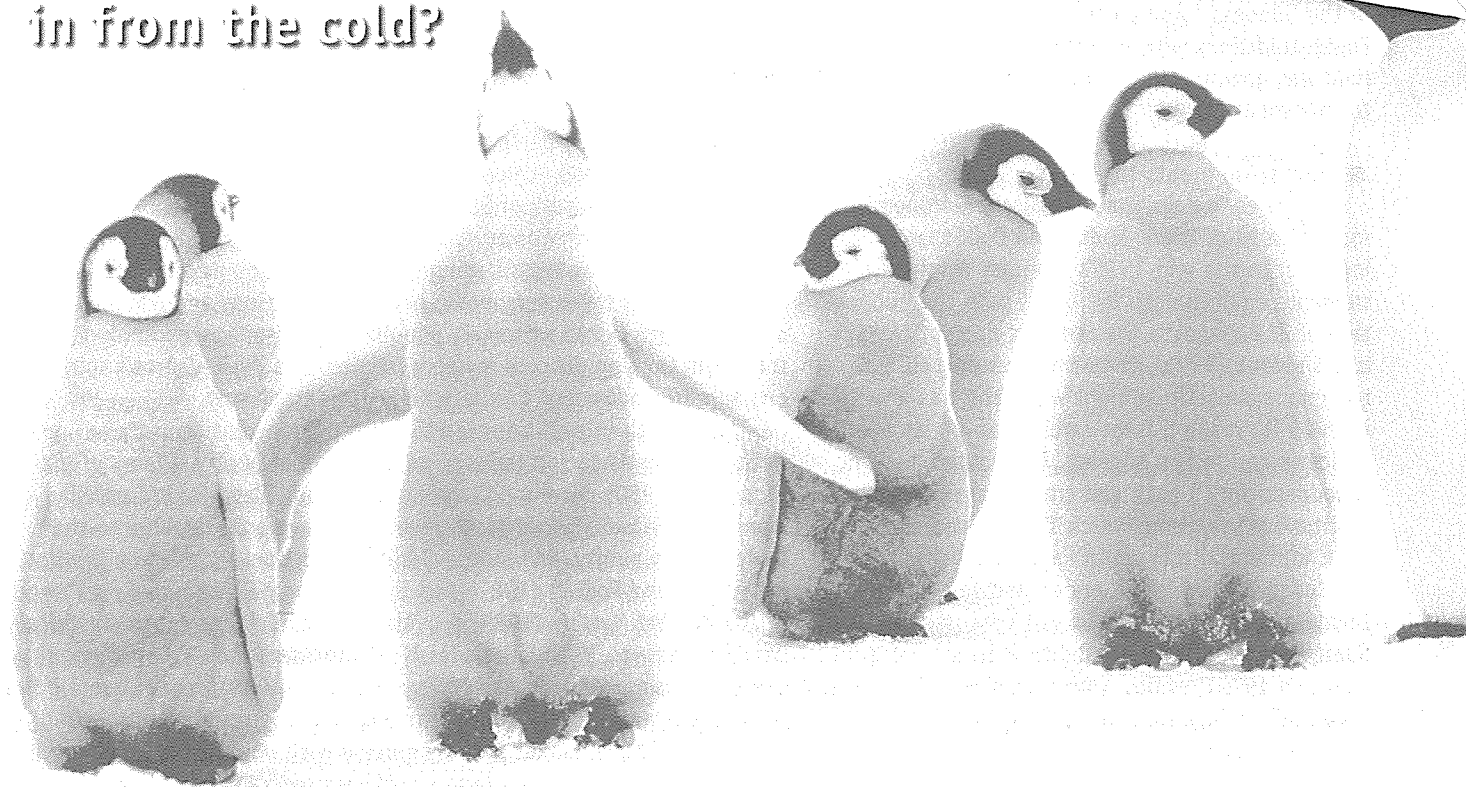


Warming Trend

Has Pagan non-fiction finally come in from the cold?

