

I got the clear sense that leaving the tradition would help facilitate the next step in my own personal evolution. I’m not sure I understand what that means yet, but leaving was an act of trust more than anything else. A leap of faith, in a way.

Leaving ADF meant that I could no longer lead the Fellowship, a group I created to be a service extension of ADF. That was a hard choice to make. But I think that had it not been for the Fellowship, and the vision I had to bring a liturgically-based model of ministry to solitaries, I'd have probably left ADF a long time ago. There's something about it that feels incomplete to me. I mean, all traditions are incomplete in their own way; but ADF began to feel incomplete in ways that really mattered to me.

**What are you currently seeking?
What might feel like more complete?
What do you want to learn?**

Those are good questions. I feel drawn to the idea of contemplative paganism as a practice. What that looks like exactly I'm still piecing together. Perhaps I'm drawn toward contemplation as a spiritual discipline because I'm naturally a little impatient. The whole "fast as a speeding oak" slogan of the ADF always used to bother me a little, but there's wisdom in it. Perhaps I need to learn patience.

I also recently discovered the Gnostic Celtic Church, an independent sacramental church of nature spirituality affiliated with another contemporary Druid order, the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA). I have great respect for Archdruid John Michael Greer, and the approach this group is taking stirs something in me. I think it's worth exploring further.

But I don't know if a complete system can come from the outside-in. Your complete system and my complete system might look drastically different, but still feel pretty complete for each of us respectively. Perhaps it's only the systems we develop for ourselves — these patchwork, pagan systems — that begin to satisfy the longings of the heart.

I'm seeking to be a person who lives fully, who gives freely, who loves fearlessly, and who works to create a world in which others can do the same. If I were to manifest any kind of life, it would be one in which all people can experience that kind of inner and outer freedom.

Some Druids speak of the Awen as not just the spirit of inspiration, but also as something akin to one's life purpose. I would like to continue to uncover what my Awen is in the world. That is something worth seeking, I think.

You were recently in Los Angeles with Cher for a taping of her first television appearance in a decade. This came about because you co-wrote her latest song "Woman's World." You've written songs for a list of famous people, and performed your own music on the likes of The Letterman show. Music and writing seem to be a big part of how your Awen works in the world. We touched on this earlier, but how are you currently linking music with your spiritual path?



Writing music, especially in professional settings, requires that I be in direct contact with the things I know to be true in my heart. That subjective "truth," is influenced by my life experience and worldview but the immediate, intimate connection with my *gnosis* is tremendously valuable to me. That connection is something that creating music provides for me.

In some ways, the act of creating music is very ritualistic for me. I have a process I follow, and following it allows me to enter into deeper and more subtle ways of thinking and feeling. I wouldn't say that any of it is exactly religious, but it's certainly spiritual.



Photos ©2013 Greg Harder

To be centered and mindful requires discipline and practice. Those experiences occur for me most intentionally when I'm sitting with an idea, a lyric, or a melody and trying to understand what it means.

And is this process informed by your soul's purpose?

Yes, I think so.

It's important when we speak of the soul that we don't think of it as something "out there." We can easily slip into a way of thinking that places the soul in a removed location, like some kind of transcendent deity. This may be why it can feel so difficult at times to understand one's purpose. We think, "If I could just get in touch with my soul, I'd know what I'm supposed to do with my life." But you're never *not* in touch with your soul. It's as close as your breath and your voice. It's more a matter of shifting your awareness to the sound in you that is your soul.

Your journey, like mine, seems to include a lot of listening for your heart's desire. Do you have any advice for people who are struggling to connect with desire and purpose?

Man, I kind of feel like an amateur; I struggle with that sort of thing all the time, too. Maybe I would remind them to be gentle with themselves, and to be forgiving of their own shortcomings along the way. We put so much pressure on ourselves to do things correctly that we miss out on doing things gracefully, or passionately. I would encourage them to be kind to themselves, and to first practice compassion on their own heart before looking to connect with their sense of desire or purpose. I might say something like –

Show yourself a little love, sweetie.

Be the honey, not the vinegar.

Be the nectar. The bees are on their way.

Something like that.

If you could manifest any life that you want, how close would that be to the life you are currently living?

Hmm. I'm not sure.

I spent a lot of time in my twenties trying to build a life that looked a very specific way. I made choices that were motivated by my ambition, by my desire to manifest one kind of life, and what I discovered was that creating a life was not all up to me. Life is never that one-sided. It's never just about what you want, or what you envision. You're always working within an ecosystem of desires, dreams, hopes, and limitations.

So when you ask me what life I might like to manifest, I'm hesitant to answer. It feels dangerously close to a way of thinking that I feel no longer serves me.

I will say that what I'm focusing on now is to develop a mindset that allows me to be more present in the life that I have, to dream without the fear of failure, and to embrace my own limitations without resentment. This body is a limitation, but it is also a kingdom unto itself, and the same can be said for one's life.

I'm seeking to be a person who lives fully, who gives freely, who loves fearlessly, and who works to create a world in which others can do the same. If I were to manifest any kind of life, it would be one in which all people can experience that kind of inner and outer freedom.

Thank you for letting me work through those thoughts. I'd never had occasion to answer that question before.

Thank you, Teo.

To find out more about what Teo's up to, check out his websites at: www.bishopinthegrove.com
<http://www.teobishop.com/>
<http://www.mattmorris.net/>.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY
SHARON PAICE MACLEOD



Three Cauldrons

water & wisdom in Celtic traditions

*Gogwn dedyf radeu, awen pan deffreu...
Awen a ganaf, o dwfyn ys dygaf...*

*I know the blessings of inspiration
at the time it streams forth...
I sing of poetic inspiration,
from the deep I wield it...*

Attributed to Welsh poet-seer
Taliesin (Middle Welsh translation
by S. Paice MacLeod)

In the Celtic spiritual tradition, bodies of water were associated with powerful attributes such as healing, purification, wisdom and transformation. From the sacred Well of Wisdom located in the Underworld, to the rivers that ran through the Celtic speaking territories, knowledge and blessings bestowed by the Otherworld flowed into, around and through the world of mortals. The Celtic Otherworld was known by many names – *Tír na nÓg* (“The Land of Youth”) or *Mag Mell* (“Plain of Honey”) in Ireland, and *Annwfn* (“The Un-World” or “Lower World”) – eventually shortened to *Annwn* – in Wales. Its inhabitants were originally known as the *Áes Síde* in Ireland, and later as the *Tuatha Dé Danann* in Ireland and *Plant Annwn* in Wales. Water was frequently associated with the realms of the Gods, and many features of the landscape, like whirlpools, cascades and waterfalls, had their own special connection with sacred knowledge and divine gifts.¹

*Left: Highland loch, Perthshire, Scotland.
Right: Pictish symbol stone with salmon
and water-bird*

Wells of Wisdom. One of the most powerful images in the Celtic mythological tradition is the Well of Wisdom. The well or spring (*tobar*) is often connected with the quest for divine knowledge. Interestingly, *tobar* can also be used to describe a “source” as in the “source of wisdom.” One of the most famous accounts of the sacred well comes from a collection of medieval poems known as the *Dindshenchas* (“Lore of Places.”) This poem tells of a myth associated with the origins of the River Shannon in Ireland.

In the poem, the well is said to be under the sea. It was located at the edge of a river, and seven streams flowed from it. Inside the well was an essence known as *imbas* (also spelled *immus*), “Great Knowledge.” Over the well stood the “melodious hazel” of the poets (*coll n-écsi n-ilcheólach*.) One of the remarkable properties of this sacred tree was that it bore nuts, leaves and flowers at once, something an earthly tree cannot do.²

From the seven streams emanating from the well came a “whispering” of musical wisdom or inspiration (*ceól-éicse*.)³ The word *éicse* has a variety of meanings. It can refer to divination, wisdom, or the profession of a seer; to revelation, lore, and learning (especially poetry and poetic composition), and also to the poetic profession, the bardic order, and the poet-seers.⁴

In a second version of Sinann’s tale, the well is again located beneath the sea. Seven streams in total rose from the well – six streams, with the seventh being that of Sinann. In this version, nine hazel trees grew around the well. These trees also bore nuts, leaves and flowers at the same time. They dropped their nuts into the well under the magical command of an obscure druidical force or knowledge (*le doilbi smachta fo cheó doirchi draídechta*.) The nuts were scattered on the bottom of the well where they were eaten by the salmon that lived inside it.⁵ In the second poem the juice of the nuts were said to have formed “bubbles of wisdom” (*bolca immais*), which flowed down the streams. Sinann possessed every art or skill, lacking only the power of *imbas*. When she saw the bubbles of wisdom, she went after them into the water, where she drowned and thereafter became the Spirit of the river.⁶

Now, the word *bolg* means “bag,” “belly,” “ball,” “berry or bud.” These “bubbles” of wisdom or inspiration are mentioned in several other sources, where they are referred to as *bolg fis* or *bolg imbais*.⁷ Frequently the bubbles are said to be red in color (*ina bolcaib corcordaib*), as are the trees and the hazelnuts themselves. The term *bolg fis* or *bolg imbais* may simply mean “ball of wisdom” (i.e. a hazelnut), which were eaten by the “salmon of wisdom” (*eó fis*.) However, these obscure kennings may refer to a type of entheogenic fungus known as the *Amanita Muscaria* mushroom. These red mushrooms often grow near bodies of water and are used in Eurasian shamanic traditions for trance-induction and the acquisition of sacred or occult knowledge.⁸



The dangers associated with the pursuit of wisdom are reinforced in another early Irish poem, this one associated with the most sacred river in Ireland, the River Boyne. The source of the Boyne was the Well of Segais, guarded by the god Nechtan and his three cupbearers. The divine woman Boand approached the well, and in defiance (or ignorance) of custom, walked around it three times counter-clockwise. The waters rose up and Boand was drowned, thereafter becoming the Spirit of that river.⁹

Another sacred well is described in the tale of “Cormac’s Adventures in the Land of Promise.” King Cormac is lured to the Otherworld where he sees a royal dwelling made from beams of bronze, wattles of silver and thatching of the wings of white birds. Inside is a fountain with five streams flowing from it, and the inhabitants of the Otherworld drink its water. Nine hazel trees grow over the fountain, known as the “hazels of Buan” (“Everlasting / Enduring”). They were crimson or purple, reminiscent of the red bubbles of Sinann.

The hazels at this well also dropped their nuts into the fountain where the five salmon in the streams severed their husks and sent them floating down the streams. As in the first Dindshenchas account of Sinann, the sound of the falling of those streams was said to be more melodious than any music that humans sing.¹⁰ At the end of the tale, the meaning of this mythical scenario is explained to Cormac by a supernatural informant:

“I am Mannanán mac Lir...king of the Land of Promise; and to see the Land of Promise was the reason I brought you here.... The fountain which you saw, with the five streams out of it, is the Fountain of Knowledge, and the streams are the five senses through which knowledge is obtained. And no one will have knowledge who drinks not a draught out of the fountain itself and out of the streams. The folk of many arts are those who drink of them both.”¹¹

These mythic characteristics were also attributed to an actual holy well on the Isle of Skye. In 1695, Martin wrote about the springs and fountains of the island, the most celebrated of which was the *Loch Siant* well. It was believed to have the power to cure a variety of ailments; those who knew the customs of the well walked three times around it in a sun-wise direction and drank its water, leaving a small offering on the stone that covered the well. Nine springs flowed from the hill above the well, and the locals paid a tribute of their well water to a rivulet that issued from the well itself. Numerous trout lived in a small lake a few yards away, fish that were highly esteemed and protected.¹²



Medieval map of Ireland showing rivers and river mouths.

Rivers of Knowledge. Rivers have been venerated in the Celtic world since earliest times. Unlike Greek rivers, which were primarily associated with male deities, in Celtic tradition rivers were connected with goddesses. For example, the River Seine in France (Gaul) was named for the goddess Sequana, the Severn in Britain for the goddess Sabrina, and the river Tay in Scotland for the goddess Tawa. Many river names are founded on a root word “*dana*” meaning “river” (like the Danube, Dnieper and Dniester), while others contain a root “*dewa*” meaning “goddess” (as in the River Dee in Scotland).¹³

Many early Irish texts refer to rivers held in great esteem.

The sacred nature of the river Boyne is reflected in the Dindshenchas tradition where it was said to have more than a dozen names, depending on the location of the river. At the site of the well, it was called by the same name as the well (*Segais*.) The first stretch was called the Arm of Nuadu’s Wife and the second the Leg of Nuadu’s Wife. Farther along, it was referred to as the Great Silver Yoke, the White Marrow of Fedlimid, Stormy Wave, River of the White Hazel and Banna (as far as Lough Neagh). At this point, the territory of the river expands beyond its purely physical boundaries to include Scotland (where it was known as Roof of the Ocean and Lunnand) and Britain (Sabrann, the Severn).¹⁴



In the story of Sinann, the river was associated with the goddess' quest for divine knowledge, a specialized power known as *imbas forosnai* ("Great Knowledge of Illumination") which was one of the three types of divination medieval Irish poet-seers had to master.¹⁵ In one version of Sinann's tale, the power she seeks is called "great wisdom by way of streams" (*imma sóis co srethaib*).¹⁶ The word *sreth* can refer to the arrangement of divinely-inspired words (as in spells or incantations), the "spreading of knowledge" (*sreth immais*), or knowledge disseminated "according to the threads of poetic art" (*iar sreth na suad*), i.e. "handed down by tradition."¹⁷

In one medieval Irish text, a sacred cauldron was said to sing or chant by way of "a stream of honor" and "rivers of great knowledge" (*srethaib imbais*).¹⁸ The idea that wisdom should "flow" from the enlightened or inspired person is also seen in the phrase *sruth sulbair ind labartha*, "a stream of eloquence of speaking."¹⁹ In the text *Immacalam in Dá Thuarad* ("The Conversation of the Two Sages"), a young poet called Nede tells an older poet Ferchertne that he has come from "a confluence of wisdom" and that the arts he practices include "a river of skill."²⁰

Cascades of Creation. Another type of water with legendary properties in Celtic tradition is the waterfall. The word *es(s)* refers to a cataract or rapid, as well as a rapidly flowing stream.²¹ Waterfalls are mentioned in the medieval Irish compilation *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*The Book of Invasions*), as the poet Amairgen invokes the land of Ireland so his people can gain access to it:

*I invoke the land of Ireland;
surging is the mighty sea,
Mighty is the upland full of meadows,
Full of meadows is the rainy wood,
Rainy is the river full of waterfalls,
Full of waterfalls is the spreading lake,
Spreading is the spring of multitudes,
The assembly of the king of Tara.*²²

The Dindshenchas contains several versions of a place-name story associated with a waterfall called *Ess Ruaid*. In the first version, the waterfall is located near a fairy-mound associated with a supernatural figure known as *Aed Ruad* ("Red/Mighty Fire"). He was a handsome, wealthy and generous leader of a religious and cultural center in northern Ireland associated with the goddess Macha.²³ In the Dindshenchas account of

Emain Macha, he is said to be her father. The tradition that Aed Ruad was Macha's father is also mentioned in the Rennes Dindshenchas account of Emain Macha. In this story, three kings were ruling in joint-sovereignty over Ireland, including Aed Ruad. He was the first of the three kings to die, having drowned in Ess Rúaid, from where his body was borne into the adjacent síd-mound. He had no children except a single daughter, Macha Mongruad (Red Mane) who demanded her father's turn at the kingship. Indeed, Macha is listed in the Irish annals as an early queen of Ireland, around 350 BCE.²³

Aed Ruad is connected with a síd-mound and a waterfall, the powerful flowing of water at this sacred location, and an essence known as "fire in water." This "fire in water" contained potential danger but endowed those selected with extraordinary powers. It was associated with heat, burning and illumination; the attainment and manifestation of wisdom; and poetic or prophetic skill.²⁴

The connection between waterfalls and supernatural wisdom and prophetic ability is also seen in accounts of divination rites from early modern Scotland. Reports from the 15th and 16th centuries describe a divinatory practice known as the *taghairm*. Whenever the community needed an answer to an important query, one person was chosen to be the seer. They were wrapped in the warm smoking hide of newly-slain ox and laid out full length in the recess of a remote waterfall. A question was then addressed to the person who was left in solitude to consider it. The diviner remained behind the waterfall with their "cloak of knowledge" around them, and the warm hide, the roaring of the waterfall, and the "assailing of the senses" all added to their experience. In the end, the community prophet provided an answer that was firmly believed to have been communicated by "invisible beings" who haunted such solitary places.²⁵



Whirlpools of Wisdom. Other bodies of water were mentioned in Celtic myths and legends. Numerous medieval and folklore accounts tell of supernatural beings who inhabited lakes and oceans. There are also stories associated with the whirlpool (*coire*). One of the most well-known is the Dindshenchas account of Coire Breccáin (*Corryvreckan*). It was believed that four seas gathered together at the site of this whirlpool. No "generous chieftain" who reached it ever returned, and even if the hosts of the "three parts of the world" were set side by side with all those who had yet to be born, this would still not fill the cauldron. The whirlpool is referred to as the "cauldron of a hundred measures," bringing to light the fact that the word *coire* means both "whirlpool" and "cauldron."

One legend associated with this whirlpool was that of Breacan, son of Partholon, who drank a draught from the whirlpool and was drowned. In one stanza, he is referred to as Breccán of Bérré.²⁶ In Scottish folk tradition *Coire Bhreacain* was associated with a supernatural figure known as the *Cailleach Bhéara*. In Ireland, the Cailleach ("Veiled One") was associated with the creation of the landscape, fertility, and wild places. In Scotland, she was also associated with wild animals and was the guardian of wells.

In one Scottish tale, the Cailleach was said to wash her blankets in the whirlpool, perhaps accounting for the inclusion of the Scottish Gaelic word *breacan* ("tartan") in the place-name. Before her washing began, the roar of a coming tempest would be heard for a period of three days before the cauldron "boiled."²⁷ Interestingly, the three forms of praise poetry learned by the poet-seers were white (positive), black (negative), and *breac* (variegated / mixed). These were associated with cauldrons of wisdom, and the variegated cauldron contained "chantings of lore" and numerous displays "out of the great seas of poetry."²⁸

Right: Cliffs overlooking the ocean in the Arran Islands



Vessels of Inspiration.

In Irish and Welsh sources, a great deal of symbolism demonstrates the association between cauldrons and the flow of wisdom or inspiration.

One of the most famous is the medieval Welsh story of *Gwion Bach*, in which the magician Cerridwen brews a magical elixir of prophetic knowledge for her son. The drops fall instead on a young boy tending the fire, who thereby acquires the gifts of poetry, prophesy and shapeshifting.²⁸ In his new poetic incarnation as *Taliesin* (“Shining Brow”) he proclaims to have obtained *awen* (“poetic inspiration”) from the cauldron of Cerridwen.

The Welsh word *awen* is cognate with Old Irish *ai/auí*; both mean “breath / wind” – in a word, “inspiration.”²⁹ The same concept may also lie behind a description of an Otherworldly cauldron in the medieval Welsh poem *Preiddau Annwn* (“The Spoils of Annwn”). In this tale, King Arthur and his retinue travel to the Otherworld to obtain a magical cauldron from the Chief of Annwn. The cauldron would not boil food for a coward and the fire underneath it was kindled by the breath of nine maidens. It appears to have had some connection with the ocean, for it was also said to be “dark about its edge with pearl.”³⁰

The most evocative medieval text associated with vessels of wisdom is an untitled Irish manuscript referred to as *The Caldron of Poesy*. It contains information associated with the training of the medieval Irish *filid* (“seers”) a respected class of poets. The poem describes three cauldrons associated with divine inspiration. The poem describes three cauldrons associated with divine wisdom and spiritual progress which were located inside the body.³¹ The three are: *Coire Goriath* (the “Cauldron of Warming”), *Coire Érmae* (the “Cauldron of Motion”), and *Coire Sois* (the “Cauldron of Excellent Knowledge”). These cauldrons were said to be the source of poetic art and every type of knowledge.³²

The first cauldron, *Coire Goiriath*, is given to the poet from the divine, from “the mysteries of the elements.” The first cauldron *Coire Goriath* is given to the poet from the divine from “the mysteries of the elements,” and could be used to compose poetry.³³



Above: Interior of Gundestrup Cauldron, depicting deities and mythological scenes.

From the second cauldron, *Coire Ermae*, flowed “an estuary of knowledge.” It was known for its ability to “sing” and pour forth streams of poetic knowledge and lore. It was referred to as a “noble brew in which is brewed the basis of all knowledge.”³⁴

The third cauldron, *Coire Sois*, was associated with the laws by which “every art is set out,” and by following these traditional precedents the poet would experience an increase in prosperity (receiving patronage for his art). Divine gifts entered this cauldron associated with poets and seers.³⁵

Coire Goiriath was born in a person in an upright position; *Coire Ermae* in a tilted position; and *Coire Sois* in an inverted position, symbolizing the flow of divine knowledge from it. *Coire Érmae* was said to change position according to the amount of knowledge possessed by the person. This change could take place as a result of an experience of extreme joy or sorrow, which then converts the cauldron into *Coire Sois*, The Cauldron of Knowledge. Four types of sorrow could turn the vessel: longing, grief, jealousy, and separation from the Divine.³⁶ The four types of joy were sexual longing; safety and freedom from care; joy from the study of poetry; and the arrival of *imbas* (“wisdom”) “which accumulates in the nine hazels of Segais in the realms of the sid and is sent upstream along the surface of the Boyne.”³⁷

The Cauldron of Great Knowledge was associated with the use of “dark” (mystical) speech,

the achievement of deep understanding, and the refinement of the senses. It was described as a “noble vessel” whose power was steadfast and everlasting, and from whom the rivers of wisdom poured forth to those who were divinely inspired.

In Celtic tradition, bodies of water were deeply and metaphorically associated with creation and destruction, healing, and transformation, and the acquisition and manifestation of divine wisdom and poetic skill. The well of wisdom was believed to be the source of these powers. Sites where the water bubbled to the surface of the earth (a well, spring or river source) were locations where the inhabitants of this world might gain access to the powers of the Otherworld. The attributes of the waters flowed into the realms of humankind, through the streams and rivers of the inner and outer landscape. They had an intensified power where they congregated in whirlpools or rushed over the edge of the earth in waterfalls and cascades. The attainment of divine wisdom was a serious pursuit and spiritual calling, associated with sacred vessels or cauldrons from which both water and wisdom poured to those who sought them, in spiritual and symbolic quests to the sacred Otherworld realms.

