



## Book of Shadows

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## **Book of Shadows** Phyllis Curott

"Most people know intuitively that when you fall in love the world is full of magic. What they don't know is that when you discover the universe is full of magic, you fall in love with the world."

When high-powered Manhattan lawyer Phyllis Curott began exploring Witchcraft, she discovered a spiritual movement that defied all stereotypes. Encountering neither satanic rites nor eccentric spinsters, she came to know a clandestine religion of the Goddess that had been forced into hiding over the course of history. Book of Shadows recounts Curott's remarkable initiation into Wicca (meaning "wise one") and shares her insights as a high priestess of an elegant, ancient spirituality that celebrates the magic of being alive.

An Ivy-league graduate and promising lawyer, Curott was a typical young woman in her twenties, determined to forge a law career within the burgeoning, male-dominated music industry. But when she began having prophetic dreams and mysterious visions of ancient female figures and unfamiliar symbols, she discovered an unexpected world of magic and began searching for a rational explanation. When her friend Sophia--a practicing Witch--suggested having her cards read by a Wiccan High Priestess, Curott instinctively dismissed the idea, but then forced her natural skepticism aside on the chance that this age-old practice might help her understand the unusual occurrences in her life.

Thus begins her journey into the magical world of Witchcraft, a religion originally practiced by priestesses, shamans, and healers that empowers our lives by working with the natural cycles of nature. Fascinated by this pre-Judeo-Christian religion that honors women as the embodiment of the Goddess and emphasizes respect and love for the natural world, Curott began attending a local coven's weekly circle to learn the sacred arts. Her Book of Shadows chronicles her ascent to the position of Wiccan High Priestess and her efforts to reconcile her newfound spirituality with her struggles as a woman rising through the ranks of the corporate world. Along the way, Curott relates the history of Witchcraft and shares many traditional Wiccan practices, such as casting a circle, drawing down the Goddess, harnessing the powers of the natural world, and casting spells for health, prosperity, and love.

Engagingly written and rich with detailed rituals and techniques, this inspirational book traces a modern woman's spiritual journey into a realm of extraordinary experience and enlightenment. Book of Shadows provides us with the keys to discover an enchanted world of divine empowerment so as to unlock the power that lies within us all

## **Book of Shadows Details**

Date : Published October 5th 1999 by Harmony (first published 1998)

ISBN : 9780767900553

Author : Phyllis Curott

Format : Paperback 302 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Spirituality, Religion, Wicca, Paganism, Witchcraft, Autobiography, Memoir



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## From Reader Review Book of Shadows for online ebook

### **Passenger B. says**

I'm not fond of all the Wiccan bashing in other brands of Paganism and so it pains me to have to rate this book no more than two stars because it basically confirms all the ridiculous, negative stereotypes about Wiccans and "fluffy New-Agers" that are floating around on the internet.

I started reading this book expecting fully to like, yes, perhaps even love it, because I'd heard nothing but good things about it.

As a Pagan - though a tad more agnostic-leaning - I'm kind of spiritual myself, there are things I question and others I "believe" or rather find very likely you could say and concepts such as reincarnation, intuition or having a personal relationship with your Gods isn't (necessarily) weird or crazy to me. I respect different beliefs and traditions, which is essential to polytheism imo. However... you can take everything too far. And Phyllis Curott is one of those people who seem not to even live in this reality or on this planet anymore. Absolutely everything that happened to her or in her life was "foretold", a message from higher powers, she sensed, dreamed or just knew things before they happened or she learned about them from other/worldly/reliable sources... And to top it off it's not enough that she is a witch or Wiccan, no, she is some kind of super-Wiccan/reincarnation of an infamous "Goddess".

I mean... come on. This is like 30% of all Americans I ever met telling me that they're "part Native American" - and not only that but they are the descendant of a Cherokee princess! It just gets old and ludicrous and, well, boring tbh.

You know, I hate it, I totally hate that I couldn't like this book although I really, I mean REALLY REALLY, tried. Perhaps Mrs. Curott is a lovely person and I feel kind of bad for bashing her book like this, but... I just honestly just didn't particularly enjoy it. I'm sorry!