One: on?
Weiser, he brings of
pub-ism,
P



Pagans read. Our voracious reading habits are notorious, wide-ranging, and constant. We read sci-fi, fantasy, mysteries, self-help, romance — just about every genre has Pagan fans. But what about books written specifically for us?

The field has evolved. Early works had a serious tone, as if the authors felt that if they sounded stern enough no one would think they were insane for believing in magic. Then came a period when anything could get published and the wildest fantasies were treated as sober facts. Today's Pagan reader finds the shelves crowded as more publishers vie for our reading dollars; the "occult" section of many bookstores is as large as that of many other genres, and buying Sybil Leek's *Diary of a Witch* is no longer cause for a comment (or even a funny look). Our genre has grown, and, as readers and supporters, we've grown up with it.

■ The "Good Old Days"

Prior to the mid 1970s, Pagan non-fiction was nearly nonexistent. The tortuous musings of Aleister Crowley were available, but they were too abstruse for any but the most devoted ceremonialist. Likewise, Dion Fortune's esoteric works were too complex for the Earth-centered seekers who were beginning to become interested in modern Paganism. (Her fiction proved far more popular.) Gerald Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*, a foundational document of the modern Craft, was nearly unknown outside of Britain, although it was beginning to gain influence elsewhere.

Popular Pagan non-fiction first emerged in the early 1970s with Sybil Leek's *The Complete Art of Witchcraft* (1971). A flamboyant woman who claimed descent from an unbroken line of hereditary witches that led back to the Dark Ages, Leek was the first author to promote "witchcraft for the masses." Doreen Valiente's *An ABC of Witchcraft* (1973) and *Natural Magic* (1975) followed soon after; *Natural Magic* was the better of the two, as it addressed basic questions in an easy-to-understand style, and the book became one of the earliest Pagan references.