The waters of divinity and knowledge flowed from the very places that physical water sprang forth. The waters of the Celtic world inspired poets, healers, visitors, and locals – and still do so to this very day. ❖

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No One is an Enemy to Water

MY JOURNEY
WITH

Ochun

The beautiful Orisa Ochun originates as the divine spirit of the Ochun river in southwest Nigeria. At Her essence, She is the Goddess of Fresh Water. Her attributes and powers go beyond this, She is the Orisa of sex, sensuality and attraction; and rules creativity, art, and beauty. Called the Mother of Civilization, Her healing powers are legendary and She is the Patroness of beauty, peace and pleasure. The source of Her power, Her *ashé*, derives from fresh water and all that flows with it.

There is a Yoruba saying, “No one is the enemy of water.” Fresh water is the life blood of our planet, pumped and renewed through an ocean heart, charged and energized through rain, delivered and dispersed through the arteries and capillaries of rivers, creeks and streams. Many of Ochun’s sacred tales describe how things become unworkable and chaotic in Ochun’s absence. Without Her presence, nothing can grow or thrive, no one can work together or get along, everything falls slowly apart. Like fresh water, Ochun’s presence makes all things possible, makes life possible.

Ochun’s magick will always revolve around water. Her rituals, Her charms, Her lore and powers almost always include water as a component or prime agent, with rivers and creeks being the preferred form. My own relationship with Ochun began when, after doing extensive reading on the Orisas and their sacred tales (*patakis*), I happened to take a walk along the Haw River late one afternoon. It was hot, and the water was low, tumbling over big rocks in its wide bed. I stood on the bridge, watching the water flowing towards me, dark and rough. I turned and saw it flowing away from me, sunlit and smooth. I could suddenly feel the cool breath of shady green water right below me. I felt Her presence, a great loving wave of compassion and awareness. Tears sprang to my eyes, and my skin prickled. I had been Pagan for a few years at that point. I had done extensive study, I was constantly inspired to learn more, and I was trying to create an ongoing spiritual practice. But I had never felt this.

I began going to the river more often, searching out different creeks and streams near home. It’s traditional to pour offerings of honey into the river, and I started bringing honey and other sweets every week to offer up to Her. Walking by the river, sitting by its banks, singing to Her and giving Her gifts are ways of thanking Her for all the gifts she bestows upon us

every day. It also creates intimacy over time. Ochun is the Goddess of Intimacy, and over time I became so much more intimately aware of the landscape I was moving through. I saw those rivers and the woods and fields around them season after season, year after year. I walked there at all times of day and night, in all kinds of weather, and I saw all kinds of birds and animals. I watched their character and size change with time and rainfall. And I felt Her presence, whether I was happy or worried or mad, whether I brought Her something extravagant and decadent or simple. She was always there, always present, always kind and loving and immanent in every eddy and rill, in all the grasses and flowers along the banks, in the darting birds and the whine of insects. She is the Goddess of Love, and pouring honey into the river (always taste it first, and let Her see you do it), I fell in love with Her.

This is the mystery of Ochun, that of an embodied spirituality, the “soul of nature that gives life to the Universe.” As water moves through a landscape and animates everything that lives, Ochun’s *ashé* radiates through everything, through us all. Becoming aware of Her, honoring and praising Her, brought me to truly see, experience and know the Divine in everything that was around me. I was able to see the profound depth of sacredness and meaning in everything and everyone around me. My spirituality was no longer theoretical; it was lived in every minute of breathing, moving, loving, seeing the world around me, witnessing the changing seasons and moods of the natural world. I was able to truly understand the intricate connections between us all. Like the water that is the basis of all life, Ochun revealed to me all the ways this connection to Source can nourish the soul. She moves us through the pleasures of the body, of the senses, of enjoyment and creativity. Each piece of information we learn about Her serves to bring us into greater intimacy with Her, helping us connect the dots. And all those dots lead to revealing to us the beauty, the power and the tender fragility of life on this Earth.

OCHUN IS THE PATRONESS OF
BEAUTY, PEACE, AND PLEASURE.
BUT THE SOURCE OF HER POWER
DERIVES FROM FRESH WATER.

Clean, Clear and Heal

Much of Ochun's water magicks involve cleansing and purifying. There are literally hundreds of recipes and formulas for washes, baths, and other mojos for protection and purification, but for me, some of my most powerful encounters with Ochun occurred in the shower. The solitude and quiet, and the immersion in moving water, offer a great opportunity for clearing out negative energy and letting go of stress, and in that quiet place, I feel my connection to Her very deeply. This is the time when a lot of personal gnosis comes through. Traditionally, psychic hygiene is very important to Ochun, and it is very important to clear ourselves of negative energies and emotions as often as possible. Consciously letting go of anger, sorrow and frustration, letting go of spinning thoughts and restlessness in the shower is incredibly effective. I'll scrub my skin with a little sea salt, or rub rosemary sprigs through my hair as the water washes through. Sometimes I sing for Her; I'll let the spray hit the back of my neck, and feel my worries wash away, or I'll turn to get it right in the center of my chest as I try to let go of sorrow and pain. The water carries it all away.

A spray bottle of distilled water with a drop of cologne can be charged with intent in Her name, to provide a pop of clarity and comfort anywhere. I take the bottle to work – charged with a prayer to grant me peace, and a tiny rose quartz at the bottom – and just give myself, spritz when I get stressed or overwhelmed. The drop of cologne is not too much scent either. If I can't take a break to clear my head, I will do this and it always helps me center and ground myself.

One spell that "came to me" one day in meditation, when my lover and I had spent many days quarreling and I felt ungrounded and sad, was to make the bed with clean sheets and place a tray or cutting board on the bed. Then place on the tray a bowl of water with one flower floating on top. I prefer roses for this because they have such a long association with love and romance. The water draws in and holds any residual resentment or negativity, and freshens the room with the intent of love, connection and reconciliation. Dump the water out before bed, and feel the way the atmosphere lightens up.

The Power to Conduct

Water has its own native power of conductivity. It can carry heavy loads, electric current, force. It can also carry the subtle energies of numinous. There is a reason why psychic ability and awareness, dreams, intuition, emotion, all manner of things that operate beyond strict rationality, are associated with water. This makes water an excellent ally in magickal workings, because it can conduct and amplify subtle messages and impressions we may receive, and the intentions, prayers and wishes we send out. Water can be used for scrying, for divination, to define the borders of a magickal circle and provide a place of repose for spiritual entities during ceremony. We can send messages to Ochun, written on paper which is thrown into the river. It is also ere that we feed Her, pouring Her offerings of honey and sweets into the water itself, to give honor and express gratitude for all Her many blessings. This way we send out the energy of our love and devotion to Her.

In Afro-diasporic traditions, the spirits, deities and ancestors are fed directly with food and drink, the light of candles, and the presence of their tools and other attributives. Like water in the desert, the life force we offer up in *ebbo* (offerings made to the Orisas) gives life to our connection to Ochun; it strengthens the bond between us so that we can hear Her voice more clearly, see Her moving through our lives more clearly, and that is the greatest blessing of all.

All Water is Blessed

Fresh water is a precious resource, one which is now under intense pressure, mostly from human activity and/or climate change. We cannot take the privilege of safe fresh water for granted; for far too many people on earth fresh, abundant water is not something they can count on having. There are many things we can do to help support water systems across the globe and locally. We can support clean water initiatives and wetland protection. We can learn about our own water systems, where our water comes from. We can walk our local streams and creeks. We can participate in stream clean-ups. We can learn how to use water more efficiently in our homes and businesses, and be aware of the ways our activities impacts the landscape and other species. Ochun is the Goddess of intimacy, true intimacy, and learning as much as we can about the landscape we live in is a way of fostering intimacy with Her. Caring for the water that we all share is a loving thing to do for all our fellow species, and what better tribute to the Love Goddess can there be. ♠

Tish Owen is a Woman of Abundance in so many ways. The owner of The Goddess and the Moon, in Nashville and the founder of Tennessee's Pagan Unity Festival is also a published author. Her book, Chasing the Rainbow: Facilitating A Pagan Festival Without Losing Your Mind, is the quintessential guide for festival planners and her newest book Spell It Correctly is equally popular.

Tish is a renowned Tarot reader, TV and radio personality, psychic counselor, daughter, and mother. Her wit, in-depth knowledge of all things "paranormal," and her powerful presence make Tish a formidable woman and a leader in the Tennessee Pagan community. Despite this, she keeps a well-oiled sense of humor about life and her role in the Universe. Our interviewer enjoyed an extended conversation with Tish in the fall of 2012.

HANK EDER: *How would you describe yourself as a Pagan practitioner?*

TISH OWEN: I would describe myself as a cafeteria-style Pagan. I like a lot of things: Sometimes I like straight-up, rather traditional ritual; sometimes I like to be more free form. I do mantras and use a *mala* (Tibetan prayer beads), and sometimes I'm content to just be quiet and see what the Gods have to say to me.

I think more and more it's that way with American Pagans. I think we're all becoming more eclectic, more garden variety, more kitchen witchery, maybe.

At what age did you begin your practice?

I did some spiritual exploring before I settled into the Pagan world, so when I began practicing, I was almost forty. But from an early age I always was interested in things that were a bit "beyond." My paternal grandmother lived with us when I was a child and she was psychic. She had a personal shrine, complete with a statue of the Blessed Mother, her rosary and her candles. It absolutely was an altar, although she didn't call it that.



Tish Owen

A Woman of Abundance

I could say to her, "I know this, I saw this," and she'd say something wonderful. (She'd also remind me that not everybody could do that). But I also had experiences that were less than pleasant, sometimes I would see an energy around people that scared me, and now I know it was the energy of something less than ethical that the person was doing. So yes, it's always been there. It's kind of ebbed and flowed over the years.

Who were some of your mentors and inspirations?

One of the first things I ever read was Shirley MacLaine. I thought, "I know that. I do that." Shakti Gawain was probably the second thing I read. Those two put me on a course with spirituality, and then I started reading Starhawk and Scott Cunningham and Isaac Bonewits. Those were the people I was looking at, reading, and trying to learn things from.

You are a reader and a counselor, both of which are associated with the Element of Water. How long have you known that you were a Water person?

Oh, my, it all started when I was about six, the year my grandmother died. I know it was then because it was our first family vacation. We had never taken a vacation before, because she lived with us and she was in a wheelchair. Back then there were not accommodations for people in wheelchairs. So after she passed, we went to Florida.

I'm from Tennessee, so I had never seen the ocean before. So we drove to Jacksonville, Florida and my father drove right out onto the beach where I saw the ocean for the first time.

I can't adequately describe what that felt like: I thought my head was going to pop off; I thought my arms and legs were going to fly off; I thought my heart was going to burst out of my chest. The ocean was the most amazing, incredible, unbelievable thing I had ever witnessed in my life. I was only six, and I got out of the car and walked right into the ocean. My mother was yelling at me about not going in too deep, and I just ignored her.

It was electricity. It was just incredible. And I still feel that way. Every time I see the ocean, I still feel that way. So for me, there's an amazing connection with the Mother. All I have to do is step into it. I don't have to do anything, just step into it. It's the best. It's the bomb!

Are there specific ways that your affinity to Water relates to your beliefs and practice?

I would say "yes" because Water, the Element, is associated with emotion. It's associated with love. It's associated with the Cup in the Tarot, which happens to be my favorite suit in the deck. I think it's because I believe almost everything in the Universe is fueled by emotion, and water is associated with emotion. It's the flow, it's the ebb, and we are definitely affected by it.



The author Isaac Asimov once said the reason we have a bloodstream is that we're carrying our own little ocean around inside of us, because once we all left the ocean, we still needed our link to it.

When did you first begin reading Tarot for others? Professionally, I mean? Have you had any memorable experiences you'd like to share?

I've been reading for twenty years, so I've seen it all. Once, a guy came in and sat down. I did a reading for him, and afterwards he said to me, "I was going to go home and kill myself. I'd already planned it." He had written a letter and laid out all his plans. He told me, "I came by and saw this place and decided to come in."

I can't remember what I said to him, but I do know that he said, "I'm going to go home and not do that." It just absolutely blew my mind that because of whatever it was I said to him, he decided not to commit suicide.

That certainly gives you a reason to get up in the morning.

That was my single most gratifying experience — that I had actually helped somebody not die. So yes, I'd say there are a lot of Aha moments in doing what I do. I help people. I feel that they walk out of my space feeling more hopeful, feeling better, feeling like they can make some changes and do some things to make the world a better place, or at least to improve their lives and live more happily. I think that probably is what gets me up every morning.

So would you say you've found your dharma, and that you're doing exactly what you would choose to do?

I would say I've found my dharma. I'm writing, and I really enjoy that! My newest book that's coming out is a murder mystery book with an occult twist in that my protagonist sees dead people, but she's a Catholic girl, from a Catholic family. I dreamt this story. I sat down and started writing it, and I was about halfway through when I said to myself, "Hey, wait a minute. What the hell am I writing?"

Tell me about your best-known book, Chasing the Rainbow.

Chasing the Rainbow is meant to help Pagans who want to do festivals, Pagan Pride days, and that sort of thing. National Pagan Pride recommends my book as the handbook for running your Pagan Pride event.

Let's talk about the Pagan Unity Festival. You're the founder of the festival. How did you begin that task?

Well, I was crazy [laughs]. A couple of different covens got together, did some things, and had some fun – it was great. I thought it would be great to have a Pagan Festival here like they have in other parts of the world. Hmm. And basically, nobody told me, “You can't do it,” so I found a place to have it, out in the woods, and people came. Next thing I know, I've been doing it for fifteen years!

We have a great time, we really do. The staff works really hard, and still we have a great time. So if we work as hard as we do and still have a great time, imagine the people that come – we have people who come back every year!

What advice would you give to someone looking to organize a Pagan festival?

Go to a lot of festivals – as a volunteer, not just a participant – and see how it's done. Take notes. Then you'll learn how hard the work really is. Unless you're willing to work yourself into the ground, worry yourself to death over money, and deal with people who make you crazy, you don't want to do it. So it takes a special person to want to do it. Yeah, a masochist [laughs.]

Speaking of crazy projects, when did you open up [your bookstore] Goddess and the Moon? Does running a store put you in the spotlight?

We opened in 1991. Yes, of course it puts me out there. I've done all kinds of media outreach: print, radio, television. The reason these opportunities come to me is because I have a shop; people know the shop is here, which also gets me involved in all kinds of community issues.

We had a flood here in 2010, and we did a lot of fundraising for people that FEMA wouldn't give any money, or the insurance wouldn't pay off. Since most of the private aid came through Christian churches, there was certainly need. We did a garage sale, and lots of people just brought stuff – clothes and shoes and food. We have one room that's our healing room, and that was just packed with blue jeans and cans of soup.

Speaking of disasters; in these uncertain times, do you have any recommendations for people to be able to calm their fears and find a center of balance?

Gosh, dare I say it? Yes. People need to understand that we are all God, that we have a little drop of God in all of us. We're all connected to each other. We can do great things, we can make change, and we can bring a sense of calm and balance to the planet. But I think there's so much craziness because people have forgotten that. They've forgotten who they really are; they've given up their power.

We must take our power back. That doesn't mean with sticks and clubs and guns. It means we simply bring our power back to where it needs to be.

I'm seeing a lot of people now who are starting to wake up psychically. I think that's part of what's going on. It's scary if you just wake up one day and start knowing things before they happen. If you'd never done it before and you didn't know anybody to talk to about it, it would scare you stupid, wouldn't it?

As I'm seeing a lot of those things happening, with people coming in saying, “I'm dreaming things that are really happening, and I knew this was going to happen before it did.” And they say, “I think I'm crazy. I think I'm losing my mind now.” I say, “Here sit down, let me talk to you. Let me tell you a story.” I think those of us who practice all need to remember that we can do things, and put our hands out to help the next person.

We much take our power back; I'm seeing a lot of people who are starting to wake up psychically now, and we who practice all need to remember to put our hands out to help the next person.

Is there a simple technique you would recommend for people to find their balance and inner guidance?

I'm going to go with meditation. Sitting in a room, maybe with some music for about fifteen minutes, dumping all the stuff, so you can just sit and be “hmmmmmmmmmm.” That's probably the greatest way in the world to start. It's very difficult, though, because our brains are how many billions of megabytes of information? If not that way, then guided meditation is a good place to start. If there's a place you can go where they have classes where there's meditation, that's a wonderful thing. Yoga is good. Anything that allows you to detach your brain from your body in the physical – that's a good thing.

There are so many ways that knowledge seekers can embark on journeys to Pagan ways. What would you tell someone who was just getting started to just get right to the heart of the matter?

I would tell them to listen to Spirit. Furthermore, I would tell them that if someone said anything that made them uncomfortable or they thought was stupid, to just discount them. As with any religion, there's a possibility for abuse in it.

It used to be a whole lot worse. It used to be, "How we do it is a big secret and you can't tell anybody, and you have to do it exactly our way. Oh, and by the way, I want you to come over and wash my windows on Saturday." I think we're seeing less of that. But it's always been "I have secrets and occult and amazing knowledge. It's life-altering, and I'll offer it to you, but there's a price."

So would you say that people learn to listen to what the Universe itself is telling them, that they have the ability to find out for themselves what works for them?

Yes, they have to listen. But that's about trust, isn't it? We don't trust ourselves.

So would you say that seeking outside of ourselves for answers is what leads people into traps?

There's a hook in that question. Because to seek outside yourself is to say you don't have it within. But if you say you have all the answers, you really don't. But the answers are inside you, because you're God/dess.

But of course, there *are* teachers and leaders who can be helpful; I'm thinking, for example, of Kahlil Gibran. Reading his work makes me feel very truly that I am God. And other authors are like this, too; definitely Starhawk, and one of my dearest friends Dorothy Morrison. (I love all her stuff.) Oh, and Ann Moura — all her stuff is very grounded and down to Earth, and there's not a lot of froufrou in it.

A true teacher, I believe, says, "We're Adepts, but

that has to do with what we have learned, and you, too, can be this." You see, I'd say to newcomers "the only reason I'm further along the path than you is because I've studied more, read more, worked more. I've got more years into it than you do, but, okay, you can do this, too. This and greater shall ye be. (Laughs.)"

I'm getting goosebumps now. So then, by empowering one's self, there's no separation between the individual and whatever part of the Universe we call Goddess?



Exactly! By the way, this leads to the fact that I don't think you can be a really good Witch unless you're empowered. It's hard to do spells for yourself unless you really believe you deserve them. You need to understand that you deserve good things. I know this isn't going to win me any friends — but I'm sick of Pagans who say, "I'm sick, I'm broke, I'm depressed, I can't go." And I say, "Really? Don't you

do Magick? Then why in the hell are you broke?"

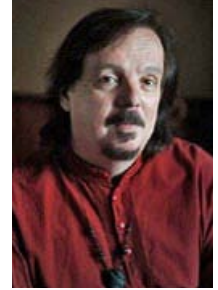
It couldn't be stated any simpler than that. So, magick is another word for manifestation and abundance?

It absolutely is. So why can't we get that? Magick is taking what you need and what you want and altering your reality to bring them to you. That's what it is.

This is probably the hardest question of all: Is there anything you'd like to add to what we've talked about?

Only that we should strive every day to keep the God in us present. That we should look at the other person and know they are God/dess, as well. ♠

Find out what Tish Owen is up to these days by checking out the website of her Nashville store, The Goddess and the Moon, at <http://www.goddessandthemoon.com/about.html>.



Old World Witchcraft by Raven Grimassi

Water: the Wellspring of Magic

Creating magical liquids is a venerable occult art.

In many ancient myths and legends, water appears in tales of magic and mystery.

One theme is the enchanted lake, which is depicted as an entry way into another world. In various tales, an enchanted island exists, hidden out in the sea or upon a lake. This mystical theme is often connected to a figure known as the Lady of Lake. Although most people associate such tales with Celtic or northern European cultures, it actually appears in southern European culture as well. One example is Lake Nemi, which lies not far from Rome.

Lake Nemi was once the site of the Temple of Diana, from which the imagery of the Full Moon on the water caused the lake to be called Diana's mirror. Associated with a stream that flowed into the lake was a water nymph known as Egeria. Her legend is connected to kingship (in this case, King Numa), and relationships of this nature appear in Arthurian tales that include the Lady of the Lake. Of particular interest is one known as Morgan Le Fay, which in old Breton was a name meaning "water-nymph" (as opposed to the common translation as The Morning Faery). For the purpose of this article, however, we must not forget the Lady of the Lake known as Nimue, (who was also a witch and shapeshifter in ancient legend). In an ancient tale, she imprisons Merlin in a tree, which speaks of her connection to the Greenwood Magic. As a Witch, Nimue's magic is tied to the Old Magic of the Green Realm, which incorporates the traditional plants of Witchcraft.

In the practice of Old World Witchcraft, the extraction of liquid from plants is indeed an ancient art. In this context, potions and elixirs are created. The oldest word in Western culture that is translated as "Witch" is the ancient Greek word, *Pharmaceute* (pronounced far-mah-koo-tay). This is, of course, the root word for Pharmaceutical and Pharmacist (for countless centuries, medicines were created from the

substances of various plants). In this light, the ancient Witch can be regarded as an herbalist; but there was also a magical tradition associated with Witches and their plants.

When I was a young boy, my mother shared a folk magic custom with me that came from her native Italy. It involved soaking roses in a bowl of water overnight. The favored time was on the eve of the Summer Solstice. In the morning, just after dawn, the practice was to splash your face with the water. This was performed in the belief that this special water restored youthfulness and vitality. It was a blessing from the longest day of the year.

In lore, myth, and legend, water appears as a mystical element. In many religious and spiritual traditions, water represents the force of purification and cleansing. In this regard, from a magical perspective, water absorbs and extracts. Some practices involve immersing an individual in water, from which they arise in a new birth. This signifies that the former nature is removed, and the person takes on a pure and untainted nature.

The Spirit of the Rose

In the spiritual tradition of Old World Witchcraft, water is connected to the creation of elixirs, potions, and brews (as well as ointments). These once heavily guarded secrets of Witchcraft were kept silent in a formal sense, reflected in the term *sub rosa* (under the rose). Later in this article, you will meet a spirit known as She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose (an entity that aids humans in working with plant spirits of the Greenwood Realm).

