

Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 189 pp., \$55.00 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

Chas Clifton's *Her Hidden Children* is a rare gem of contemporary Pagan history and ethnography. In this book, a successful balance is struck between an unapologetic insider positionality with regard to North American Pagan subculture and rigorous data and source analysis. Culling from sources as diverse as academic studies of Paganism to contemporary Pagan periodicals, popular publications, and interviews, Clifton presents a complex and nuanced history of Paganism and particularly Witchcraft in America, shifting easily between careful analytic outsider to participant and insider in the community he discusses. In addition to Clifton's engaging style, the effortlessness of this positional shift is a remarkable achievement and adds to the enjoyment of this necessary historical contribution.

Analogizing the growth of American Paganism to an island where many overlapping and dependent life forms spring up simultaneously, Clifton explores the emergence of Pagan subculture with its fractious and invented lineages, solitary practitioners, innovations, apocrypha, and syncretistic leanings, and argues successfully for these to be considered components of the American Pagan community character. Understanding this as American Paganism's cultural background provides insight into the perceived endemic schisming and hiving within the community – which means American Pagans will always be wary of lineages, boundaries, and claims of legitimacy – but also, similarly to Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon*, lays to rest much of contemporary Paganism's lore-laden foundation stories. Not only does Clifton bring to the table the perception and interpretation of one who has witnessed this repeatedly in his practice, but backs up the legend-unraveling with abundant source literature. Particularly effective, and an example of this effortless insider/outsider shift, is his description and deconstruction of the Pagan "Fam-trad," a phenomenon so common in Paganism that Clifton is able to split it open and display it as a cultural and conventional pattern, which most involved in the community have been unable to detect in the past because of their immersion and investment in their tradition. Clifton does a solid job of stepping out of his community and holding a mirror back at it for everyone to see, and doing so respectfully and, at times, with a reverent humor.

Clifton also explores influences on American Paganism that span lineage, literature, and popular culture, and attempts the beginning explorations of regionally specific expressions of Pagan identity and practice. Within this analysis, Clifton explores the construction of the American "nature religion," and how a small, modern occult mystery tradition from England hit the American shores and morphed into a social and political phenomenon that grew around a rare common theme of "reverence for nature." Clifton successfully discusses the invention of the concept of "nature religion," based on these varying influences alongside American notions of sacred wilderness, which, along with the traditions and personalities of lineage innovators, aided in the creation of the American Witch and Pagan.

*Her Hidden Children* is an important and welcome contribution to academic and non-scholar Pagans alike. It is unusual for the dissection and exploration of nuances and complexities to solidify an identity; paradoxically, through his careful research and willingness to present divisions and overlaps in Paganism as strengths, Clifton has presented a history and discussion of identity formation that fills in foundational

gaps and broadens the scope of what it means to be Pagan in America.

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Alan Pert, *Red Cactus: The Life of Anna Kingsford* (Watsons Bay, Australia: Books and Writers, 2006), ix + 233 pp, AUS \$39.95 (paper).

Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) cut a wide swath during her short life. One of the first female British physicians (having received a medical degree in Paris), she owned a newspaper, promoted progressive views on women’s dress, diet, and health, and espoused vegetarianism and animal rights. “As I am against the orthodox priest, I am against the orthodox ‘doctor’,” she wrote at one point (p. 86). Elsewhere, according to a friend, “she had recently come to the conclusion that the proper and natural food for man was uncooked, therefore mainly fruit and nuts” (p. 46). The same friend, Florence Fenwick Miller, praised both Kingsford’s physical beauty and her intellect and force of mind, comparing her variously to Cleopatra, Mary Queen of Scots, the martyred philosopher Hypatia, and “Aspasia the friend and counsellor of Pericles” (p. 47).

Having married a theological student who gained a parish position in Shropshire, Kingsford converted to Roman Catholicism in order to escape the duties of a rural vicar’s wife, produced one son, and thereafter used her husband primarily to forward her mail while following her callings in more metropolitan locales.

The chief male companion of her adult life was one Edward Maitland, himself a flamboyant mystic, a bit of a would-be Svengali, and until now Kingsford’s only biographer. In this new work, Alan Pert (music librarian at the University of Sydney) rightly mourns the fact that no sooner had Kingsford died from tuberculosis than he burnt all her letters and diaries, not to mention documents connected with her presidency of the British Theosophical Society. More concerned with her own brand of esoteric Christianity than with H.P. Blavatsky’s mahatmas and ascended masters, she eventually withdrew after various conflicts with Blavatsky’s partisans.

Some scholars of Western esotericism credit Kingsford’s leadership with renewing interest in Gnostic Christianity; she is also credited with opening the way for the Societas Rosicruciana and subsequently the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. That aspect of her life (beyond the political infighting of the Theosophical Society) is played down in *Red Cactus*, however, in favor of her women’s rights and anti-vivisection campaigning. Pert spends very little space on her hermetic and mystical writings. Thus, for the researcher in Western esotericism or the history of contemporary Paganism, *Red Cactus* will be a secondary source at best, setting Kingsford within her milieu of Victorian social causes.

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