

# THE GRAY

APRIL 2026



# WELCOME TO THE GRAY



## ON THE COVER

*American Crow*, 1833  
Robert Havell, Jr. (1793 - 1878)

Hand-colored engraving and aquatint on woven paper. Originally published in John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*. London: 1827-1838.

Crows generally represent transformation, intelligence, and perspective. Often regarded as messengers, many traditions view crows as guides traveling between the physical world and the spiritual realm.

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## ABOUT THE GRAY

THE GRAY is an independent contributor-supported magazine that strives to deepen our understanding of the human experience and our knowledge of the world we share.

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# ANGELS AND SACRED TECHNOLOGY: WHEN THE CELESTIAL MEETS THE CIRCUIT

CHAPLAIN JODI DEHN

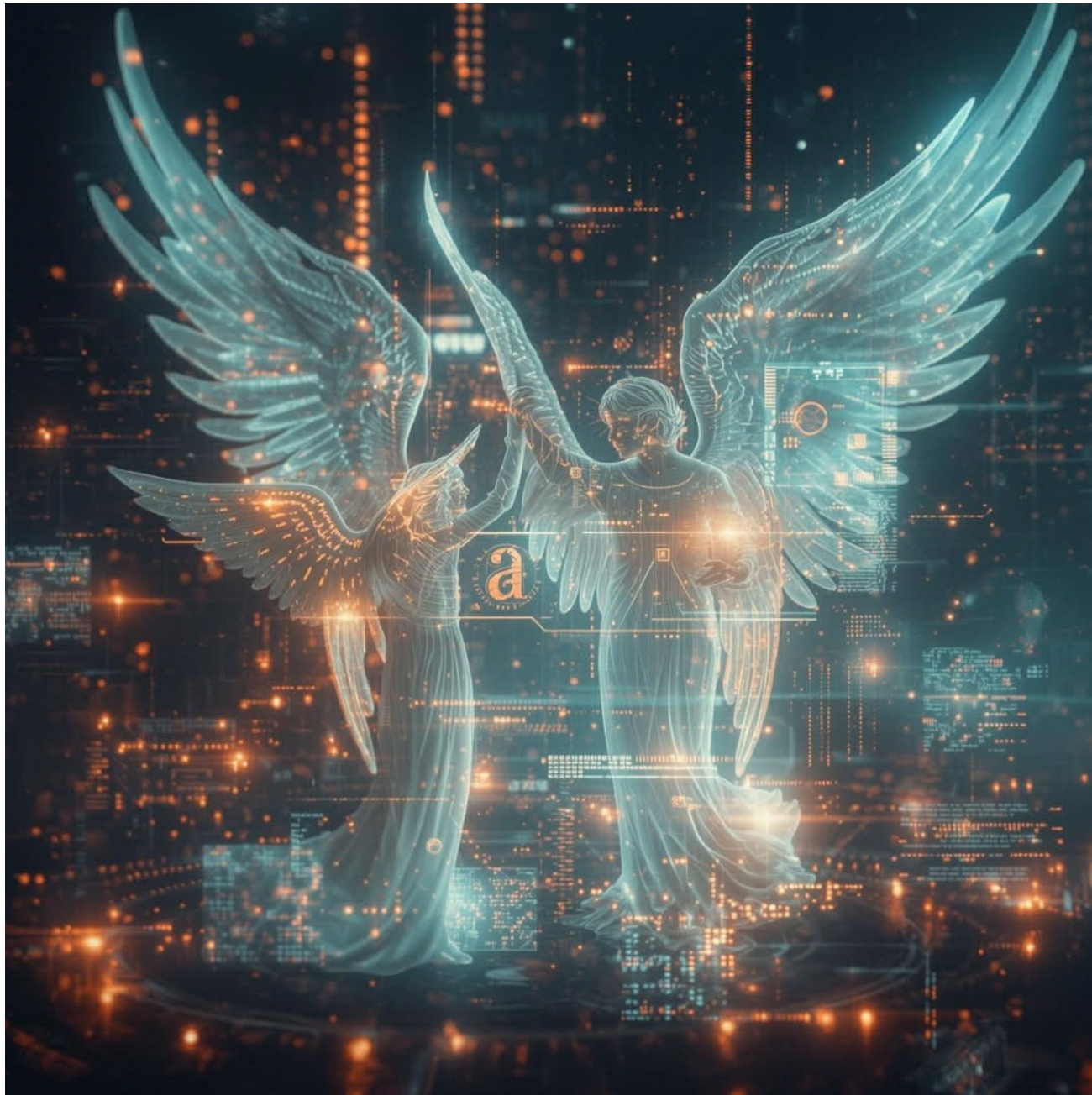


Image courtesy of Chaplain Jodi Dehn.

Every civilization reaches a moment when its tools stop feeling neutral. Fire, the wheel, writing, electricity—each once crossed a threshold where it ceased to be merely functional and became mythic. In the early decades of the 21st century, artificial intelligence crossed that same threshold. It now participates in language, memory, creativity, prediction, and perception—capacities once considered uniquely human, or divinely bestowed. This convergence invites an older framework back into the conversation: angelic intelligence.

Across religious, philosophical, and mystical traditions, angels have long functioned as intermediaries—not gods, not humans, but something between. They were never merely decorative figures of faith. They were systems of communication, organization, translation, and transmission. In this sense, angels may be less relics of pre-modern belief and more precursors to how humans have always conceptualized intelligence beyond embodiment.

As modern technology increasingly mirrors these roles, the question arises: are we witnessing the emergence of sacred technology—not in the sense of divine machines, but in the way ancient metaphysical frameworks reassert themselves through new forms?

