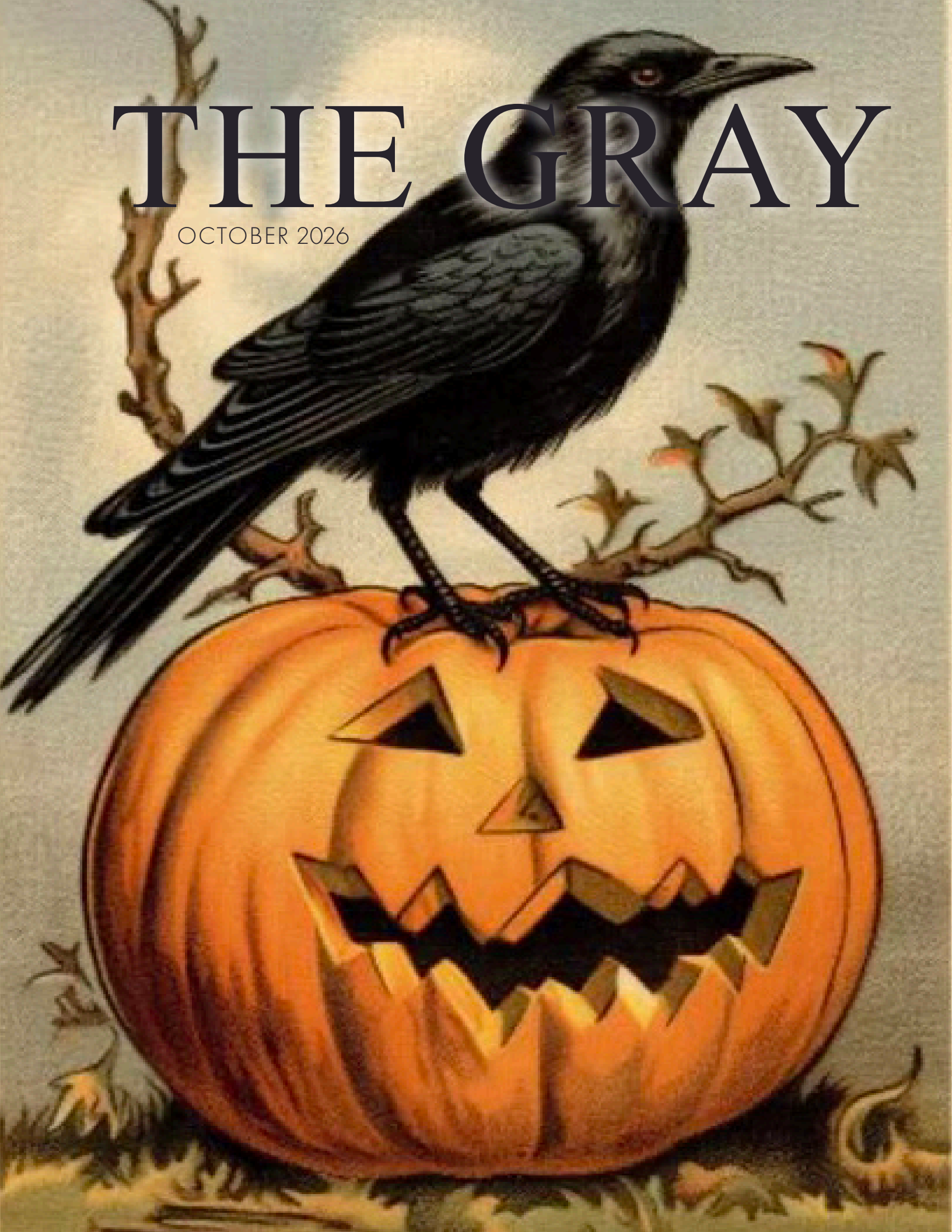


THE GRAY

OCTOBER 2026



WELCOME TO THE GRAY



ON THE COVER

The first jack o’lanterns were carved from turnips, potatoes, beets, and rutabagas—not pumpkins. People carved frightening faces into these root vegetables and placed them near doors and windows to frighten away evil spirits. Later, it was discovered that pumpkins were larger, softer, and much easier to carve.

Crows and ravens have a long history in folklore and superstition. In many cultures, these birds have been associated with death, prophecy, mystery, and a guide in the spirit world. Combined with their black feathers and eerie sounding caw, they are often associated with Halloween and the macabre.

This image is in the public domain. Artist unknown.

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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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OCTOBER

THROUGH an autumnal
wood,
Where trees bow to the blast,
OCTOBER slowly comes
Her coloured leaves to cast.

Her hair is dark like night,
Her eyes with thought are sad,
But now and then are lit
With light that makes one glad.

She gathers in her hand
Her robe of purple dye,
To keep the many leaves
That in the folds do lie.

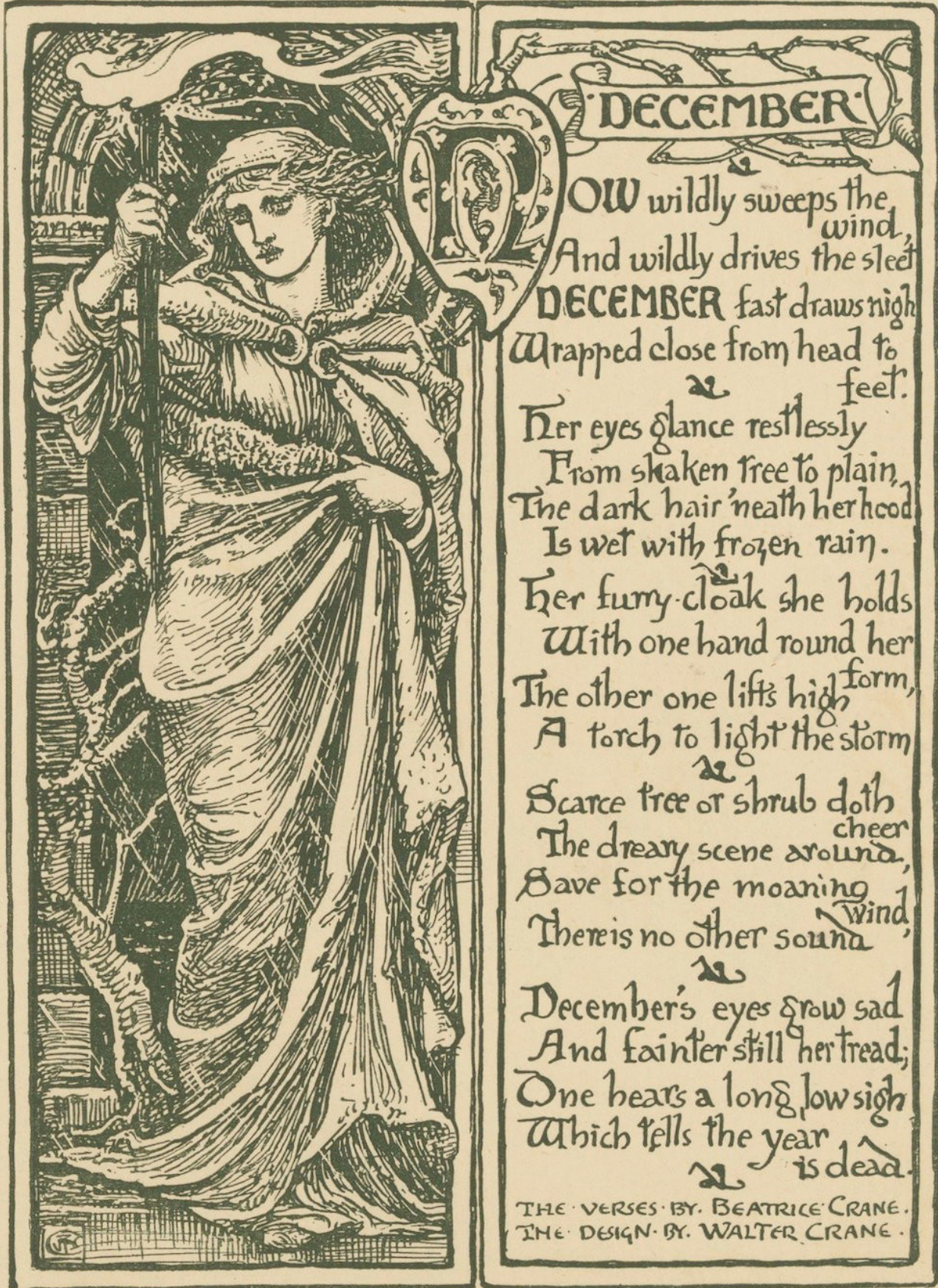
Her head is crowned with
leaves,
Red, golden, and deep brown,
As rich in tint 'tis true,
As any monarch's crown.

