

S/HE

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GODDESS STUDIES

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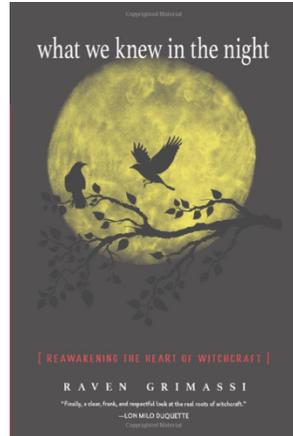
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Book Reviews

Raven Grimassi, *What We Knew in the Night: Reawakening the Heart of Witchcraft* (Newburyport, MA: Weiser Books, 2019)

Reviewed by Francesca Tronetti

Whether you go into a chain bookstore, an independent seller, or a metaphysical shop, you will find a wide array of Pagan/Magic/Witchcraft books. More are being published every year as alternative spiritual practices become more normalized in mainstream American society. A majority of these books are How-To guides for new practitioners filled with spells and instructions for rituals that introduce the author's understanding of magic. These books are marketed towards the solitary practitioner and do not require the learner to participate in group learning or study from a teacher.



However, this was not always the case. When witchcraft first became popular in the 1960s, few books were available to students, and if you wanted to learn, you needed to find a teacher. Finding a teacher often involved chance meetings in shops or a comment to a friend who "knew someone" who was a practitioner. Once you found a teacher, you would be introduced to a hidden world of magical gatherings, teachers, and writings that imparted knowledge to those who they took under their wing. One such student was the author Raven Grimassi.

Raven Grimassi (1951-2019) was an authority on witchcraft, the occult, and spiritual practices. With over 45 years of experience in esoteric traditions, Grimassi was a recognized expert on Italian witchcraft who published over twenty books. While his belief system and teachings do not focus on Goddess worship, he referred to her as the Queen of the Witches in his book *Italian Witchcraft*. This, his final work, reflects the witchcraft he was introduced to as a young man and what the craft has since become. Drawing on his own experiences as a young student of mysticism and authors such

as Eliade Mircea, Erich Neumann, and Doreen Valiente to deliver the "spiritual legacy, or perhaps, the mystical lineage" (Grimassi, xi) of contemporary witchcraft.

With a few meaningful sketches to guide the reader, each chapter of the book is dedicated to explaining a different concept of witchcraft based on the teachings Grimassi learned from his teachers and what he learned from the works of scholars. With some of these concepts, Grimassi offers instructions for different rituals which serve as an initiation into witchcraft. The book serves as both a text explaining the history and spiritual beliefs of witchcraft and as a text for self-initiation into the craft. By combining different ritual phases with an explanation for why it is done, Grimassi offers us a similar initiative experience to his own when he was taught witchcraft.

Grimassi tells the reader how he was introduced to witchcraft in 1960s San Diego. Growing up with folk magic or what he calls the peasant tradition of Witchcraft from Europe, he often traveled far to find items for rituals or spell work. At an herbal tea shop, where he purchased herbs that would not make good tea, the owner Elizabeth commented that the herbs were "good for other things" (Grimassi xiv). She gave him a knowing look and directed him to a man named Don, who ran an occult bookstore, and he introduced Grimassi to Lady Heather, who ran a coven. Lady Heather initiated Grimassi into witchcraft.

In chapter one, he describes the teachings of the night, the lore on which witchcraft was based. Next, he explains some common witchcraft symbols and where they originated from, such as legends and Celtic mysteries or Italian folk magic. The first ritual presented is what he calls The Witchening, a five-step process that forms the foundation for the practice of witchcraft. The following two chapters describe how witchcraft is viewed as a religion and the metaphysical principles which denote the higher and lower planes. Chapter four addresses one of the main arguments leveled against pagans and witches, that witchcraft is not the expression of long-held traditional beliefs but was instead made up by its founders. Grimassi points out that every tradition was "made up" at some point, and instead, people may be receiving the teachings of the earth as their ancestors once did. He describes some of these differences between those who learn witchcraft through initiation in a group and solitary practitioners.