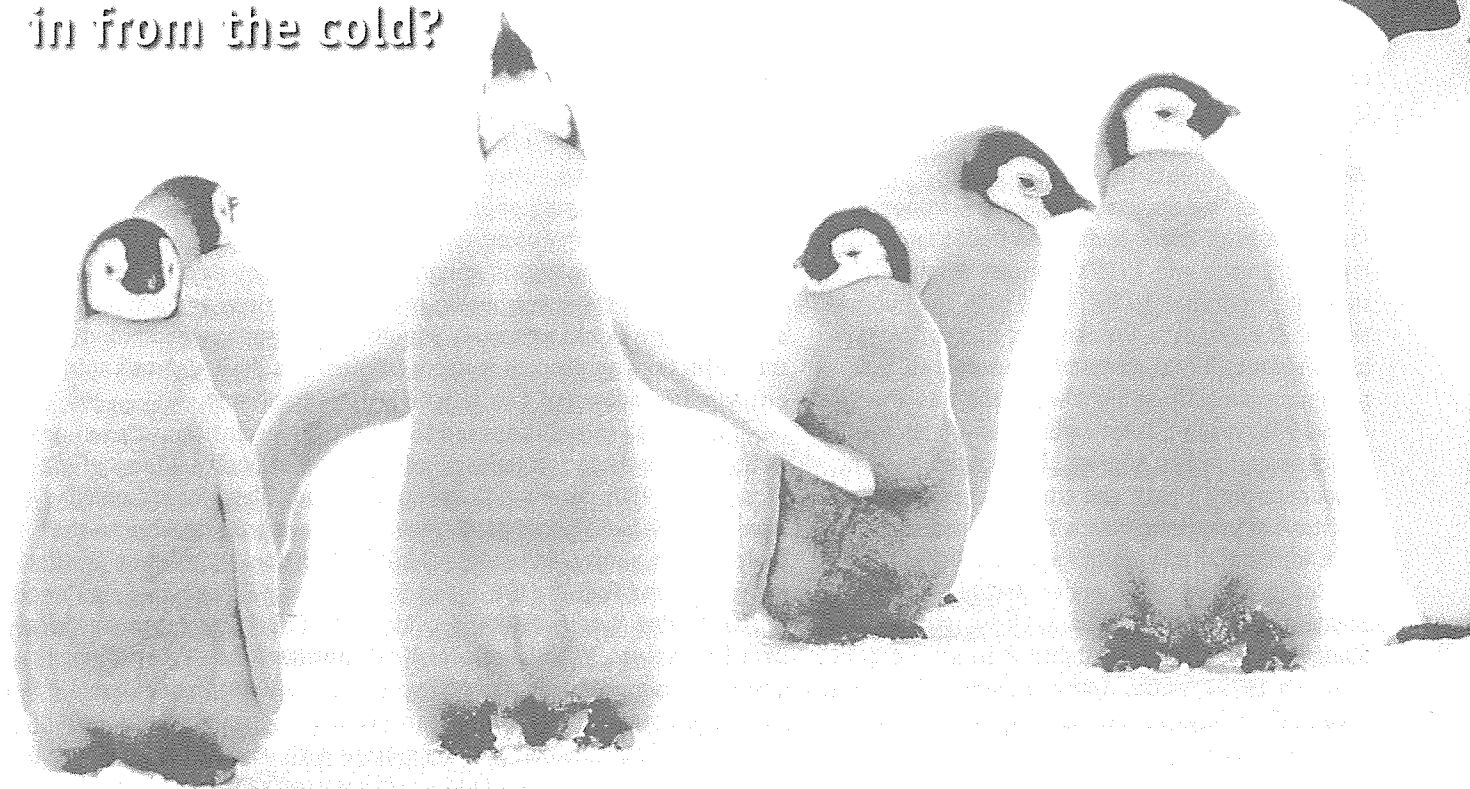
Not to be overlooked is the influence of two pioneering publishers, Carl L. Weschcke, owner of Llewellyn Publications, who published Raymond Buckland's *Witchcraft from the Inside* in 1971, and Donald

Warming Trend

TEXT
Lisa McSherry

IMAGE
Digital Stock

Has Pagan non-fiction finally come in from the cold?



Pagans read. Our voracious reading habits are notorious, wide-ranging, and constant. We read sci-fi, fantasy, mysteries, self-help, romance — just about every genre has Pagan fans. But what about books written specifically for us?

The field has evolved. Early works had a serious tone, as if the authors felt that if they sounded stern enough no one would think they were insane for believing in magic. Then came a period when anything could get published and the wildest fantasies were treated as sober facts. Today's Pagan reader finds the shelves crowded as more publishers vie for our reading dollars; the "occult" section of many bookstores is as large as that of many other genres, and buying Sybil Leek's *Diary of a Witch* is no longer cause for a comment (or even a funny look). Our genre has grown, and, as readers and supporters, we've grown up with it.

■ The "Good Old Days"

Prior to the mid 1970s, Pagan non-fiction was nearly nonexistent. The tortuous musings of Aleister Crowley were available, but they were too abstruse for any but the most devoted ceremonialist. Likewise, Dion Fortune's esoteric works were too complex for the Earth-centered seekers who were beginning to become interested in modern Paganism. (Her fiction proved far more popular.) Gerald Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*, a foundational document of the modern Craft, was nearly unknown outside of Britain, although it was beginning to gain influence elsewhere.

Popular Pagan non-fiction first emerged in the early 1970s with Sybil Leek's *The Complete Art of Witchcraft* (1971). A flamboyant woman who claimed descent from an unbroken line of hereditary witches that led back to the Dark Ages, Leek was the first author to promote "witchcraft for the masses." Doreen Valiente's *An ABC of Witchcraft* (1973) and *Natural Magic* (1975) followed soon after; *Natural Magic* was the better of the two, as it addressed basic questions in an easy-to-understand style, and the book became one of the earliest Pagan references.

