

Sabbat Wine of the Witches

by tim hartridge

Drink from the cup of Witches' wine and remember ancient rites forgotten by time.

WITCHCRAFT is a practical system of mysticism whose method is known as magick. At the core of my experience of Witchcraft is a direct and personal encounter of the psychic reality. I have come to understand Witchcraft as a type of gnosis or mysticism through which communion with the Divine is the principle initiation. Akin to the Mystery Cults of the ancient Pagan world, the experiences hold an occult quality that may lead you far from the usual encounters of secular religion and into the practice of magick. I believe this is exactly what the Initiates of the old Pagan Mystery Cults experienced and precisely what Gerald Gardner, the father of modern Witchcraft, had in mind with the contemporary expression of Wicca (I use the terms Wicca and Witchcraft interchangeably).

My early encounter of practical magick was via the casting of spells learned from a man who had spent years living with the Spanish Gypsies. Marc de Pascale had published his collection of Gypsy sorcery under the title Book of Spells. He was a gifted psychic, a natural clairvoyant and over an occasional exchange of tarot readings we became friends. His spellcraft worked well and it taught me to rely on my ability to wilfully cause results through visualisation. By candlelight I would enter a dreamlike state where desires took on ghostly forms, tangible and fluid-like. Later, I learned this manifestation had a name, the vinum sabbati or sabbat wine of the Witches.

The vinum sabbati is a substance not made of any ordinary fruits of the vine. It's roots draw from the rich, dark recesses of dreams. This ethereal fruit may be harvested under the light of the midnight moon, and fermented in a cauldron of dreams generated in the nocturnal trance of sleep. Whether awake or dreaming the world of imagination is most acute in children, but some adults maintain this capacity. Although I didn't realise it in my youth, for most of my life I have had a natural propensity to this type of imaginative impulse. In the practices of Witchcraft I found methods to engage my psychic dreams, coupled with an overwhelming fascination to understand what was behind these twilight experiences...

excerpt continued...

'We mark this round and cast this rune
Upon this night in the sight of the moon
Our bare feet mark this Witches' round
And thus it becomes hallowed ground'
(From the rite 'Lumen in Tenebrae' by Tim Hartridge)

The coven membership had expanded and with it our need for a more dedicated space. We rented a large old house in an inner suburb of Adelaide, it was perfect for our needs and not surprisingly had a witchy number, No.13. We painted the whole house, the ritual room standing in stark contrast to the rest of the rooms with it's deep indigo blue walls and stained red cedar floorboards with the witches' circle painted on it. This became the physical heart of the coven's ritual practice.

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Hypnotic, strangely soothing, the Witches' mantra named and called to the twilight spirit to draw down. The lithe spirit entered into the mid -

night-room. Weaving the magick of the sonorous spell, as ancient as humankind, the Witches called to the moon. The supreme and archaic Witch Goddess, ruler of the deep indigo night, the ethereal shape-shifter who bestows mana upon Her chosen. The voice of the Goddess's Priestess sang the charm to the night and the moon, calling the Lunar Goddess to draw near. Other voices joined, summoning the bright Goddess into the Witches' circle. A spirit of the night responded and I felt afloat as though on the flowing tide. The deeper the echoes chanted, the more I sank into an emotional sea mixed with currents of excited joy and engulfing sadness. Luna was with us, She who rules the oceans, lovers and lunatics. I was immersed in an atmosphere both brightly charged and darkly intoxicating. She began to appear. Gliding into the sensuous bodies of the Witches and gazing out through their eyes; she was all around me, in the faces of these wild Witches and in the rhythm of the dance, She whirled around and around me. The lunar current swarmed tangibly and surreally in the sea of incense in which we swam. In the centre was a dark iron cauldron and out of it danced a flame. The scarlet fire rose and flared with such force it wound and spiralled up into the air. It transformed into a massive leviathan, from out of the black cauldron it belated a flood of flame like a firestorm. Awe, terror, thrill, intensity poured out in a powerful cone of bright fire, engulfing my body and brain.

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Such encounters taught me a great deal. If the Goddess had been an ideal, something not quite real to me, then experiences like these changed all this. I instinctively knew She stalked me, occasionally leaving me hints and clues where I should look to find Her. If the Goddess had seemed more like a yearning for something far away, like lovers kept apart by the cruel circumstance of Fate, then through such initiatory experiences Her presence was felt most acutely in my life...

About the Author



TIM HARTRIDGE has been a practicing Witch since his early teens, and became involved in coven-based Witchcraft in 1973. An active Pagan advocate, he has appeared in TV, radio and print media interviews. For a number of years he ran an Adelaide radio programme 'Broomstick Corner' (1981--84) and independently published 'Dark Cycle Magazine'(1986--89), 'Venifica' newsletter (1986--89) and 'OzPagan' newsletter (1992--93). The OzPagan Internet site was also launched in 1992, making it the first Pagan Internet site in Australia. He was the driving force behind the annual Eostre gathering (1985--1997), the first Pagan festival of its kind to be held in Australia and is currently a major contributor to the annual Euphoria gathering (2000--present) held in Victoria. He was a founder-member of the Sydney-based Dark Circle (established 1984) and continues to run a local coven. He presents regular Workshops in Witchcraft and runs the WitchesWorkshop internet-based E-list, now the largest Australian Pagan E-group.

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