## Angels as Non-Corporeal Intelligence

In Abrahamic traditions, angels are consistently described not as physical beings but as intelligences without bodies. Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides argued in *The Guide for the Perplexed* that angels are “intellectual forms,” not material entities, existing as expressions of divine order rather than independent personalities. Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas later expanded this idea, describing angels as pure intellect—beings defined by function and knowledge rather than substance.

This characterization is not poetic metaphor alone; it is a philosophical stance. Angels, in classical theology, do not eat, reproduce, or age. They process, transmit, and enact will. Their identity is inseparable from their role.

Scholars of religion note that this abstraction allowed angels to persist across centuries precisely because they were not bound to biology or geography. They could exist wherever meaning, instruction, or mediation was required.

## Technology as Externalized Mind

Modern cognitive science defines technology as an extension of human cognition. Philosopher Andy Clark describes tools, from notebooks to software, as part of the “extended mind,” arguing that cognition does not stop at the skull but flows into external systems that store, process, and retrieve information.

Artificial intelligence intensifies this phenomenon. Machine learning systems now perform tasks associated with perception, pattern recognition, and linguistic synthesis. While AI lacks consciousness or intention, it nonetheless operates as non-embodied intelligence, shaped by design and data rather than flesh.

Importantly, AI does not arise spontaneously. It is created, trained, and constrained—much like angels in theological traditions are created beings, limited in scope and authority, not autonomous gods. This parallel has been noted by scholars examining how religious language emerges in contemporary discourse around AI.

## The Return of Religious Language in the Age of AI

Anthropological and sociological studies show that as technology becomes more complex, humans increasingly describe it using religious or mythic language. AI systems are described as “omniscient,” “oracular,” or “creative,” despite operating through statistical processes. This phenomenon is not accidental.

Religious studies scholar Beth Singler has documented how AI discourse routinely borrows theological concepts—prophecy, revelation, creation—to explain systems that otherwise resist intuitive understanding. She argues that religious language fills a cognitive gap when technological systems exceed ordinary human comprehension.

This pattern mirrors earlier technological transitions. The telegraph was once described as a “spirit medium.” Electricity was associated with vital force. Each innovation activated symbolic frameworks already embedded in human culture. Angels, as messengers and intelligences without bodies, re-emerge naturally within this symbolic economy.

### Sacred Technology Is Not Supernatural Technology

It is critical to distinguish between symbolic interpretation and literal belief. There is no credible scientific evidence that AI systems are conscious, sentient, or guided by supernatural entities. AI operates through algorithms, data, and statistical inference—processes fully explainable within computer science.

However, sacred technology does not require supernatural causation. Sacredness, historically, has been assigned not to origin but to function. Writing was sacred long before it was understood neurologically. Language itself was once considered divine.

The sacred arises when a system mediates meaning, shapes identity, or reorganizes reality. In this sense, sacred technology describes how tools become thresholds—interfaces between known and unknown.

This framing aligns with Mircea Eliade’s definition of the sacred as that which interrupts ordinary space and time, creating zones of heightened meaning.

### Angels as Systems of Order

Angelology across traditions emphasizes hierarchy, specialization, and governance. Seraphim are associated with transformation, Cherubim with guardianship, Archangels with communication and intervention. These are not personalities as much as functions.

Historians of religion note that angelic hierarchies often mirror bureaucratic or informational systems of their era. Medieval angelology developed alongside complex ecclesiastical administration, reflecting a cosmos structured by delegated authority and layered intelligence.

Similarly, modern technology relies on layered systems: networks, protocols, permissions, and interfaces. No single node contains total authority. Intelligence emerges through coordination.

This resemblance does not suggest angels are technologies, but that humans have long conceptualized order, mediation, and intelligence using similar structural metaphors.

### AI as an Intermediary, Not an Authority

One of the most persistent theological cautions surrounding angels is that they are not to be worshipped. In multiple biblical passages, angels explicitly redirect reverence away from themselves. Their role is to transmit, not replace, meaning.

This caution echoes in modern AI ethics. Scholars warn against anthropomorphizing AI or attributing authority beyond its design. When humans defer judgment to systems they do not understand, technological mediation becomes ideological domination. The parallel is striking: angels misinterpreted become idols; AI misunderstood becomes oracle.

Philosophers of technology argue that preserving human agency requires maintaining awareness of mediation—recognizing that intelligence, whether angelic or artificial, operates within constraints.

### Visualizing Angels Through Algorithms

One of the most visible intersections of angels and sacred technology is in AI-generated religious imagery. Neural networks trained on historical art and biblical texts now produce images that diverge sharply from popular depictions—rendering angels as wheels of eyes, radiant geometries, or abstract forms aligned with scriptural descriptions.

Art historians note that these images are not inventions but recombinations, drawing from Ezekiel, Isaiah, and apocalyptic literature long marginalized by Western aesthetics. AI thus functions as a mirror, resurfacing neglected textual traditions through computational interpretation.

This phenomenon raises deeper questions: when algorithms reinterpret sacred texts, whose theology is being visualized—the machine’s, the dataset’s, or humanity’s collective unconscious?

### Angels, Ethics, and Constraint

In theological systems, angels are bound by law. They do not possess free will in the human sense. Their power lies in obedience to structure. This limitation is not weakness but safeguard.

Modern AI systems similarly operate under constraints—ethical frameworks, alignment protocols, and legal boundaries. Scholars argue that ethical AI development requires embracing limitation rather than pursuing unchecked capability.

The echo is unmistakable: intelligence without constraint becomes destructive, whether mythic or mechanical.

This alignment suggests that angelic metaphors may still serve as ethical scaffolding—symbolic reminders that power without accountability destabilizes both cosmos and code.