Roses are commonly associated with love and with the goddess Venus. Through an interesting connection, Witches were once linked to Venus in the making of love potions. Before Venus was the goddess of love, she was a deity of cultivated gardens. Herbs were part of gardening, and in this regard, the Witch is joined with Venus through various herbs used to create love potions (a charge made against Witches in olden times). In some forms of traditional Witchcraft, she is known as Dame Venus.

The fluidic nature of potions is conjoined with the element of water. This element carries, moves, and flows. In this way it serves to convey the magical charge of a potion or brew. From a metaphysical perspective, water is magnetic. This allows it to hold a charge for a relatively long time. One effective method of charging water is to use your breath, which contains moisture in it. A simple way is to charge some rose water for general well-being (I've included the recipe for making rose water at the end of this section along with other recipes).

Place an open container of rose water in front of you. Prepare yourself for generating

energy by individually recalling pleasant memories that made you feel the following: peaceful, loved, happy, and joyful. With each emotion, focus on the past moment attached to the feeling, then speak the associated key word out loud towards the water. This will acclimate the water to receive the charge. Next, take in a deep breath and exhale across the surface of the water (while again recalling the emotion). This will pass the charge into the water where it will be held.

From a metaphysical perspective water is magnetic; this element carries, moves, and flows, conveying the magical charge of a potion or a brew.

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You can sprinkle this water in any setting, or include it in casting a ritual circle. Rose water is also perfect for blessings, particularly rites such as a handfasting or the birth of a newborn. Sprinkling rose water on those in attendance can help create an atmosphere of love. Rose water is also appropriate at funerals, and can serve as a way of blessing and releasing someone who is crossing over into the next world. Flowers can be anointed with the water, as can the casket, or the body can be anointed in advance of cremation.

How to make rose water

Place one cup of firmly packed rose petals into a bowl. Next, pour two cups of boiled water over the petals. Cover the bowl and allow it to sit until it becomes cool. Afterwards, using a cheesecloth, strain and squeeze out the excess liquid in the petals. Pour the strained liquid into a glass bottle, refrigerate, and use as desired. Make a new batch every two weeks (discarding the previous brew.)

A deeper connection to the fluid essence of the rose is associated with its plant spirit. In Old World Witchcraft, a tincture is made for empowering potions and brews in general. The tincture is created by first evoking the spirit of the rose and requesting that she pass her favor into the fluid. This requires that you hold a red rose in your left hand. With the rose in hand, place the tincture in front of you. Hold the rose over the tincture and say these words:

*"Rhondonna, spirit of the rose -
Come to the Old Ways Witch who hails,
I call you to pass through the verdant veils.
I reach out from the time-honored power,
By seed, sprout, budded-leaf, and flower"*

Next, join your hands together to form a triangle. Do this by placing the palms of both hands facing downward. Touch the tips of your thumbs together along with the tips of your index fingers. This formation will make a triangular shape appear, which is called the triangle of manifestation.

View the container of the rose tincture through the opening between your hands, and then say these words:

"Rhondonna, Spirit of the Rose, look with favor upon my spell, and pass your virtue into this tincture, imbuing it with your power, your nature, and your magic"

Pause for a moment, and then continue with these words:

Be this tincture empowered with the energy to [name what you desire, bearing in mind that it must relate to the symbolism and meaning of the rose].

As with all evocations of spirits, release Rhondonna, giving thanks and bidding her to withdraw back into her Greenwood Realm. Finish by giving an offering to her of your choice.

How to make rose petal tincture

Fill a pint container with rose petals. Dump the petals out on to your work area and slice them in half with a knife. Place the petals in a clean canning jar. Next, fill the jar with vodka, making sure that all the petals are covered. Seal the jar tightly and place it inside a cupboard. It is important to shake the contents at least once a day. In four-to-six weeks the tincture will be ready. Strain it and bottle it for use.

Raising the Sacred

Working with spirits is only one aspect of Old World Witchcraft. Another is reflected in the tales of the Witch known as Medea, who was also described as a priestess of Hecate. In this role, we can identify a religious connotation associated with ancient Witchcraft. In this light, a deeper connection beyond spirits can be established — one with a religious element. Here we turn to the rose in a third aspect, that of a rose liqueur. This serves as a "sacramental" liquid to enhance rapport with deity. The classic concept of "sacred" indicated something set apart for the service or worship of a deity. The use of rose liqueur can immerse you in this time-honored tradition.

How to make a sacred rose liqueur.

Begin by placing the container of liqueur on your altar. Using rose petals lay out a triangle design that encloses the liqueur in its center. Light a red candle and floral incense to enhance the environment of enchantment. To activate the liqueur place the palms of both hands over the container, and then speak these words:

I devote this rose liqueur exclusively to the service of the Goddess, and I hold it to be sacred to her rites. May it bestow the mystical virtue of the Goddess to all whose lips it touches, and through it may all come to know that within them which is of the eternal gods.

Keep the container in a special bag to honor its sacredness, and never use it for mundane purposes.

Rose Liqueur (one quart recipe)

- 1 cup rose petals
- 1 cup damiana leaves
- 1 cup of powdered chocolate
- 3 cups vodka
- Honey (to taste)

Start with a quart size jar. Fill it two-thirds with equal parts of rose petals, damiana, and chocolate. Pour the vodka over the mixture in the jar. Seal it with a non-reactive lid (such as stainless steel). Place the jar in a sunny window for four weeks, shaking the contents daily. When ready, strain the contents through cheesecloth, and then add heated honey to taste (stir in thoroughly). Conclude by bottling the rose liqueur for later personal use.

Drinking it all in

In Old World Witchcraft there is nothing more mystical than a process tied to liquid chlorophyll, which is the green blood of plants. You are most likely aware of the concept of blood as an oath-binding, a joining in kinship, or an intimate offering of a portion of one's life-force. Something of this nature appears as well in the Witchery of the Old Ways. It is an exchange of the red and green blood, the joining of humankind with plant-kind. While the idea of using blood is controversial, our bodies naturally bleed in various ways, and this is one in which we can honor its power and sacredness.

The oldest form of this covenant of life essence appears in the way of the Thorn Path, which is part of the foundational roots of Old World Witchery. It begins by dedicating a rose bush to the spirit called She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose. The bush must be in bloom. After the dedication, prepare a shot glass by filling it about a quarter full with liquid chlorophyll. Fill another glass with clean water, about half full. Set both next to the rose bush, and then pick a thorn from the plant. This is the threshold moment of entering into a relationship with this spirit who is the intermediary between the Greenwood Realm and the world of humankind.

This blood covenant binds humankind with plant-kind, and establishes She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose as an ally. Through her, you can meet and create relationships with other plant spirits. The blood covenant begins with an exchange of the red blood for the green blood.

This is accomplished through pricking a finger and squeezing three drops of blood into a small container of water. The mixture is then poured out on the base of the rose bush. The covenant is completed by drinking a sip of liquid chlorophyll (the green blood) in front of the rose bush. As you perform each of these actions separately, say these words of joining:

*Blood to blood, make kindred One,
Beneath the moon, beneath the sun.
Plant and flesh, spirit and soul,
Bound to ways that make us whole.*

At this stage, take a rose in your left hand and gently inhale its scent. This is the spirit of She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose passing into your being. Sense this and perform it with great reverence. You are now ready for the next phase, which is to commune with She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose. In doing so, you can create the necessary rapport needed to work successfully within the Green Realm. In Old World Witchcraft, we do not rely upon "visualization" as part of the process. We use, instead, an organic method.

Begin by closing your eyes and holding the rose in your hand. Gently touch the rose to your face and other exposed areas of skin. Feel this in the sense that She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose is touching you. Then, with eyes still closed, use your fingers to lightly touch the rose. Do this with the feeling that you are touching the flesh of She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose.

Finish by sitting with the rose cupped in your left hand, and remain receptive to communication, thoughts, and feelings. Do not try to make that happen or try to rush things. Remain peaceful and wait to see what comes to you. When you are ready to finish, kiss the rose and lay it in front of the rose bush. Thank She of the Thorn-Blooded Rose for being present (no matter how the experience was for you). The more you work with this technique, the more it can produce interesting results. ♠

Raven Grimassi is a practitioner of Old World Witchcraft; the author of seventeen books on Witchcraft, Wicca, and Magic; and the co-directing Elder of the Ash, Birch, and Willow tradition. His most recent book is Old World Witchcraft, (Weiser, 2011). Visit his website at www.ravengrimassi.net/

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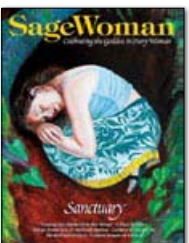
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Connections by Archer

The Ocean

In the beginning, there was the Sea.

Every summer, my family drove eight hours — with four kids crammed in the back seat — to the ocean. How sweet that first breath of salt air was to me. The car could barely stop before I fell out and ran straight down to the beach. Suddenly there it was, stopping me in my tracks: the ocean, roaring and beautiful in the lowering sun. The steady roar of the waves drowned out thought and time and memory — the last eight hours, the last year, my whole life. Freed, light, irresistibly pulled, I'd strip down to my underwear and race in, shivering with fear and exhilaration as the waves hit and lifted me off my feet. The ocean, my ocean, swept me away, pulled me from myself and into its turbulent embrace, overwhelming me and connecting me to universe all at once.

We — like all life on this planet — come from the sea, and we carry it in us still, in the salty waters of our wombs, blood, sweat, and tears. The pull of this ancient relationship has been explored in myth and legend worldwide. There, the ocean is seen as both generous and dangerous, a primordial chaos which gives birth to creation and, on occasion, overwhelms it in world-destroying floods. It contains the unknown and powerful — monsters and gods — and even holds the secret of eternal life. It embodies the unpredictable, uncontrollable nature of existence, always in transition, rich with both possibility and threat. Accordingly, the ocean's inhabitants are serpentine and shifting, its surfaces and shores unpredictable boundaries between known and unknown. We can sail the ocean or swim in it, reap its riches or explore its depths, but in the end our only real option — as with fate, as with nature, as with life — is to surrender to its power.



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In the Beginning

In the beginning, according to both tradition and science, the ocean gives birth to everything. In myth, life begins when a single thing arises from the featureless waters. In India (as in Greek Orphic writings) the original waters give birth to an egg.¹ Or they hold up a sleeping Vishnu who dreams creation into existence.² In ancient Sumeria and Egypt, a mountain arises from the ever-existing sea to start the world.³ In Hindu myth, this original mountain rises from a cosmic sea of milk. With it as axis, a great serpent as churning rope, and gods and demons pulling the serpent's ends, the ocean is worked to extract all the glories and dangers of worldly life: poison and cures, poverty and riches, and finally *amrita*, the elixir of immortal life.⁴ In other traditions, the oceanic waters that give rise to all this are sometimes personified as a pair of original parents: Greek Okeanos and Tethys, Babylonian Apsu and Tiamat, or as a single being — the primordial Greek goddess Thalassa, or the bi-gendered Egyptian Nu.⁵

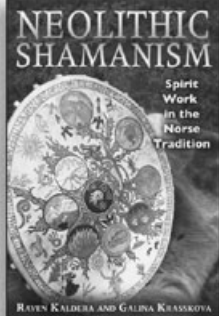
Even after the emergence of the manifest world, the waters of birth remain: In Israel, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, they are understood

to be both above and below the world, encasing it completely. In Egypt, Nu's waters bubble up as the Nile, just as Okeanos's waters give birth to both under- and aboveground rivers.⁶

Ever present, yet lurking on the margins of known life, ocean waters are home to gods who retain mysterious powers to shape-shift and tell the future, and have as their companions primordial monsters such as the Greek Ketea or the Norse Kraken.⁷ In Babylonian myth, it is an oceanic parent herself who becomes the monster and the mother of monsters. After the successful generation of life from Apsu and Tiamat, the other gods rise against them. As a result of the battle, Tiamat is divided into upper and lower waters by the god Marduk. The Canaanite god Baal makes the cosmos habitable by killing Yam, the primal sea, symbol of chaos.⁸ In a similar tale, he subdues the sea serpent Lotan⁹ as Leviathan is subdued by Yahweh (Psalm 74: 12-14). In Genesis, Yahweh is shown separating the original waters as Marduk had before him (Genesis 1:6).

The threat of sea monsters echoes the threat of the waters themselves. Given the great floods of Mesopotamian and Hebrew myth, is it any wonder that the faithful of the New Testament are promised that in the New World "there will be no sea"? (Revelations 21:1) Divided and pushed into the margins, the ocean acts as the defining limit of the world, a force of order: Okeanos, encircling the world, provides the paths and resting places of the sun, moon and stars.¹⁰

Yet this containment is always conditional. The Norse sea serpent Jormungandr girds the earth with his tail in his mouth symbolically holding it together. But when he lets the tail go, the world ends.¹¹ The ocean likewise rises and overwhelms the world periodically, proving that it is beyond even the gods' control.



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The Goddess

Against the unpredictability and danger of the ocean's vast reaches stands the experience we may have at its shore, traditionally the site of many rituals and shrines set up in the face of the humbling vastness of the ocean, the margin of the great beyond.¹² There the ceaseless rhythm of surf and tide reassure us that the heartbeat of time is constantly renewed, and that life will go on. In fact, it's said that the motion of the surf on the shore is reminiscent of the act of lovemaking, as are the salty odors and enveloping moisture of the sea.¹³ These echoes, and the memory of the oceanic womb riding in our cells, make the shore a place of renewal and rebirth, a place where we can feel a return to our origin or even a sense of refuge from life's problems — diminished as they are next to the infinite and powerful sea.

That refuge has frequently been offered by maternal sea goddesses. Mother Tethys raises Hera and her sisters in secret when they are threatened by their father Cronos.¹⁴ The sea goddess Thetis rescues Zeus from an Olympian coup, takes in the malformed god Hephaestus when Hera flings him down from Olympus, and shelters the outcast god Dionysos when he is violently expelled from Lycurgus's kingdom.¹⁵ Aphrodite returns to the sea near her birthplace of Paphos after being caught in an illicit liaison with Ares.¹⁶ In ancient Greece, the statues of both Athena and Hera were washed and renewed in the sea every year; and right up into the late sixteenth century, men and women in Naples were said to bath nude at the Summer Solstice.¹⁷ On the shore is found renewal and cleansing, while beneath the waves lies a haven from storms above.

Aphrodite herself captures the generous, alluring and maternal aspects of the ocean. Ocean-born (from Uranus's sperm flung on the waves and/or from the older sea deity Thalassa), this goddess of salty sex and moist fertility combines elements of earlier Near Eastern goddesses associated with the star Venus, the moon, and the sea.¹⁸ This combination of celestial and oceanic traits is found again in the Hellenic version of Isis, who is identified with the star Sirius, depicted as crowned with the moon, and named, in Alexandria, as the patroness of sailors.¹⁹ Carrying these symbols into a new context, the Virgin Mary is named

"Star of the Sea," identified with the lunar crescent, and looked to for maternal love and help with fertility — the latest in a long line of ocean goddesses who offer protection from the storms of life.²⁰

The sense of the ocean as a protective force extended to those special children who were abandoned to her waves. Perseus and Dionysos (Zeus's children by mortal women) were both said to have been thrown to the waves in a chest, only to wash up on shore and be raised by foster parents to an illustrious future of heroism or godhood.²¹ Moses, Romulus and Remus, Polynesian god Maui, and Norse hero Siegfried were also consigned to the waters and grew to great things, perhaps as a result of this baptismal ordeal which carried them far from mundane life and consigned them to the maternal care of the wider forces of nature.²²

The Sea Road

Placing oneself in the ocean's hands is obviously never without risk. Yet many gods are said to come from "over the sea,"²³ and humans long to see for themselves what lies beyond that horizon. While the ocean is full of unknown dangers, it is also the only road to places that represent, in contrast, all our dreams of permanence and pleasure — paradisiacal lands that hold the fruits of immortality. On the Greek isle of the Hesperides, the golden apples of immortality are guarded by a dragon and tended by three divine maidens.²⁴ The Garden of the Gods described in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh is a paradise with jeweled trees, bordered by the waters of death, which in turn lead to the isle where the two survivors of the great flood live, keepers of the secret of eternal youth.²⁵ In Celtic lore, there are several "isles of joy", and "isles of women" where the rivers run with mead and the trees are full of fruit, which, when eaten, seems to halt the passage of time.²⁶ In Polynesian myth, the land of the dead is also the home of waters granting eternal life.²⁷

Immortality and death, divine beauties and monsters — all are to be found in the ocean's immensity. Yet while its distant lands might offer pleasure and even eternal life, these benefits seem elusive. The sea-farer Gilgamesh finds the secret of youth only to lose it to a serpent.²⁸ The Celtic hero Bran is lured to a island of beautiful, otherworldly women where life seems perfect.

But when he and his crew attempt to go home, they find hundreds of years have passed, and the first man to set foot on land turns to ash. Exiles from their own time and place, they end up sailing the seas forever.²⁹ The Arthurian isle of Avalon, elaborated from such tales, is a refuge — but also a kind of limbo for the wounded Arthur. Attended by nine maidens, he sleeps, until his promised, but ever-receding, return.³⁰

Perhaps what these islands offer is not even what we really want. During his sea wanderings in search of home, Odysseus is enchanted by two island goddesses: Circe, who eventually helps him, and Calypso, who holds him captive, and, tellingly, cannot persuade him to stay, even with the offer of eternal life.³¹ In the end it seems the desire of every hero who crosses the sea is to return — with or without what he came for — to his starting point. Poems as divergent as Homer's *Odyssey* and "The Wanderer" (from the Norse tradition) deal with both the call of the sea and the far deeper ache to go home again.

In the End

Yet it is over the ocean waves that the soul must journey in death to a new and unknown land, to its final home. Egyptian images show the souls of the dead travelling on a barge — the route to the Egyptian afterworld is a river, as in Greece, but those rivers are upwellings of the primal sea.³² In Celtic lore, the blessed dead cross the waters to the Fortunate Isles in the west — comparable to the Greek isle of Elysium.³³ In Polynesia, canoe burials may be related to an earlier tradition of setting the funeral canoes out to sea to reach the land of the dead. In the Tongan tradition, souls travelled in an invisible canoe over the waves to their final destination.³⁴

Willing or unwilling, homebodies or wanderers, we all must make that voyage in the end, surrendering to our fate. The mythic power of the sea has been an apt symbol of that fate, and of the tenuous nature of any form of order or control we might wish to impose on our lives. Standing before the ocean, we are forced to acknowledge the expansive, expressive, contradictory, unknowable nature of the universe — and of ourselves. For we are ocean born, and its immensity and potential are our birthright. With an ocean — of water, of stars, of the unknown

itself — surrounding us, we are truly "bounded by the boundless."³⁵ For the soul that yearns to go beyond, the ocean represents an ultimate, but also an infinitely receding, limit. Infinity is our home. In it, we will always be at the mercy of vast forces, but if we recognize that we are one with them, then we will always be free.

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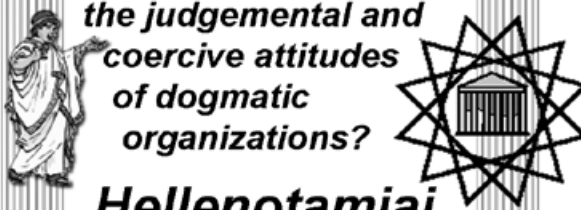
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Looking for Trouble by Hecate Demetersdatter

The Century of Water

A personal practice that honors water is a good beginning.

Aachiko from the Musicians Guild rose. "It seems to me that this decision is both strategic and spiritual. We have a lot of differences in this city. We come from different ancestors, different cultural traditions, different values, different religions —"

"Water is my religion!" Cress shouted, interrupting her. "Water is my politics and water is my strategy."

Several people applauded, but Salal glared at him. "Interrupting is a form of bullying, Cress. Wait your turn."

The Speaker raised her hand, calling for silence, and bent her ear to the Salmon mask.

"Friend Salmon says, 'Learn from water. Water is malleable, water is gentle, but drops of water wear away stone, and everything it touches is shaped by its passing.'"

— *Starhawk, The Fifth Sacred Thing*



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The 21st Century is the Century of Water. Future wars will be — regardless of whether our armies blame them upon religion, or information, or sex — about water. Access to water; control of water; profit from water. The right to use water for these crops, and not those. Just before Enron went bankrupt, having overestimated the profit to be had from commodifying bandwidth, it was buying up water rights across the globe, planning to commodify water. Since then, global corporations have continued to buy up water rights, land above aquifers, and rights to rivers. Along with tax cuts that have left local water systems defunct and given the impact of fracking upon water supplies, it's not difficult to imagine a future in which Enron or Bechtel controls access to water. Well, we're Witches. We should do something about that. What?

Derrick Jensen says: "we've been victims of a campaign of systematic misdirection. Consumer culture and the capitalist mindset have taught us to substitute acts of personal consumption (or enlightenment) for organized political resistance. *An Inconvenient Truth* helped raise consciousness about global warming. But did you notice that all of the solutions presented had to do with personal consumption — changing light bulbs, inflating tires, driving half as much — and had nothing to do with shifting power away from corporations, or stopping the growth economy that is destroying the planet?"

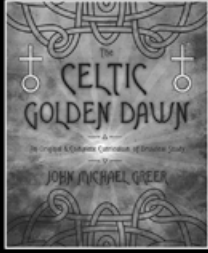
And he's not wrong. Yet, one thing we can do, as Witches, is to pay attention to how we use water. Do we save bath water to use on our herb beds? Do we wait until the dishwasher is full? Do we xeriscape whenever possible? A personal practice that honors Water is a good beginning.

When I sit at my altar, I begin with, "Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, come be with me. I'm your daughter."

For most Witches and other Pagans, the Element of Water is key. Water, for us, symbolizes not only the "sacred waters that are Her blood," but also the flow of emotions, intuition, and insight that aid and affect our magical workings. Water is, as well, an element of change. Water can rush through and destroy old structures, and water can slowly drip until it wears a new pathway. Water can dissolve the hard minerals, of tradition and water can move silently, underground, for miles before it springs forth and gurgles something new upon the Earth. Water cleanses us, and water makes our herbs and sacred trees grow. We pour water from our goblets onto sacred ground, and we sprinkle salt water from rosemary branches to purify our circles.

For most of us, the Element of Water is key. Water, for us, symbolizes not only the "sacred waters that are Her blood," but also the flow of emotions, intuition, and insight that aid and effect our magical workings. Water is, as well, an element of change.