Not to be overlooked is the influence of two pioneering publishers, Carl L. Weschcke, owner of Llewellyn Publications, who published Raymond Buckland's *Witchcraft from the Inside* in 1971, and Donald

Weiser, who gave the market a push in 1976 when he brought Gardner's books to the United States, published Raymond Buckland's *Tree: the Complete Book of Saxon Witchcraft*, Crowther's *The Witches Speak*, and reprinted Charles G. Leland's *Aradia: or the Gospel for the Witches*. *Aradia*, first published in 1899, is the source of the foundational "Charge of the Goddess," and all three books described Pagan traditions which claimed ancient roots. The field was growing, but Pagan authors were limited to this small group of esoteric publishers.

■ Feminism meets the Craft

In the early days, traditional and Gardnerian-rooted paths of Wicca dominated publisher's catalogs, but in the mid-1970's feminist Witchcraft suddenly erupted onto the scene with the publication of Z. Budapest's *The Feminist Book of Light and Shadows* (1975). Z went from being obscure to famous almost overnight when she was arrested in 1975 for reading Tarot cards to an undercover policewoman in Los Angeles. Z promoted a Dianic ("Goddess-only") path and created the Goddess Spirituality sub-genre which still forms one of the most influential threads in Pagan publishing.

Budapest's work influenced that of emerging Goddess-scholars such as Carol Christ (*Woman Spirit Rising*, edited with Judith Plaskow and published in 1979), whose work introduced "Goddess-oriented" anti-patriarchal religion to young people at college campuses across North America.

Also popular on campus was Isaac Bonewits' *Real Magic: An Introductory Treatise on the Basic Principles of Yellow Light* (1978) a surprisingly readable Ph.D. dissertation which examined the occult arts and compared them to scientific principles. Scholarly, yet filled with wry humor, *Real Magic* was accepted by both a popular audience and the academic community.

■ A "Star" is Born

1979 proved to be the year that Pagan books moved decisively into the mainstream with the publication of arguably the two most important Pagan books of the 20th century. Starhawk's *Spiral Dance*, which brilliantly combined feminism, Witchcraft, and the emerging "ecology" movement, quickly became a best-seller, and was featured in mainstream bookstores as well as in occult shops and feminist bookstores. *Spiral* was quickly followed by Margot Adler's cultural study of the burgeoning Neo-Pagan movement *Drawing Down the Moon*. *Spiral Dance* and *Drawing Down the Moon* were huge successes for the mainstream houses that published them and both are still in print today. Following this success, the early 1980s saw books

like Marion Weinstein's *Positive Magic* (1981), Diane Mariechild's *Mother Wit* (1981), Stewart Farrar's *What Witches Do* (1983), and Paul Beyerl's *Master Book of Herbalism* (1984) added to the developing backlist of Pagan-oriented non-fiction. (In addition to *Spiral Dance* and *Drawing Down the Moon* an extraordinary novel was published during this period: Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1982). Over time, this work of feminist Arthurian fiction has probably brought more converts — mostly women — to the Pagan subculture than any other single book ever published.)

■ Silver and gold

This flood of new adherents came to Paganism through reading books rather than by personal contact with other practitioners. Meanwhile, publishers had noticed that there was a substantial market for magical titles. The work of Scott Cunningham encouraged these trends, beginning with *Earth Power: Techniques of Natural Magic* (1987). Cunningham focused on encouraging people to employ magical methods that worked for them personally; his clear directions and warm writing style made his books extremely popular. Paganism was beginning to transform from an obscure mystery religion to a do-it-yourself spiritual community made up of a variety of eclectic traditions.