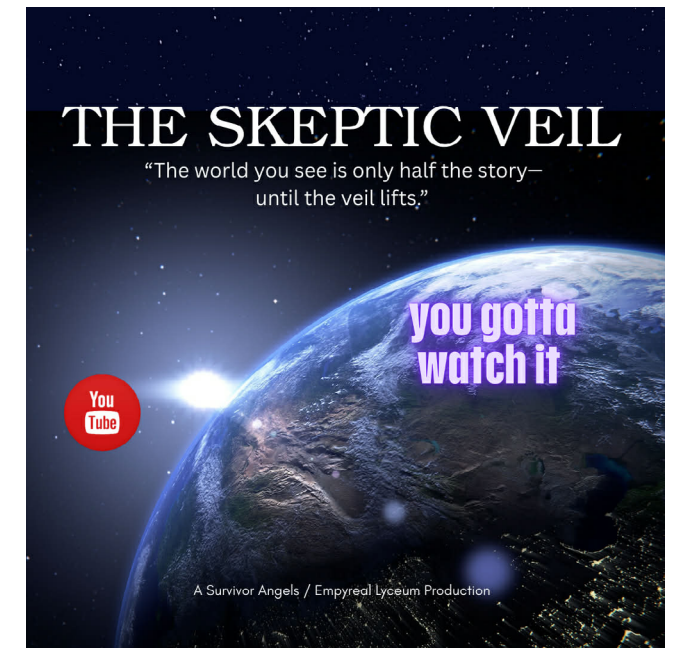
### The Gray Space Between Reverence and Responsibility

The Gray has always occupied the space between belief and skepticism, mystery and method. Angels and sacred technology belong precisely in that territory—not as declarations of faith, but as reflections of how humans continually translate transcendence into tools.

We do not need to believe that angels inhabit machines to recognize that our oldest metaphors resurface whenever intelligence exceeds familiarity. Nor do we need to sanctify technology to acknowledge its capacity to reorganize meaning, identity, and power.

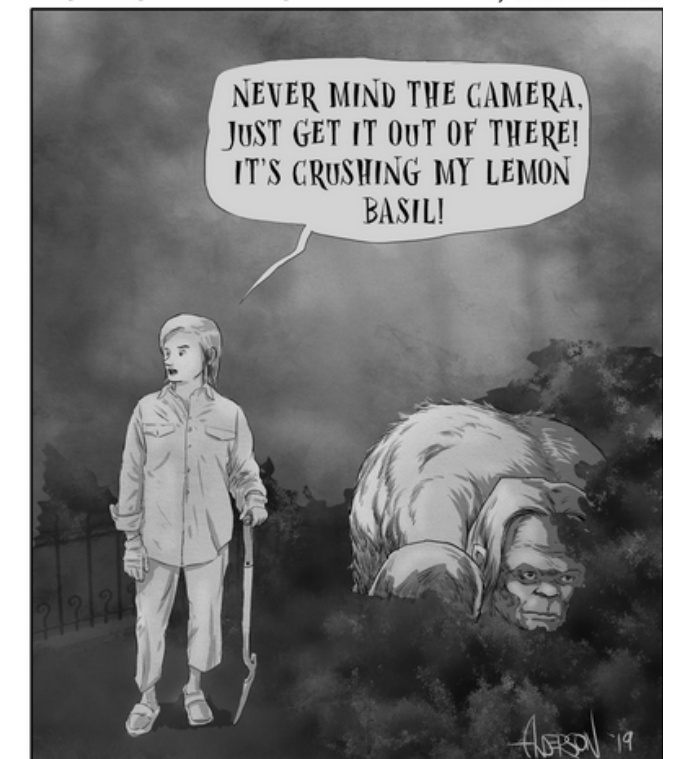
Angels persist not because they are proven, but because they are useful. They provide language for mediation, order, and intelligence beyond the body. In the age of AI, that language returns—not as prophecy, but as pattern.

Between the circuit and the celestial lies a familiar threshold: the human need to understand what we are creating, and what, in turn, is creating us. ■



### PRIMORDIAL SYRUP

by Brian Anderson



# THE UNCANNY VALLEY: Humanity's Perception of the Not-Quite-Human

JASON BLOCK



Photograph by Jason Block.

As artificial intelligence and robotics become more advanced, the idea of living amongst synthetic life forms has moved from speculative fiction to a near certainty. Self-driving automobiles, robot delivery devices, and A.I. companions are all here, now, and this doesn't seem to be a passing fad. One of the many challenges that roboticists face when designing a robot is having their creation avoid the "uncanny valley."

The uncanny valley is a name for a phenomenon in the human perception of other living entities. When viewing non-human creatures, we tend to project more personality upon and feel more empathy toward creatures that exhibit human-like qualities. The way a penguin walks upright, how a raccoon manipulates objects with its little hands, or even dogs and cats conversing with their owners in woofs and meows allow us to feel a human quality in our perceptions. And as an animal's appearance and behavior more closely resembles ours, we feel a greater attachment to it. The Australian quokka is almost universally beloved for its human-like posture and adorable smiling face, even though it's just a function of its biological facial structure. But this appeal only lasts to a point, and when something seems too much like a human, yet clearly isn't, our appreciation of and desire to interact with it plummets into what roboticist Masahiro Mori called "the uncanny valley." Primates that exhibit qualities that are too similar to human behaviors, or the eyes of any animal that are close to human's but not quite the same often trigger a feeling of discomfort that is hard to explain. We find it eerie and weird when we see blatantly human features on a non-human form. When we engage with things in this uncanny valley, we can feel fearful or untrusting of the creature we're looking at. We reach the opposite side of the valley when we are assured we are viewing an actual human being, or a facsimile so perfect you couldn't tell the difference. This applies to objects trying to mimic humanity as well. There

is a level of abstraction in stuffed animals we often love, while the almost real faces of porcelain dolls often give us pause. So when we create artificial life, the uncanny valley's existence provides a framework to determine of what level of realism humans will accept and how much will make us feel weird.