The first four chapters explain the history and metaphysics behind witchcraft, grounding the reader in a deeper understanding of the practice. These chapters flow nicely into the next part of the book, where self-initiation takes place. In chapter five, Grimassi tells us the history of Old Magic as understood by the Christian church. Here Grimassi explains the meaning behind the pentagram and other symbols associated with witchcraft. Finally, he presents the reader with several small rituals for charging objects for use in different practices or spell work.

Chapter six is the reader's introduction to the practice of magic, what it is, the components which are essential to working magic, and the tools associated with the witch. However, unlike most books for those who seek self-initiation, Grimassi does not start by telling you the tools you need, setting up your altar, and giving you a ritual to bring something into your life. Instead, it is not until chapter five, after the reader has a deeper understanding of what witchcraft is and what it means, that he even tells the student about the tools they will need.

The remainder of the book describes axioms in magic such as the rule of three and the witches' creed, names for the Divine common to Wicca and traditional witchcraft, a few rites, and methods of divination in witchcraft. The final chapter reminds the reader that the witch is not a person who can use magic to enrich themselves but has a spiritual duty to perform in the world.

Chapter six is where Grimassi earns my respect as a teacher who uses magic while following the Goddess. As part of my spiritual journey, I recently stepped back from the group I had been initiated into years ago. I needed to recharge myself and branch out and relearn magic and ritual as a novice. As a result, I found many books published in the last five years marketed to new practitioners. While many included an introduction to the idea of sacred space, mentions of Goddesses often occurred in later chapters, if at all.

These books focus on magic as part of self-care, intention setting to reach personal goals, and sometimes mindfulness. Absent in these books is a deeper understanding of the history of witchcraft and women's wisdom, which comes from the divine feminine. *What We Knew in the Night* grounds the reader/student in the mindset of

connection to a spiritual lineage and taught rituals that do not bring money or love but instead form a connection to the Divine.

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 and www.StudioM.space/.

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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

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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

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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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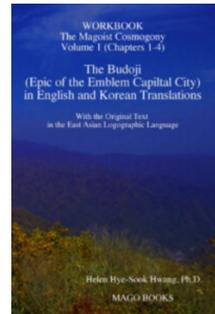
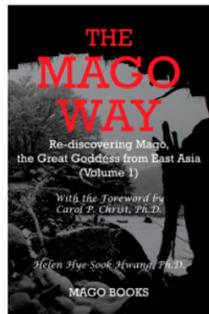
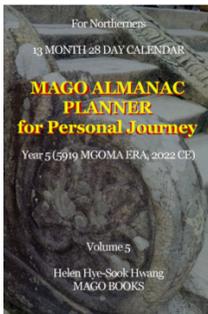
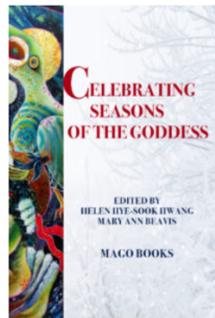
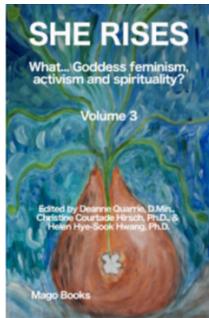
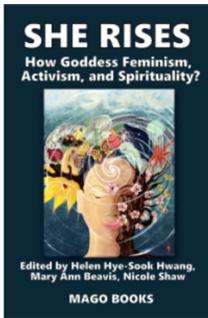
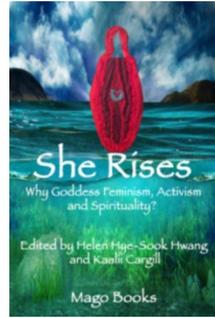
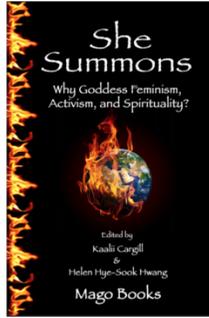
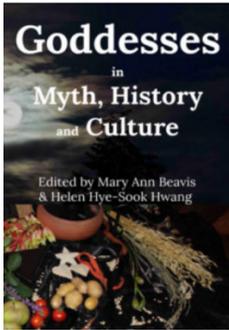
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