

# S/HE

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S/HE:  
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**Nané Jordan and Chandra Alexandre eds., *Pagan, Goddess, Mother* (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2021)**

**Reviewed by Barbara Bickel**

*Pagan, Goddess, Mother*, opens with the “charge of the Goddess” by Doreen Valiente, as adapted by Starhawk. The charge or ‘call to deeply care’ for mothers and children captivatingly continues through the thirteen compelling chapters of this book. I read the full book in three sittings, and had difficulty putting the book down even as I drifted off to sleep during my second round of reading at the end of a long day. The stories of women committed to living life fully awake to the significance of Earth, Goddess and Mother

are a balm for the wounded, yet awakening earthling, mother, child in all of us. The honouring and reverence of, for and with the Divine Mother and mothering acts of love is the catalytic thread bonding each chapter to the other. The co-editors, Jordan and Alexandre, as matricentric feminists, create a clear and encompassing matrix of thought for the many pathways travelled by the contributing authors. They generously include a chapter of their own stories of interconnecting yet distinct paths of coming to women’s spirituality, the Goddess, and mother-centred devotions. In a vulnerable heart held way, they open the reader to a matricentric life-focused and nesting worldview in high contrast to the death-focused nest destroying patricentric worldview that has been spiraling off center for centuries, wounding all; men, women and children, more-than-humans and our mother Earth in its path.

The love of the mother, expressed in the vision of a contemporary Goddess spirituality, that “draw[s] from and legitimizes female-centred and material embodied social powers, with diverse expressions of the feminine being possible beyond gender norms” (Jordan & Alexandre, p. 20) pours out from the pages



of this book. Section I is entitled “Priestess, Witch, Artist, Midwife: Mother Stories” and opens with a call for the “Mamapriestess” in Molly Remer’s chapter as she brings the priestess, mother and Goddess to presence through poetry, autobiographic storytelling, and scholarly valuation of the divine mother and female body. Sarah Rosehill, in chapter two further deepens understandings of the passionate mama through her story of a difficult birth and single motherhood by sharing how the teachings of Anamanta and pagan spiritual practices helped her, as her title states, in “Finding my Footing as a Witch and a Mother.” An image of Mother Mary with her direct and attending gaze graces the cover of the book. This symbolic painting emerged from Asia Morgenthau’s sacred art practice described in chapter three “Remothering and the Goddess,” where Morgenthau through her making practice, explores the inner child and the inner mother. Through making she writes that we become aligned with all creation and can transform ourselves. Foremothers and minks slide with parallel ease into our imaginaries in the poetics of chapter four written by Elizabeth Cunningham entitled “Minks.” In this chapter we witness the spontaneous presence of prayer in a sacred moment shared between mother and teenage daughter. Chapter five, the last in this first section, follows a life full of lessons learned by Alys Einion, a mother, priestess, and midwife in her chapter entitled “‘Call Unto They Soul’: Reflexive Autoethnography of a Pagan, Priestess, Goddess-Worshipper, and Mother.” Responding to the call of the Goddess she reflects upon a lifetime of trust in the Goddess in the midst of uncertainty in “birth, death, life, nurturing, abandonment, destruction, construction and communion” (87).

Section II is entitled “Scholarship from Pagan Goddess Motherlines” and traverses challenging and conflicting aspects in Pagan practices, pre-Christian Goddess cultures and Christian influenced occult teachings. Christina Hoff Kraemer’s chapter six, entitled “Pagan Mothering, Body Sovereignty, and Consent Culture” launches this section with teachable and valuable approaches for understanding how children can be raised to know the manifestation of the divine life force in their bodies. The understanding that the divine manifests in bodies is honoured and supported through nurturing healthy body boundaries, encouraging sovereignty and empathetic beingness with all others. Chapter seven

questions cultural and religious confines in India that continue to limit women's sovereignty in Kusmita Mukherjee Debnath's critical and vulnerable dive into historical and present practices of the Hindu religion and culture. In her search for female agency in stories of goddesses she has grown up with, she instead finds the perpetuation of a god centered subserviency and thus rejects her cultural and religious teachings regarding the prescribed role of women. Critical reflections continue in chapter seven, Georgia van Raalte's chapter eight, entitled "The Path of the Cold Hearth-Stone: Reflections on Sex, Saturn, and Solitary Working." This chapter offers a critical scholarly overview of early occultist Dion Fortune's teachings, which have and continue to have a significant impact on contemporary goddess, pagan and occult practices and communities. Of significance for this book is Fortune's recognition of motherhood as a spiritual path alongside her consequent separation of motherhood from priestesshood. Van Raalte rejects Fortune's elimination of an occult liberational "left-hand path of exuberant endurance" (130) for those without privilege and means to enter dedicated priestess practice. Van Raalte then offers a third "Path of the Cold-Hearth-Stone, which is the path of struggle and submission as a negative ecstatic liberation theology of motherhood" (132) as an essential addition to Fortune's two paths for women, that of the Adept and the Path of the Hearth-Fire.