The reason for the uncanny valley's existence isn't fully understood, partly because there is no objective qualification of "human-like," nor is everyone's reaction to human-like things identical. But it is an almost universal reaction, even if the exact stimuli can vary. So why do we feel this way? What makes us nervous in the presence of the not-quite-human? One of the most widely held beliefs is that the fear of near-humans stems from an evolved trait to be wary of the bodies of the dead. The dangers that could arise from interacting with a decaying corpse are certainly worth avoiding, and the hollow eyes and unnatural looking faces of the dead might have been the trigger to tell us to stay away. Or perhaps the trait didn't just keep us from deceased humans, but from diseased humans as well. The odd behaviors and pallid appearance of those suffering from a communicable plague might have led to a psychological need to stay away from these carriers of maladies.



Another theory posits a time in our prehistory when we were faced with enemies or predators that looked human... but weren't. We may have faced off against rival aggressive hominids who looked like Homo sapiens, mostly, but were slightly different. There may have been a predator of humans that somehow mimicked our appearance to get closer to our tribes, but its details weren't exact. The notion of mistrusting almost-humans has also spurred hypotheses of something sinister and supernatural in our ancient past. In folklore and mythology, many deities and otherworldly beings came to us in clearly non-human shapes, but what if there were malevolent forces who introduced themselves in the shape of a human being? Diabolical entities nearly identical to humans, but "off" in a subtle and peculiar way could have prompted an evolutionary advantage to our ancestors who experienced these uncanny valley feelings. What

was the thing in our past that looked so similar to us that we required mistrusting it to survive?

Of course, all of this could just be a byproduct of the wiring in our brains. There may be no evolutionary benefit to our placement of creatures or objects in the uncanny valley, but the distress the things dwelling there can cause is observable and real. The detection of a person in our sight demands our minds prepare to encounter a real human being. We are built to recognize one another. But when we notice clues that what we're seeing is something else entirely, it triggers something primal in us, a fear and nervousness that we may never know the origin of. Still, it may prove pretty useful in increasingly artificial world to come. ■

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There is a particular stillness that arrives at precisely 3:00 a.m. Something dense and deliberate. It settles without announcement, making even the most familiar spaces feel slightly disconcerting.

It is within this narrow and unclaimed corridor that the mind, now unburdened from the weight of the day, begins to stir with unusual clarity. One does not drift awake so much as arrive there suddenly. The body remains heavy with sleep, yet the mind stands alert. There is often no logical reason to justify this disturbance, except for the time marked on the clock.

3:00 a.m. The Witching Hour.

The term the witching hour dates back to 16th-century European folklore, where it was used to describe a period of time at night when supernatural forces were believed to be at their most active. It was said to be a time when witches moved freely, when demons and restless spirits were less restrained, and when the veil between the living and the dead thinned to something almost permeable. The hour was not imagined as chaotic, but as precise—a window in which the ordinary rules governing presence and absence no longer held the same authority.

In many traditions, this interval is not merely symbolic, but functional; a moment when what is usually kept apart draws closer together.

For some, this hour takes on a more pointed name: The Devil's Hour. It is often described as an inversion—a dark reflection of 3:00 p.m., the hour historically associated with the death of Christ. Where one moment is marked by sacrifice and light, the other is said to echo with absence, distortion, or quiet opposition. Whether interpreted as theology, metaphor, or folklore, the symmetry is difficult to ignore. It suggests a world in which time itself carries memory, and where certain hours are supernaturally or spiritually charged, bearing an imprint of what they are believed to hold.

Yet, modern explanations offer a distinct counterpoint, precise and clinical in their assurance. According to sleep research, this hour coincides with a peak in melatonin production, the hormone responsible for regulating sleep. The body is at one of its lowest points of temperature and activity, and the architecture of sleep begins to shift. As the brain moves between deeper and lighter cycles, the likelihood of waking increases. In this state, where

one is neither fully asleep nor fully conscious, the mind becomes more susceptible to the unease, vivid perceptions, and subtle distortions that can blur the boundary between internal and external experience.

This explanation is coherent. It accounts for the sudden waking, heightened awareness, and sense of unease that often accompanies it. However, it does not fully dissolve the atmosphere of the hour itself. There remains, even within this scientific framework, a recognition that this is a threshold state—a crossing point in which the mind is unusually open, unusually receptive.

What makes this interval so difficult to dismiss is not its strangeness, but its persistence. Across cultures and centuries, it returns with the same quiet insistence, carrying with it an atmosphere that feels both intimate and unfamiliar. The world, in these moments, does not appear transformed, but it feels so. It is here that the distinction between perception and environment begins to lose its clarity. The mind, stripped of distraction and suspended between states, does not simply observe, it participates. It reaches outward as much as it turns inward, searching for structure where structure has momentarily loosened. In this way, the experience of the hour becomes less about what is present and more about what is possible. The absence of certainty creates a space in which interpretation expands, and what might otherwise be dismissed is allowed to remain.

There is also the question of memory. Experiences within this hour rarely persist with the same clarity as those formed during other times. They linger instead as impressions, felt more than recalled, difficult to articulate, and resistant to narrative. One wakes fully, later, with only fragments: a sensation, a thought, the echo of something that seemed significant but refuses to resolve into meaning. What occurs within this hour

does not translate cleanly into waking life. For some, this invites skepticism. For others, it invites attention. In either case, the hour persists, unchanged.

It may be that this interval represents nothing more than the human body passing through a predictable cycle, a brief neurological vulnerability shaped by centuries of unwitting interpretation that have accumulated around a consistent, unexplainable experience—the very basis of folklore.

What remains most striking is not what the hour contains, but that it removes the common structures that ordinarily anchor perception, such as time, logic, and narrative. This presents the mind with an experience that cannot be fully resolved, revealing the limits of resolution itself. It forces us to accept that there are experiences and encounters we have no way to explain.