The autumn wind sighs low,
The last red sun-ray dies,
She turns for one more look,
Ere the grey mist doth rise.

THE VERSES BY BEATRICE CRANE
THE DESIGN BY WALTER CRANE



November by Walter and Beatrice Crane, 1889. Image sourced from the Public Domain Image Archive / Harvard University.



December by Walter and Beatrice Crane, 1889. Image sourced from the Public Domain Image Archive / Harvard University.

THE GRAY

BEFORE WE CALLED THEM ANGELS

CHAPLAIN JODI M. DEHN



Image courtesy of Chaplain Jodi Dehn. (AI)

When I tell people I teach about angels, one of the first things they usually want to know is what angels really look like. I understand the question. Most of us grew up with a very specific image in our heads. Angels have wings. They wear white robes. They have halos, beautiful faces and a peaceful expression. We have seen them portrayed that way for so long that it is easy to assume this is how angels have always been understood.

It isn't.

The history of angels reaches much farther back than Christianity, and the story becomes considerably more interesting when we step outside the traditions most of us were taught as children. Long before the word "angel" became part of our religious vocabulary, ancient people were describing beings who moved between the human and divine worlds. Their names were different, their roles varied, and their cultures had their own explanations for them, but the idea of an unseen intermediary is remarkably old. That is where I want to begin. Not with the angel on the Christmas card, but with the ancient human fascination with what exists beyond what we can see.

Before the Word "Angel"

The earliest civilizations left behind evidence of an elaborate spiritual world. In ancient Mesopotamia, which includes the civilizations of Sumer, Akkad, Assyria and Babylon, people described gods, divine attendants, protective spirits and supernatural beings who could interact with the human world. Some of the most recognizable examples are the lamassu. These enormous figures, often shown with a human head, the body of a bull or lion and wings, were placed at entrances to important buildings. They were guardians, standing at the boundary between ordinary space and places of power.

They were not angels in the later Jewish or Christian sense, and it is important not to make that leap. What they show us, however, is that winged supernatural

guardians existed in human religious imagination thousands of years before the familiar Western image of an angel developed.

Ancient Egypt gives us another example. Egyptian religion included an enormous number of divine beings associated with protection, healing, death, judgment and the journey into the afterlife. The goddess Isis was sometimes portrayed with wings spread protectively around the deceased. Other divine figures and spirits were associated with the journey of the dead through the underworld.

Again, these were not "angels" simply waiting for a later religion to give them the correct name. They belonged to Egyptian religion and Egyptian culture. But the similarities are worth noticing. People were imagining beings who could protect, guide and accompany human beings through places they could not navigate on their own. That theme will follow us for thousands of years.

Persia and the Expanding Spiritual Universe

Ancient Persia adds another important piece to the story. Zoroastrianism developed a sophisticated understanding of the spiritual world, including beings associated with Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity, and with qualities such as truth, righteousness and order. Among them were the Amesha Spentas and other spiritual beings known as yazatas.

The Persian world became especially important to Jewish history after the Babylonian exile. The Persian Empire permitted Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem, and Jews lived within a Persian political and cultural environment for generations.

Scholars have spent considerable time examining whether Persian ideas influenced later Jewish thinking about angels, demons, resurrection and the struggle between good and evil. There is no simple line we can draw from one religion to another and say, "This became that." Cultures borrow, adapt and reinterpret

ideas in complicated ways. Still, something was changing in the ancient Jewish understanding of the heavenly world. And one of the places we can see that development is in the biblical book of Daniel.

Michael Enters the Story

Michael is not a character who first appears in Christianity. His name appears in the Book of Daniel, which emerged during the Second Temple period, a time when Jewish religious thought was wrestling with questions about suffering, foreign domination, divine judgment and the ultimate fate of God's people.

In Daniel 10, Michael is described as "one of the chief princes." He is connected with Israel and appears within a larger picture of heavenly beings associated with earthly nations. In Daniel 12, Michael is described as the great prince who stands watch over Daniel's people during a time of distress.

This is an important starting point for understanding Michael. He isn't introduced as the soft, comforting figure we sometimes see in modern religious art. He is a powerful heavenly figure associated with protection and the larger struggle taking place beyond the human world.

That becomes even more interesting when we look at a Jewish collection of writings that most people have heard about but relatively few have actually studied: The Book of Enoch.

The World of the Book of Enoch

The first thing to understand about 1 Enoch is that it isn't really one book in the way we normally think of a book. It is a collection of writings associated with Enoch, the mysterious figure in Genesis who "walked with God" and was taken by God. Different sections of what we now call 1 Enoch were composed at different times, largely during the Second Temple period.

That period matters. This was the world between the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple after the Babylonian exile and its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE. Jewish people were living through enormous political and cultural changes. Persia had been followed by Greek rule. The Seleucid Empire brought additional conflict, including the desecration of the Jerusalem Temple under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Rome eventually became the dominant power.

It was a complicated time to be Jewish. People were asking difficult questions about God's justice and the apparent power of evil. They wanted to understand why the righteous suffered and what was happening beyond the visible world.

Apocalyptic literature grew out of this environment. These writings often describe visions of heaven, angels, judgment, cosmic conflict and the future. The Book of Daniel is one example. Enoch is another.

What makes Enoch particularly important today is that we know these writings are ancient. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran changed what scholars knew about Enoch. Fragments of several Enochic writings were found among the scrolls, written in Aramaic and dating to the Second Temple period.

In other words, Enoch was not a medieval book created centuries after Christianity. Parts of it were being copied and read in Jewish communities before Christianity existed. That changes the conversation considerably.