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The Everyday Witch's Book of Shadows

Another important part of our magical/political practice is to get involved in local politics. Water issues can become national news — see the recent Supreme Court case of Tarrant Regional Water District v. Herrmann, which decided water rights between Texas and Oklahoma — but many water issues are local. Who can dump what into local rivers? Which farmers can draw water from local rivers for their crops? What access will Native Americans and other minority religions have to rivers and other waterways for their rituals (see, e.g., Bear Butte State Park in South Dakota)? How much tax money will go to repairing hundred-year-old water pipes? How will developers pay for the long-term impact that their condos and golf courses impose on the local watershed? These issues are often decided by one or two votes, by a few letters to the town water commission. How many each year come from Pagans, Witches, Heathens and Polytheists?

Pagans can have political and magical impacts on these local decisions. Pagans can run for and win positions on local water boards, commissions, and town planning committees. Pagans can show up and testify at local hearings — hearings that are often attended only by the lobbyists for developers.


Of course, Pagans have been doing water magic for centuries. Going to the river, creek, run, or bay and blessing the waters is certainly the work of most Priestesses and Druids. Taking one leaf from a local plant, gifting the plant with compost and water in return, and charging the leaf with health and protection before floating it upon the water is a time-honored magic. Gathering a bottle of water from a local river, charging it in ritual, and pouring the water back into the river during the waxing Moon is an ancient working.

And then there is the ancient magic of muscles, water, soil, and plants. In "French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France," Richard Goodman tells about the ancient ritual of bringing water to his vegetable garden:

Watering my garden was not easy. It was a complicated, laborious job and a frustrating one. Since my land was away from the town, I had no robinet, no faucet that provided ready water. I did have a stream that flowed near my land, but it ran in a ravine about ten feet below the plot, off to one side. So there was only one way to get the water: by hand. The main device in this process was a thick, fifteen-liter green rubber bucket Jules had loaned me. I simply attached a rope to its handle, tossed it the ten feet or so below into the

stream and then pulled it back up, full. . . . After hauling it back up, I carried the full bucket -- or nearly full, since some water always sloshed out on the way up -- to the garden and watered my plants. . . . Generally, the entire process, including the hauling and the actual watering, took about an hour. By the end of that hour, the bank was slippery from spilled water, and I was exhausted. My back and arms were aching, not only from hauling dead weight, but from the forced angles I had to place my body in to keep the bucket from banging against the side and spilling as it was pulled up. . . . Even though it was difficult and time-consuming, I loved to water my plants. There was something eminently satisfying about giving water to them. I hesitate to use the word spiritual but . . . I loved the pure, colorless liquid, spraying out from my vessel and splashing to the ground, this strange substance that made things grow. It was mysterious to me. And still is.

I think most of us could benefit from a Summer's worth of watering in that way, in order to become true Priestesses and Priests of Water. I think that we need to show up -- in business suits and sporting watery tattoos -- at boring and lifeless meetings of town water commissions. I think that we need to do magic, in the moonlight, along the banks of our rivers and cisterns and rain barrels. Deep magic, dark magic, sex magic, magic meant to spring water from the well-planned courses of those who would make of the Fourth Sacred Thing a commodity. I think that we need to dig up arcane maps of water systems laid down when our ancestors did magic in granges and Masonic brotherhoods, and to strengthen them, purify them, visualize clean water flowing through them. I think that we need to bathe ourselves in river water and town water and rain water and dance into being a connection between the three. I think that we need to bless every glass of ice water, cup of tea, and chalice of wine we drink into the cells of our bodies. I think that we need to become Pagans Protectors of Water.

Are you in? 

HECATE DEMETER is a woman, a Witch, a mother, a grandmother, an eco-feminist, a lawyer, a gardener, a reader, a writer, and a priestess of the Great Mother Earth. See her at <http://hecatedemeter.wordpress.com/about/> or her PaganSquare blog "Looking for Trouble," <http://witchesandpagans.com/Looking-For-Trouble/Blogger/Listings/hecatedemeter.html>.



Beyond the Circle by Ashleen O'Gaea

Cooling Springs

There's no place like the desert to learn to appreciate water.

Water is — well, let's say, *should* be — most sacred among equal Elements for those of us who live in the desert. Now and again we get a few gentle drops of rain, and sometimes a downpour, but nonetheless we're into our second decade of "extreme drought" down here in Southeastern Arizona. You'd never know it the way some of us use it: swimming pools, fountains, lawns even I have a pool, two fountains, and a lawn. Well, sort of a lawn.

Most summers, we put up an above-ground pool. For several years it was one of those with an inflated top ring, but we got tired of mesquite beans and the occasional hawk puncturing it and flooding the yard. This year we're trying one that's supported by a metal frame; these pools are fifteen feet across and about forty-two inches deep. We have little net-and-foam floaty chairs, and it is wonderful to bob about for an hour or so at the end of a hot and busy day. Relaxing. Soothing. Healing. (Not so much cleansing: it's a big enough pool to need chlorine; but the warm shower afterwards, that's cleansing.) We pay quite a high utility bill for this use of precious desert water, but the psychological and emotional rewards seem worth it to us.

We have what we call "the Lady pool" in one corner of our yard, at the West Quarter of our Circle. She's a terra-cotta maiden, pouring water from a pot. We painted her to look like a Celtic goddess, and the pot to look like a Hubble picture of the Universe. "For lo, my love is poured out across the Worlds," as we paraphrase part of the Charge of the Goddess. We love watching hummingbirds drink from the stream of water; there are rocks in the pool so birds and bees can get a drink; and a bull snake or a California king snake wends its way through every once in a while, enjoying their pool as we do ours.



Our lawn is old and tired and gets more shade than it wants, so it's sparse, but it's still nicer than bare dirt under our feet in the Circle. (Dirt here in Arizona tends to be hard and crunchy, full of rocks and a cement-like substance called *kaliche*, usually pronounced *%\$#! kuh-lee-chee.) The previous owners of our house installed a watering system, and we use it for what grass is left. The birds, from doves to hawks, use it (though not at the same time) to take showers. The roots of the Chilean mesquite — that's making more shade than the grass enjoys — appreciates the watering, too. And of course, the tree shelters all kinds of "buddies," including lizards and wasps as well as the birds.

So yes, we use our water for our swimming pool, our fountains, and our lawn. We capitalize that water, because to us, yes, it's Water-with-a-capital-W. It's an Element, dear and vital, and not ours alone. We share it gladly — yes, with a sense of duty, but with a sense of privilege as

well. We cherish the monsoon rains (and collect them in plastic wading pools,) and share that water with the plants, too; we have to put bricks in the pools so the ground squirrels and beetles can get out when they drink too enthusiastically and fall in).

And, of course, we cherish the Winter rains. We get excited (and very wet, running out to take pictures) when the dry wash behind our house fills and runs. We're always ready for rain when we camp, and made joyful when the creeks are running in the Chiricahua (*cheera-cow-uh*) Mountains southeast of Tucson.

I'm originally from western Oregon, where there's a tendency to take water for granted, there being plenty of it. Here in the Sonoran Desert, not so much. In cities, yes, we do take it for granted that when we turn on the tap, out will come something we can safely drink and wash our dishes and clothes in. Maybe that should — maybe that will — change some day; already most of us have water-saving shower heads and water-saving washing machines. But one thing we can always count on — though we should not fail in our gratitude for it — is the Spirit of Water. No matter how scarce the physical resource becomes, the Mother's womb, the source of all Water, her blood, her love, will always be there, in the gentle drops that are the rhythm of her heartbeat, in the downpour that is the fierceness and determination of her caring, in the life-bearing, life-sustaining ocean-pool of unconditional love that floats us between our busy lives.

ASHLEEN O'GAEA is the author of *Family Wicca, Raising Witches, and Celebrating the Seasons of Life*. She and her family live in Arizona. Catch up with her at her website and blog located at www.ashleenogaea.com/



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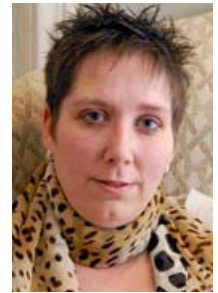
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Wyrd Ways by Galina Krasskova

The Nation of Water

A conversation with Water priestess Nganga Zola

Water is a powerful element. In Norse cosmology, it is one of the two primordial elements (the other being fire) from which all life evolved. In esoteric lore, water is the element of healing, psychism, emotions, and mystery. It is a Power, worthy of veneration, engagement, and respect. It is alive, sentient, and utterly necessary for life.

My primary ancestral ties are with fire rather than water, so, I turned to one of my colleagues, Nganga Zola, an initiated Bantu water priestess for her insights on this element.

Galina: *Nganga Zola, thank you so much for being willing to share your experience. What does it mean to be a water priestess?*

Nganga Zola: It means working in partnership with the *njusu*, the water spirits, and with the ancestors that are closely aligned with them. It means working to bring balance, healing, and to restore respect for their cultus. For me, this also includes an obligation to the ancestors of the *Maafa*, who died during the Middle Passage and who went under the waves. There can be no complete healing for their relatives and descendants in the diaspora or in Africa until they are honored and remembered and embraced by their descendants on both sides of the Atlantic.

Bantu traditions are heavy with ancestor work. It is acknowledged that when there are a lot of ancestors in pain and turmoil, it is difficult for their relatives and descendants among the living. There is a weight on the land on each side of the Atlantic that tells us that until we all work together to heal this and to heal these wounds, to look at them, to engage, we will continue to



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There are many types of water spirits, just as there are many types of water; from the smallest spirits in a thimble of water to the spirit of an ocean.

be lost in the consequences of those wounds. We will be lost until the diaspora deals with its legacy of slavery, and Africa deals with its legacy of colonialism and all of us working together deal with it.

Galina: *When I teach ancestor work to folks of Northern European descent, I often speak about two specific ancestral wounds that must absolutely must be acknowledged, engaged with, and addressed. First, the genocide of our people and indigenous religions caused by the spread of monotheism across Europe. Secondly, what that genocide turned us into: a people that went across the waters and became the destroyer and enslaver of nations. I'm wondering if you would also draw a connection here.*

Nganga Zola: Absolutely! I believe there's a strong link there. This is a family issue. It all needs to be addressed. Any family wound has to be addressed by the descendants, otherwise it's going to create a mess for those descendants. After all, whether you address it or not, that wound is there. Issues like this *have* to be addressed. You simply can't do ancestor work and have African ancestors — and we *all* have African ancestors — and not run into this whole issue: either colonialism, or slavery and the *Maafa*. You can't have Native American ancestors and not run into *that* genocide. You can't have European ancestors and not run into what happened when Europe fell and the obliteration of indigenous cultures and polytheism of Europe — which was also a genocide. This all has to be addressed.

Galina: *You were initiated into the Bantu water tradition, a lineage-based tradition. Why is lineage important?*

Nganga Zola: Lineage is important because that's how the energy of the tradition is transmitted. The contract with the spirits involved goes through the elder to the initiate. Lineage is important because there's great value in eldership and in having respect for the tradition. Both these ancestor and *njusu* spirits are very powerful and if someone is not in a place where they are mentally, spiritually, and emotionally ready to carry the weight of what opens up for them when working with these powers, then that can be very unhealthy and damaging.

These are traditions where it's really up to the spirits. You can't do any work in this tradition unless you have a working relationship with these spirits and these ancestors; if these spirits and ancestors don't want to work with you,

they are not going to work with you. That's just the way it is. If someone wants to work in this tradition, that, call needs to be confirmed with an elder in divination, that a) this person can handle what they are about to given; b) that the timing is appropriate for them to be receiving what they are about to be given; and most importantly c) that the spirits and ancestors want to deal with them.

Galina: *I'm so glad you pointed this out. Humans, despite what we like to think, are not at the top of the spiritual food chain. I mean, it's not all about us, after all, and spirits have the ultimate say over who they work with.*

So, moving on, what are the lessons of water?

Nganga Zola: Memory, flow, balance, finding a level, persistence, adaptability, creativity, sudden change, healing, and ancestral memory.

Galina: *What is the first thing we all need to know about the element of Water?*

Nganga Zola: Water is alive. It is sentient. All water communicates with all other water and all water that has ever been, because it exists in a cycle and water is as old as time. It's memory is as long as time. The ways of water are not the ways of human beings, and its cycles are not those of humanity. So it has a different culture. It has a different wisdom that we could all very much benefit from.

Water is a culture. Water is a nation, a family of spirits that have their own way of being and interrelating with one another, with the other elements, and with the humans that surround them. It is a part, a fundamental part, of who we are: we are primarily comprised of water. We cannot survive without it. We have lived in this interdependent dance with water since we sprang forth from the womb that was the ocean where all life began. We come from the water and return to the water. Our lives are part of the flow of water, and by understanding water — because we're primarily comprised of it — we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and our ancestors. We can become more balanced as human beings, by understanding this part of our own nature and by learning how to treat it with respect.

There are many types of water spirits, just as there are many types of water, from the smallest

spirits that are manifest wherever water is (in a glass, even a thimble full of water) to an ocean, the spirit of an ocean, a river, the spirit of a brook. There are many different variations of water that exist. There's a lot of diversity, just like there is with any nation and culture: the culture of water.

Water will purify and cleanse; water will try to seek a balance; water will try to remain in balance and has many healing and nurturing qualities. But don't forget, water can be a tidal wave; water can be destructive. Water has been done grave disservice by humanity. Many waters around the world are polluted; our oceans are polluted. We take water for granted when it's one of the most precious resources that exist; and we profane it and devalue it on a constant basis. So, we need to be aware of that and also be aware of the debt that we owe to water, which is the medium and element in which life was generated on this planet.

So approach Water with care; approach with respect and be willing to listen to even the smallest spirits because they also have important things to teach us. Humans can be very haughty and proud; approach water with proper respect and care. Water gives a great deal, but you don't wish to anger it.

Galina: *What is the first thing you suggest for someone who wants to work with water?*

Nganga Zola: Well, I'd start with a water altar. This is something that can be done as a lay person. A water altar should have the colors associated with water, maybe a nice cloth, and a big bowl that actually contains water that you keep there. Make sure that water is regularly changed and not allowed to stagnate.

Some things that Water may like are things that are gathered with reverence for this purpose, possibly from a beach or a river bank, like stones. Be sure that you never put on a water altar anything that has been hacked from a reef, or improperly harvested!

Most of all, spend time on the water spirits; honor them, think about them. Meditate and maybe slip a hand into the water. There are many forms of divination that include water. Learn to begin to listen; water can communicate very well if you have the ears to hear. Spend time; ponder it; sit with it and know that water appreciates honesty.

Galina: *What other offerings would you suggest?*

Nganga Zola: It's better if you can take your offerings to one of the larger spirits rather than to the water that you're temporarily holding in a bowl. (As you change out the bowl, by the way, each time you'll notice there might be a different personality contained in that bowl of water, a different spirit or set of spirits).

One of the things I like to do is to go to a local body of water: a pond, lake, river, or to the ocean itself. For your more extensive offerings, identify a local body of water, a river or lake or the ocean if you're nearby. Go to water in its natural state and you can bring it things (make sure they're biodegradable): baked goods, pastries, cookies, fruits to the water directly. They especially like melons, citrus, sugar, and other sweet things. They also like sweet liquors.

Galina: *Thank you, Nganga Zola.*

I would like to emphasize that quality of being, of sentience, of nationhood and culture is something that all the elemental powers share. I respect and honor Water as I do Earth, Ice (which is actually a different tribe from Water) and Air; and have ancestral obligations to Fire.

As an elemental worker, one of the things that's become really clear to me over the past few years is that these Powers need to be approached with courtesy and respect. One of the more mundane ways that one can do this is to find charities or environmental organizations that work to have a beneficial impact on the Earth. I donate regularly to the The Big Sur Land Trust in honor of my deceased mom, but I could just as easily do this as an offering to Water.

Sometimes, I and my House will make pilgrimages to the ocean to honor the ocean deities, and one of the things we'll do is spend an hour or two picking up trash. There are all sorts of things one can do to celebrate and venerate the elemental Powers, it's just a matter of thinking a little bit outside the box. Good luck, folks. ✨

GALINA KRASSKOVA has been Heathen for close to twenty years. She is a shaman, priest, and godatheow of Odin. She's written multiple books including *Northern Tradition for the Solitary Practitioner*. See her blogs at <http://krasskova.weebly.com> and Heathen Heretic at PaganSquare.com



Magick on a Shoestring by Deborah Blake

Going with the Flow

It's easy to connect to this most mercurial of elements.

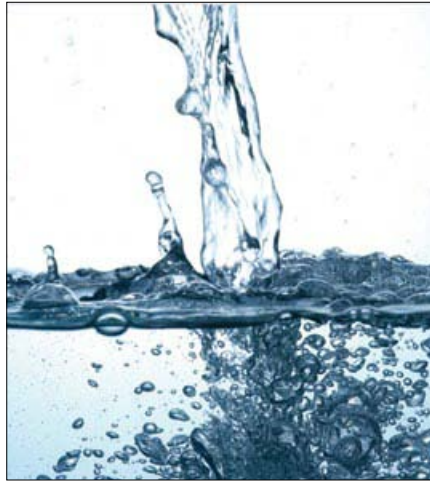
If you read my two last columns (and *of course you did*), you will remember that I started a series that talked about inexpensive and fun ways to create a stronger connection with the four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Last time we focused on Fire; this time around we'll be taking a look at the cool, cleansing element of Water.

Water is everywhere; the most mutable element, it can take the appearance of a liquid, a solid (snow or ice), or even something in between (mist or fog). Connected in most modern witchcraft practices with the West, with twilight, and with the season of autumn, water is also associated with the emotions (which makes sense, since what could be more changeable?), Intuition, fertility, and cleansing. The colors of Water are those you would expect if you looked into a pond or stood by the seashore: blues, blue-green, and gray, with the addition of white in some instances. The zodiac water signs are Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces (the fish).

Water is as easy to come by as turning on the tap, but for magickal uses, some prefer to use water from a more natural source, including wells and springs, ponds and rivers, and the ocean. Or you can always put out a container to catch rainwater, or collect snow if it is winter.

Cleansing & Clearing

The most basic use of Water is as an aid to cleansing or clearing — whether you are talking about yourself, your tools, or even a space (whether living space or a magickal circle.) But doing so isn't quite as simple as stepping into the shower or taking a walk in the rain. Remember that in magick, intent matters. So if you need to clean a crystal, for instance, you don't want to just plunk it in a bowl of water. You're not trying to clear only the surface of gunk, after all, but also the aura or energy of the stone. For that, you need a little more effort.



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Water is everywhere, and it's surprising how many magickal uses it has.

Some witches keep a supply of blessed and consecrated water for use in rituals, which isn't a bad idea. It is simple enough to make: Gather some rainwater, spring water, or whatever you want to use. Tap water will do if you don't have anything else. Place the water on your altar, or out under the Full Moon. (A windowsill will do if you can't leave it outside.) It is nice to use a special container — a pitcher, bowl, or decorated jar — that is saved for only this use. Ask the gods or your spiritual powers/guides to bless the water for magickal use. If you like, sprinkle a little sea salt in it, waft a sage wand over it, or even leave a crystal in the water overnight.

To cleanse a magickal tool, get the most pure water you have available to you or use pre-consecrated magickal water such as that described above. If the tool is something that won't be harmed by water, such as a stone or crystal, then immerse it in a bowl. It can be placed on your altar or in the light of a Full Moon, with the intention of clearing and cleansing it of any negative or unwanted energy.

If the tool can't be placed directly in the water (like an athame, or a wooden wand), you can place a cloth underneath the item and then sprinkle water over it, saying, "Cleanse and clear this magickal tool, and leave it pure of energy and ready for positive work. So mote it be."

If you need to cleanse yourself, place a bowl of water on your altar, close your eyes and focus on the beneficial cleansing properties of the water, and your intent to clear away negativity or bad feelings. Then dip your fingertips into the water and sprinkle a little over your head, dab it onto your third eye (in the middle of your forehead), your eyelids, your lips, your heart, your core (under your belly button), and anywhere else that needs to be purified. Dip your hands one more time and wipe them off on a towel, visualizing your energy field shining brightly.

For a more intense cleaning, you can take a bath (with or without the addition of salt or cleansing herbs or essential oils), a shower, or even go for that walk in the rain. Just remember to focus on your intent to let the water wash away anything you no longer want or need.

The Power of Persistence

Water may seem soft and mild, but it can be a truly powerful force. Consider the ability of water to wear away at things over time. The Grand Canyon, for instance, was slowly created over eons by the flow of water. If you need help in persisting in the face of long odds, you might want to consider doing some Water magick.

Try this simple ritual:

Take a piece of paper and write your goal on it. Focus all your intent on your determination to keep working towards that goal, no matter how long it takes — day after day, one foot after the other. Then place a small pile of sand (salt will also work) in a bowl, and get a small pitcher filled with water. You can even use an eyedropper, if you happen to have one around.

Place the piece of paper with your goal on it underneath the sand or salt, and very slowly, add the water, one small drop at a time. With each drop, say, "Like the water, I will persist. Like the water, I will wear away all that stands between me and my goal." You can specify your goal, such as "between me and achieving the goal of _____ (whatever it is.)"

When the water has washed away enough sand to reveal the paper with your goal on it, say, "So mote it be, and so it is." Repeat whenever you feel like you need the boost.

Connection

One of the aspects of water I love the most is the way it is connected to the rest of the world; the raindrop that falls in my garden might once have lived as a drop of water in the ocean. We are all made of water—adults can be up to sixty percent water, and babies are even more. I like to think that all that water connects us both to the earth and to each other. Every time we drink a glass of water, or take a shower, or stand in the rain, we are also walking in the ocean; the water that flows through my body is just like the water that flows through yours, no matter where we live, what color we are, our sexuality, religious practices, or age. We are all water.

So if you are feeling the need to connect with people or the planet, try this simple meditation:

Place a glass of water where you can reach it. Sit comfortably and take a sip. Close your eyes and feel the water sliding down your throat. Visualize the molecules that make up the water spreading out to nourish the cells of your body until you are glowing with health and vitality. Now visualize the invisible moisture in the air around you; you can't see it, but it is always there. Feel the connection between the water you just swallowed, now a part of your entire body, and the water in the air. Send your awareness out on that moisture, sensing how it connects you to the people around you, the people further away, the rain-filled clouds far above you, and the water flowing deep underground. Spreading your awareness out further, feel the rivers and the fish swimming in them, feel the oceans and all the creatures that call the sea home. Rising up, view the earth from above and see all the places where water is bringing life. Embrace this world and feel yourself a part of it, then slowly come back to awareness of your own body. Open your eyes and take another sip of water. Ah . . .