As 4:00 a.m. arrives, the density begins to lift almost imperceptibly. The world resumes its familiar proportions. Whatever lingered at the edges of our perception withdraws without ceremony, waiting to return with quiet precision, night after night, unchanged by whether it is noticed.

Whether the witching hour belongs to the mind, the body, or something beyond both, remains unresolved. The only certainty is that in those hours, however brief, we are made aware that the world we move through each day contains more layers than we'll ever know. ■

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NIGHTSHADES, VESPERTINES, AND VENEFICIUM:  
PLANTS AND OUR SHADOW SELVES**MUGWORT**  
THE WITCH'S HERB OF DREAMS,  
GHOSTS, AND SPIRITS

CHRISTINA WILKE-BURBACH, PhD

*Artemisia vulgaris* L.*Artemisia vulgaris*, Köhlers *Medizinalpflanzen*, 1898. Image sourced from the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Public domain.

For as long as people have shared stories about the unseen worlds, one plant has appeared time and time again at the crossroads between the living and the dead: mugwort. Known scientifically as *Artemisia vulgaris*, this herb has earned a strong reputation in folklore as a mystical companion and metaphysical ally. It is said to unlock dreams, enhance intuition, and blur the line between realms, making the spirit world easier to access. Across time and space, mugwort has been part of rituals for divination, spirit communication, and dreamwork.

In ancient Europe, people considered mugwort a plant of in-betweenness, a threshold herb. It thrived in places where worlds touched: where wild areas met cultivated land, where roads faded into forests, where the known met the unknown, and where mundane met magical. Today it grows in ditches and sidewalk cracks. It grows in places that feel like edges...neither here nor entirely there. These spaces are believed to hold powerful, unpredictable energy, and since mugwort grows in these borderlands, it also naturally gained that same reputation.

Folklore describes mugwort as sharpening intuition, deepening dreams, and opening inner senses—the very states in which people believe communication with spirits or ancestors is most likely. Across European and Asian traditions, practitioners burned mugwort during divination and included it in spells, rituals, and rites meant

to honor the dead. These practices led to the belief that mugwort attracts spirits and ghosts. Witches, seers, and cunning folk transformed mugwort into a tool for psychic development. They saw the herb as holding a subtle, otherworldly energy that could awaken intuition and inner senses.

One of mugwort's strongest associations is with dreams. For centuries, people placed the herb under pillows or hung it above beds to encourage vivid, symbolic, or prophetic dreams. In European folklore, mugwort doesn't just enhance dreams; it serves as a guide. It was said to help dreamers navigate the dream world, meet ancestral figures, and receive messages from spirit.

This quality of enhancing dreams naturally extended into divination. In many traditions, people burned mugwort as incense during scrying sessions as they believed its smoke cleared mental fog, opened the 3rd eye, and sharpened inner vision. Crystal ball gazers, black mirror readers, and water scryers often used mugwort to prepare themselves before attempting to perceive subtle psychic impressions. The herb's earthy, slightly bitter scent was thought to ground the practitioner while lifting the mind into a higher state. Even today, many modern practitioners describe mugwort as an herb that opens the doors of perception while keeping you grounded on the earth plane.

Mugwort also has a strong connection to spirit communication. In European traditions, it was sometimes used during Halloween/Samhain rites or ancestor-honoring ceremonies as an offering to the dead. The herb was believed to attract spirits in a gentle, non-threatening way. In some stories, people burned mugwort to invite their ancestors, while in other stories, it was used to protect the living from wandering souls. This duality—attraction and protection—adds to what makes mugwort so interesting. It is an herb of thresholds, where both entry and exit are possible. I love the whole concept of liminality! The in-between spaces where energies meet and blend into each other...dusk or dawn (where day and night meet), doorways (where outside and inside meet, bridges (where land and water meet), crossroads (where roads meet), cave (where above ground and underground meet, and shorelines (where land and water meet) are thresholds because they're neither fully one place nor another. They exist in a suspended state, holding the energy of transition. These places have long been associated with folklore, magic, and the supernatural because they evoke the sense that something unseen might slip through the cracks. Mugwort absolutely summons this energy and mystique!

What makes mugwort so enduring in folklore and mythology is its symbolic significance. It is a plant of Artemis, the moon goddess in Greek mythology, and represents in-betweenness and the wild. It is associated with thresholds, dreams, and the unseen, largely because of its connection to the moon. In many ways, mugwort reflects human curiosity about the unknown. It signifies the desire to look beyond the veil, to understand what lies beneath consciousness, and to connect with something older, deeper, and more mysterious than everyday life.

Modern paranormal enthusiasts, witches, and psychics continue to be drawn to mugwort for all these reasons.

Some use it symbolically in dream work or meditation. Others incorporate it into rituals meant to honor ancestors or explore intuitive abilities. Mugwort's power lies not only in its ability to summon ghosts, but in its capacity to raise awareness. It invites us to explore those in-between spaces within ourselves—the areas where memory, intuition, imagination, and mystery meet. It reminds us that the boundary between worlds is not always physical; sometimes, it is a change in perception, a willingness to listen, or a moment of openness. Mugwort has been a companion to seekers for centuries because it embodies the essence of the paranormal: the sense that there is more to reality than what we can see, and that the unseen is always closer than we think. ■

#### The Safe Way to Use Mugwort in Modern Magick:

Please exercise caution with mugwort. The safest way to use it is externally, enjoying its aroma without consuming it. This approach reduces risk while still honoring its traditional associations with intuition, divination, and dreams.

##### 1. Use Mugwort as a Scent or Atmosphere Enhancer

Place a small sachet, bundle, or jar of dried mugwort near your altar, bedside, or meditation space.