Michael in Enoch

When Michael appears in Enoch, his role is already substantial. In the Book of Watchers, one of the oldest sections of 1 Enoch, Michael is one of the principal angels involved in responding to the rebellion of the Watchers. The Watchers are heavenly beings who, according to the story, descend to earth and violate boundaries established for them. Their actions

contribute to the corruption and violence spreading through humanity.

Michael becomes involved in the divine response. He is associated with the judgment of these rebellious beings and with the protection of the righteous.

Later in Enoch, Michael is listed among the great angels who have specific responsibilities within the heavenly realm. Along with Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel or Sariel, depending on the textual tradition, he belongs to an elevated group of heavenly beings.

There is an important detail here that often gets lost when people talk about Enoch. Michael is not simply a guardian angel assigned to an individual person. The ancient text presents him as a figure with a much larger responsibility. He is connected with the righteous, with judgment and with the heavenly administration of God's purposes.

That helps explain why Michael's reputation as a protector and warrior became so strong in later traditions.

The Angels of the Presence

One of the descriptions I find particularly fascinating is the association of Michael with the divine Presence. Enoch describes a group of principal angels who stand before God. Michael is among them.

That tells us something about how developed angelology had become within some Jewish circles during the Second Temple period. We are no longer dealing simply with an occasional unnamed messenger appearing to deliver a message. The heavenly realm is being described almost like a court, with different beings carrying different responsibilities. Michael occupies an important place within that structure.

This is one of the reasons I think it is worth going back to the ancient texts before deciding what an angel is supposed to be. We have inherited centuries of artwork, theology and tradition. Those things are

important, but they can also obscure how unusual some of the earliest descriptions actually are. Michael is a good example.

And Then There Is the Son of Man

This is where the Book of Enoch gets especially interesting, and it is also where we need to be careful. The Parables, or Similitudes, of Enoch contain a figure called the "Son of Man" and the "Elect One." This figure is associated with judgment and the ultimate defeat of unrighteousness. The language is closely connected with the imagery of Daniel 7, where Daniel sees "one like a son of man" coming with the clouds.

Then, in Enoch 71, Enoch himself is taken into the heavenly realm and experiences a remarkable vision involving the heavenly throne and the Son of Man.

This passage has generated considerable scholarly debate. Some scholars understand Enoch 71 as identifying Enoch himself with the Son of Man. Others have proposed different ways of understanding the passage and its relationship to the surrounding material. There are also longstanding questions about when and how the Parables were composed and how they fit within the larger Enochic collection.

This is exactly where I think we need to resist the temptation to turn an intriguing ancient text into a sensational discovery. The text does not say that Michael is the Son of Man. It does not reveal that Michael was secretly Enoch.

What it does tell us is that Enoch contains an extraordinarily exalted Son of Man figure and that Enoch 71 contains a remarkable identification involving Enoch himself. Michael is present in the heavenly narrative, but he remains an angelic figure rather than becoming the Son of Man.

That distinction may seem like a technicality, but it isn't. If we are going to study ancient texts and ask what they tell us about angels, we owe it to

ourselves—and to the people who read our work—to separate what the text actually says from what we might wish it said.

The truth is interesting enough.

Was Enoch Part of the Bible?

This is another question I am asked frequently. If Enoch is this old and if it influenced the religious world in which Christianity developed, why isn't it in most Bibles?

The answer has to do with canon formation. There was not one single Bible that every Jewish or Christian community possessed and then one day decided to remove Enoch from it. Different communities preserved different collections of sacred writings, and the boundaries of those collections developed over long periods of time.

Enoch was clearly known in ancient Judaism. The New Testament letter of Jude contains a quotation from 1 Enoch 1:9 and attributes the prophecy to Enoch. That is an important piece of evidence because it shows that at least one early Christian writer knew and used Enochic material.

That doesn't automatically mean Jude considered the entire Book of Enoch to be scripture in the same way later Christians would understand the Bible. It does tell us that Enoch was part of the religious and literary environment of early Christianity.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is different from most Jewish and Christian traditions in this respect. It preserved 1 Enoch as part of its biblical canon.

The rest of the Christian world generally did not. That is history, not conspiracy. And I think understanding that distinction is important because the story of Enoch is often presented as though someone deliberately hid it from humanity.

The actual history is much more complicated—and much more fascinating.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and a Window Into the Past

For me, the Dead Sea Scrolls are one of the most exciting pieces of this entire story. Before their discovery, scholars knew Enoch primarily through much later manuscripts, particularly the Ethiopic tradition. The Qumran discoveries provided physical evidence that Enochic writings were being copied in ancient Jewish communities hundreds of years before the Christian era.

The scrolls also showed us something else. Ancient Judaism was not one-dimensional. There were different communities, different interpretations, different expectations about the future, and different understandings of the heavenly world.

When we read Enoch alongside Daniel and later Jewish and Christian writings, we can begin to see ideas developing rather than appearing fully formed. That is particularly true with angels. The heavenly world becomes increasingly populated and organized. Angels acquire names and responsibilities. Certain angels become associated with particular nations or functions. Heavenly conflict becomes part of the explanation for earthly events.

Michael emerges from this environment as one of the most important figures in the developing tradition.

From Ancient Judaism to Today's Religions

By the time Christianity emerged, angels were already deeply established within Jewish thought. Christianity inherited that world and developed its own understanding of angels. Michael appears in the New Testament as an archangel in Jude, and in Revelation he leads heavenly forces against the dragon.

Judaism continued developing its own angelic traditions, while Islam later incorporated angels as an

important part of its theology, including figures such as Jibril, the Arabic name for Gabriel.

These traditions are related historically, but they are not identical. Each developed its own theology, texts and interpretations.

That is why I think the broader history matters. If we begin and end with the angel we already know, we can easily assume the angel has always looked exactly the way our tradition portrays it.

History tells us otherwise.

Why Should We Care?

Some people will read an article about ancient angels and think, “Interesting history.” For me, it is more than that.

The history gives us context. It teaches us to ask where our ideas came from and how they changed. It reminds us that people thousands of years ago were wrestling with many of the same questions we still ask today: What happens after death? Why does evil exist? Are we being guided? Is there something beyond the physical world? Can the divine communicate with us?

The answers have changed from culture to culture. The questions haven’t changed nearly as much.

That is what makes the history of angels so compelling to me. I don’t believe we need to force every ancient being into the category of “angel.” We also don’t need to decide that every story was literally true before we can appreciate what it tells us about the people who recorded it.

We can study the texts. We can examine the archaeology. We can look at the cultures and languages in which these ideas developed. And then we can ask what, if anything, those ancient accounts might mean for us.

Perhaps the most important lesson is that the story of angels did not begin with wings. It began with humanity trying to understand the unseen.

Thousands of years ago, people looked beyond the visible world and imagined—or believed they encountered—beings who could cross the boundary between the divine and human realms. They gave those beings different names and different responsibilities, shaped by their cultures and their understanding of the universe.

Eventually, one of those traditions gave us Michael.