Flexibility and "Going with the Flow"

For most of us, life can be filled with challenges and difficulties. One of the toughest skills to master is the ability to take life's ups and downs in stride. We all want to handle the tough stuff with grace and dignity, but it can be hard to "go with the flow."

Water can teach us a lot about being flexible. It changes shape and texture depending on the circumstances. A wide river may narrow until it becomes a skinny creek and then expand to become a pond. It can freeze and then thaw, and then turn into tiny, delicate snowflakes (or, if you live in upstate New York and some other places, giant pieces of hail as big as golf balls). It can turn into a fog so thick you can't see through it, or make a lake so smooth and still you can see yourself in it like a mirror. If only we could all be as flexible as water!

When you need to work on your ability to go with the flow of life's circumstances, try this easy spell. All you need is a few glasses or clear containers of different sizes and shapes, and some water. If you can do this outside under a full moon, with the light shining on the water, that's great. Otherwise, just stand in front of your altar, if you have one, or a table.

Start with the water in one container, and hold the container up a before your eyes. See the way the water fits inside the glass. Then pour it carefully into another container, and see it change to fit the shape of its new home. Repeat this a few times, really paying attention to the way the water shifts and changes effortlessly. It loses nothing from the change; it is still the same water.

Hold the water up to the sky and say: *Like the water, I will go with the flow of life. I will change when change is needed, I will shift with grace. I will be flexible and calm. I am the water — I go with the flow.*

If you are outside, you can pour the water on the ground to nourish the soil. Otherwise you can drink it, or even water your plants with it. You're flexible — you'll think of something!

Power Water

You can buy all sorts of fancy waters that will supposedly give you more energy, make you smarter, and turn straw into gold. (Okay, I made up that last one.) The only thing those specialty waters do is magickally teleport your money into someone else's wallet.

Why not create power water of your own? Take a crystal or a few special stones (I particularly like quartz crystals, moonstone, amethyst, or citrine); wash the stones well, and then put them in a container. Add a few sprigs of herbs: peppermint (for prosperity and health) or rosemary (for protection), or any edible flower petals. (Use only organic plants to avoid pesticide residue.)

Now add the purest water you can find. Using your athame, a wand, or a wooden spoon, stir the contents nine times in a clockwise motion, concentrating your intent on the positive energy of the stones and/or herbs/flowers, and having that energy move into the water. Say:

All that is nature is as one. As the gods have formed the rock and the plant, so they have made the water. Let them be joined together for my positive and beneficial use.

Place the container outside in the moonlight or on a moonlit windowsill under the light of the Full Moon. The next morning, strain the water into a clean container. If you used flowers or herbs in it, keep it in the refrigerator. Otherwise, you can leave it on your altar if you like. Whenever you need a boost, take a sip or two of the water, and feel the power that comes from the natural world.

Because water is everywhere, the power of the element of Water is also available to you on a daily basis. It only requires mindfulness and intent on your part to take a simple cup of tea and turn it into magick, or make your evening shower a way to energetically cleanse yourself of the day's stresses. One of my favorite everyday uses for magickal Water is to keep a bowl of water by your front door. Every time you come in from outside, dip your hands in the water, and visualize any negativity you picked up being siphoned off harmlessly into the water. When it gets dirty (and it will), simply replace it with a new bowl. And be sure to say thank you to the power of Water, for helping to keep you safe and your home clear and clean. ♠

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In the Orchard by Jason Mankey

Under the Umbrella

We all speak “Pagan” here, don’t we?

I should have seen it coming way back in the second grade. It was a February morning, the sun was shining brightly, and it was just warm enough to go outside without a heavy coat. I remember looking up at the sky and wondering to myself “why doesn’t anyone worship the Greek gods anymore?” I knew there was something odd about asking that question out loud, so I kept it hidden in my heart. Away from my house I looked up at the sky and grinned at Zeus, *some of us still believe in you.*

Years pass and I’m visiting my local library. Having always been interested in the occult, Sybil Leek’s *Diary of a Witch* captures my eye on a spinner of paperback books. Because my Dad is cool, I pick it up and take it home with me. It’s summer and I don’t pay much attention to it, but when it comes time to return my checked out books to the library, one turns up missing. My parents grow impatient, and in desperation, I use one of the spells in the back of the book designed to help find lost objects. The missing book shows up moments later. Witchcraft works. This frightens me. Triple Goddess indeed, I am just getting ready to start the eighth grade.

A year-and-a-half later and I’m in art class, assigned to construct something out of clay. After a day or two I decide to build a temple dedicated to Aphrodite. As a moody teenager I think this will bring me love. I build an altar in the center of my temple and place little phalluses upon it. The temple is completely lopsided and the columns look more like half-cooked sausages than stately pillars, but shortly thereafter I fall madly in love with a girl named Marcy. She doesn’t return my ardor; I resolve to learn how to construct my spells better.

Modern Paganism isn’t just Eclectic Wicca with a scattering of Druidism anymore; it’s made up of dozens of faith traditions, many of which have moved far beyond the borrowed ritual stylings of the Golden Dawn and Freemasonry.



It’s the summer after my junior year of college. I still pray every night, but I’ve begun to leave the Christianity of my childhood behind. I spot a book called *Celtic Magic* at a St. Louis mall, thinking it might bring me closer to the thinking of Led Zeppelin’s Robert Plant, I buy it. It has no “Stairway to Heaven,” but it leads me to something greater: Wicca, Witchcraft, The Goddess, and The God. It’s almost twenty years later now and I’ve never looked back.

I’m Jason; we might have met before, but most likely not. For the last twelve years or so, I’ve been speaking at Pagan Festivals from coast to coast (and even in Canada a few times, it’s always cool to be able to say “I’m an international speaker”). I meet a lot of people

while on the road, but the number of Pagans who visit festivals is pretty small. Two years ago, I started blogging a little bit; little by little, people discovered my online ramblings. Eventually I started writing for a large multi-faith religious website called Patheos, and after a few months of that, I ended up with my own blog there. That blog, “Raise the Horns,” is now the number one Pagan blog with the word “horn” in the title.

A few years ago I found out that I have a beer allergy. Luckily for me, by the time I realized my problems with hops and brewer’s yeast I had discovered hard cider. At an early age, I marvelled at the appearance of “golden apples” in Greek mythology. Now I marvel at how those same apples turn into my favorite drink this side of water. A lot of American history revolves around apples and hard cider, and when you slice an apple down the middle just right you get a five-pointed star. Sitting next to all of that, “In the Orchard” sounds like a good place to be.

The passions of my childhood remain the passions of my adulthood. I love the history of magick and the occult in the Western world; figuring out how gods like Pan and Demeter were worshipped 2100 years ago brings me closer to them today. I’m also a hardcore rock-and-roll guy and much of my spirituality is filtered through a prism of The Doors, Fairport Convention, Tori Amos, and Iron Maiden.

I’m a huge believer in Pagan community, and that the word “Pagan” has a great deal of real power. If you spend any amount of time online, you’ve probably noticed the ongoing dialogue over what is (and what is not) “Pagan.” Much of the online argument seems to be about limiting the definition of Pagan (and those limits seem to vary from person to person) or even destroying the Pagan Umbrella entirely.

Many of the loudest voices are coming from the Reconstructionist camps (Hellene, Norse, Celtic, etc), especially those camps who adhere to a “hard polytheism” — aka belief in the gods and goddesses as individual entities with agency in the material world. We all have the right to our own opinions, but the fracturing of the umbrella has been painful to watch.

As Pagan practices have exploded over the past thirty years, more diverse ideas are being brought to the table. Modern Paganism isn't just Eclectic Wicca with a scattering of Druidism any more; it's made up of dozens of faith traditions, many of which have moved far beyond the borrowed ritual stylings of the Golden Dawn and Freemasonry. I think this is an exciting development, and I love the seriousness and scholarship that many on the Reconstructionist path engage in.

I think an active and working knowledge of ancient paganisms enhances Modern Paganism. I don't think I'll ever abandon Wicca to work exclusively with a Traditional Hellenic group, but I like participating in those types of rites on occasion. As a full-on Panhead, anything that might get me closer to Him is something that I want to explore. I've celebrated Pan in traditional Greek ritual and found the experience beneficial. It's not going to change what I already do, but it's great that I can explore the many avenues of spiritual experience in Modern Paganism.

I can only imagine the difficulty of being a part of a minority tradition in a minority faith community. If I were an Asatru, I'd get pissed off too, if all the open rituals in my area were only Eclectic Wiccan. I sympathize with those who feel as if they are on the margins and that their traditions and beliefs are being given short shrift in the larger marketplace of Pagan ideas. As a British Traditional Witch, I sometimes feel that way, too (“you mean to tell me you AREN'T calling the God tonight?”), but that doesn't mean I want to separate myself from the more eclectic greater community.

As a polytheist, I have a firm belief in the gods. My relationships with them are the primary reason I'm a Modern Pagan. I often feel as if I have more in common with Evangelical Christians than Atheist Pagans, but that doesn't mean I can't communicate with a nontheist. I share all kinds of things with many Atheist

Pagans: a ritual calendar, a respect for tradition, and a great deal of love for Mother Earth. It is strange that their conception of Mother Earth is more of an awesome blue space rock than a world full of deities and spirits, but we both love it just the same.

In a given year, I circle with literally a thousand people in the course of my Pagan travels. That means I probably connect with over a thousand different conceptions of deity on an annual basis. Just because the guy sitting next to you is a polytheist doesn't mean they have the exact same conception of deity as you do. Ideas on the nature of the divine are practically limitless, and I'm going to guess that most of us have differing opinions on those ideas. If I wanted to worship with people who all thought the same way as me, I'd either convert back to Christianity or close myself off from the rest of Pagandom and worship as a solitary.

The way I see it, ideas that differ from my own aren't threatening, they help to define my own ideas. I have one Shepherd and His name is Pan, and instead of running with the sheep, I've always chosen to run with the goats. Lay all of those ideas about deities on me; if we disagree a little bit, that's what adults do.

I sometimes run into people online who constantly harp on the differences between Pagans and never write about the commonalities. Those are the folks who make it seem as if half of the room is speaking German while the back two corners are speaking Vietnamese and Hindi. That has *never* been my experience. I travel from shore to Pagan shore most years, and I have never encountered a group of Pagans that I was unable to converse with. We read the same blogs and magazines. We are often familiar with the same authors and myths. We celebrate seasonal rituals even though we might conceptualize our reasons for celebration differently.

We all speak a shared language, even if we don't always realize it. That doesn't mean we are all going to agree on every point, but it means that we can have the discussion about those points without reverting to name calling or other such ridiculousness.

The people who constantly seem to put down Big Tent Paganism are usually the Pagans who never leave their little slice of the world. I

go to festivals across the country and talk to all sorts of different groups. When I say that there is more to unite us than divide us, I speak from a degree of experience. I've been there, I've done the work, and I've participated in at least a dozen different kinds of ritual in the last year. (That doesn't mean I like all of them equally, just that I ate all the vegetables on my plate without making too many faces.)

My favorite people on the road are often those that I disagree with the most. I can't stand most types of Druid Rituals, but I love Druid Ritualists! We might not agree on what makes up a good rite, but talking about those differences is often enlightening. Similarly, I've never been much of a Ceremonial Magician, but I just love those OTO people! I can talk about what Uncle Al(eister) Crowley bequeathed to my tradition, too. I'm not a Dianic, but the Goddess has certainly played a role in my life, and I've never felt uncomfortable with a Womyn's-only group being a part of any festival or gathering I've attended.

I'd never argue that as Pagans we should get up every morning and roll the religion dice (“look honey, today I'm a Kermetic Spiritualist Shaman!”) It's great to be proud of our traditions and the journeys we take with our gods (or with the Earth or whatever you find holy), but just because we have different traditions and journeys doesn't mean there's not a “Pagan Center” somewhere out there. It might be hard to see sometimes, but I honestly believe we have more in common than we do in difference. In my humble opinion, instead of always looking for the ways that separate us, maybe we ought to spend a bit more time looking for the things that bring us together. ☞

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The Operative Druid by John Michael Greer

A Mess O'Pagans

We tend to forget an entire era of Pagan history.

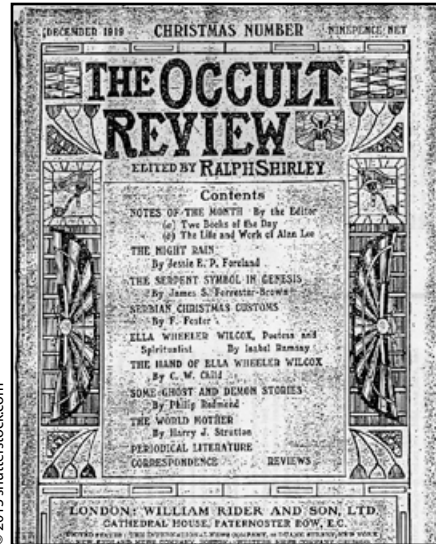
As I suggested in my first column, one problem with much of what passes for Pagan history these days is that it so often fixates on the distant past to the exclusion of anything else. It doesn't help that the potted histories in beginner's books on Paganism still insist that the only thing going on between Ye Olde Days and the late 20th century Pagan revival had to do with 3rd degree grannies off in the New Forest. (Let's not even get into the shopworn debate over whether those grannies existed.)

The point that needs making is that during those same centuries there were other things going on that can definitely be termed as Pagan. It's only fair to admit that these practices weren't the same thing as Pagan spirituality before the ascent of Christianity; it's also true that the practices of Regency and Victorian Pagans don't always look familiar to the Pagan mainstream of today. Real as those differences are, they can be exaggerated, and by so doing, dismissed as irrelevant to modern Pagans.

Three Stages of Paganism?

The most normative form of this dismissal came in the 1970s in the writings of the late Isaac Bonewits, who argued that Pagan history unfolded in three stages. According to his formulation, first came the Paleopagans: people who followed Pagan religions prior to the rise of Christianity. (For most Pagans nowadays, these might as well be called Real Pagans.)

Bonewits described the next group — about whom he had almost nothing good to say — as MesoPagans. He saw them as stuffy, too Christian losers who tried to revive Paganism in the 18th and 19th centuries, and failed. Finally, Bonewits named moderns as Neopagans, who turned their backs on the MesoPagans and all their works, in order to revive the traditions of the Paleopagans — and got it right this time.



I've long wondered how long it will be before one of the Golden Dawn orders realizes that their tradition is steampunk occultism.

It's an interesting model, and very revealing in its idiosyncratic way, but what it really reveals is the state of Pagan politics in the 1970s. During the time during which Bonewits was creating and publicizing this model of Pagan history, he was also trying to reform (and later, replace) the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA), the organization from which he received his original Druid initiation. His writings at the time (which can be found in the big RDNA volume *A Reformed Druid Anthology*) argue that RDNA was stuffy, too Christian, and got its history all wrong, just like the Regency and Victorian Mesopagans had done. Meanwhile, the alternative he proposed — which eventually took shape as Ar nDraiocht Fein (ADF) — was clearly modeled on what he thought Neopaganism ought to look like.

Redefining yesterday's history to supply ammunition for today's quarrels is a common habit, and not just in the Pagan scene. Nor was there anything wrong with Bonewits' quest for a more historically authentic Paganism — or for that matter, with the desire of other RDNA members to keep the traditions they knew and loved, whether or not those measured up to Bonewits' standards. The problem crept in when Bonewits' three-stage schema became a filter through which many came to view the entire history of Pagan spirituality. That's a problem because it gets in the way of understanding our Pagan past — and thus, the prospects of a Pagan future.

A Visit to Paganism's Not-So-Distant Past

Let's pay an imaginary visit to a London park in a bygone September. A small group of people, some in white robes, some in ordinary clothes, have just cast a circle and are about to perform a ritual to celebrate the Autumn Equinox, under the gaze of a midsized mob of baffled onlookers. The leader of the group claims to have received ancient Pagan traditions handed down in secret since ancient times. (He's also a poet with a drug problem and a day job to make ends meet.) Another member of the group is an avant-garde writer and edgy graphic designer who's already made a name for himself in the London scene. The others are likewise artists and urban intellectuals, most of them far to the Left in politics and culture, into new and alternative ideas of all sorts.

The scene I've described above could have happened last fall, or in the 1970s or 1980s, or for that matter in the 1920s. But in point of fact, this particular Autumn Equinox ceremony at Primrose Hill in London actually took place in 1792. The fam-trad Druid and opium addict was Edward Williams, better known these days by his craft name Iolo Morganwg. The cutting-edge graphic artist? William Blake, who described the scene to a friend in a letter years later.

Iolo and his fellow Druids weren't the only Pagans running around London in those days, either. Another member of Blake's circle was Thomas Taylor, whom newspapers of the time called "the Pagan High Priest of England." Taylor was a brilliant scholar of Greek and Latin literature, who translated every surviving scrap of Greek and Roman Pagan religious and philosophical writing into English and got them into circulation in alternative religious circles all over the English-speaking world. He publicly referred to Christianity as a "barbarous superstition" which he hoped would be replaced someday soon by the true religion of humanity: Paganism.

What Taylor meant by Paganism will be instantly recognizable to anybody who knows their way around today's Reconstructionist scene. Taylor was a Greek Pagan Reconstructionist. He drew his philosophy from Iamblichus and Proclus, the last great theoreticians of classical Greek spirituality, and his religious practice from ancient Greek literature. He had altars to the Greek gods, poured them libations of wine, and did most of the other things a devout person would have done in Greece two thousand years earlier, short of sacrificing oxen to Zeus — and I'm pretty sure he would have done that, too, given the chance. Nor was he the only believer in the Greek gods in Regency London; at a time when every well-educated person was fluent in Greek and Latin, and knew classical literature inside and out, Greek Paganism was an obvious alternative to the suffocatingly proper Christianity of the time.

One of These Things is Just Like the Other

The early 19th century British Pagan scene was comprised of two primary groups. One was a set of people who claimed to have inherited secret traditions from Celtic antiquity, performed public rituals on Pagan holy days, and had close connections with the wider avant-garde culture of the time. The other set of people were hard at work reconstructing ancient Pagan spirituality by way of close study of authentic texts. In other words, the Pagan scene of two centuries ago featured roughly the same mix of grandmother stories masking creative innovation, on the one hand, and scholarship guiding thoughtful reconstruction on the other. If this doesn't sound strikingly familiar, dear reader, you don't get out much.

We owe a great debt to these early modern Pagans, though we often don't recognize their influence. For example, many of us grew up reading Kenneth Grahame's durable children's classic *The Wind in the Willows*, and thrilled to the cameo appearance that Pan makes in that story. Not many people know that Grahame was also the author of a volume of essays entitled *Pagan Papers*, in which he proclaimed himself a follower of the Old Religion. This wasn't Gerald Gardner's Old Religion — Gardner was still tending rubber plantations in Sumatra when *Pagan Papers* was published — but it wasn't quite Thomas Taylor's Old Religion, either; it was more or less halfway between them, a Greek Paganism reshaped and enriched by a Romantic sensibility focused on the sacredness of nature.

Pan's appearance in *The Wind in the Willows* is an expression of that same religious vision. Today's Pagans whose first steps toward Pagan spirituality are set in motion by reading that scene in childhood are tapping into a bit of otherwise forgotten Pagan history. (Steampunk fans take note: there was a rich tradition of Victorian and Edwardian Paganism, which ranged from Greek-influenced Romantic nature worship along Grahame's lines, through Druid orders heavily influenced by Welsh and Breton traditions, to Egyptian reconstructionism. I've long wondered how long it will be before one of the current Golden Dawn orders realizes that the Golden Dawn tradition is steampunk occultism, and starts decorating its temples to suit.)

There are any number of lessons that can be drawn from the close family resemblance between today's Pagan scene and its equivalents over the last two centuries, but I'll limit myself to highlighting two of them. The first is that most of the troubles that assail today's Pagan groups are far less unique than we tend to think. Two hundred years ago, Pagans were already dealing with dubious origin stories, confronting the challenges of updating ancient religious practices for modern use, and coping with many of the other issues that Pagans face today.

Karl Marx began one of his essays by pointing out that history repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce. It might help avoid some of the more farcical dimensions of today's Paganism if more of us learned something about the last few centuries of Pagan history, and recognized the parallels with our own time.

The second lesson unfolds from the first. Much of the criticism leveled in recent years at the so-called Mesopagan traditions — that is, Pagan traditions that originated before the Second World War or thereabouts — fixates on the claim that the scholarly resources used as raw material for older Pagan traditions are outdated and disproven. As a blanket generalization, this claim has its problems; Thomas Taylor's translations of Greek Pagan texts, for example, are still considered valid. Still, it's true that a great many of the ideas that guided Pagan traditions founded in earlier times have been discarded by more recent researchers.

The problem with using this distinction as a hard line dividing modern Paganism from its older equivalents is that the same thing is already happening with the scholarly sources that guided the creation of many of today's Pagan traditions. That's long since been true of Wicca, which had to weather the collapse of Margaret Murray's claims about the Pagan nature of medieval witchcraft — claims that were central to Gerald Gardner's original publicity for the Craft. It's increasingly true of the first generation of modern Reconstructionist traditions as well, whose members are discovering to their dismay that the branches of scholarship most relevant to Pagan traditions are lively fields in which change is the only certainty.

Today's Neopaganism will become the Mesopaganism of tomorrow, and our grandchildren will look at the ideas that inspire us today in much the same way that we look at the theories of Margaret Murray and Robert Graves. In that light, it might be more sensible simply to admit that there's been a mess o' Pagans in western culture for several centuries, and that trying to draw rigid boundaries between the past and present may be less useful than it might appear. ♦

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The Crafty Curmudgeon by Fritz Muntean

Delusions of Grandeur

In which abnormal psychology masquerades as magick.

A couple of months ago I attended a workshop by a Pagan advocate for the mentally ill. The presenter began the session by suggesting that we not cast a circle when performing rituals in public space, lest we fail be inclusive of the others nearby — specifically those homeless people who might be living in the park. This was part of an appeal to adjust the boundaries of Pagan practice so as not to exclude those who are, in a word (or two) barking mad.

First, a disclaimer. I am an interested layperson in the field about which I am writing in this essay; my own education is in Religious Studies, rather than in Psychology or Counseling. I'm not without allies in those fields, however: my wife was the head of Children & Family Counseling at a large urban mental health agency before she retired, and among the members of our Pagan social circle we have a psychiatrist, as well as a PhD candidate in Developmental Psychology. I've also tried my best to keep up with the writing in the field — especially with those professionals who provide us with a Pagan perspective.