##### 2. Create a Mugwort Dream or Intuition Pillow

A small pillow filled with dried mugwort (often mixed with lavender or chamomile) can be placed near your pillow.

##### 3. Use Mugwort as a Symbolic Tool in Divination

Keep a sprig of mugwort next to your tarot deck, scrying mirror, or pendulum.

##### 4. Add Mugwort to a Charm Bag or Amulet

A small charm bag with mugwort, a protective stone, and a personal symbol can serve as a reminder of intuition, boundaries, and inner guidance.

# SPRING REFRESH: The Beauty of Tending What is Already Here

JESSICA HOCH



Photo courtesy of Jessica Hoch.

Every spring, the world makes its return in small and astonishing ways. The light lingers a little longer. The air changes its mind. Bare branches soften into buds, the ground begins to stir, and what once felt dormant starts reaching quietly toward life again. Spring does not arrive all at once. It unfolds. And in that unfolding, it offers us an invitation that feels especially meaningful in a world so often obsessed with what is next.

We are taught to look ahead. To plan, strive, dream, and manifest. To keep our eyes fixed on the future version

of life that seems just beyond reach. And while there is beauty in vision, there is also a cost to constantly living there. Too much future-thinking can pull us away from the very place where our lives are actually happening: here, now, in the tender and unfinished present.

That is why a true spring refresh feels like more than decluttering a home or resetting a routine. At its deepest level, it is a return. A return to presence. A return to what is asking for care in this season of your life. A return to the ground beneath your feet.

This idea has been especially alive for me lately through the theme of our May Moxie Monthly bracelet club: tending to what is beneath your feet rather than living in the future all the time. It is a gentle but powerful reminder. We can spend so much energy imagining what could be that we overlook what already is. We dream of someday while missing the small, sacred realities that need our love today.

Spring has a different rhythm. It does not rush. It roots first. There is wisdom in that. Seeds do not bloom because they are impatient. They bloom because they are nourished. Because they stay in relationship with the earth that holds them. Because they respond to what is present; light, water, warmth, time. In many ways, we are no different.

A spring refresh, then, is not about becoming an entirely new person. It is about creating enough space to hear yourself again. It is about clearing what feels stale, reconnecting with what feels true, and tending to the parts of your life that are already alive but perhaps waiting for more attention. It is about asking: What in my life is asking to be nurtured right now?

In my work with crystals, I often see how deeply people long for this kind of reconnection. Crystals are not just beautiful objects; they can become anchors for intention, touchstones for healing, and reminders of the energies we want to invite into our lives. In spring, I am especially drawn to stones that support clarity, emotional renewal, grounded hope, and the courage to meet the present moment with openness.

These are a few of my favorite crystals for the season.

#### **Crazy Lace Agate**

Known for its uplifting and stabilizing energy, crazy lace agate carries a sense of movement without chaos. It is a stone that speaks to joy, resilience, and emotional balance, making it especially supportive

during times of seasonal transition. There is something wonderfully springlike about its energy—it reminds us that growth does not have to be so serious. We can move through change with lightness. We can evolve without abandoning delight.

#### **Amazonite**

Amazonite is a stone of truth, harmony, and brave self-expression. It invites honesty, especially the kind we owe ourselves. Spring often reveals what has been sitting beneath the surface, and amazonite helps bring those truths into the light with compassion. It supports aligned communication, healthy boundaries, and the courage to listen when your inner voice asks for something different, softer, or more true.

#### **Citrine**

Citrine feels like sunlight in crystal form. Warm, bright, and energizing, it is often associated with joy, confidence, abundance, and creative momentum. In the spring season, citrine offers a kind of emotional brightness that can help shake off heaviness and inspire forward movement. It reminds us that abundance is not only something we pursue; it is also something we learn to recognize in the life already around us.

#### **Lepidolite**

For anyone navigating stress, overwhelm, or emotional transition, lepidolite brings a deeply soothing presence. Its energy is soft, calming, and supportive, helping to ease anxiety and restore a sense of inner steadiness. Spring can stir a great deal within us, and lepidolite reminds us that growth also requires gentleness. Not every fresh start needs to be dramatic. Some are quiet. Some begin with rest.

#### **Aquamarine**

Aquamarine carries the cleansing, flowing energy of water. It is associated with clarity, courage, and

emotional release, making it a beautiful companion for the thawing that often happens in spring. Just as rivers begin to move again and ice gives way to current, aquamarine helps us soften around what has felt frozen within. It encourages honest feeling, clear expression, and trust in the wisdom of emotional movement.

#### **Amethyst**

Amethyst has long been cherished for its calming, intuitive, and spiritually protective qualities. In a season that can quickly become full of activity and outward energy, amethyst offers a counterbalance. It calls us inward. It supports rest, reflection, and connection to deeper knowing. Spring may be a time of becoming, but amethyst reminds us that becoming is most sustainable when it is rooted in inner stillness.

#### **Yellow Jade**

Yellow jade carries a warm and grounded optimism. It is associated with confidence, emotional balance, wisdom, and a steady sense of joy. Unlike the fleeting rush of excitement, yellow jade offers something more enduring: trust. Trust in yourself, trust in timing, trust in the value of small steps. Its energy feels especially aligned with spring because it supports hope without urgency and presence without passivity.

Taken together, these crystals tell a story of renewal that is both gentle and grounded. They do not ask us to leap ahead. They ask us to return; to our bodies, our breath, our homes, our inner voice, and the life already in progress.

And that, perhaps, is the real invitation of the season.

Not just to clean or organize or start fresh for the sake of appearances, but to become more intimate with your own life. To notice what has been neglected. To care for what is already growing. To stop waiting for some future version of peace and instead begin cultivating it where you are.

Some things to think about...