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### **Gaile says**

An American woman's journey into the ancient practice of Wiccan or the Old Religion of Europe.

This is a true story but it is not an easy read.

This book will give the reader much food for thought. It includes descriptions of the old ways of worship, the various tales and names of the goddess gathered from many lands and cultures. It describes not only what the author's group did in their circle meetings but also how the friendships she made and how it impacted both her personal and professional life.

Deep and absorbing, if you have ever lived a life in which you participated in the rituals described in this book, you will dream it. I certainly did and emerged wondering, "Did I just stumble across this book or was it set in concrete that I would eventually come upon it?"

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### **Makereta says**

I have a soft spot for this book. I read it at a time I was making great changes inner changes and it influenced me profoundly. Phyllis Curott's delivery will not appeal to everyone. Such books can only ever be written from one's own experience and Ms Curott does come from a strong academic background, and has built a career as a successful New York lawyer and peace activist, with a strong feminist streak. It was in fact the

'urban intellectual' edge that appealed to me, being as I was at the time a childless city girl living in a farming community and surrounded by people whose beliefs I admired but which seemed reinforced by a connection they had to the land - a connection I did not quite share. What Ms Curott was able to impress upon me through her story was how every single one of us can find our own way to a congress with the natural world and with the mystical if we are prepared to read all the signs. That particular connection will not be open to us unless we seek our own inner truth and choose lives that enable us to reflect that truth - wherever we live, whatever we do, whoever we love, whatever traditions we were raised in.

I am no longer the person I was when I first read this book. And I follow no church-, party-, or coven-line when it comes to spirituality - but I think that is the point of the story. Do your own research and follow your conscience accordingly. This book still stands as a reminder to me never to be frightened of change and to always keep an open heart and mind. For this I thank the author and will continue to keep a well-thumbed copy of her "Book of Shadows" on my shelf.

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### **Megan Orr says**

The only thing that really bothers me about this book is the style of writing. I feel like the author is describing life through Cinderella's eyes or something. I feel like the author could spend an entire paragraph going into flowery description about the most mundane thing and it bothers me a bit.

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### **Jen says**

In honor of Samhain, I thought I would give props to my favorite book about Wicca and Paganism of all time. This book literally changed my life.

In *Book of Shadows*, Ms. Curott tells the incredibly compelling (and true) story of her personal journey finding the Goddess, and thereby her truest self. I found this book while I was just starting down that path myself, and it helped me release all of fear and shame I felt for leaving the religion I was raised in to find something that fit with my inherent world views. There have been many books published on this subject, many of them either misleading or downright ridiculous, and finding a good one can be difficult (especially for the beginning practitioner). However, this one is eloquent, smart, and cut through the bullshit enough to make me realize that I had found the right fit for me.

I highly recommend this book if you are 1) exploring this path yourself, 2) are just curious about what the hell it's all about, or 3) if you have a friend/relative who just "came out of the broom closet" and you're worried they are going to start sacrificing squirrels or virgins. (You think I jest, but I've heard it all...)

She is one of my personal heroes, and not just for writing her amazing guidebooks. It's because as a Priestess, a filmmaker, and a human rights lawyer, she's an inspiration to all of us who want to make the world a better place.

I was lucky enough to meet Ms. Curott in person at a book signing for one of her other books, *The Love Spell*, and I had the privilege of thanking her in person for what she did for me.

And I'll thank her again in this review. Thank you, Ms. Curott, for helping an awkward, agnostic,

questioning girl with huge self-esteem issues find a path that has kept her grounded for the last decade.

Blessed be.

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### **Jillian says**

I read this book when it was first released , and as a starry eyed woman in my early adulthood, I thought it was so amazing. I was "Enchanted" by Curott's descriptions of her coven, magickal work, and initiations. I re-read it recently , 20 years later, and through my now-skeptical , older eyes, I didn't find it nearly as good. The visuals in this book are beautifully described, and I really liked the sound of her HPS', Maia and Bellona (who are amazing women IRL, haven't formally met them, but know who they are..trailblazers in the NYC craft.). It read like a myth or tale and did make me want to keep reading it as a result, Phyllis does a good job of characterization and the storyline moves along pretty well.