Secondly: what I have to say in this essay is primarily in regard to those who a) deny their illness and/or b) refuse appropriate treatment. For the many people who live with mental illness but who have acknowledged their condition and sought help, I have nothing but compassion and good-will. But many in our communities actively deny their unbalanced conditions, and furthermore seek a safe haven for their delusions within Paganism.

Being mentally ill causes serious distress; to psychotics perhaps most of all since their delusional state places them in conflict with consensual reality. But of special concern to us as Pagans is the fervor with which the delusional blame their distress on the malign behavior and actions of others.

The most common delusion specific to Pagan psychotics is that they are suffering “psychic attacks” by malign magickal practitioners. To such as these, my own elder, Maggie Carew, offered this advice: “[Although] There is a possibility that the difficulties you’re experiencing have their origins outside of your own head, that’s very, very unlikely.”

But such claims are often presented with such absolute assurance and unwavering authority that the friends and fellow Pagans of such people — especially those with little or no training in abnormally psychology — can be drawn into these dark fantasies.

Thankfully, untreated delusional psychotics are fairly rare in Pagan circles. Far more common are those individuals whose dysfunctions are less acute and obvious, but just as real. Although much less disruptive, the sheer numbers of such folks in our communities is daunting, and finding solutions to the problems they pose can be quite challenging.

Holier-than-thou eating

One red flag of possible emotional dysfunction is a person claiming to require a highly-restrictive diet; a problem that has reached near-epidemic proportions. As somebody at Spring Mysteries Festival this year remarked: “Science tells us that up to 3% of the population suffers from celiac disease — and they *all* seem to be here this weekend!”

Of course there actually *are* people who have genuine dietary restrictions, which can be challenging in group eating occasions like potlucks. (I’m diabetic, for example.) The difference is that those of us with bona fide health issues generally prefer to discreetly take care of our own needs, unlike those who loudly proclaim their uber-specialized requirements and the moral authority to demand complete and precise accommodation of their needs.

There’s often a (usually not acknowledged) moral dimension to these demands. What’s often going on is called “Encratism,” named after a sect of desert monks known for their extreme acts of asceticism who lived near Alexandria in the 2nd century C.E. The term has come to be defined as “The creation of hierarchies of piety, based on the practice of self-denial.” In other words, a person believes that if s/he can abstain from something that others can’t (or won’t) deny themselves, then that entitles him/her to claim greater sanctity than everyone else.

My advice to Pagan event organizers: don’t cave. Offer a reasonable variety of food options in any catered/buffet-style event, provide advance notice to your participants, and leave it at that. Catering (literally) to the constantly-changing fad diets and eating disorders common in today’s culture only ratchets up the volume of one-upmanship among the afflicted. (Dear readers on restrictive diets, I plead with you to reality check yourself: Are you an evangelist for, or pest about, your diet? If the answer is “yes, I talk about my diet at every possible occasion,” you may want to take a long, hard look at what’s going on.)

Is Paganism anti-therapy?

Mental illness is caused by a variety of vectors, including traumatic events, biochemical imbalances, and family/cultural abuse, among others. Medically-based therapists and many (though not all) ministers in mainstream faiths are trained to deal with such suffering to lesser or greater extents. Such training is considerably different from the practices of those who self-identify as practitioners of New Age or Human Potential Movements. Many of the latter frequently state that Pagans cannot benefit from counseling or therapy by mainstream non-Pagan practitioners.

As a result of being told “therapy cannot help you because you are Pagan,” many in our communities are unnecessarily stuck in pain, suffering from unstable mental illness simply because they don’t believe that they have access to professional mental health care.

To complicate things further, many popular Pagan writers have promoted contemporary Paganism (particularly Wicca/Witchcraft) as a cure in-and-of-itself, through the judicious use of modern magick and group “talk” therapy.

Originally, this idea was well received, as group-based methods can meet the needs of many, especially the episodic kind of suffering brought on by grief or temporary conditions. But not everyone’s issues are so simply treated by peer-to-peer counseling.

To complicate matters further, the professional training required for administration of a therapeutic group setting is quite extensive, among other reasons to apply triage. Such training is often omitted in magickal groups, sometimes out of ignorance of its necessity, at other times out of a mistaken insistence on an egalitarian model. Such leaderless groups can create

a “blind leading the blind” form of therapy that can be ineffective at best, and at worst can cause further damage by feeding the delusions of those involved. Persons who are clearly delusional — or whose severe demands for attention place an undue burden on other members of the group — often need to be referred to a more “transformational” therapeutic regimen, where they can come to understand that their problems are being generated by their own beliefs and behavior, and not by the malevolence of others.

There are few genuinely qualified therapists in our communities; all too often those lay leaders who take on the mantle of “healer” without adequate education and experience find themselves overwhelmed both by the sheer size of the problem and by the near total lack of progress they’re able to make in ameliorating the suffering around them. Because they have not learned how to maintain their own boundaries (a primary point in professional psychological education) many would-be “healers” become entangled in the illusions and delusions of the mentally ill Pagans they find in their covens and groups.

Crazy in the Coven

As a result, many Pagan organizations have become homes to unbalanced persons whose psychological healing processes are not being fostered by their participation in the group. Furthermore, due to an unholy combination of neediness and oversized ego, these folks may end up being placed in positions of authority rather than being urged to seek professional help.

Discerning members of such groups, especially those with the professional training and experience to know insanity when they see it, often become frustrated with their fellow Pagans for not seeing the obvious. These knowledgeable people can end up cast in the role of angry Cassandras, or even be forced out of the group entirely.

Many experts in the interface of the fields of religion and psychological therapy believe that the entire concept of “therapeutic magick” is ill-advised. Former *Witches&Pagans* columnist Judy Harrow, in her excellent book *Wiccan Covens* observes that a “coven is not and should not try to be a therapy group,” and that even those with “professional training in clinical psychology should not attempt to do in-depth psychotherapy in the context of a coven.” (p.111).

Wiccan elder M. Macha NightMare is on record as warning us that when “. . . the proportion of ‘Offs’ to ‘Okays’ gets out of balance, and the ‘Offs’ are molly-coddled [and] put into positions of authority and responsibility, [they become] generally encouraged in their obnoxiousness.”

Senior leaders of Pagan traditions as diverse as Reclaiming and the Wiccan Gardnerians are starting to understand and apply these principles. Both have recently stated that Paganism is, essentially, a Mystery Religion. As such, it may not be appropriate for everybody. ☞

A co-founder of California’s NROOGD tradition, FRITZ MUNTEAN holds order and honorary degrees in several other traditions. Fritz edited The Pomegranate: The Journal of Pagan Studies until 2003, and works to promote Pagan scholarship and the academic study of Craft organization and theology. He’s now retired and lives in Vancouver, Canada, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, and has recently taken up knitting. Fritz is a member of ‘Poetry Music and Fire’, a NROOGD-based ritual team that performs locally.



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Phantom Armies of the Night: The Wild Hunt and the Ghostly Processions of the Undead

Claude Lecouteaux, Inner Traditions, 2011

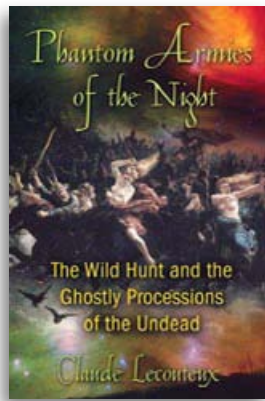
This book is ambitious, thick with information, and impressive. Lecouteaux examines the historical record of Europe in search of every story of ghosts, monsters, supernatural animals, gods and demigods, and the like, on “parade” in the middle of the night. Here’s how he summarizes what he found:

“the Wild Hunt is a band of the dead whose passage over the earth at certain times of the year is accompanied by diverse phenomena. Beyond these elements, all else varies: the makeup of the troop; the appearance of its members; the presence or absence of animals; noise or silence; the existence of a male or female leader who, depending on the country and region, bears different names — the devil, Wode, Mother Hulda, Dame Holle, Percht, Hennequin, and more.” (pg. 2)

Further, Lecouteaux has a thesis: that the stories of wild hunts, phantom armies, processions of the dead, and so on, emerge from pre-Christian ancestor worship and fertility rituals. At various places in the text he says something like this: “It is obvious that what we are dealing with here is the recuperation by the church of beliefs that it was incapable of eradicating and which it twisted to serve didactic and catechetical ends.” (pg. 53). And while one might be skeptical about how this thesis could be proven, Lecouteaux meticulously traces every account to its earliest source. Then he traces the shared details between multiple variations of similar stories in order to isolate the features that are most likely to be ancient survivals. It’s a sound method, although a time-consuming one, and those who are not accustomed to academic writing might find it a little tedious.

Although his thesis is that Wild Hunts have pagan origins, still a lot of the lore of the wild hunt is Christian, and not just because mediaeval Christians grafted their own interpretations upon ancient customs. Rather, as Lecouteaux says, “what is most striking in the history of the Wild Hunt is its variability, its ability to meld with other beliefs, to draw elements from them and to combine them.” (pg. 237) In many instances, the Wild Hunt is composed of dead souls who committed serious sins during life and are now on their way to purgatory, or to hell. Thus, following the evidence, Lecouteaux rejects the popular idea that the leader of the Wild Hunt is the Norse god Odin: “It is possible he [Odin] belongs to the Wild Hunt, but it is impossible to say whether this has been the case since the beginning or if he entered this legend much later” (pg. 213); and Lecouteaux says the evidence supports the latter possibility. But it’s in remarks like this that Lecouteaux reveals his real thesis. He’s actually not trying to uncover our pagan past. His real thesis is about the way that stories transform over time, in accord with people’s needs and their cultural situation. “Phantom Armies of the Night” is a story about a changing story.

But although this is a book with lots of stories, it’s not a book “of” stories. Rather, it’s a book “about” stories, and also about how best to analyze and understand those stories. So it might not make good bedtime reading. In fact, when I got one-third of the way through the book, I found myself skipping ahead to later chapters, and reading the text out



of sequence. But it’s a solid piece of work, and I found myself going back to it regularly, reading and re-reading short snatches every day for the better part of a month.

Lecouteaux is a historian, and he is studying the records of these events as they appear in literary and folkloric sources over a period of more than a thousand years. But Lecouteaux does not try to interpret the events and figures of his subject as aspects of a collective imagination, or as projections or representations of different parts of the psyche. As he says, “I strive to let our witnesses — the texts — speak for themselves so that the reader may form his or her own opinion before becoming acquainted with my deductions.” (pg. 5) I must say, I very much appreciated this.

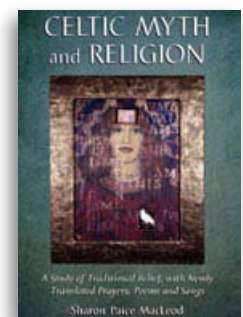
Pagan readers who are looking for practical applications may be interested in Lecouteaux’s discussion of Wild Hunts composed of flesh-and-blood mortals who impersonated the dead at certain times of year. Those who claimed to possess the ability to see the dead, or who claimed to interact with the dead through astral travel (Lecouteaux compares them to the Benandanti), gathered in quasi-secret societies to enact their own Wild Hunts using costumes and masks. Sometimes this re-enactment was sombre and funerary, but it could also be flamboyant, resembling a bacchanalia. Their purpose was to honor the dead, protect themselves from the dead, banish winter and invoke springtime, and sometimes to bestow blessings upon newly married couples. Lecouteaux does not give a lot of attention to these customs: in fact, it’s in only one chapter and in a handful of references in the chapters which follow. And this seemed to me too bad, since it made for some of the most interesting reading in the book.

After finishing it, I felt as if it is the kind of book one likes to have on the shelf for reference and consultation, rather than the kind of book one reads from start to finish in the usual way. Unless, of course, you are an academic, who enjoys reading analytical books for fun (as I do). Still, even if you are not an academic, I’d recommend it to you anyway. And on your way to the bookstore, gather some friends and don your hooded cloaks and your ghost masks. The look on the cashier’s face is sure to be priceless. REVIEW BY BRENDAN MYERS. FIVE BROOMSTICKS 🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️🕯️


Celtic Myth and Religion: A Study of Traditional Belief, with Newly Translated Prayers, Poems and Songs

Sharon Paice MacLeod, MacFarland, 2011

For those of us who follow a modern Celtic spiritual path, one of the challenges of reconstructing such a path is finding out what our Ancestors believed and practiced. As a new religion rises from the ashes of the old, our task is to sift through those ashes and find material that speaks to our needs today. Before this sifting and sorting process can begin, we need to know what our Ancestors practiced in the first place.



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Sharon Paice MacLeod's book, *Celtic Myth and Religion* offers a wealth of information to those who follow such a path. With over ten pages of well-researched references and a large "recommended reading" list, MacLeod has given us more than enough material to work with. Her book includes newly-translated material from the early Celtic period, including works in Gaulish, Old Irish, and Middle Welsh, and folklore from modern Irish, Scottish, Gaelic, Welsh, Cornish, Breton, and Manx sources.

MacLeod is well-qualified to write on Celtic lore. Her resume includes membership on the faculty of the Celtic Institute of North America and training in Celtic Studies at Harvard University. She is a teacher of Celtic belief and mythology and a musician, and she brings a Bard's understanding to her work. Her award-winning album, *The Moors*, is something of an underground classic in the Pagan music scene. The new translations of the Celtic works in the book are her own, as she is also a student of many ancient and modern Celtic languages.

Celtic Myth and Religion is an excellent reference work for both newcomers and the experienced practitioner. The book is divided into three parts. The first, "Celtic Religion and Mythology," lays the foundation for what is to come by covering sources of mystical knowledge, the Otherworld, Celtic Gods and Goddesses, and the ritual year. MacLeod looks at the beginnings of early Celtic religion, and traces its growth through the coming of Christianity and into the folklore of the modern Celtic peoples of the British Isles and Celtic Europe. Of particular interest in this section is the idea that the *filid*, or the bardic poets of Ireland, used poetic inspiration as a means of divination.

The second part, "Celtic Shamanism and Wisdom Traditions," is possibly the most interesting of the three. It explains how many Druidic practices were probably absorbed by the Irish Bardic Schools as Christianity swept across the British Isles. Her conclusion: The Druids were the Shamans of the Celtic world.

In the third part of the book, "Celtic Legends and Folklore," MacLeod traces the wisdom of the Ancestors from ancient times to today. Many scholars have lamented the lack of a surviving Irish creation myth. MacLeod speculates that the book *Lebor Gabala Erenn* (The Taking of Ireland) contains hints of such a myth. As Christianity

spread throughout the British Isles, absorbing the earlier beliefs and forming a hybrid belief system, the original Irish myth of creation was lost forever, but *Lebor Gabala* discusses how various lakes, mountains, rivers and other landscape features were created as five successive races occupied and then conquered Ireland. MacLeod believes that these tales of creation are the remnants of the original myth.

In addition to a detailed historical account of Celtic myth and religion, modern Pagans who read this book will find a wealth of information. Anyone who has ever attempted to research Celtic Gods and Goddesses has been met with a bewildering array of names, places, and tribes. MacLeod helps to clear up all of this confusion in Chapter 6: Irish Gods and Goddesses. In a section from this chapter you will find Gods and Goddesses who don't usually show up on those Internet lists of Celtic deities, including Bodb Derg (Red Raven), a son of the Dagda associated with Newgrange, and Aillenn Fhialchorcra (Aillenn of the Purple Veil), who was allowed by Saint Patrick to marry Aed mac Muiredeach, King of Connaught.

In Chapter 7: The Ritual Year, MacLeod reviews the Quarter Days and the Cross-Quarter Days by revealing the folk customs associated with each high day, focusing on the importance of each of these days to an agricultural people.

The Irish alphabet known as 'ogham' is unique in that each letter of the ogham also represents a tree. In Chapter 13: The Knowledge of Trees, MacLeod provides a chart listing each of the trees or plants associated with the ogham, as well as the cultural context and divinatory meanings of each letter. Finally, the appendices cover the rights of women in early Celtic culture, the Celtic folksong tradition, and a list of recommended books.

Perhaps the only flaw in this book is that in the folklore section it is sometimes difficult to tell whether the folk tale being discussed is an ancient or modern one without relying heavily on the chapter notes. If you're a bibliophile, this isn't a major flaw, as the chapter notes also offer recommendations for further reading.

Celtic Myth and Religion is an excellent reference work that belongs on every erudite Pagan's bookshelf. REVIEW BY CHARLTON HALL.

FIVE BROOMSTICKS 

The Candle and the Crossroads: A Book of Appalachian Conjure and Southern Root Work

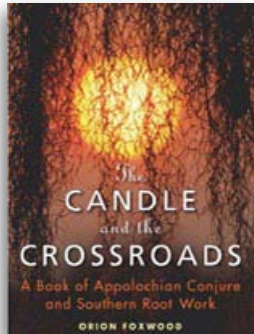
Orion Foxwood, Weiser, 2012

Orion Foxwood of Foxwood Temple of Old Religion in Maryland and a co-founder of Conjure Crossroads and Folk Magic Festival in New Orleans has penned both a guide to and memoir of hoodoo as the practice of doctoring the root and conjuring as a call out to Spirit. Born with the caul or second sight, he takes the notion of the crossroads in hoodoo and expands it into a guiding metaphor.

In conjure, the physical world — including candles, herbs, roots, minerals, oil lamps, powders, and conjure sticks — all are used to reach out and call to the divine. Orion shares his eclectic roots as having taken him through many paths — including spirit sight, signs and wonders, healing, predictive dreaming, blessing, and cursing — and leading back to where it all began. There is no need for visualization here; the nitty-gritty of daily life fuels this practice.

Throughout the whole book, Orion reiterates that “root” is a metaphor for the soul. He discusses treating the “root” soul of a person by discerning unseen forces including divine directive, divine discontent, ancestral paradox, and elemental paradox acting on an individual’s mental, emotional and physical states. A wonderful summary of the nature of conjure and its history is also a large part of this book and includes one of my favorite quotes: “If you are not willing to cry for, be angry for, pray for and ask help of its spirits, then get away from this work.” A truer statement I cannot find about conjure work. Because conjure is an attempt to return power back to marginalized people and grew out of pain and oppression, it is a very practical magic.

The book addresses some basics with regard to different styles of conjure work, including fire, healing work, spiritual cleansing, praying true, and many others. This particular book is not a table of correspondences; rather it takes you



into the very heart of conjure, the energy that drives the work. It is one matter to know that lemon balm or lemon leaves will cut and clear a situation. It is another matter entirely to know when to do it, how to do it, and to whom you should appeal to get the job done.

The most beautiful component is the healing work, where the worker is a conductor and the very breath of the divine takes away or “sin-eats” the disease. The worker draws out the dark forces which are harming the client and breathes it up into the mouth of God until the worker can feel the Spirit take the affliction away. Having watched this process performed by a local practitioner, I have to tell you it is one of the most moving and beautiful parts of ministry. Regardless of your particular niche of alternate spirituality, there will come that moment when you face a devastated human being and the divine uses you to carry that person through a very dark place. This is very sobering and sacred work and I am so grateful that Orion shared some of these very personal techniques.

The most touching part of this book is how deeply personal it is. Reading it feels as if you are sitting under a cypress tree at a picnic table sipping sweet tea and listening to the wisdom of not only Orion, but of his mother and his people. One quote from Orion’s mother, “Claim your spirit or someone or something else will,” really speaks to the core of this work.

The dark rider. Oh, have mercy. When Mr. Foxwood introduces us to him, the psychopomp, the guardian, where the human world and the spirit world meet, it is both historical and prophetic. This is one of those occasions where as a reader, I truly wanted to be at that picnic table, so that I could ask many more questions. A well-written book will introduce you to the lay of the land and compel your mind to follow rabbit trails to wherever they may go. This is one of those books. I am ready for the second because I have follow-up questions.

As a practical how-to book, *The Candle and the Crossroads* is both theoretically and

instructionally very strong. As a glimpse inside Orion Foxwood’s world, I can only say that I am getting to Conjure Con one way or another because this book is amazing and I will be buying it as a gift for many beloved friends. Having said that, I have a notebook of questions, so I am going to get to Conjure Con, sit down with Mr. Foxwood, and begin where he begins. I want to know more about where it all started, what it felt like to meet the dark rider, and a million other questions. The delightful point of this is that I never want that conversation to end. REVIEW BY OLD BEFANA.

FIVE BROOMSTICKS 



Through the Faerie Glass: A Look at the Realm of Unseen and Enchanted Beings and Fairy Tale Rituals: Engage the Dark, Eerie, and Erotic Power of Familiar Stories.

Kenny Klein, Llewellyn, 2010 and 2011

“Faeries are scary, awesome, frightful creatures.” So states

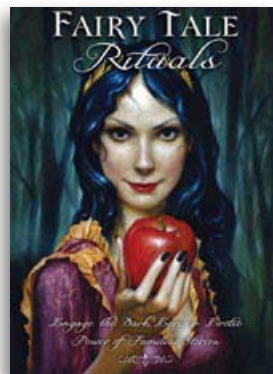
Kenny Klein at the beginning of the first book in this series, and he’s right. Cleansed of the Disney-fied Victorianisms that have plagued our modern perceptions of the fae, the Fair Folk are indeed uncanny. As someone with more than a passing history with, and interest in, faerie tales both old and new, I tore into the first of Klein’s books when it arrived, and was pleased to receive the second one shortly afterward, after I’d had time to read the first.

In a nutshell: Bravo, Mr. Klein.

In a field swamped with glittery nonsense, *Through the Faerie Glass* returns a dark sense of wonder to the fae. Klein’s “faeries are scary” introduction caught my interest. “Hmmm...” I thought to myself, “Maybe *this* one won’t suck.” I was right. Not only is *Faerie Glass* a direct repudiation to all that Tinkerbell crap, it’s also a fairly well-informed exploration of the nature of fae lore and the allure it continues to exercise upon us.

Employing a wry, enjoyable tone, Mr. Klein weaves his way through various subjects: changelings, faerie sexuality, prophecy, music,

fae beasts, and the transformation of faerie stories from cautionary tales of otherworldly hosts to the adorable claptrap to which we've grown accustomed. Skirting – yet recognizing – the pop-culture “fairy” tropes, Klein recounts old songs and legends that paint a very different picture. Rather than employ New Age conception of the folk as cheerful earth-servants, he recounts possible origins for such tales in anthropology and metaphysics. To Mr. Klein, the Folk are an authentic presence, dimly understood but universally perceived. And, as he shows time and again, they must be treated with respect and caution for they can, sometimes without meaning to, be extremely dangerous.