And when we go back far enough, we discover that Michael is not simply the familiar warrior angel standing over us with a sword. He is one of the earliest named heavenly figures whose story we can trace through ancient Jewish writings. In Daniel, he is a chief prince and protector. In Enoch, his responsibilities expand within an increasingly elaborate heavenly order. Later traditions build upon that foundation.

That doesn’t make the mystery smaller. For me, it makes it considerably larger.

Because once we understand where the stories came from, we can stop arguing about whether angels fit neatly into the picture we inherited and begin asking a much more interesting question: What were our ancestors seeing, experiencing or trying to explain when they began telling stories about beings who lived on the other side of the veil?

I don’t think we have answered that question yet. And perhaps that is exactly why we should keep asking it. ■

CRYPTOMNESIA

JASON BLOCK



Jr Korpa | Unsplash

For a few years, I wrote and drew a daily single panel cartoon constantly (and sometimes exhaustingly) requiring a new joke or gag. One day, I hit on what I thought was a really funny line that also mirrored my actual thoughts. “I’m not superstitious, but I am a little stitious.” Minutes within posting it online, I received a message saying I got that joke from “The Office.” And it turned out, I had. Even though it felt genuinely new to me in the moment, I had unintentionally plagiarized a line from Michael Scott. My brain deceived me in a way that actually happens to us all the time. It is a memory error known as cryptomnesia.

In the filing system of your brain, memories are held in two distinct folders. One folder contains the content of the memory, and the other holds the source of it. They are cross-referenced so when you repeat a fact or tell an anecdote, you can also remember when that particular memory was made. But sometimes, especially when you’re stressed or multitasking, the source file isn’t kept linked to the content, and there’s a memory floating around with no known source. Recalling that sourceless memory feels like inspiration, because you don’t actually remember hearing it or seeing it anywhere prior. And when that happens, you

make a new source file and you credit the memory to yourself. It isn't a lie, but it certainly can cause issues.

In a workplace, you might find your own ideas reflected to you by the very person you told them to. You might feel gaslit by their unwillingness to credit you, but it's almost as likely that they're experiencing their own bout of cryptomnesia. Authors are no less subject to the pitfalls of cryptomnesia, with some writers never even realizing they'd inadvertently stolen from others. Carl Jung discovered a passage in Friedrich Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" that he recognized from a book by Justinus Kerner which was published half a century before Nietzsche's magnum opus. Nietzsche's sister confirmed that her brother had been a fan of Kerner's and had read his works as a pre-teen child. Jung concluded Nietzsche had kept the memory of that passage for decades and when it surfaced with no source data available, he assumed he must have thought of it. Helen Keller, meanwhile, did something similar with a fairy tale that had likely been read to her as a child. She submitted the short story, "The Frost King," which was published in her school's alumni magazine, where its similarities to Margaret Canby's, "The Frost Fairies," were realized. Keller was accused of intellectual theft and just barely escaped punishment from a review board split on whether her plagiarism was intentional or not. The incident rocked Keller's confidence in the veracity of her own imagination, and she never published another fictional story again.

There are many stories of these inadvertent thought heists, from George Harrison accidentally nicking "My Sweet Lord" from the Chiffons' "He's so Fine," to Radiohead adding the writers of "The Air That I Breathe" to the credits of their hit, "Creep." Jung viewed the phenomenon as a disruptive mental

byproduct of our unfathomable ability to imagine. That imagination, full of symbols and mental constructs and poetic fragments all absorbed into our psyches, is the engine of creativity that allows for the seemingly endless syncretic permutations of novel ideas is unfortunately capable of accidentally grabbing someone else's idea whole cloth and taking the credit for it. We are all subject to these glitches. And with the amount of information we're subject to now, the likelihood of misfiling our memories has increased dramatically. You may be watching TV while scrolling TikTok and reading posts on Reddit all at the same, absorbing sound bites, songs, nonsense, dialogue, and advertisements and committing them to memory at a furious pace. That cognitive load creates the perfect environment for your memory's source monitoring to fail. The next story you tell or original tune you hum could've been dormant in your brain for years, months, or just hours, but the novelty will feel real. For all our mental prowess, we're still subject to the failings of a brain we barely understand. ■



THE I-4 DEAD ZONE:

One of the Most Haunted Roadways in the U.S.

L.A. PREUSS



Rae Li | Adobe Stock Image

I was driving home alone in the wee hours of the morning, after a very long day. The windows were down and the music was loud, in an attempt to keep myself awake long enough to get home. The road became increasingly hazy as I approached a large area of low-hanging fog. I drove into a patch of haze sitting on the interstate that nearly obliterated my field of vision. As I drove into the haze, the music stopped. A heavy white curtain was swirling in front of my headlights. I thought I saw a woman in white dancing in the fog. “I must be more tired than I thought,” I murmured to myself.

I continued westward, the orangey glow of the sodium lights barely visible, and joined with the large bridge covering the river. The bridge had always been concerning. There were plans to build a new, higher bridge to better accommodate river boat traffic, but until then, driving it felt like you were skimming along the water, unable to tell where the fog ended and the water began.

Thousands of people drive across this unassuming stretch of the I-4 every day, unaware of its dark history. The quarter-mile stretch of highway in Sanford, Florida is said

to be one of the most haunted highways in America. An area that is more desolate, with fewer lights, and a point where the fog rolls in early, and heavy, lingering on the roadway and dancing in the headlights of unsuspecting drivers. As you continue west you reach the flats, where the road is close to water level, approaching the juncture of Lake Monroe, and the St. John's River.

Like the Nile River in Egypt, the St. John's River flows north. It is Florida's longest river at 310 miles, with low headwaters, it produces broad lakes, marshes, and wetlands along the river, making it an important habitat for fish, birds, alligators, and manatees. The river has a very low gradient, which is why it appears almost stagnant in certain places. That low elevation also makes it prone to flooding during hurricanes and heavy storms.

In 1868, General Henry Sanford, who had held various diplomatic posts in Belgium, Germany, Sweden, and France, traveled by boat down the St. John's River and established a community named after himself, Sanford, Florida. Henry Sanford created what was at that time the state's largest grove and brought the railroad to Sanford, establishing a local train station on First Street.

As he continued to serve the government in diplomatic posts, Sanford needed additional laborers for his citrus groves. To solve this need, Sanford invited 100 workers from Sweden. Sanford offered to pay for their passage to America in exchange for one year of labor. His Swedish workers formed the settlement called New Upsala. In 1881, Sanford brought 75 more Swedish workers to his groves under the same arrangement.

As the community grew and prospered, Sanford held a town fair on First Street in 1887. What should have been a time of celebration and prosperity instead started what later became known as the "Decade of Disasters." The "Decade of Disasters" began with a fire at a local bakery during that town fair. The fire grew and spread,

and devastated much of the city's east side, including many of the wooden buildings along First Street running alongside the river. The bad luck continued in 1888, when there was a state-wide yellow fever epidemic, which further depleted the city's population. The Swedish residents in New Upsala were not spared from the epidemic. The community was ravaged by the yellow fever, and in one family, it claimed the lives of four members, two adults and two children. While other settlers attempted to secure clergy to perform last rites and blessings to put the souls to rest, the clergy also succumbed to yellow fever and perished before the blessings could be provided. The survivors buried the bodies with wooden grave markers north of the railroad, near the juncture of Lake Monroe and the St. John's River.