Section III is entitled Empowering Spirited Mother-Daughter Lineages. Chapter nine opens this section with Laura Zegel's powerful and practical focus on mothering daughter's groups and is entitled "The Spiritual Dimension of Mother-Daughter Groups: Healing with Artemis, Demeter, and Persephone." Studies of mother-daughter groups and her personal experience in a long-term mother-daughter group inspires mother-ways to support the spiritual, emotional and relational growth of young and mothering women living in a patriarchal culture that has altered, for its own means, the goddess-centred understandings of Artemis, Demeter and Persephone. Chapter ten then, aptly and poetically walks us directly to a garden-planting-nurturing moment of a present day Persephone and Demeter in the rhythmic prayer-filled words of poet-mother Jennifer Lawrence in "My Persephone." Sleep,

dreams, and story poems unthread and thread themselves across mother-daughter-grandmother lines through time and place in chapter eleven. Stitched and told lovingly, gently, yet truthfully to all daughters by Arabella von Arx in her chapter “The Thread. From Mother to Daughter to Grandmother: Talk to Their Daughters from Mythical Times to the Birth of History.” The poet continues to stitch the reader into chapter twelve, entitled “Goddess is Mother Love, which opens with a poem by Nané Jordan in the braided méttisage writings with Chandra Alexandre. Their Goddess-led life stories reclaim “female spiritual authority in a Goddess-centred, Earth-loving, and mother-based consciousness” infused by the teachings of midwifery, the India-based lineage of the ‘Sakta Tantra path, and the USA-based Goddess movement of the 80s and 90s in their chapter entitled “Goddess Is Mother Love.” Their paths, led by a “commitment to the divine as both immanent and transcendent, to the interplay of duality in oneness, to the untamable power of nature, and to the liberating potentials of our own trauma”(173) offer a remembering of how mother-Goddess love in our daily lives restores our inner and outer selves in the service of all. Author Corey Ellen Gatrall brings the Pagan, Mother, Goddess full circle with a death-teaching-learning story in chapter thirteen, entitled “Death and the Mother: Integrating Death in a Pagan Family Life.” Words spoken to her children in response to their question “What if our mama died?” offers a fitting mother-Goddess worldview with which to face the current “fear of death” driven dominant patriarchal worldview we live within. She shares a tender response rooted in deep listening,

I would be in the earth around them as well as in the water and the air... I would be in the peach tree in our back yard. They could rest their hands on the earth or sit in the stream and speak to me, and perhaps there would be no answer they could hear with their ears, but what which was their mother would be there nonetheless. (184)

May the relational Pagan, Goddess, Mother blessings found in this anthology reach across all divides to touch the Mother and engender resiliency, healing, wonder and curiosity in all.

## Contributors

### **Mary Ann Beavis**

Dr. Beavis is Professor Emerita of Religion and Culture, St. Thomas More College, the University of Saskatchewan. She is the author of several books and many articles in the areas of feminist biblical interpretation, parable studies, goddess studies, and religion and popular culture. Her most recent publications attempt to reconstruct the experience of enslaved persons in early Christianity. She is the co-author of the Wisdom Commentaries on Hebrews and 2 Thessalonians.

### **Barbara Bickel**

Dr. Bickel is a writing artist, researcher, teacher and an Emeritus Associate Professor of Art Education, Southern Illinois University. In 2017 she co-founded *Studio M\*: A Collaborative Research Creation Lab Intersecting Arts, Culture and Healing*. An internationally socially-engaged artist she works with humans and more-than-humans and maintains a ritual performance and exhibition practice. She is published in over 60 peer reviewed journals and book chapters and is co-founder and co-editor of *Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal*. She co-edited the book *Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Research and Teaching: Honoring Presence* and wrote *Art, Ritual and Trance Inquiry: Arational Learning in an Irrational World*. To view her art and research: [www.barbarabickel.ca](http://www.barbarabickel.ca) and [www.StudioM.space/](http://www.StudioM.space/).

### **Tanya Lynne Brittain**

Ms. Brittain is a Master's student at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. She is writing her thesis on the material religion of talismans during the Meiji (1868-1912) period in Japan. Her research interests include Buddhist Studies, Goddess Studies, Religion, Tantrism, and Hinduism.

### **Helen Hye-Sook Hwang**

Dr. Hwang is the researcher, writer, publisher, and advocate of Magoist Cetaceanism, the matriversal consciousness embodied in

the socio-historical-cultural expressions of traditional Korea and beyond. After earning her MA and Ph.D. in Religion with emphasis on Feminist Studies from Claremont Graduate University, CA., she pursued an M.A. degree at UCLA, CA. Hwang's authored and co-edited books include *Goddesses in Myth, History and Culture*, *Mago Almanac*, *The Mago Way*, *She Rises* trilogy, *Celebrating Seasons of the Goddess*, *She Summons*, *The Budoji Workbook*, and *Return to Mago E-Magazine*.