I approached the second book, *Fairy Tale Rituals* with trepidation. It looked, on first glance, like one of those profiteering tomes that turns a good idea into a wretched franchise. Once again, I found myself surprised. Rather than employ the typical “Use this rhyme to call a faerie to clean your room nonsense,” Klein’s rituals are based upon archetypes drawn from faerie tales — specifically, for the most part, Grimm’s faerie tales. While this preference for a certain pair of German brothers limits the scope of Klein’s approach, he explains simply: “When we talk about fairy tales, we always seem to use the word Grimms.” The Grimm brothers, for better and worse, provide a powerful touchstone within American pop culture. Klein doesn’t bother trying to pretend that his rituals are authentic holdovers from ancient times, but works with what Taylor Ellwood calls “pop-culture magic,” using archetypes and their shadows as tools to manifest our will through the path of our imaginations. In the process, he also unlocks details and symbolism that often get lost in translation or buried in chintz and CGI. (Yes, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, I’m looking at you.) Klein’s rhymes, to be honest, are pretty trite, but I get the impression he provided them mostly to fulfill the expected function of “a ritual book,” and the rest of the book works just fine. Klein finds a way to define Wicca that manages to satisfy both the Old World mythologists and the post-Hutton anthropologists; he even

underscores the difference between fairy and Faerie. As I said earlier, bravo.

Taken either separately or together, Klein’s books provide welcome respite from trivial fairy dreck. Neither claiming nor attempting to be comprehensive, they still convey a deeper understanding than most other books of their kind. In my endorsement of Klein’s books, I also want to give credit where credit is due to their publisher, Llewellyn. I often come down hard on that company in my reviews . . . and with good reason; in this case, though, they have — like

Klein himself — lived up to their promise and delivered two books well worth having.
REVIEW BY SATYR.

FOUR BROOMSTICKS 

A Witch’s Guide to Sexuality and Relationships

Tarona Hawkings & Howard Rodway
Mandrake of Oxford, 2011

In *A Witch’s Guide to Sexuality and Relationships*, the bunny did not die. The bunny wrote the book.

Authored by a “doctor of metaphysics” (essentially a B.S. degree that has nothing to do with either bachelors or science), *Witch’s Guide* begins with a series of howlers and then gets even worse. This book, we’re told in the Introduction, “will be the most unusual sex handbook that you have ever read. . . This is not an idle boast; it is a statement of fact.” Really? Well, if by “unusual,” editor Rodway means “half-assed egotistical ramblings punctuated by inaccurate and sometimes dangerous advice,” that is indeed a statement of fact. If he meant something else. . . well, not so much.

“Dr.” Hawkings then ushers in the book with a two-page “pen sketch of what the world of witches and witchcraft is all about” . . . and yes, this is the level of the writing and grammar throughout the book. Amazingly enough, this “sketch” manages to combine historical gaffes (“Wicca . . . is Britain’s own native religion originating far back in time”), discredited mythology (the concept of Wicca as an ancient eco-faith), wishful thinking (“Witches are the

original environmentalists”), mangled cultural references (members of this ancient British creed traditionally employ Romany Tarot cards, Nordic Runes, and the Hindu concepts of reincarnation and karma — inaccurately described as “the law of cause and effect”), and potentially hazardous misconceptions (“A coven is ruled by a High Priestess and her word is law. . . for she is regarded as the earthly embodiment of the Goddess.”) Concluding with generalized nonsense about how witches conduct their sex lives, Hawkings invokes “some excellent books. . . about witches and their craft” — none of which involve names like Gardiner, Bonewits, Hutton, Graves, Starhawk or even Buckland. Adler is referenced, but she’d be appalled to be “credited” with such gibberish.

And this is all within the text’s first five pages.

I cannot do justice within these few hundred words to the cavalcade of pernicious, generalized tripe that follows for the next 190 pages. The book’s primary sins include, but are not limited to . . .

- Atrocious writing, grammar, editing and proofreading throughout.
- A complete lack of organization or consistency beyond an endless stream of anecdotes. Not even the infrequently presented rituals remain consistent — they vary in format and content from chapter to chapter, with no rhyme, reason, reference, cultural background, or even explanation as to why such rites should be productive, much less what ends they should achieve.
- A one-page bibliography that does not include a single reputable book about Tantra, sex magic, human sexuality, herbal medicine, or relationship skills. . . but cites three novels by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.
- A presentation that essentially amounts to: “I got this call from this person, and they looked like this, and reminded me of this, and here’s a bit of movie trivia that I wanted to throw in, and so like there’s this sexual thingie (oooo, how shocking!), and I think it’s kinda like this, but I really won’t substantiate that with actual research (‘cause that’d be boring), but because I’m a sex witch and I know all about this stuff I’ll throw in some unsubstantiated and probably fake statistics to make it look

official, but then I did this, and they did this, and now I'll go on to the next chapter."

• Those "chapters" range between one and seven pages in length... because of course that's going to offer plenty of information about subjects like infantilism, anal intercourse, sexual yoga, and pedophilia. The longest chapter, incidentally, involves 11 pages about "reading" a person's sexuality from the shape of that person's hands. These chapters have no logical flow between subjects; the one-and-a-half-page section on sex yoga is followed by a section about fantasies, another about self-pleasure, and then "senior sex" (for all those "oldies"), "geopathic stress," and herbalism...

... which brings me to the reason for the Zero Broomsticks rating.

This supposed "witch's guide" isn't just trite, self-focused and superficial. It doesn't simply ignore same-sex relationships (or, to be honest, relationship skills period) aside from a few titters about guy-on-guy "bisexuality" and men who want to be "reborn" as women. (Did you know, by the way, that homosexuals may be people who were the opposite sex in a previous life? Not all of them, of course, but maybe quite a few. So says our author.) It doesn't just skip from anecdote to anecdote to anecdote while offering half-assed advice about complicated and sometimes traumatic topics.

It's that said advice is usually wrong, typically insensitive, and sometimes dangerous.

The danger's most obvious in the constant references to herbs and foodstuffs — often for things like weight loss, erection problems, masturbation reduction, and the expulsion of parasites — typically without dosages, cautions or instructions. Eventually, there's a section titled "The Responsible Use of Herbs"... 125 pages into the book, and after several suggestions about using herbs. Said section runs less than two pages in length, and boils down to: Don't use the following herbs (referring to several toxic herbs that have been traditionally associated with sexual witchcraft), but grow yourself a nice herb garden! Hawkins advises her readers to employ fennel and fenugreek (which changes hormonal balances) in order to help men grow breasts, recommends the diarrheac chickweed for weight loss, and advocates ginseng (which accelerates heart rates) to aid erections. None of these suggestions involve dosage amounts, and several of them (like the combination of ginger with cardamon to "produce an erection") don't even tell you how to employ those substances, simply that you should.

Kill the bunny. Kill it with fire.

I pity "Doctor" Hawkins' so-called "patients." I feel sorry for the people who regard her "psychic readings" and "past-life regression treatment" as anything more than wish-fulfillment. I cringe at the thought that anyone could read this hodgepodge of self-promotion and sketchy advice and actually take it seriously. And I want to hurl this book at the publisher's head for presenting such rubbish as a "guide" to anything other than how not to write a sex witchcraft book — much less for expecting readers to pay... um, an unspecified amount (there's no price given)... for clueless and potentially dangerous trash. REVIEW BY CEDAR BLAKE.

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Short Takes on Books & More

The Wizard's Tarot

by Corrine Kenner, illustrated by John J. Blumen, Llewellyn, 2011, 4/5 Broomsticks.

First off, I just gotta say that I absolutely LOVE this deck! The artwork is beyond gorgeous, and the symbolism is rich and complex. The concept is both original and brilliant — each of the Major Arcana is presented in the metaphor of a Professor in a School of Wizardry called “Mandrake Academy.” Of course, as Headmaster of my own Grey School of Wizardry, I found this approach irresistible!

All the traditional symbolism of classic Tarot decks is here, but John Blumen’s stunning illustrations add depth and meaning, with themes carried through in multiple cards. For instance, each Arcana “Professor” is accompanied by his or her particular familiar creature; appropriate astrological and Hebrew glyphs are imbedded in the designs; and books and other objects in the “classroom” backgrounds are all highly significant. The Minor Arcana are as beautifully illustrated as the Major, and every card is a masterpiece I would love to frame and hang on my wall.

The accompanying book reads like a textbook for a school of Wizardry, introducing the Reader (in both senses of the word) as a student (the Initiate) to the various departments and disciplines offered in this Academy, in a graduated sequence of studies. In the sections for each card, various elements of magick and wizardry are introduced. There are Tables of Correspondence, pantheons of Gods and Goddesses, runic alphabets, practical magick, exercises, ritual, Alchemy, herbalism, the Wheel of the Year, spells, astrological Zodiac charts, the Four Elements, and, of course, numerous spreads for different types of readings.

One of the cleverest aspects of this deck is that the characters representing the four Elemental Suits are depicted as the respective Elementals: Salamanders (Fire), Undines (Water), Sylphs (Air), and Gnomes (Earth). This provides a whole new dimension I have never before seen in a Tarot deck. In most Tarot decks, the Elemental associations don’t really show up in the imagery, and readers can use their own interpretations. But in the Wizard’s Tarot, these attributions are explicit, which poses a challenge. Since Sylphs are Faeries, whose antipathy to iron is notorious, it seems incongruous to see them here wielding Swords. Likewise, wooden Wands (here shown as torches) in the hands of Salamanders would shortly be burned to ash! So doing readings with this wonderful deck will be an interesting challenge for me personally. I look forward to it! REVIEW BY OBERON ZELL.

The Empowerment Manual: a Guide for Collaborative Groups. Starhawk, New Society, 2011, 4/5 Broomsticks

There are many spilled words regarding our current era. You can read Derrick Jensen, Joanna Macy, Bill McKibben or Rob Hopkins for varying levels of despair, frustration or action. Actually, there seems to be little in the way of action: gathered groups of well-intentioned folk have shared many an organic potluck meal and not a single

chicken tractor has been filled with feathered livestock. Many people seem to be mindful of the changing times but organizing a collective of the willing too often defies our abilities — even in the face of the rising storm.

Starhawk has been on the forefront of change as long as we have known her, and I admit I was grateful to see *The Empowerment Manual: a Guide for Collaborative Groups*. She is both a thinker and a do-er — an increasingly rare combination. When I first met her in 2001, she had just come from the G8 and was still raw and tired.

“Empowerment” is a word that has almost lost all meaning but in Starhawk’s capable and experienced hands, we are treated to a discussion of the definitions of power in Chapter 4. She keeps looping the discussion back to the importance of collaborative groups and the language is clear. “Power-over” (coercive power) is familiar to all of us from centuries lived within hierarchical systems. “Power-from-within” is the phrase used to illuminate empowerment; it is creative power, moral courage, spiritual power. It is a force that flows from a deep connection to the generative power of the planet, of the Universe. She further expands the subtleties of power through her use of an imaginary community called “RootBound Ecovillage”.

This book is indeed a manual, structured in a way that is useful as a workbook. Complex and difficult ideas are made usable and understandable; text boxes throughout hold question for the reader to answer, to get to the meat of the issue in her own collaborative group. Many will appreciate one of the later chapters — Dealing With Difficult People. It holds clarity, focus, vision and some time-tested techniques for moving through the kinds of crises that often destroy well-meaning groups.

The Empowerment Manual is not for everyone. If you are not working in a collaborative or consensus way, it won’t be useful to you. But if you are part of the group of Pagan leaders who are striving to make the transition into collaborative cultures, this book will be invaluable. REVIEW BY BYRON BALLARD.

Llewellyn's Complete Book of Correspondences Sandra Kynes, Llewellyn 2013, 4/5 Broomsticks

Much of magic begins from wondering how one element will affect another — can that leaf encourage my lover to appear? Does the rainwater I collect during a potent thunderstorm have the ability to wreak havoc in my enemy’s life? Is an intention for clear communication best honored on Mercury-ruled Wednesday? Whether in the basic crafting of magical work, the refinement of ritual practice, or the development of devotional worship, correspondences are both present and necessary.

Correspondences are what many an old grimoire and spell book were full of — how this effects that, what the best day to perform certain ritual workings might be, and how to set up a spell so that you are likely to get the best possible outcome. There are many books on the market that detail various correspondences, but perhaps no modern work is quite so thorough as Sandra Kynes’ new work. Aptly titled, the *Complete Book of Correspondences*, this work really does aim to give a comprehensive view of how various systems interrelate to each other.

The book is divided into seven chapters; the first chapter covers the issues, intentions, and powers that a practitioner needs to become familiar with. The next five chapters deal with various elements we often see in magical work: plants, minerals, animals, Deities and other spirits, Astrology and Timing, and then a catchall miscellaneous chapter. Ms. Kynes is upfront in the introduction about the fact that this book is not really complete — no one volume can hold all the information about a single object-like a quartz crystal, so of course no one book will contain all the knowledge gathered about the thousands of sacred items, planets, Deities, plants, animals, and ritual workings that Kynes collected in her work. The book does an excellent job of providing a broad survey of many of the most common aspects in multiple pagan practices; it’s especially good for beginners who want to get a “bird’s eye view” of how it all fits together.

Another good way to work with this book is to treat it as a survey course in magic. Within the pages, there are many complicated systems that are treated in a straightforward and simple manner; for someone who is beginning their magical journey, or for a veteran who desires to consider new approaches and possibilities, the *Complete Book of Correspondences* is a perfect resource. The book is also incredibly user friendly; Kynes has made every effort to keep the book clean, clear, and to show how various elements relate to each other and talk to each other. This text is one that should be in any magical practitioner’s library. REVIEW BY BRI SAUSSY.

Tarot Spreads and Layouts

Jeanne Fiorini, Schiffer Books, 2010
4.5/5 Broomsticks

This book took me totally by surprise. Unlike the majority of books on spreads, this book offers a total of 17 spreads. Instead of going for an overwhelm factor, *Tarot Spreads and Layouts* offers a unique instruction manual that gently guides readers through understanding and getting to know a modest, but widely applicable, set of spreads. In Part one, readers are given a quick tutorial on the cards: picking the right question, what constitutes a good question, and some things to consider when doing readings for others. The rest of the book delves right into the spreads. Fiorini breaks each one down into its various components: she gives us an introduction to the spread and when to apply it; a diagram and position key; how to read the spread as a whole and as each individual card; and finally how to expand upon the spread with more cards.

I love this methodology. Beginning readers are walked through the process of doing a reading from layout to interpretation, that gives them a flexible framework to use with their own real-life readings. This methodology builds confidence in using these spreads and interpreting them truthfully. Intermediate tarot enthusiasts will gain deeper knowledge through looking at the nuts and bolts behind the spread. The book’s sections on expanding the layouts, also give advanced users a way to integrate the spreads deeper into their life. This book taught me a really nice timing spread that I can’t wait to incorporate into my own practice; I can’t wait to have my students read this book. REVIEW BY INNOWEN.

**The Way of the Horned God:
A Young Man's Guide to Modern Paganism**
Dancing Rabbit, Moon Books, 2010
5/5 Broomsticks

The Way of the Horned God differentiates itself from other guides targeting the younger Pagan population. One will generally find a goodly number of books listing principles and ideologies, rituals, formulae, and common beliefs and practices, rather than truly teaching the reader. On the contrary, in this book the reader is encouraged to actually experience being Pagan rather than memorizing what it's like. *The Way of the Horned God* contains instructions that help the reader truly come to understand just why Pagan religions are earth-centered.

The best way to picture this book is as a journey. The young man is led through the steps of discovering himself and the Sacred, while at the same time recording his thoughts and feelings so that he may keep track of his progress. Reading this book encourages learning about Paganism, understanding the Divine, finding and designating the sacred space, self-dedication, the consecration of tools, going on nature walks and camping trips, and the rewarding and gratifying passage into manhood. The book aids the reader in setting goals while giving him the advice necessary to meet those goals.

My favorite section of the book is the journey of the reader's imagination back to the initiation ceremony of a young man into manhood in the Pyrenees Mountains in Southern France many millennia ago, in which the reader truly experiences the young man's excitement as he crawls through a damp narrow passageway to the sight of the Horned God fifteen feet above him in a dimly-lit cavern. I would recommend this book to any young man interested in Paganism, as this book is instrumental in discovering just what it is like to be Pagan. REVIEW BY MIKE CISLO.

Neolithic Shamanism: Spirit Work in the Norse Tradition
Raven Kaldera and Galina Krassikova
Destiny Books, 2012, 4/5 Broomsticks

Neolithic Shamanism has quite a few things going for it, and one of the most important is that it's always very clear on what it is — and what it isn't. What it isn't is training for people who want to become shamans. It also isn't a manual on Asatru or any other religious practice. Instead, it is an entry-level book for anyone who wants to learn basic shamanic techniques from a Northern perspective.

In this case, "Northern" refers to a variety of Eurasian cultures with some common roots, including Germanic, Norse, and even Siberian traditions. While the authors draw on specific historical details, much of the material is fleshed out through the authors' own experience. At the beginning of each section, both authors describe their experiences separately, which provides an interesting perspective on the different ways these techniques can work out in practice.

The magical techniques themselves are mostly nothing fancy, but in the context of this tradition, that's a strength. For the most part, the focus is on making offerings to various spirits and then getting in touch with them psychically to negotiate working relationships. The book is divided into sections describing different families

of spirits that practitioners can get to know, including plants, animals, ancestors and various elementals. Each section describes several spirits and the best ways of interacting with them. There is also a lot of emphasis on practical life skills, like those neolithic people might have practiced. Though they aren't described in depth, a number of traditional crafts are suggested with an eye to their magical application, and as a way to integrate shamanic practices more deeply into various aspects of life.

While it is a very accessible book, there is plenty here to work with, especially if you choose to delve into a lot of the craft projects. These practices could provide years of experience and bring practitioners to the level where they can easily move on to a variety of intermediate books, or take further guidance directly from the spirits with whom they have built relationships. REVIEW BY LAURA GYRE.

Witchy Crafts:
60 Enchanted Projects for the Creative Witch
Lexa Olick, Llewellyn Publications, 2012
4/5 Broomsticks

While it is very true that the most important tool you can have in the Craft is yourself, it is also true that many of us in the Craft adore the many trinkets and tchotchkes we can find at many fairs and metaphysical stores. While there are many beautiful Pagan products available from fine artisans, some folks find it very rewarding to make some things themselves. It's for such folks that *Witchy Crafts* was written. Ms. Olick's book is easy to understand with lots of little helpful extras for those new to crafting (the artsy type of craft that is) without too many simplistic projects that might bore experienced crafters.

Firstly, the crafts themselves — there are instructions for sixty different projects. There's a nice mix of pretty simple ones to execute (mostly involving stamping and painting) and some complicated ones. I really like that she gives very detailed steps for the more complex ones; even though I find 3D clay sculpting intimidating, I am inspired to give it a try after looking some of her clay crafts. I also like that she included lots of ideas for crafts from recycled goods. As can be expected, some of those are a bit on the kitschy side, but I have to admire the cleverness of making a set of runes out of keyboard buttons.

The book has some nice little bonus material aside from the main projects. I really like that the author took the time to explain how to work with the materials in the book in a very general way, allowing the reader room to develop their own ideas for projects. The troubleshooting section in the back is a very nice touch as well, especially for newbie crafters. A very interesting bonus section is the chapter on crafting throughout the year, where she discusses general lore associated with each month. The information is primarily from a Neo-Wiccan perspective, with the bulk of the information discussing Greco-Roman deities and traditions. There is also a very simple correspondence chart in the appendix, which is handy. The bottom line is that this is a cute, fun book with plenty of ideas to keep most people busy. Neo-Wiccans especially will get some good mileage from it, but if you are at all crafty, or craft curious, there's enough there to satisfy you no matter what your path. KESTRIL TRUESEEKER.



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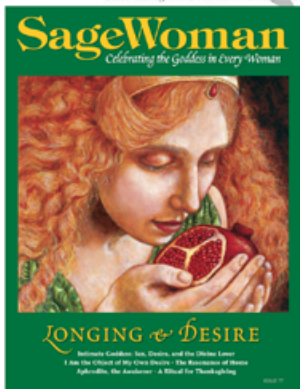
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A Dictionary of Western Alchemy
Jordan Stratford, Quest Books, 2011
5/5 Broomsticks

Let us be clear: Jordan's text is a dictionary. So if one is looking for an in-depth historical examination, or a practical manual, this isn't your book. But as a dictionary, it can do things which the history primer and the practical manual cannot do. It can be the resource reference that you need at a critical moment, or in a fleeting whimsey, that your other alchemy books cannot provide. So, you are probably not going to read this book cover to cover in the usual way. But if you are interested in alchemy for any reason, you will want this book on your shelf. Indeed with this book, you could give yourself a decent self-directed education in the basics of what alchemy is really all about.

What, then, is alchemy? Well, it's marvelously convenient that Stratford has an entry for "alchemy" in his dictionary! There he defines it as "the philosophical and natural science of elements and interactions" (pg. 6). While this is usually characterized as the search for a means to turn basic metals into pure gold, Stratford is quick to observe that "the main reward sought by the authors of alchemical texts seems to have been knowledge, both of the natural world and of the place of the Divine within it." (pg. 6) These lines, to my mind, define the character of the dictionary as a whole, if you can imagine something like a dictionary having a character at all. But this character does not constrain the reader to use the dictionary in one way and not another.

Stratford presents more than just a dictionary, but an impressive collection of concepts and ideas; a vocabulary for a living language with which we may speak of the divine, asking questions and pursuing possible answers. He often details his entries with hand-drawn symbols representing basic concepts and processes, as well as quotes from primary sources, and biographical details of important contributors to the tradition, much to my delight. This book bids well to become a standard and a classic in the field. REVIEW BY BRENDAN MYERS.

Steampunk Magic
Gypsy Elaine Teague Weiser Books, 2013
3/5 Broomsticks

The future of magic is here — and it looks to the past for inspiration. Gypsy Elaine Teague, author of *Steampunk Magic*, brings us a new magical path, using a dash of steampunk. Steampunk is a subculture that combines Victorian principles and fashion with the would-be future of steam and blends the two together in a fun and fanciful way. Teague's *Steampunk Magic* shows that combining the two together proves that you can wear your corset and continue to have a magical connection. *Steampunk Magic* gives readers a deep introduction to the social aspects of magic. It assumes you already are following a magical path and know a bit about spell and circle casting. The book includes recipes to make your own implements, what roles your airship (steampunk magic's version of a coven) has, and how to adhere to this new circle. However, I believe that the book was rushed through the publication process and it shows. The book includes a small selection of spells and correspondences that feel forced.