This growth in traditions led to a veritable explosion in Pagan non-fiction. Victor Anderson republished his book of poetry, *Thorns of the Bloodrose* (1980) describing the Feri Tradition; Diane Stein's popular *Women's Spirituality Book* (1987) welcomed average women into the Goddess community, and Starhawk's next two books, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (1987) and *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery* (1989) provided role models for non-hierarchical power structures. With Luisah Teish's *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book Of Personal Charms And Practical Rituals* (1988), readers were introduced to ritual from an African-American perspective.

Eventually the market became glutted with books written from the perspective of overlapping (and sometimes contradictory) traditions, each author claiming that their tradition was more authentic than the rest. Silver RavenWolf's *To Ride A Silver Broomstick* (1993) broke through the confusion; her practical attitude about magic inspired readers who weren't interested in esoteric religion, but just wanted to know how to improve their lives. Her popularity prompted authors to respond with a flurry of "lifestyle magic" books like Z. Budapest's *Goddess in the Office* (1993), Ashleen O'Gaea's *The Family Wicca Book* (1993), and Amber K's *Covencraft: Witchcraft for Three or More* (1998).

■ Out of the Broom Closet

The revolution that had transformed Paganism dovetailed with the growth of the "New Age" movement. Authors such as Carlos Castaneda had been turning out best-sellers since the late 1960's and interest in the development of psychic skills, divination, and shamanism continued to grow. Many New Age (now "body-mind-spirit") authors exhorted their readers to use meditation, hypnosis, and affirmations to bolster their self-esteem, increase confidence, and lose weight; their techniques were often familiar to Pagan readers, who saw them as "Paganism Lite." As formerly esoteric concepts bled into the mainstream, publishers who had never previously published occult titles climbed aboard the magical bandwagon; conversely, many niche publishers who once concentrated solely on occult titles now branched out into less specific areas. The end result was a dissolution of the formerly firm barriers between occult and mainstream publishing houses.

■ Where do we go from here?

Following closely on the "lifestyle magic" and New Age trends came another unexpected influence: the burgeoning interest in witchcraft as part of teen/alternative/Goth culture. Once dominated by initiatory (and "adult-only") covens, the Pagan community now began to experience a flood of interest from teenagers (and younger kids) who were introduced to Wiccan concepts through television, books, or access to the Internet. Publishers responded quickly with Jennifer Hunter's *21st Century Wicca: A Young Witch's Guide to Living the Magical Life* (1997) and Silver RavenWolf's controversial *Teen Witch* (1998).

Simultaneously, a more sophisticated Pagan sub-market began to develop which advocated depth instead of breadth in their Pagan reading. Books like Chas Clifton's *Witchcraft Today* series (1992-1994), Robin Wood's *When, Why... If* (1997), and the Reclaiming Collective's *Pagan Book of Living and Dying* (1998) began to appear, and academic houses began to target ethnographic and sociology of religion titles towards the Pagan market as well. One book in particular, Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (2000), caused a near-riot in the Pagan community: *Triumph* questioned many of Neo-Paganism's favorite (and foundational) myths from the point-of-view of a Pagan-friendly historian. If Hutton's work is any indication of what is to come, academic works in Pagan studies may end up being one of the most intriguing new sub-genres in the field.

Pagan non-fiction has become a recognized genre of mainstream publishing and will continue to mature as the next generation of Pagan children grow up. Important topics of interest will center on issues of interfaith relationships: how to raise Pagan families, cope with mundane neighbors and communities, explore ethical codes, find meaningful work and in general, assist Paganism in becoming more a part of society and less a rebellious subculture. Books like the Starhawk, Baker, and Hill collaboration *Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions* (2000) are steps in this direction. There will also continue to be a call for books on more advanced topics for practitioners who have already read every "Wicca 101" book and want more depth, leading to titles like GreyCat's *Deepening Witchcraft* (2002) and Judy Harrow's *Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide* (2002).