However, here's where I saw the rot I didn't see about 20 years ago:

The author is undoubtably privileged..wealthy background more than hinted at. lawyer. educated. White woman. Etc. However..she seems to want to remind you of this throughout the book. Her lunch at the Russian Tea room where she sees the celebrities and one at his "usual table", name dropping oh so casually and letting us know she's been there before. Knowing what to order without looking at the menu and ordering caviar and champagne, which seemed a little hacky, like a caricature of what rich people eat. she went to one of the "top law schools in the country" and wastes no time telling us that. She shops at Bergdorf's and goes to a boutique with a fitting room "larger than her apartment". We get it, Phyllis. You have money and are hobnobbing with the stars. Enough said. That was all a head scratcher, as the truly wealthy people I've known, especially NYC people, don't name drop or discuss at length what rich people do in New York. Most old money people find that tacky and pretentious.

For someone that reminds us constantly she is privileged, tall, blond, thin and desired apparently by every man that crosses her path, she does little to CHECK her privilege. The way she describes her HPS' are often patronizing...Bellonna.."Her education stopped at high school, but she was intelligent". Maia.."earthy edge of a Bensonhurst accent.". She puts her teachers on a pedestal on one hand, but on another, she seems to place herself above them. She is the rich, educated one, they are just poor women from the Bronx that are somehow "intelligent". She also seeks out Gillian in the group as a friend, as "by background and education" they have so much in common and she "recognizes her prominent last name". Ugh. Again, a lot of ooohing and aahing over Gillian's wealth. She makes friends with Jeanette, a Caribbean woman older than her, and takes the role of patronizing white woman: she wants to rescue Jeanette from her ex. Jeanette "needs her" for a ritual. Please. The other women are also walking stereotypes: Marcia, the "bodybuilder" who is gruff is a lesbian. Naomi, the other openly lesbian woman, of course has a relationship with her. Annabelle, the southern belle. A few of the other women on the periphery aren't mentioned at all..i think you hear about Mindy once.

She also lets us know that a "winnowing" occurs and she is one of the women invited back for the circle and others are voted off the island, I guess. I doubt that's what really happened. she said they "weren't invited back"..but did she ever stop to think maybe they had covens of their own? were solitaries? High Priestesses or Elders? She wasn't particularly speshul for being singled out, and might not have been. The HPS' probably selected the women that wanted to be trained in the coven and asked them about it. No mention of Curott's superior attitude needing to be taken down a notch, and from the training I have had, most HPS would do that in a heartbeat. When I was a cocky 22 year old in a new coven and a know it all, i got brought down to size , in a nice way, PDQ/.

I realize it was written in the early 80s when stereotypes were more readily acceptable and there was less awareness, but she offers no retrospect. Nothing. and a "feminist" would examine their relationships to women of colour and other income brackets and see they might be acting superior.

Then we get to the magick. Oh, the magick. I was so amazed by it as a young woman. She sees flaming pentagrams, spirals of light, has visions that rival MGM and their spells/rites always work in an obvious way and are phenomenally successful.

Maybe that is how she experienced it. I have seen things myself, but not in this hollywood-style manner. Also..this isn't "Charmed." . Spells don't always work. People are not always healed. Your boss doesn't always suddenly cower in his office because you envisioned pentagrams on his door. No, no, no.

Magick does work, but often in ways we least expect, or very subtle ways. Sometimes people stay sick and die, and we aren't able to save them. Prosperity and love spells don't always work. Nor do banishings. Or, they don't work in ways that are completely obvious and exactly what we want.

For someone that highly doubted anything religious or spiritual, she does little questioning of what she is learning. She seems to take to it right away. No struggle about identity or what this means or serious doubt lasting longer than a page or two.

I also know that any group of women (or women and men, or men, or whomever) does not get along famously 100% of the time. Nor do covens. Maia shows her temper once, and then immediately cools down. Covens have gossip, people that just can't get along, and emotional outbursts. Same as any other group. Either this is the most miraculous group of women paired together i've ever seen, or it's highly embellished. I'd bank on the latter.