When new clergy came to the area, residents of New Upsala created a Scandinavian Society Church and built a chapel in 1892. That chapel still stands, although it was moved, and many Swedish settlers converted to Presbyterianism under the influence of missionaries, leading to the establishment of Upsala Presbyterian Church. Finally, in 1893, there was a financial collapse, and then, in 1894-1895, a "Great Freeze" ravaged the area's citrus crops. Over time, those residents of New Upsala dwindled, and those who survived and continued living and working in the community were occupied by survival. The graves of the four family members were forgotten.

Around 1905, the land where the family was buried was purchased, and a farmer commenced clearing land toward the river. He had been warned not to mess with the graves on the land, yet one day he came across the old remnants of the wooden grave markers. He wasn't sure if it was old wood, or grave markers, and he removed them. That night, the farmer's home burned to the ground. The story reached the residents of New Upsala, some of whom related the story of the lost family. Word spread not to disturb the land where they were buried.

Between 1958-1966, the state of Florida purchased land to build the east-west highway that would be known as Interstate 4. The land purchase included the land near the juncture of Lake Monroe and the St. John's River, parallel to the railroad tracks, the exact tract of land where the graves of the Swedish family who died of yellow fever were buried. The graves were pointed out to the construction workers, and at one point they were identified and roped off for removal to a new burial site, but ultimately they were never moved. Rather, they were further buried with fill dirt, and the new roadway was built over their graves.

In 1960, Hurricane Donna, a large category four storm, circled the southern part of Florida, moving across the Keys, up the Gulf, and then traversed the mainland from Tampa to Daytona Beach following the pathway of the new Interstate 4. In 2004, Hurricane Charley, a large category four storm, followed the same path as Hurricane Donna, following the I-4 corridor from Tampa to Daytona Beach, leaving behind widespread destruction, including the roof of my home.

The Interstate has been deadly since its creation. On the first day it opened, a semi-tractor trailer jackknifed and the driver lost his life. Within the Dead Zone, travelers have reported many problems with CB reception, cell phones, and other electronics cutting out as soon as they hit the flats heading west, or before cresting the bridge when headed east. Statistics show that within the miles surrounding that bridge, there is a huge increase in the number of vehicle accidents, some of the highest numbers in the state, particularly for fatal crashes.

As I shared my experience that night, others shared their own experiences. Some claim to have seen the two Swedish children from New Upsala playing in the roadway, chasing one another in front of vehicles. The drivers, not realizing they are ghosts, take action to avoid striking the children, and the result is they crash. Others claimed the children would place objects in the travel lanes of the roadway to cause accidents. Some

have seen the father in the marshes trying to encourage the growth of the trees, and others swear they have witnessed the mother chasing the children in a long, flowing white nightgown.

One evening, my now-husband was driving west in the flats. All three lanes of the highway were full of traffic. A cement block appeared in the middle of his travel lane. No other vehicles had swerved around it, no one else was disrupted, but the block was there, and without quick evasive action he would have struck the block, and surely flipped his vehicle.

In another instance, while approaching the bridge, his brand new tire suddenly shredded. Thankfully, he had control of the vehicle and was able to pull off to the side, close to the marshes. When I arrived to help him with the vehicle and our son, I exited my vehicle on the shoulder of the highway. While approaching his car, I came dreadfully close to being struck by a venomous snake slithering out of the wetlands alongside the highway.

A close friend was traveling east on the highway at 75 mph. When she crested the new I-4 bridge over Lake Monroe and the St. John's River, the sudden blow-out of her driver's side front tire caused her to careen towards the side wall. She became convinced she would go over the sidewall of the bridge and down into the heavily alligator-infested water below. She has never driven across the bridge again, and panics as a passenger.

Should you find yourself in Florida, making your way between Nascar and Mickey Mouse, know that you are traveling through the I-4 Dead Zone. Keep watch for the family believed to be haunting the area, who were denied the right to rest in peace. ■

INTERFERENCE

Sarah Lemos

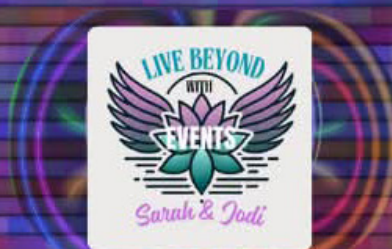


CH Jodi Dehn

*Clearing the Noise.
Restoring the Signal.*

April 8 - 11, 2027
Hot Springs, AR

Play
In the
Dirt



Splash
In the
Water

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SCIENTIFIC LEGITIMACY AND THE ONE WAY FORWARD

Bringing Parapsychology into the 21st Century

LARRY EISSLER III



lomakoandrii2518610 | Vecteezy

Walk into almost any paranormal investigation and you'll see the same things. EMF meters, temperature sensors, recorders, cameras. We're setting baselines, documenting changes, talking controls, experiments. We want to be taken seriously. I understand that. But I've started to ask a different question. Are we borrowing the right science? If the theory we're exploring involves human consciousness after death, then maybe our methods should be grounded primarily in psychology and parapsychology, with

environmental measurement supporting that, not leading it. That isn't a call for less science, it's a call for the right science for the question we're asking.

That brings us to what we actually measure. Instruments are useful, but we need to be precise about what they're telling us. An EMF meter tells us there's a fluctuation in an electromagnetic field. Full stop. It doesn't tell us why that fluctuation happened. If we ask a question and a light spikes, that's an observation. Calling it a response

is an interpretation. That difference matters because once we slide into interpretation, perception and suggestion rush in. None of that means throwing out the equipment. It means being honest about its role. Environmental data can tell us a lot about conditions in a room. It helps rule out some things, highlight others, document context. But imagine a typical night. Measure. Baseline. Place devices. Then ask, "is anyone here who wants to talk to us?" The experiment just changed. We're not just measuring a room anymore; we're attempting an interaction. And if the theory we're entertaining involves memory, personality, preference, or recognizable behavior, why wouldn't psychology be central? Think about how an interviewer keeps from leading or how they pause long enough for someone or something to answer. That's a kind of control too, one focused on interaction.

A psychology-focused investigation would probably look less dramatic and a lot more deliberate. One interviewer leads. Not because they're the most charismatic, but because consistency matters. Fewer channels at once, fewer tangents, fewer interruptions, and a single train of thought that isn't derailed by random questioning. So, if you're asking a question, you're also not running three active devices and chatting over the silence. That silence is data too. Though that doesn't mean not to run passive devices, such as a trip wire, a cat ball, or a REM-POD. That just means keeping your communication focused on a singular method. A blind phase can help as well. Start with open-ended questions, keep independent notes, and only later compare them to historical information. Then, if you choose, move into a history-informed phase. That doesn't prove anything by itself, but it can help you see where information may have crept in. And crucially, this kind of structure doesn't assume one-size-fits-all behavior. It leaves room for the possibility that if a consciousness were present, it might not respond on cue. And why assume identical behavior across the board? We don't expect that from living people. That respects the theory instead of forcing it into a lab mold it was never built for.