### **Stuart McHardy**

Dundee-born McHardy spent much of his childhood in the Angus glens, graduated from Edinburgh University and has variously been a musician, a journalist, an author and broadcaster, a lecturer, a storyteller and a poet. He has travelled for both pleasure and professional reasons in various parts of the globe and was a founder member and one-time President of the Pictish Arts Society as well as being the original Director of the Scots Language Centre in Perth. He has been a Teaching Fellow at Edinburgh University's Centre for Open Learning for the past three decades. Now living on the Lothian Riviera he is married to the beautiful Sandra, has one son Roderick and two bonnie grand-daughters Ishbel and Flora.

### **Ally Kateusz**

Dr. Kateusz is a cultural historian specializing in the intersection of women and religion in early Christian art and texts. Her recent books are the illustrated *Mary and Early Christian Women: Hidden Leadership* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) and *Maria, Mariamne, and Miriam: Rediscovering the Marys* (Bloomsbury, 2020), which she co-edited with Mary Ann Beavis. She has published peer reviewed articles in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, *The Priscilla Papers*, and other venues. She is Research Associate at the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research.

### **Krista Rodin**

Krista Rodin is Emerita Professor of Humanities at Northern Arizona University where she taught a variety of interdisciplinary courses relating to ancient cultures and sacred traditions. She received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of

Salzburg, Austria. During her lengthy academic career in Europe and the U.S., Dr. Rodin held a number of administrative positions, including Dean and Vice Provost of Continuing Studies and Engagement programs in Maine and Connecticut, and Campus Executive Officer for the Yuma campus of NAU. After retiring from NAU she moved back to Austria, where she continues her research on ancient and living goddess traditions, and teaches part-time for Salzburg College. Dr. Rodin's extensive travel blog can be accessed at: <https://journals.worldnomads.com/krodin/>.

### **Francesca Tronetti**

A dedicated community educator Dr. Tronetti is part of the Cherry Hill Seminary faculty and on the editorial board of S/HE: An International Journal of Goddess Studies. She writes articles on ancient Goddess cultures and contemporary American Paganism for *Return to Mago E-Magazine*. She is interested in American Folk Magic Traditions of Appalachia and the Pennsylvania Dutch and developing a course on the subject. A published poet, author, and fiber artist, she hosts a weekly community radio program on green living and self-care. She lives in Northwestern Pennsylvania and studies American mythological creatures and legends.

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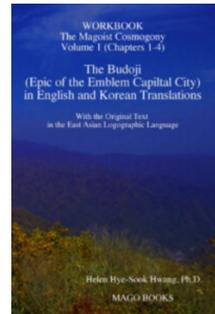
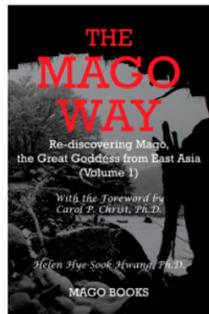
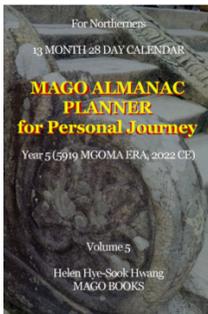
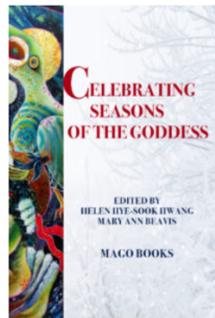
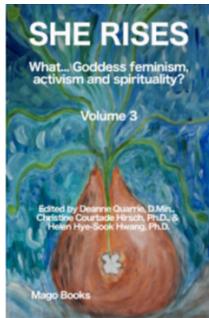
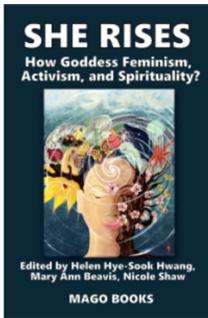
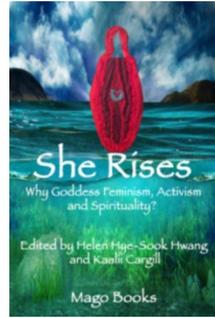
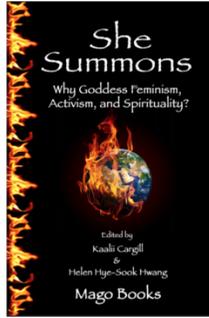
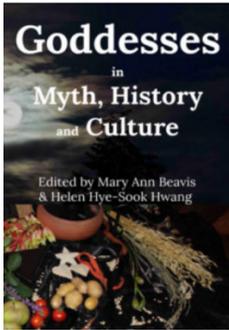
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