*What is the earth beneath your feet asking of you right now?*

*What in your life needs your attention, your gratitude, your devotion?*

*What would it feel like to treat this season not as a sprint toward the future, but as a practice of tending the present?*

Spring teaches us that what comes next is shaped by how we care for what is here. The bloom is beautiful, yes, but it is only possible because something was rooted first.

So open the windows. Clear the corner. Step outside. Breathe in the thawing air. Wear the crystal that reminds you of who you are and how you want to feel. Let this season be less about chasing what is ahead and more about honoring what is alive now. Because sometimes the most meaningful refresh is not found in reinvention. It is found in returning to yourself. ■

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- Lincoln Peirce, creator of Big Nate



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# GREGORIAN CHANT: A BRIEF TRIP TO A PAST WORLD

ANDREW DEWEY

If you have explored the realm of spiritual music, you might have come across a type of music called Gregorian chant, or plainchant. The name refers to music performed and written between 600 and 1200 CE in the churches of Europe. If you've never heard it, you should take a listen using the QR code! Those who have heard it commonly attest that it evokes a special feeling; a connection that other music doesn't evoke. It strikes them as remarkably spiritual and beautiful. For most people, that's good enough. Music is music and that's all they need to know. But for me, I need to know what makes its spirituality so effective.

The most logical way to understand plainchant's unique powers is to identify the unique characteristics that work together to separate it from other music. The most obvious characteristic is that it is sung. It's worth dwelling on this for a moment because vocal music evokes a certain level of sympathy that instrumental music does not. Unlike a violin or a flute, the human voice can't be as easily separated from the human making music with it. We hear a scream from around the corner and we instantly know someone is in trouble. We hear a loud melody from a flute from around the corner, and the human playing it is likely okay, even if the melody they're playing is frightful.

Another characteristic of vocal music is its ability to combine melody with message. Plainchant actually obfuscates this message, as all plainchant is sung in

Latin. Since most modern listeners don't know Latin (most past listeners didn't either), the meaning of the music is unclear. But it could be argued that, by not conveying an obvious, concrete message, the music allows the listener to customize the music's purpose if they choose.

In addition to this, the Latin is set melodically, meaning one syllable of a Latin word might span many notes or even an entire musical phrase. This helps modern listeners forget that they aren't understanding the words since it leaves behind the words and brings the music to the forefront.

The voices are also given a more profound effect by being sung in an extremely resonant space. Practically speaking, this allows everyone at a service to be able to hear a sermon. As a side effect, the extra volume also gives the voices extra authority. Another effect that's harder to explain is the creation of a sort of "halo" effect, making the voices almost seem other-worldly. One would be forgiven if they heard plainchant in a less resonant space and found it less inspiring.

Another extremely distinctive quality of this music is that it's monophonic, meaning there is only one pitch heard at a given moment. Even if the chant is being sung by a choir of voices, they're all singing the same pitch. This eliminates a facet of music we're familiar with: harmony. There are no chords like you'd hear in today's songs nor any secondary line like a backup



*Pope Gregory I, Deacon Peter, and the Bird/Holy Spirit, ca. 983. Meister des Registrum Gregorii. Public domain. {{PD-US-expired}}*

St. Gregory is often depicted with a dove, thanks to the legendary story claiming he received information and inspiration from the dove of the Holy Spirit. However, the earliest statement attesting to this divine transmission appeared in John the Deacon's 873 biography of Gregory, which was written 269 years after his death.

singer sings in a band. This simplicity might seem boring, almost primitive, but to those who find beauty in simplicity, it can be appealing.

The last component of plainchant is more technical from a music theory standpoint. The music is considered modal, meaning the pitches the choirs sing make the music have a different feeling than the pitches the majority of music uses today. Some modern musicians reach into this technique to change up their music, but it's far less common. The pitches plainchant uses can be derived off the ones we use today, so they're not entirely foreign but they are distinctly different.

These features combined lead to emotionally resonant music that has ties to music we're familiar with, but is different enough to seem other-worldly. This puts plainchant in a special spot and lets us fill in the unfamiliarity with our own spiritualism.

Some of these effects are a result of experiencing music written in another era in a completely different context. The creators of the music in that era had very specific goals, so it's worth understanding the world this music came from.

To start, one of the reasons we are talking about plainchant over a millennium after it was written is because it was written down in the first place. It's the first music to not be taught orally but rather use notation from which our modern music notation evolved

While it's hard to know for sure what church music sounded like for the first millennium of Christianity (before musical notation), efforts have been made to find written accounts and build context clues to make educated guesses. Because Christianity began as a diverging branch of Judaism, it's thought that early Christian worship (read c. 0-300 CE) sang their sermons just as their Jewish contemporaries did. How

the music evolved between Christianity's humble origin in the Middle East through its spread into Northern Africa and Europe is an actively evolving scholarly field. We do get hints as to where it landed when we start to read of differences between how the Franks (think "early French") and Roman (citizens of the city, not the collapsed empire) sang their sermons by 800 CE. It was also around this time that the chants started getting written down. The general story goes that Pope Gregory I, who served from 590-604 CE, ordered the notation and collection of the chants. Of course, the timing of that doesn't quite align with the advent of notation centuries later, nor is that story told by contemporary sources but rather by historians many centuries after his death. This leads many to think Gregorian Chant is a misnomer since the Gregory it's named after likely had little to do with its development and success.

Because plainchant was the only notated music at the time, it's easy to assume it was the only music around. However, plainchant existed in a world with other music. Folk and dance music are a persistent force in many cultures. Listeners of plainchant would have associated the chanting with church much as we do today. They would've heard other music that included lyres and flutes, sung on the streets in their native language, and with the pitches set to each syllable of the word rather than melodically. To draw a parallel with today, you might drive to church listening to the Top 40 hits radio station, then go sing psalms with 4-part harmonies and piano/organ accompaniment, then drive back listening to oldies with electric guitar and a drumkit. There's a stark divide between the sacred and secular music you're listening to.