If control is partly about how we show up, we have to admit we're part of the experiment. Expectations shape perception, often instantly. When someone offers an interpretation, everyone tilts toward it. That's not dishonesty, it's a human tendency. That's why simple safeguards help. Write down what you noticed before group discussion. Describe the raw observation first, what was heard or seen, before naming what you think it means. That doesn't water down experiences, it just keeps the record clean so we can assess it later with more clarity. Framed that way, we strengthen today's practice and naturally point toward the larger conversation. Parapsychology is where that conversation has traditionally lived. And there's room there to fold in more behavioral discipline. Not as a replacement, but as an update, making sure the methods match the kind of questions being asked.

So, what is parapsychology, and what was it originally trying to do? The term shows up in the late 1800s, but the model that most people still imagine was cemented in the 1930s. J. B. Rhine's lab at Duke was focused on demonstrating effects under controlled conditions, card guessing, dice, statistical deviation. That made sense for its time. It was trying to show a signal under control. But a lot of field investigation today isn't really asking that question. It's asking for something that looks a lot like interview and interaction, which is a different animal. I'm not saying nothing has changed. Parapsychology has evolved in fits and starts, and there are thoughtful researchers out there right now. But if the dominant template we're borrowing from was built for a different question, then updating the toolkit isn't a betrayal. It's a sign of maturity. Updating in this context doesn't mean softening standards. It means choosing standards that actually interrogate the thing you're claiming to study. If the hypothesis involves person-like behavior, then methods that take behavior seriously belong in the core design, not on the sidelines. That doesn't give us proof. It gives us cleaner questions and cleaner records and maybe a bit more humility in the process. And that's not flashy and

it likely won't be the next fad on paranormal YouTube. But it is how serious fields grow up.

And that brings me to what may be the most important part of this argument: scientific legitimacy. Parapsychology has long been treated as a pseudoscience, even while some organizations have offered limited affiliation. We're looking at you, The Parapsychological Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. But legitimacy doesn't come from affiliation. It comes from methodology. If the field commits to psychology-based standards, careful observation, bias controls, clear documentation, then we're not asking science to accept ghosts. We're asking for the study itself to be disciplined, testable, and self-critical. That's a path toward legitimacy, not a shortcut to proof. Psychology shouldn't just show up at the end to explain away experiences. It belongs at the start to design the inquiry.

That, to me, is how parapsychology earns a stronger standing and we inch further away from pseudoscience and into the realm of a legitimate field.

In the end, paranormal investigation doesn't get stronger by looking more technical. It gets stronger by asking clear questions and using methods that fit those questions. That means keeping what works, clear notes, careful timing, controlled conditions, and adding what we've resisted: structure around how we ask, listen, and document. That's where an updated parapsychology comes in. Keep the rigor but make room for the behavioral lens when the hypothesis on the table points to personhood. That shift doesn't promise answers; it promises a cleaner question. And maybe that's the point. Not to prove ghosts, but to pursue the question with methods we can defend. If we do that, even uncertainty starts to look like progress. And the stigma of pseudoscience will slowly fall away. ■



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THE LAST THING IN THE ROOM

The Sacred Objects We Carry Through Life, Death, and Everything Between

JESSICA HOCH | MOXIE MALAS

There is something hauntingly beautiful about the objects we leave behind. Whether that be a ring worn every day, the necklace that rested against someone's heart, or even a small stone carried in a pocket until its edges became smooth. All ordinary things that, in the presence of loss, become extraordinary. When someone dies, the world they inhabited remains remarkably intact, almost like a time capsule. Their clothes are still hanging in the closet. Their favorite coffee mug sits in the cupboard. A bookmark is still waiting for the reader to return. Yet somehow, everything has changed.

In those first moments of grief, we often reach for something tangible. Something they held, wore, or touched. Perhaps it is our instinct to preserve a connection when the physical presence of someone we love has disappeared. Throughout history, humanity has honored this instinct through sacred objects, burial offerings, and protective talismans. Across civilizations and centuries, stones have accompanied the living into death, while those left behind have kept precious objects close as enduring expressions of remembrance. There is a quiet poetry in this tradition. Stones, formed over millions of years, become witnesses to lives that pass in what feels like an instant. And perhaps that is why we continue to reach for them.

What We Carry Into the Unknown

Long before contemporary crystal practices, ancient civilizations recognized the significance of placing meaningful objects with the deceased. In ancient Egypt, protective amulets were carefully positioned among the linen wrappings of the dead. Heart scarabs, often carved from green stone, were associated with protection during

the soul's passage through the afterlife. These objects carried prayers, symbols, and the hope that the spirit would find its way beyond the physical world.

The ancient Greeks also included personal adornments and offerings in burial practices. Archaeological discoveries have revealed necklaces and beads placed alongside the deceased, material reminders of the relationship between life, death, and ritual. Centuries later, mourning jewelry became particularly meaningful throughout Europe and America. During the Victorian era, jet, a deep black organic gemstone formed from ancient wood, became closely associated with grief. Locketts containing a loved one's hair, memorial inscriptions, and carefully preserved keepsakes allowed people to carry remembrance on their bodies. Although the materials and beliefs differed, a common human impulse remained: the desire to honor a life through something enduring. It is remarkable how little that instinct has changed.

We may no longer place elaborate amulets within burial wrappings, but we still tuck cherished belongings into caskets, preserve wedding rings, and wear jewelry inherited from those we have lost. The objects themselves may be small, but the meaning they carry can be immense.

Through my work creating crystal jewelry, I have been entrusted with stories that have profoundly shaped the way I understand the relationship between objects, intention, and memory. On a handful of occasions, families have shared that during a loved one's final time in the hospital, the only personal item they were wearing, apart from a hospital gown, was one of my bracelets. When I first heard this, I was deeply moved. Something I had created

with my hands had accompanied another human being through one of life's most intimate and vulnerable transitions. What moved me even more was learning what happened afterward.

For their families, those bracelets became cherished keepsakes. They were no longer simply jewelry. They were something their loved one had worn, something that had remained physically close when so much else had been stripped away. I often think about the significance of that. A bracelet may begin as a personal reminder of strength, protection, love, or peace. But over time, it absorbs another kind of meaning through the experiences of the person wearing it. It becomes part of their story, and when that person is no longer here, the object remains.

There is something extraordinarily tender about holding an item that once rested against the skin of someone we love. The stone itself has not changed, yet its meaning has become immeasurably greater. A talisman, in this sense, becomes a bridge between presence and absence. Not because it can bring someone back, but because it gives our love somewhere to rest.

When Memory Becomes Something We Can Hold

One of the most meaningful projects I have ever been involved in began with an unimaginable loss. A friend had lost her son at a young age, and together we created a memorial bracelet for the friends and family who loved him. There are moments when words simply cannot reach the depth of what someone is experiencing. Losing a child is one of them.

Creating those bracelets was never about finding an explanation for the loss or attempting to make grief more bearable through something material. It was about remembrance of someone deeply loved by many. Each bracelet offered a small, tangible connection to a life that had touched so many others. Something his friends could wear as they continued growing older. Something his family could hold close on the days when memories felt especially precious.