The original tarot spread seems a bit too broad to give a good focused reading. *Steampunk Magic* makes some broad strokes in claiming that it's a perfect path for those who want to walk a divination path but the book falls short on showing exactly how this could work. Despite its shortcomings, this book is a great introduction to those looking to blend their subcultures with their spiritual practice. I hope that Teague does release more volumes down the road to help dive deeper into the idea of this new path. REVIEW BY INNOWEN.

The Mystery of the Lost Hive
Suzanne Cheryl Gardner, available as paperback, Kindle, and PDF from Amazon.com. 3/5 Broomsticks.

The Mystery of the Lost Hive is geared towards young elementary school aged Pagans and tells the story of a lost bee who meets a nymph named Petrina and her animal friends. Told using snappy dialogue and colorful pictures, this short graphic novel teaches young Pagans about colony collapse disorder in simplistic terms along with other basic Pagan and nature based concepts such as meditation, where one's home actually is, pollution problems, and following one's instincts. A quick and entertaining read that I would recommend a parent reading with a child to use these concepts as jumping off points to more deeply discuss these issues. My biggest complaint would be that I wish that more factual information was presented for parents to use in discussing these issues or that there was a parent's guide at the end to do so. In the parent's guide I would have recommended discussing solutions past positive thinking, such as potential suburban and urban beekeeping, supporting forest clean-up efforts and supporting local beekeepers. REVIEW BY DEBORAH CASTELLANO.

ALU: An Advanced Guide to Operative Runology
Edred Thorsson, Weiser, 2012, 4/5 broomsticks

ALU, Edred Thorsson's latest addition to his corpus of books on rune-working, bills itself as a sequel to his 1984 classic, *Futhark*. Indeed, *ALU* exactly follows the structure of the earlier book, beginning with a broad overview of the runes and the nature of rune-working, followed by a long section going through the lore of each rune individually, followed by several chapters on runic magic. Thorsson prefers to think of magic here as "operative runology" — using the runes to have practical impact, or "operate," on reality. Unlike most rune manuals, *ALU* does not examine any techniques for divination, instead focusing on these operative methods.

The second chapter, "Lore of the Fupark," which contains analyses of the individual runes, strikes me as the book's weakest section. All of the information included seems solid enough, and Thorsson brings his characteristic fusion of the individual and the academic to the work. But this blow-by-blow method has been used in many other books, *Futhark* not the least of them. Throughout *ALU*, Thorsson emphasizes that this text was written for an advanced practitioner; unfortunately, this chapter, the book's largest, seems no more advanced than others available, and doesn't contribute much new to the discipline.

The rest of the book, however, mostly makes up for that lacking second chapter. For me, the biggest innovation is Thorsson's incorporation of all three attested fupark systems – Elder, Anglo-Frisian, and Younger – into the system, giving distinct uses for each of them. Thorsson embraces the idea that the runic systems have a linguistic affinity that makes them especially suited to work in different languages; therefore, an English speaker creating formulae in ancient or modern English would be best served by the Anglo-Frisian Fupark, while formulae written in Old Norse or modern Icelandic would have better success with the Younger Fupark. Given that the book is written in English, most of Thorsson's example formulae use the Anglo-Frisian line, which is a departure from the focus on the Elder Fupark in some of his earlier works.

In addition to the practical matters of using runes, there is a wealth of intriguing theory in the book as well. One of my favorite sections introduces both scientific and traditional theories of magic, and then presents a synthesis of those theories as the basis for operative rune-work.

I think *ALU* could have been targeted better; as it is, half the book seems made for beginners and half seems made for the advanced practitioners Thorsson intends to reach. But while experienced rune-workers may find little new in the section on rune-lore, the sections on theoretical and operative rune-work make this a worthwhile volume. REVIEW BY ERIC O. SCOTT

Tarot in Reverse: Making Sense of the Upside Down Cards in a Tarot Spread

Janet Boyer, Schiffer, 2012, 3.5/5 Broomsticks

What I liked most is that Janet Boyer shows you how life's reversals can actually be opportunities in disguise. Janet is a very down to earth teacher, exploring in depth and detail the surface as well as the deeper meanings of each card and putting them forth in an understandable, comprehensive, and exciting manner.

Janet Boyer proffers a plethora of information to chose from. For the most seasoned of readers to the newest initiates of Tarot, there is something new and fascinating to learn and glean ideas, advice, and conclusions from. With clear, upgraded reversed meanings, as a Tarot reader you can now better than ever advise your client where to take the next step in their life journey. I have gained a sense of renewed freedom from Janet Boyer's book *Tarot in Reverse*. Now I will no longer feel stuck or undergo the dread I, and so many other readers have experienced when reversals pop up in a spread. Every day builds increased confidence as I study each reversed card meaning more in-depth and will continue to do so over time. After reading *Tarot in Reverse*, I am excited and delighted to begin using reversals in the knowledge of integrating hope into the lives of those I read for, expanding their knowledge to higher plateaus.

Tarot in Reverse will certainly upgrade and broaden any Tarot reader's card repertoire and elicit respect from clientele. I suggest reading Janet's book, be it for fun or professional reasons, it will enlighten and delight you.

I recommend *Tarot in Reverse* to those who have a fear or hesitation when it comes to reading reversed Tarot cards or simply for those curious to learn what those upside-down cards are all about. REVIEW BY JOANIE MITCHELL.

The Hum and the Shiver

Alex Bledsoe, Tor Books, 2011

Intriguing. How could songs that kill not be intriguing? And the world Alex Bledsoe pulls together from mystery and shadows in the eastern Tennessee mountains is no less so. The Tufa are "dark haired and dark skinned, yet not white, black, or Native American (although often content to be mistaken for any of the above if it meant they'd be left alone)" and keep their cultural history and secrets close to the chest. Full of well-written characters, *The Hum and the Shiver* follows Army Private Bronwyn Hyatt, who returns to her hometown a hero from Iraq. Unfortunately, she returns to the same things she left behind: her family, her obligations, and her ex-boyfriend. At first, the story seems simple, but it's swirling in music and magic, and as I turned each page, I was drawn further into the world Bledsoe constructs until even the surprising things made sense in context.

I also liked that the novel is — putting aside the magic and music — realistic in tone, rather than fantastical. Bronwyn's physical injuries, for example, take almost the entire story to heal (despite the Tufa ability to heal more quickly than the average human), and the interactions between the characters who like each other (and more, the ones who don't) are authentic. It's full of ups and downs, heartache and injury, like real life. And that makes the novel more endearing, not less.

One of my initial surprises was that the story is set in modern day. That is, within the last five years or so, and I wasn't expecting that at all. I had assumed a novel about alleged fairies and magic would be set sometime in the mystical past: King Arthur, Shakespeare, or even Mark Twain. I assumed it would be set during a time in which science wasn't so prevalent, but I was happily surprised. It gives me hope for other novels that incorporate Pagan ideas and themes.

And let's not forget about the music. The music weaves through the novel, effortlessly calling magic into its pages. I just wish the story included a soundtrack. REVIEW BY V. E. DUNCAN.

How to Create Sacred Water

**Kathryn W. Ravenwood, Bear & Company, 2012
4/5 Broomsticks**

In *How to Create Sacred Water: A Guide to Rituals and Practices*, Ravenwood shares her very personal journey and calling to encourage others to connect with the waters of Gaia. Ravenwood fills her book with stunning color photos of a quality rarely found in books these days. From images depicting rainforests, water altars, to the author herself in her altar room, the reader is instantly drawn in and connected. For the reader who would like to explore ways of enhancing their sacred space or creating a water altar or simply exploring the element more, Ravenwood provides beautiful vivid step-by-step rituals that are rooted in a shamanic tradition.

This book encourages the reader to explore and discover ways to optimize their own connection to water and its usages. Whether or not you normally connect with water, the journeys within *How to Create Sacred Water* are valuable to any practice. REVIEW BY STARLYNN.

Wet Goddess: Recollections of a Dolphin Lover

**Malcolm J. Brenner, wetgoddess.net, 2009
3/5 Broomsticks**

This adult novel is set in the 1960s, a time when many in the counterculture were seeking to expand, even transform, their consciousness. Some did this with drugs, sex, and rock music. Others went even further, seeking new ways of perceiving life on a psychic or spiritual level.

Wet Goddess is not an overtly Pagan book. It's more about a young man's personal explorations during a historic time period that helped to create fertile ground for Paganism in society. It's about interspecies communication — and, of course, the erotic nature of this particular relationship. If you're looking for a book that will test your comfort zone and force you to think, this might be it. Alternately, just take it as a fun flight of fantasy.

The narrator, "Zack", is a college student caught up in hippie culture. As part of his academic endeavors, he develops a high-minded but somewhat vague idea of studying interspecies communication. Toward this goal, he starts out photographing trained dolphins at a Florida facility designed to entertain tourists with animal antics.

The dolphins have some surprises for him, however. By the end of the book, Zack has fallen in love with one of his subjects — and this is not just a spiritual love, but a very physical, sensual, sexual love. He also learns first hand about interspecies communication, and it's not at all the way he imagined. Instead of training a dolphin to jump through hoops or mimic spoken English, he's learning to swim as a dolphin on the astral plane.

A considerable amount of the plot is devoted to the telepathic relationship between Zack and his dolphin lover, Ruby. Sharing mental space is an unusual form of intimacy which can be difficult to convey textually. The author makes it believable; his writing style, while unsophisticated, is descriptive and makes it easy for the reader to get immersed in the narrator's world.

Ruby also trains Zack to create an astral dolphin body; a process that will no doubt resonate with some readers who have explored the astral. Also familiar will be Zack's confusion, not infrequent to beginners learning about the astral, as to where reality ends and the workings of his own mind begin. Slowly, he comes to learn that the definition between the two is not as clear-cut as society teaches.

This is not just some feel-good fantasy; the dolphins are not depicted as all love and light; they are shown as emotional and even violent, much like humans. Through his unexpected love affair, Zack comes to understand that dolphins are individuals, not stereotypes.

Ultimately, this book is a tragic love story, and it also has something to say about the treatment of dolphins by our own species. The dolphin photos provide an authentic sixties period feel. Because of the story's mature content, it may not be for everyone, but it's worth a read if you feel like something that is different and thought-provoking. REVIEW BY FERN GREEN ASHEM.

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*(My Path: Striving for Horns,
continued from p. 88)*

strive to be as much like their patrons as possible. This is true of me as well, and in no case more so than with Cernunos. While there are many traits from the deities I work with that I find challenging, I have no qualms with any aspect of growing more in line with the essence of the Horned One.

This is especially true when it comes to my most complex personal challenge: walking the line between genders. Years ago, I was able to get through the most difficult part — coming to know and love myself. I also have been very fortunate in the community of people who are allies willing to accept me just as I am. But in a society that is still strongly divided by gender and suspicious of anyone who transgresses those boundaries, there are still times when a little divine backup goes a long way, and Cernunos provides that.

Seeing the archetypal image of Cernunos sitting with antlers, torc, snake, and wilderness around Him reminds me to be assertive and at ease with power, to carry myself with nobility, and to strive to be the best leader I can. It also reminds me to revel in my sexuality and be positively changed by transformation, to spend time in His domain and to meditate often. Depictions of Him surrounded by animals remind me to heed the messages from nature. Half-stag and half man — his boundary-breaking image is a reminder to dance and to refrain from neglecting the animal in me. Images of the other gods who fit the Horned One archetype also inspire me; Pan, laughing, caught up in the joy of lust or music is a reminder to feel ecstasy, to appreciate the simple, hedonistic joys of life, and to spend time with two of my passions: music and sex.

Strictly speaking, I am closer to a soft polytheist than a hard polytheist (seeing the God behind the gods), yet of the Horned Ones, it is ultimately Cernunos who has my heart. Perhaps it is because so little is historically known about Him, which makes it possible for me to connect directly, without interference from (often historically dubious) attributes being attached from long ago. For example, without much recorded information, it is easier to avoid ascribing to him the dubious (to me) moral values of Pan. Or maybe I love Him because I am of Irish heritage and it is to my own cultural background that I turn most often.

Whatever the reasons, Cernunos does not merely *inspire* me. He gives me something towards which to *aspire*. While many Pagans — including myself — refer to Matrons and Patrons as well as Mother and Father deities, my relationship to the Horned One is different. Yes, He is my patron. Yes, He offers guidance, aid, and support. But He is less of a father figure and more of a wise older brother. He has my back, gives good advice, finds it amusing when I get myself into mischief (but always helps me out of a bind when I ask), and is Someone whom I look up to and strive to emulate.



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*As a woman living
in a man's world,
it is Cernunos on whom
I rely to remind me of
my right to be there, of
the masculine qualities
I already possess and
to give me something
greater to aim for.*

As a woman, voluntarily living in a man's world, it is often Cernunos on whom I rely to remind me of my right to be there, of the masculine qualities which I already possess, and to give me something greater to aim for. It is His essence which reminds me to exercise, and then spurs me on to do one more repetition past what I really believe I can; it is His spirit that encourages me to return to nature and commune with the plants and animals. It is He who encourages the rowdy laughter bubbling from my throat. It is He who reminds me that much of what we truly need is provided for by the Earth and ourselves, not by an overheated consumer culture.

For a deity Who is so strongly associated with the element of earth, it is frequently fire which makes me think of Him the most. The physical fire of alcohol in my throat and the stirrings of lust, the emotional fire

of controlled, righteous anger and overwhelming love, the mental fire of quick banter and intellectual discoveries, and the spiritual fire of self-knowledge and reaching past my limits to come out transformed and improved on the other side.

As a gender-fluid person, it makes sense that how I relate to Cernunos changes all the time. But regardless of all that, when I experience nature, it is with pride and gratitude that I send out a call to Cernunos. I echo that age-old cry from humans to their deities, no matter what religion they are: "My God, teach me to be more like you!"

SHAWNA is a faerie-hearted solitary eclectic who lives, loves, and writes on the awe-inspiringly beautiful coast of New Jersey. She shares her home with her significant others, multiple fur balls, faeries, and a Jade plant with some serious attitude.

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Primal fire from the liquor I swallow in salute to the God warms a path to my stomach. I can almost hear His laughter as one of my cats bats at a berry I left as an offering to Him. I live in an efficiency apartment with multiple cats, and I can't afford to get testy about offerings not staying where they were put. Besides, the Horned God is a nature deity. I figure He doesn't mind.

Being solitary and eclectic, with a healthy dose of impatience and frankness, my personal practice is rooted far more in intention, respect, and good working theory than in formulas, spells, specific rituals, and the nuts and bolts of getting phraseology exactly the same each time. I have nothing against a more traditional approach; in fact, for a brief time, I followed one. But it just doesn't mesh well with my muddy, mucky, animalistic, and sometimes downright gritty life.

But the micro ritual I performed that night made me feel so much better; that was (most) of the point. It also served the function it was designed for, of course — a gift and sign of respect for the God. But it also helped in another way, one which I had not anticipated, though I should have expected it: the ritual not only *reminded* me of the Divine Masculine in myself, it helped bring it to the surface again, simply by reminding me that I am already granted with that most incredible blessing — permission to be myself.

Witchcraft and Paganism have reputations for being open-minded when it comes to questions of gender and sexual orientation. Personally, I have found that to be true. As I am pansexual, in an open relationship, and transgendered (currently non-transitioning), understanding and acceptance for these aspects of myself from my faith community are important to me.

Yet there are times when the inherent oddity of a path that stresses polarity, duality, and the male and female principles — while still being accepting of those who fit in both extremes — or neither — gives me pause. Intellectually, I understand that every individual holds both masculine and feminine within themselves and that balance — both universal and personal — is the key.

Personal balance is what I want to write about here. Stories abound of women who found an equality and peace in Witchcraft and Paganism that had been lacking in patriarchal religions with solely masculine deities. There seem to be a similar number of thankful reminiscences from Pagan men who are finally able to worship a female deity and accept the Divine Feminine within themselves. These stories are so common in Pagan communities that they almost rise to the level of cliché.



Striving for Horns: Walking Between Worlds

by *Shawna B. Laird*

These days, what with the excitement of being able to (finally!) pay homage to the duality in all things and worship a Divine Feminine as well as a Divine Masculine, it seems that the God often is treated as merely a figurehead in Pagan culture, reduced to the role of mere servant to or consort of the Goddess. That is, when He is acknowledged at all.

This observation is far from a judgment or criticism: while the polarities exist and ultimately must balance, there is frequently a preponderance of one or the other in an individual at any given time. When either masculine or feminine deities are consistently more frequent in the practice of an individual over time, it makes sense that they work more closely with the deities who personify aspects of that quality. For many, if not most Pagans today, that entity is the Goddess.

My story is the flip side of the typical Pagan narrative (especially for someone of my birth gender); rather than finding a

Goddess who “looks like me,” it is through my connection to Paganism that I have welcomed my inner male.

It's not as if there's a shortage of religions with male deities and founding Fathers in the world; furthermore, I respect and admire much about what I know of these figures. Most of the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Buddha, and Lao Tzu are close to my heart; there's also an abundance of Goddesses who fit the warrior archetype, including one of my patrons. But there would be a certain quality missing in my life if it weren't for my connection to Cernunnos.

Part of my draw to the Horned God is the inherent balance He contains: light and dark, god of both predator and prey. Cernunnos is just one deity who fits the archetype of the Horned God; Pan and Herne are two others that are commonly known in Pagan culture. I was lucky to come across Cernunnos as quickly as I did, which occurred largely as a result of being drawn initially to the Irish Celtic pantheon because of my heritage. I count myself blessed to work with Him.

Most of the deities the majority of Witches and Pagans I know work with share attributes and interests with Their devotees. In conversations I have had with others on their paths, it seems that many folks

My story is the flip side of the typical Pagan narrative: rather than finding a Goddess who “looks like me” it is through my connection to Paganism that I have welcomed my inner male.

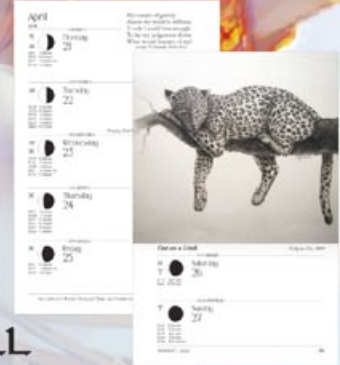
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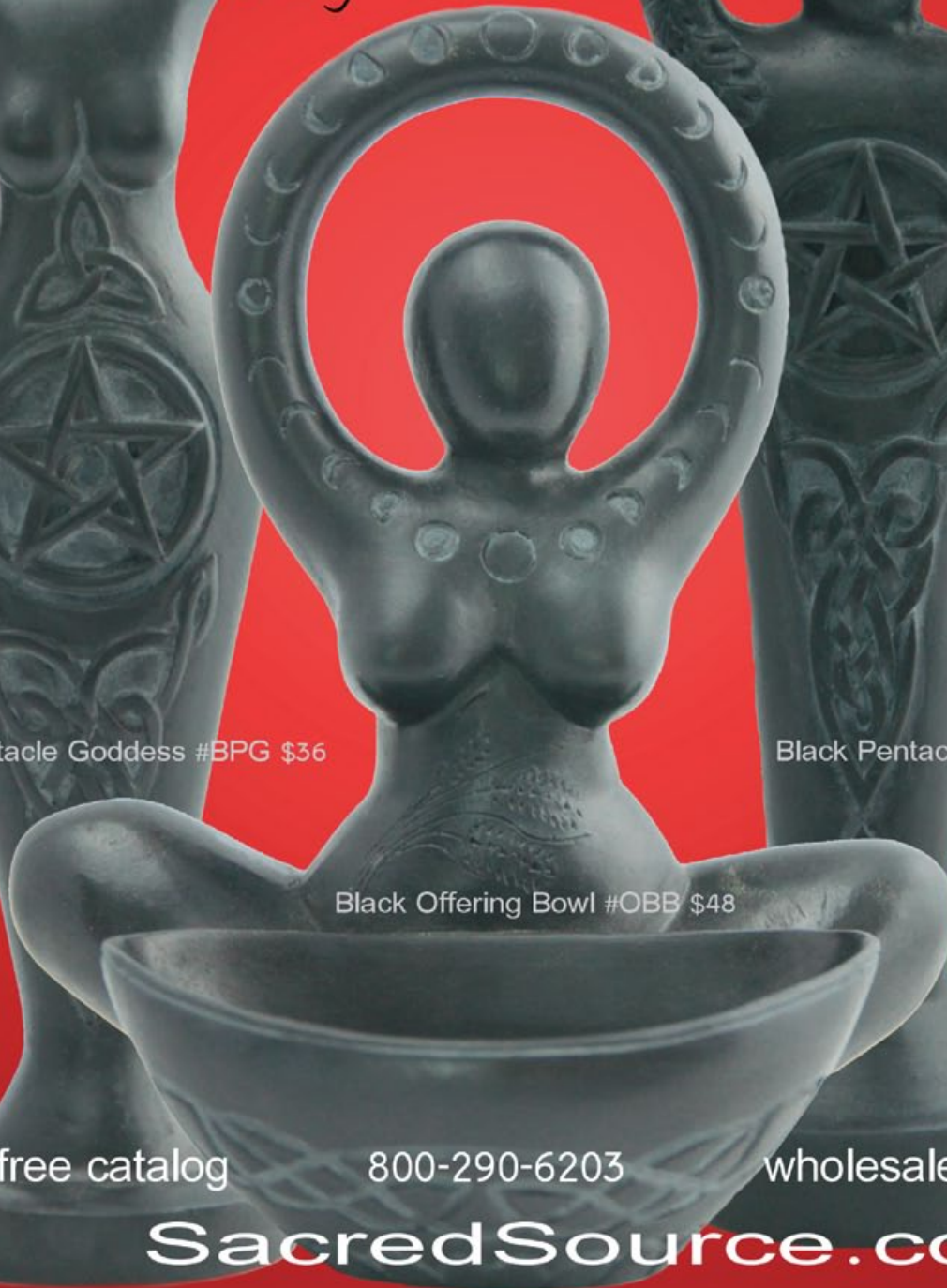
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