Now, Hadus. Oh dear. First of all, it's not a stretch for the reader to figure out this is a play on the Greek God "Hades", that captured Persephone in his underworld. She is obviously Persephone and he is Hades, whisking her into his realm of riches and glamour (eye roll). Yes, he was an awful person and a sexist pig, and I know women in the 80s had it even worse in the workplace than they do now. I don't doubt that for a second. But he was so one dimensional..Hadus, bad. Phyllis, good. He was basically Satan incarnate. Then there is the jolly older boss, the grim secretaries, the nasty personal secretary and the chipper Madeline (who also name drops according to this account.). It seems more like a Greek tragedy than a memoir. Maybe it was..but she said the story was true and only the names changed. I kept thinking that whoever Hadus is, he must recognize himself in the story and not be too thrilled about it. Maybe he deserves it. But, did she ever face repercussions from that? Would be interesting to know. She also protects the names of her first teachers in the book, then thanks them publicly in the beginning by their real names. (what?). That also confused me. I'm sure they agreed to it, but why not use their names throughout?

This lady certainly thought an awful lot of herself. Being selected from a tarot reading, a group, then told she was the one they were all waiting for. Not saying she had to grovel, but i didn't see a whole lot of humility here.

It is really sad when your favourite books as a younger person kind of stink when you read them older. I know Phyllis has made a lot of contributions to the Craft and is a respected Elder. I don't deny that at all, and I don't know her so can't say how she is in person. However, just from reading this book, I wouldn't get a great impression. Maybe she was trying to show how her 25 year old self was more self-involved than she is now? If that were the case, would be nice to see that in the forward.

Overall, I don't see why so many old school witches adored this book. too much puff and pageantry and too little reality and self-awareness.

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### **Sarah says**

I was expecting to like this book based on many good reviews and recommendations. It was an easy read, and somewhat entertaining despite that it read like a chick flick movie script full of cliche situations. From the beginning I had guessed that near the end she would declare some greatness via reincarnation. She kept talking about Isis and ancient priestesses. Everything came to her in a psychic premonition. She dreamed up everything before formally studying or learning about it. She was always reluctant to practice witchcraft with her group and even before being initiated was wondering if they were really Satanists. What I am getting at is, she (or her very much invented character based on herself) never took initiative to learn basic things for herself from books or ask simple questions early on in her practice. Many of the situations she got stuck in were eye roll worthy. The leaders of her group casts love and prosperity spells especially for her, despite her being a successful, wealthy businesswoman.(Probably the most successful in her group.) She even breaks down in tears after being fired/quitting her job under her evil-ex-boyfriend-who-is-always-lusting-after-her boss, wondering how she will keep food on the table. We have to believe she was chosen out of 70 some odd women to practice with them despite her reluctance and mistrust of witchcraft. Then in her initiation to the coven, she quickly chooses the name Aradia (you know because books fall off the shelf for her all the time and it always means something). The crone nods at her and says, "We've been waiting for you." and I couldn't stop laughing. I guess she gets away with it, because she didn't directly state it, but she is implying that she is Aradia (One cannot deny the build-up of her being someone special, destined for greatness). I really thought this book was phony and I think those are pretty good reasons why.

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### **Caroline says**

I really like this book and have re-read it numerous times over the years. Each time I pick it, something else stands out that was missed the last time it was read. If you are wanting to re-balance and re-think and move forward within from a starting point of discovering that spiritual side of you, then this is the perfect book for you.

Try not to take it too literally. Each person is on their own path spiritually, whether its Wiccan, priestess or just trying to connect to oneself. You have to remember, its Phyllis's journey, I'm sure there are aspects of the book that are embellished, and if so, just take what you like from it and put the rest aside. This book is worth the read.

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### **Charis Branson says**

A must read for anyone interested in the Craft.

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## **Meg says**

I have to give this book 4 stars because it's just so well written and enjoyable. It's an absorbing page-turner which does a beautiful job of integrating information about witchcraft with the author's personal journey.