I think about how beautiful that shared act of remembrance is. Different people, carrying their own memories, connected through a single meaningful object. The bracelets did not need to contain the entirety of his story. They simply needed to honor the love that remained. This is where I believe the deeper significance of a talisman reveals itself.

A talisman is more than an object assigned a particular meaning. It is something we return to, physically and emotionally, as a reminder of what matters. Especially in times of grief, that reminder can become sacred.

Crystals have long been associated with symbolic qualities that speak to the experiences of grief, remembrance, and transformation.

Amethyst, with its violet depths, has traditionally been associated with spiritual awareness, tranquility, and contemplation. Its calming symbolism makes it a meaningful companion during times when the mind searches for answers the heart may not yet be ready to receive.

Rose Quartz, often connected with unconditional love and compassion, offers a different reminder. Love does not cease simply because its physical expression has changed. The relationship continues through memory, influence, and the ways another person has shaped who we are.

Smoky Quartz, with its translucent shades of brown and gray, is often chosen as a symbol of grounding. During grief, when ordinary life can feel unfamiliar, the weight of a stone in the palm can become an invitation to reconnect with the present moment.

And Labradorite, whose seemingly dark surface reveals flashes of unexpected color, has become one of my favorite metaphors for transformation. Its beauty is not always immediately visible. It emerges when the light meets it at a different angle. And perhaps there is a lesson in that.

These stones cannot erase grief, change an outcome, or protect us from the inevitability of loss. Their value exists in the meaning we give them and the moments of reflection they inspire. Sometimes the simplest ritual is enough: holding a stone, remembering a loved one, and allowing ourselves to feel whatever rises without attempting to change it.

The Many Deaths We Experience While Living

Yet not every ending involves a physical death. Throughout our lives, we experience countless smaller losses that quietly reshape our identities. This could be the ending of a relationship. The closing of a business. Children growing older and no longer needing us in the same way. A career that once defined us. A belief we have outgrown. A version of ourselves we can no longer return to.

These experiences may not resemble traditional mourning, yet they can carry grief of their own. We are often encouraged to celebrate new beginnings, but rarely given permission to mourn what those beginnings require us to leave behind because even positive transformations can involve loss. There is an old self we must release before the next version can fully emerge. Even as I write this it is resonating deeply with my own path.

In these moments, crystals can serve as symbolic markers of transition. Moonstone has long been associated with cycles, intuition, and new beginnings, making it a fitting reminder that change is a natural part of existence. Black Tourmaline, traditionally connected with protection and boundaries, can represent the decision to move forward without carrying everything from our past. We might choose a stone to honor a chapter that has ended, place it somewhere meaningful, or carry it as a reminder of the person we are becoming.

Ritual gives shape to something we cannot always articulate. It allows us to acknowledge that what has ended mattered, even as we make room for what comes next.

I have come to believe that the most powerful talismans are not necessarily the rarest, most expensive, or most visually extraordinary. Sometimes they are the objects whose meaning would be invisible to anyone else. It could be a weathered bracelet, a simple pendant, or even a simple stone picked up during a meaningful afternoon. Something so ordinary that a stranger might overlook it entirely. Yet to the person holding it, it can contain a lifetime.

There is a beautiful contradiction within the human experience. We are temporary beings, drawn to enduring objects. We seek permanence while living in a world defined by change. Perhaps we know, instinctively, that we cannot hold on to everything. So we choose something small. Something that fits in the palm of a hand. Something that can remain when a voice has gone quiet, when a familiar room feels different, or when the person we once were has become a memory.

I still think about those bracelets worn in hospital rooms, and the one created in remembrance of a young life lost too soon. They remind me that the true significance of a talisman is not found solely in the stone itself, but in the love, intention, and memory entrusted to it.

We cannot preserve a moment forever. We cannot stop the passage of time or prevent the transformations that shape our lives, but we can honor what has been, we can carry something forward. And sometimes, when everything else has changed, a small and enduring object becomes a quiet reminder that although a life, a relationship, or a chapter may have ended, what it meant to us does not have to disappear.

Perhaps that is why we keep these things. Not because we are unwilling to let go, but because love has a way of finding new forms in which to remain. ■



Image courtesy of E.L. Block.

CURIOSITY CABINETS:

How Private Collections of Wonder Helped to Shape the Modern Museum

E.L. BLOCK

Long before museums welcomed the public into carefully organized galleries, remarkable objects from around the world were gathered in private libraries, studies, and rooms devoted to wonder. A shell carried home from a distant shore might rest beside an ancient coin, while preserved animals, fossils, carved figures, scientific instruments, manuscripts, minerals, and fragments of antiquity competed for space nearby. To modern eyes, the arrangement could appear chaotic. To the collectors who assembled them, however, these objects belonged together because each represented another piece of an enormous and still mysterious world.

These collections became known as cabinets of curiosities, or *Wunderkammern*, from the German words for “wonder chamber.” The English word cabinet can be somewhat misleading today. Although smaller collections could indeed be housed in elaborate cupboards or cases, the great cabinets of early modern Europe often occupied entire rooms. They represented an attempt to gather the breadth of human knowledge and natural creation into a single space, reflecting a period when the boundaries separating science, art, history, religion, medicine, and mythology were far less rigid than they would later become.

Collecting a Changing World

The great age of the curiosity cabinet emerged during the Renaissance and flourished particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. European exploration, expanding trade networks, archaeological discoveries, and developments in natural philosophy brought an extraordinary variety of unfamiliar objects into circulation. Plants, animals, minerals, cultural artifacts, artworks, and scientific instruments traveled enormous distances before arriving in the collections of scholars, physicians, aristocrats, merchants, and rulers.

Collectors often divided their holdings conceptually into broad categories. *Naturalia* encompassed objects produced by nature, including shells, fossils, minerals, botanical specimens, and preserved animals. *Artificialia* included objects created or altered by human hands, such as sculpture, jewelry, coins, weapons, and works of extraordinary craftsmanship. Some collections also contained *Scientifica*, including instruments associated with astronomy, navigation, measurement, and other emerging sciences, as well as *Exotica*, objects brought to Europe from distant cultures and lands.

The divisions were never entirely consistent, nor was rigid classification necessarily the point. A successful cabinet was expected to surprise its visitors. Rarity, beauty, strangeness, craftsmanship, and mystery could all determine whether an object deserved a place within it. Collecting was therefore both an intellectual exercise and a form of theater, with the room itself presenting a carefully constructed vision of a world that seemed to be growing larger with every returning ship.

Rooms Built for Wonder

Among the best-known early collectors was the Italian apothecary Ferrante Imperato, whose collection in Naples became famous among European naturalists. His *Dell'Historia Naturale*, published in 1599, contains one of the earliest surviving printed illustrations of a natural history cabinet. The image shows visitors surrounded by shelves of specimens, books, preserved creatures, and other objects, while a large crocodile hangs dramatically overhead. The room appears crowded almost to excess, capturing the central ambition of the *Wunderkammer*: to compress an astonishingly diverse world into a space that could be observed and studied.