Pagan nonfiction started from obscure beginnings and has grown into a multi-million dollar business; as with anything else, this growth has both its upsides (increased availability of material) and its pitfalls (too many books makes it hard to find the good ones). The simplest way to deal with this is vote with your dollars: buy the books you like (hopefully you have good taste!) and encourage others to do the same. Only with the steadfast support of the Pagan community will publishers continue to produce books of quality and substance.

Books Referenced

- Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1979.
 Victor Anderson, *Thorns of the Bloodrose*, Cora Anderson, San Jose, CA, 1987.
 Paul Beyerl, *The Master Book of Herbalism*, Phoenix Publishing, Blaine, WA, 1984.
 P. E. I. Bonewits, *Real Magic*, Creative Arts Book Company, Berkeley, CA, 1978.
 Raymond Buckland, *Tree: The Complete Book of Saxon Witchcraft*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach, ME, 1974.
 Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, Del Ray Books, 1982.
 Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Feminist Book of Light and Shadows*, Wingbow Press, 1975.
 Ibid, *The Goddess in the Office: A Personal Energy Guide for the Spiritual Warrior of Work*, Harper San Francisco, CA, 1993.
 Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Harper & Row, New York, NY, 1979.

Chas A. Clifton, ed., *Witchcraft Today — Book One: Introduction? Modern Craft Movement*, (1992); *Book Two: Modern Rites of Passage*, (1993) and *Book Three: Witchcraft and Shamanism*, (1994), Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN.

Patricia and Arnold Crowther, *The Witches Speak*, Samuel Weiser, New York, NY, 1976.

Scott Cunningham, *Earth Power: Techniques of Natural Magic*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN, 1987.

Stewart Farrar, *What Witches Do: The Modern Coven Revealed*, Phoenix Publishing, Blaine, WA, 1983.

Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, Citadel Press, New York, NY, 1955.

Grey Cat, *Deepening Witchcraft*, ECW Press, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2002.

Judy Harrow, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Pagan Guide*, ECW Press, Toronto, Ontario, 2002.

Jennifer Hunter, *21st Century Wicca: A Young Witch's Guide to Living the Magical Life*, Citadel Press, Seacacus, NJ, 1997.

Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon, A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2000.

Amber K., *Covencraft: Witchcraft for Three or More*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN, 1998.

Sybil Leek, *The Complete Art of Witchcraft*, Signet, New York, NY, 1971.

Charles G. Leland, *Aradia: or the Gospel of the Witches*, original publisher unknown, 1896.

Diane Mariechild, *Mother Wit: A Feminist Guide to Psychic Development*, The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY, 1981.

Ashleen O'Gaea, *The Family Wicca Book: The Craft for Parents & Children*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN, 1993.

Silver RavenWolf, *Teen Witch*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN, 1998.

Ibid, *To Ride A Silver Broomstick*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN, 1993.

Starhawk and M. Macha Nightmare, ed., *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying: Practical Rituals, Prayers, Blessings, and Meditations on Crossing Over*, Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, 1998.

Starhawk, Diane Baker, and Anne Hill, *Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Traditions*, Bantam Books, New York, NY, 2000.

Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*, Beacon Press, San Francisco, CA, 1982.

Ibid, *The Spiral Dance*, Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, 1979.

Ibid, *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery*, Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, 1982.

Diane Stein, *The Women's Spirituality Book*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, MN, 1986.

Luisah Teish, *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book Of Personal Charms And Practical Rituals*, Harper San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, 1988.

Doreen Valiente, *An ABC Of Witchcraft*, Saint Martin's Press, New York, NY, 1973.

_____, *Natural Magic*, Phoenix Publishing, Blaine, WA, 1975.

Marion Weinstein, *Positive Magic*, Phoenix Publishing, Blaine, WA, 1981.

Robin Wood, *When, Why... If*, Livingtree Books, Dearborn, MI, 1997. ©

— LISA McSHERRY lives in Washington State and is the author of several books. You can visit her website at www.cybercoven.org.