Now we come to the reason I can't give it full marks: I want Phyllis Curott's life. It seems she doesn't ever have to do the laundry, call the phone company to sort out billing issues, or clean puked-up red jello off the living room couch. (Yeah, no one in this book has kids... for a fertility religion, it would seem Wicca doesn't really make a lot of room for actual parents.) Besides working long hours at her glamorous, high-powered job with a cinema-worthy villain boss, her life is apparently composed of: taking scented baths to wash away her frustrations, meditating under park trees, decorating her altar with fresh flowers, reading books about ancient Goddess worship, sitting in the Metropolitan Museum's Egyptian wing meditating, going camping where she is surrounded by fireflies yet never by mosquitoes, and having fulfilling/ empowering rituals with her amazing coven that NEVER has interpersonal issues. Oh, and buying designer clothes that fit her perfectly and make her look gorgeous.

Hmmm. Perhaps I sound a little bitter. I mean, I know she has to pay her bills and change the cat litter like anyone else, and it probably wouldn't be such an exciting read if she included all that stuff. Then again... if she could make changing the cat litter into a magical act, that would be a lot more useful to me at this particular stage of my life than hearing about fantasy rituals and scented baths.

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## **Elisa says**

Abbandonato.

Io ci ho provato ma proprio non fa per me, troppo didascalico e semplicistico. Racconta una storia fin troppo personale dove trovare qualcosa di universale che valga per tutti i neofiti wiccan è davvero difficile. Non penso che possa essermi utile per rispondere alle mie curiosità sull'argomento, che sono di natura più filosofico-teorica che pratica.

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## **Gail Cleare says**

This is the best book on witchcraft for beginners that I have ever read. It is not a simple spellbook, but goes into the emotion and spirituality behind the magic.

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## **Steve Cran says**

Back in the 70's at age 25 Phyllis Currot was in her last year of law school. At age 25 she begins having prophetic visions and dreams that start coming true. In her dreams she hears the chanting dedicated to the Goddess. Isis, Astarte, Hecate, Diana, Demeter, Kali Inanna. She meets with Isis and starts doing research. Later she will move to Washington DC to fight organized crime for a labor union. The firm she works for eventually closes its doors and Phyllis returns to New York. While in Washington she works hard and soon loses her prophetic vision.

Back in New York Phyllis links up with a friend who introduces her to a coven of Wiccan follower. Her friend is a solitary witch. The coven is an all female coven dedicated to the Goddess that meets in the back of an occult shop. Phyllis decides to join. Along the way she is instructed by three people. Maia, Nonna and Belonna.

Phyllis also lands a new job at a record company doing contracts. Her boss Mr. Hadus is a typical powerful executive with inferiority issues underneath his macho exterior. He is demanding, verbally abusive and predatorial. The job is stressfull.

While in the circle Phyllis learns about meditation, casting spells and the philosophy of the Goddess. The true aim of magick is control over oneself not over others or the universe. Phyllis's introduction into the coven prompts her on a journey into the history of witchcraft and how witches were persecuted.. She also learns how the world once worshipped the Goddess and women were Shaman and leadership. The world was peaceful until the male dominated religions took over and degraded the woman's position

As her life progresses Phyllis discovers along with her friend Jeanette the need to do a banishing spell against Jeanette's ex husband. They do a spell invoking a West African Goddess. They make a poppet and put it in a icebox. The man later gets arrested in a drug deal by federal agents. She does a banishing ritual against her boss by imagining pentagrams on his door. It works and he leaves her alone. She trains for a year with her mentors and during that year she does find the strengths to leave her job.

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At the end she must find a magical name for herself.. She finds it in Central park and at first thinks it is prosperina but later calls herself Aradia. Excellent book filled with anecdote for newcomer to the craft.. Several useful techniques as well.

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### **Tanya says**

This is one of the best books I have ever read about what it "feels like" to be a witch, to be in a coven. It is not a stand here say this type of novel. It describes the author's journey into Wicca. What I loved most about this book is how the author made you feel as though you were sitting right there in the group when the circle was cast. Descriptive and beautiful. This is a great book for a beginner to read to get the feel of how to begin the Wiccan path.

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### **Hilary says**

On second reading of this book, I realized that my life now is mirroring the author's, with the whole "Persephone's descent into the Underworld" theme. All that glitters most certainly is not gold, and the thing

of true value in this world are our spirits.

An amazing book, and highly recommended for those people still seeking out their own form of spirituality.

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