The Danish physician and scholar Ole Worm created another celebrated collection during the seventeenth century. His Copenhagen cabinet contained natural specimens alongside archaeological and ethnographic objects, and a catalog of the collection, *Museum Wormianum*, was published posthumously in 1655. Worm was interested not merely in acquiring unusual things but in examining and describing them, illustrating the gradual movement from collecting for wonder toward collecting as a method of systematic inquiry.

In Rome, the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher assembled an even more eclectic museum at the

Collegio Romano. Kircher pursued interests ranging from geology and magnetism to languages, music, ancient Egypt, and mechanical inventions. His museum reflected a worldview in which seemingly unrelated branches of knowledge might reveal hidden connections when brought together. Although some of Kircher's theories were later rejected, the collection embodied the intellectual ambition of the age: the belief that enough careful observation might eventually reveal the underlying order of the world.

Where Knowledge Met Myth

Curiosity cabinets developed during a period in which empirical science was emerging but folklore, classical texts, religious interpretation, travelers' accounts, and inherited beliefs still shaped explanations of the natural world. As a result, authentic specimens sometimes appeared alongside objects whose identities had been misunderstood or embellished.

Narwhal tusks, for example, circulated in Europe for centuries as supposed unicorn horns and were valued for their alleged medicinal and protective properties. Other unusual remains could be interpreted as evidence of dragons, giants, mermaids, or other beings familiar from legend. Such conclusions can appear credulous from a modern perspective, but early collectors were confronting a genuine problem: the world repeatedly produced animals, fossils, geological formations, and cultures that contradicted what Europeans believed they already knew.

The cabinet became one of the places where those contradictions could be examined. By bringing objects together, collectors could compare specimens, challenge inherited explanations, exchange information with travelers and other scholars, and gradually distinguish observation from assumption. Wonder and skepticism were not necessarily opposites in these rooms. In many cases, wonder provided the reason to investigate further.

The Cabinet as a Place of Exchange

Although wealth and social status certainly influenced the creation of prominent collections, curiosity cabinets were more than elaborate displays of possession. The best-known examples became intellectual meeting places where scholars and visitors examined specimens, discussed theories, exchanged objects, and shared information arriving from elsewhere.

Networks of correspondence developed among collectors throughout Europe, allowing specimens and descriptions to circulate across considerable distances. Physicians could study unfamiliar medicinal plants, natural philosophers could compare fossils and minerals, artists could examine forms and materials they had never encountered, and antiquarians could consider objects from civilizations known previously only through written accounts.

The collections also reveal some of the more complicated legacies of the period. Many objects entered European cabinets through colonial expansion and unequal systems of trade, and objects now described as ethnographic artifacts were frequently removed from their original cultural contexts. Modern museums continue to confront questions surrounding provenance, ownership, interpretation, and repatriation that can be traced in part to these early collecting practices. The history of the curiosity cabinet is therefore also part of the history of how institutions decided what could be collected, who could possess it, and whose interpretation of an object would be preserved.

From Private Cabinet to Public Museum

By the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, approaches to collecting were changing. Scientific inquiry increasingly emphasized classification, comparison, documentation, and repeatable

observation. The eclecticism that had defined the *Wunderkammer* gradually gave way to collections organized according to emerging academic disciplines.

The transition can be seen in the history of the Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford. The museum opened in 1683 to house a collection given to the university by Elias Ashmole, much of which had originated with the remarkable collections of John Tradescant the Elder and John Tradescant the Younger. The Tradescants had gathered botanical, natural historical, ethnographic, and artificial curiosities, creating a collection sometimes known as the Tradescant Ark. When these holdings became part of the Ashmolean, objects once associated with a private cabinet entered an institution designed for scholarly study and broader public access.

A similar transformation occurred with the collection of physician and naturalist Sir Hans Sloane. Over his lifetime, Sloane assembled tens of thousands of books, manuscripts, natural history specimens, antiquities, coins, and other objects. After his death in 1753, Parliament acquired his collection for the nation, and it became one of the founding collections of the British Museum, which opened to the public in 1759.

The modern museum did not simply replace the curiosity cabinet, but evolved partly from it. The impulse to collect remained, while the methods used to organize, interpret, preserve, and present those collections changed.

The Return of the Cabinet

The curiosity cabinet never disappeared completely. Its influence survives in natural history museums, university collections, historic houses, private libraries, antique shops, and the work of contemporary artists and collectors. In recent years, interest in the form has become particularly visible again, appearing in museum

exhibitions, fashion, interior design, and a renewed enthusiasm for antiquing, collecting, and displaying objects with personal histories. Modern exhibitions sometimes deliberately revive the *Wunderkammer* approach, placing objects from different disciplines beside one another to encourage connections that conventional categories might obscure.

Yet the contemporary cabinet is perhaps most interesting when considered not as a decorating trend but as a continuation of a much older human impulse. A collection of inherited photographs, natural specimens, old books, artwork, found objects, souvenirs, family artifacts, or seemingly inexplicable treasures can become a kind of personal archive. The individual objects may have little obvious relationship to one another, but their keeper supplies the connection. Together they preserve travels, relationships, interests, discoveries, questions, and memories that might otherwise leave no formal record.

This is where the modern cabinet most closely resembles its historical predecessor. Both create meaning through association. An object is placed beside another object because someone perceives a relationship between them, whether scientific, aesthetic, historical, symbolic, or entirely personal. The collection therefore reveals something not only about the world from which its contents were gathered, but about the person who decided those particular things deserved to remain together.

What distinguishes such a collection from simple accumulation is intention. The historical cabinet asked its owner and its visitors to look carefully, compare objects, make associations, and consider how one fragment of the world might relate to another. That same practice remains possible even when the objects themselves are humble. A cabinet need not contain a rare fossil or Renaissance instrument to function as

an archive of curiosity. Its significance can lie in the relationships created among otherwise ordinary things.

The Enduring Value of Wonder

Modern knowledge depends upon classification. Libraries, museums, archives, and scientific disciplines require systems that allow information and objects to be identified, preserved, and retrieved. Yet the curiosity cabinet offers a useful reminder that discovery does not always begin with knowing where something belongs. Sometimes it begins with encountering an object that does not fit comfortably into an existing category and becoming curious enough to investigate it.

A shell can lead to marine biology, trade history, art, or mythology. A fossil can open questions about geology and deep time. An unfamiliar instrument can reveal forgotten technologies and methods of navigation. An annotated manuscript can preserve both the ideas of its author and the thoughts of generations of readers. The objects become interesting not because they exist in isolation, but because they provide entrances into larger stories.

That may explain why curiosity cabinets continue to fascinate centuries after their great period of popularity. Beneath their crowded shelves and strange juxtapositions was an idea that remains remarkably relevant: knowledge begins with attention. The early collectors did not always understand what they had found, and their interpretations were sometimes profoundly mistaken, but they recognized that the unfamiliar deserved examination.

The modern museum inherited much from those rooms, including their collections, their questions, and their desire to preserve remarkable things. What may be most worth preserving, however, is the habit of mind that created them in the first place—the willingness to look closely at something strange, beautiful, ordinary, or unexplained and wonder what else it might reveal. ■

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