

Patrick Maille, *The Cards: The Evolution and Power of Tarot* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 260 pp., \$99 (hardcover), \$25 (paperback).

I've written extensively about Tarot, particularly its history, so I am always excited to see a new volume out on the subject with the potential to expand my knowledge and shift my viewpoint. I was particularly excited because at first flush this seems like an academic work, written by a professor of history, Patrick Maille, of Oklahoma Panhandle State University.

It's soon evident that this is not the case. *The Cards: The Evolution and Power of Tarot* is an incongruously named book which does not really deal with either the evolution or the power of Tarot. It is not an academic work at all, referencing just a handful of books throughout (including my own). Because of this, it is sitting in an odd spot. It is not a work for academics; the referencing is sporadic and inconsistently formatted. But neither is it a work for Tarot practitioners; there is not an exposition of symbolism or spreads, interpretations of card combinations, or reversals. This volume sits alongside those books you find in any bookstore that provide an overview of a topic. For anyone with a passing interest in Tarot it is an engaging read.

*The Cards* consists of two parts made up of seven chapters in total. The introduction neatly deals with how Maille comes to this topic (the woman who was to become his wife read his Tarot cards). He also makes explicit his views on the Tarot (he does not believe they are magical, but believes they have value). What I am less comfortable with, and again, what signals that this is not an academic work, is the populist use of terms such as esoteric and Gnosticism. These terms are generally well-defined in the literature but Maille has declined to situate them within that context.

Part 1 of the book deals with the history of Tarot and playing cards. I am cited heavily in those chapters, along with a few others. However, Maille is not always scrupulous about acknowledging the work of others. More worrisome, there are a number of errors in his account. Prominent Tarot scholar Emily E. Auger has elsewhere written a very detailed review of this volume, and I suggest Pagan studies scholars seek that out rather than replicate that list here. One

particular error that concerns me the most is Maillé's assertion that the regular playing card deck and the trumps co-existed quite separately for a number of centuries. There is no evidence to support this assertion and there are a number of extant decks and written accounts (such as Christina Olsen's 1994 thesis *Carte da Trionfi*) that demonstrate otherwise. Having said all of that, these chapters will give the reader a reasonable overview of Tarot history, including the deck's progression from a game to a fortune-telling and magical device in more recent times.

Also included in this part is a third chapter that describes some of those people who comprise the Tarot community in North America. It seems like an odd chapter in an illogical place, featuring the anecdotal experiences of Maillé's own reading daughter who provides a transcript of readings to middle-aged women seeking advice.

The second part of the book is made up of four chapters that examine cards themselves and then a chapter each describing as depicted in television, movies, and comics. It was this second part of the book I thought would really add value to the corpus of works about . The first chapter in this section, "The Art of Tarot," is little more than another look at the history of from a slightly different point of view. It almost exclusively deals with the artists and ideas dealing with the design of , rather than looking at how has featured in art works, especially in more contemporary times.

The subsequent three chapters consider in television, movies, and comics respectively. The three chapters take a very similar approach in that they describe those contexts in which is depicted but without any overarching analysis or even speculation about how has impacted popular culture or will continue to impact popular culture. Popular culture studies is its own discipline with its own theorists, literature, and methodologies, yet Maillé has not engaged significantly with any of those, instead restricting his discussion to a description of the cards and their context where they appear in television, movies, or comics.

In conclusion, I feel I am critiquing a book that was never intended to be what I wanted it to be. Those with an interest in , a rainy afternoon, and a hot chocolate, may enjoy perusing this book. It is accessible and easy to read. Maillé's anecdotes and musings are interesting and engaging. The book is a bit like a Wikipedia article in that it will broadly orient you to the area, but it is not a reputable source that systematically details a specific topic after a careful digestion of the literature. Scholars interested in the academic treatment of will not

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find it here. There is a well-established and ever-expanding body of literature that deals with Tarot. The timeline and the reading list are not exhaustive. This volume thus reflects Maille's own fairly superficial research rather than being a genuine attempt at documenting the space.

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