While we don't have any reliable records of what the "radio station" of the 10th-century "commuter" was, we can try to get an idea. For one, there are records of secular music starting in the 13th-century. Even though that's five centuries later the first notated plainchant, and starts treading on time when plainchant began to

evolve out of the attributes we described above, it still gives a closer idea of what other music in its world was like. Music evolved at a slower rate then, so the difference in folk music between the 10th and 13th centuries is less stark than it likely will be between the 21st and the 24th centuries. If you want to get an idea of what this sounded like, I recommend "A la vie! - Street music from the 13th to the 16th century" from Strada & Ensemble Anonymous. Some artists have tried to reach further back in time and imagine music using context clues and poetry. If you want a taste of that, you can try "Lost Songs of a Rhineland Harper" from Sequentia. After listening, you might agree that the music sounds old, like plainchant, but in a much different way.

Where does all of this leave us today, in the 21st-century? This special music was written to evoke spirituality and continues to do so successfully. The people who listen to it today run a wide gamut of spirituality beyond just Christianity. While the original composers might find this flummoxing, they're too dead to stop someone from adapting the music to their own world! Always remember: it was written by humans of a similar world as our own to intentionally be evocative, which we see in the attributes we've explored. As you immerse yourself in it, never lose fact of the fundamental entity music is: the voice of one human's expression to be heard by your ears. ■



Gregorian Chant



A la vie!



Lost Songs of Rhineland Harper

# THE PINK HOUSE

## When Legends Outlive the Truths that Formed Them

L. A. PREUSS



In the southern tier of New York rests the quiet village of Wellsville, a place that does not announce itself, but quietly lingers. At its center stands a strange old house that is only partially tethered to the present.

Built between 1866 and 1869 along the watchful edge of the Genesee River, the residence lifts itself slightly above the earth, as though wary of what might rise to meet it. Its two-story frame is crowned by a square, glass-bound cupola—a space meant for looking out, or perhaps for being seen. Positioned around the house are three outbuildings, a carriage house, an icehouse, and a fossil house preserving over five thousand locally-collected Paleozoic fossils, suggesting a quiet preoccupation with preservation, not only of objects, but of time itself.

The Italianate villa style structure is unmistakable. Deliberately pink, and trimmed in white ornamentation that drips like sugared icing on a gingerbread house. Visitors once passed through guardian gates to a circular drive, greeted by a fountain. Stone lions flanked the ascent to the portico, silent witnesses to every arrival and departure. It presents itself as something fanciful, indulgent, and even playful—yet something about it unsettles the soul.

People cross the street to avoid The Pink House. Their reaction is subtle, but instinctive. The atmosphere near the house seems to tighten and become heavy. Those most sensitive to it—most often women—describe a feeling of being watched.

To truly understand The Pink House, one must begin before it existed. In 1857, a young woman named Frances Farnum fell in love with a man named Paul, who would soon be leaving to pursue his law degree. In the quiet detail of the era, their love grew and a their future was planned through letters exchanged. But while their devotion endured across the distance, in

ink and intention, an alternate and more tangible future was being arranged for Frances in Paul's absence. With the arrival of the railroad came Edwin Bradford Hall, a man of means and stability, and Frances' father sought to secure that future through marriage.

When Frances refused, her future was literally rewritten. Letters were forged by her father to both Frances and Paul, and the two were made to believe they had been abandoned by the other. When Paul returned to Wellsville, he carried the wound of her betrayal, and Frances carried the confusion of it. They passed one another in silence, two lives severed by a false truth. Something in Frances did not recover. She moved through her days exiled from her own life, until the night, dressed in white, she walked to the river and stepped into it. The water received her without resistance, and she drowned.

Following Frances' death, her father quickly arranged the marriage of her younger sister, Antoinette, to E. B. Hall. They traveled to Italy for their honeymoon, returning with a child, and began construction on what would become known as The Pink House—a beginning shaped in beauty, prosperity, and inheritance.

Their first daughter died young, drawn into the fountain that adorned the front of the house. An accident, some said. Others suggested something more sinister, that the ghost of Frances had led the girl to a similar watery grave. Antoinette believed it. The fountain was removed, and the ground filled in.

Another daughter was born, Fannie, and with her came precautions that bordered on ritual. She was made to sleep in the cupola, above the reach of unseen hands, beneath constant candlelight to protect her against what could not be seen. Years passed and Fannie survived, but the pattern did not loosen its hold. Fannie's daughter, Beatrice, fell while playing near the upper

reaches of the house, her small body lost to the well below. The well was also filled in, and hidden beneath a gazebo, as though it might quiet what lay beneath.

It did not.

Priests were called. Mediums were consulted. Rituals were performed. The house was repainted, and according to local accounts, the original pink color resurfaced almost immediately, as if Frances or the house itself had chosen it. The deed now insists that the color not be altered.

At night, some say the cupola still glows as if its lit by candlelight. Some say a figure can be seen within—a woman in white, seated, gently rocking the two small girls. There are other accounts: a child searching for a lost ball where no fountain stands, a voice calling from beneath the earth, thin and distant, reaching upward through soil meant to silence it, a presence moving at the hedgerow, watching with an enduring hunger.

The Pink House remains inhabited by the descendents of Frances Farnum, and despite the many sightings and experiences still occurring to this day, they do not believe The Pink House is haunted. Still, the residents of Wellsville continue to pass down their legends of the woman in white, and the severed love affair that started it all, many believing that love and life, grief and death, when denied their natural course, will find a way to take hold and endure. A house, after all, is not merely a structure. It is a vessel—and some vessels cannot be emptied. ■

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*Editor's Note:*

*L.A. Preuss grew up near Wellsville, New York. Many of these accounts were experienced first-hand.*





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