

Walking between *the Stars*

The Fey Shamanism of Francesca De Grandis



One can listen to the wind whispering the secrets of magic. One can also read a good book. Francesca De Grandis one day accidentally discovered that she had, indeed, established a distinct tradition of Witchcraft. This tradition is the foundation for her school, The Third Road School of Celtic Shamanism, and her acclaimed books, *Be A Goddess* and *Goddess Initiation* (Harper, San Francisco). There is a marvelous essay called “Faerie Tradition and the Third Road” on her website* about the birth of The Third Road so I won’t repeat the story here. Francesca had just published her third book, *BE A TEEN GODDESS! Magical Charms, Spells, and Wiccan Wisdom for the Wild Ride of Life* (Citadel Press) on which we spoke, and, she tells me lays the foundation for the teen practice of Third Road-style magic and witchcraft.

The content of her new book may be geared towards young adult Wiccans, but this interview is not. I asked her about some of the most sacred and powerful aspects of Witchcraft and the Third Road tradition. While Francesca is no stranger to the media or the public eye, there is only one way to have this kind of a conversation with her — over the course of several years during training. I am pleased that she let me do this interview and that she was open and forthcoming in her answers.

*<http://www.well.com/user/zthirdrd/FT&3.html>

When you are training Witches, what is your priority?

To teach them how to have great sex and serve the community.

Is training important? Does that year and a day thing mean anything anymore?

To people for whom training is important, it is very important. Training is often viewed as a stifling mechanism. Real Wiccan training frees the soul and lets the spirit soar. The disciplines of Wicca should not be suppressing but rather are tools for full-tilt living.

How is it different teaching over the phone compared to teaching face-to-face?

I have to be much more disciplined when teaching over the phone. What is remarkable to me about teaching by phone is that magic is magic. Shamans teach by walking in the other worlds with their students; there's no reason you can't do that by phone. And when we are working together as a group, one student might be in Canada, another in California, me in Pennsylvania, and the sacred space, the magical realm we are inhabiting together, is still here in my living room and there in California in their living room and there in Canada in their living room.

Who are the Fey and what do you teach about them?

Ssssh about the Fey. You should be very quiet about the Fey. The Faerie Folk teach Witches. The Fey magic permeates Third Road, but to talk too much about them is to lose their magic. A fish does not say "I'm a fish," it just goes about being a fish. Faeries don't go about talking about being faeries, they go about teaching us. And we should go about being Witches.

What do you think of when you hear the word "Witch"?

Great sex, dancing next to the trees in Western Pennsylvania in the middle of nowhere, the snow falling from the sky today that I can see out my window that is being kissed by the faeries on my property, the power to be oneself, the power to make a difference in the world, the fact that if anything is truly current, truly hip, truly changing the world, it is also ancient and at the heart of every human being. Aren't I deep?



On your website you have a t-shirt that says "I'm a reasonable person, that's why I'm an anarchist." What relation do Witchcraft and anarchy have to each other?

I don't want to define Witchcraft for other people; part of the strengths of Wicca is that we get to define Wicca ourselves. But Wicca is becoming "standardized" according to some people and that makes me very nervous. So for some people, if Wicca is not the equivalent of anarchism, I bless their Wicca and I know the Goddess does too. But for me, as a Wiccan who is a mystic, I celebrate the chaos. I believe there is actually a blueprint under that chaos I can't see, and that blueprint is divine and it is guiding me, and I wish this culture as a whole would embrace the beauty and tenderness of chaos. Chaos is not a destructive force. Anarchy, as I see it, is not a destructive force, but it is a release from oppressive structures as opposed to a rejection of healthy structures.

If everyone were a Witch, who would be the healers? Is a society of Witches possible? Theoretically speaking, I mean.

The ancient village — the one everyone likes to think existed in which everybody believed in the Goddess — had a shamanic culture. Everyone in that village would be by today's standard a Witch. But in that culture there would also be people that specifically focused on healing, and they were the shamans. Everybody in the village would do some healing; everybody would be involved with magic. But the shaman would focus on it and would be considered a professional. What I just said about the difference between the villager and the professional shaman is a paraphrase of Malcom Margolin's work.

You do shamanic counseling, what is that? Does shamanism and Witchcraft have a connection? Are Witches also shamans?

In my tradition, they are synonymous. In The Third Road, we get our power by journeying into the self at a very deep level in order to move through deep inner blocks, and also to find the gold that is buried within the psyche. Jung, when he defined the shadow self, was not only talking about the negative, he was talking about

what he called “the hidden gold.” That is a shamanic process. And in that shamanic process you gain your magical powers. That is not how power is gained in all Wiccan traditions. This is not to say that we do not also train our magical technique, but we come at it in our tradition from both angles.

Some Witches I have talked to do not incorporate much cleansing work in their practice. What are the reasons for doing cleansing work and what are the consequences of not doing it?

I assume by cleansing work you mean removing your inner blocks to celebration, self-respect, community service, healthy relationships, good parental skills, and so on. In a shamanic tradition, obviously if one does not rid oneself of one’s blocks, one is not going to be as happy and self-fulfilled and as effective in the world. To not draw on the power of Witchcraft to remove these blocks is to really miss out on an enormous opportunity. Also, when these blocks stay in one, one’s magic can be less effective. At least in The Third Road, the practitioner is the tool and the healthier the tool the more powerful the magic.

Is initiation important?

I think initiations happen whether you do an initiation ceremony or not. And they are important if you look at the larger definition of them, which is “beginnings into new power.” Whether it is the power of motherhood that happens at childbirth or the ritual initiation of a new Witch that brings them closer to the old gods, the important thing is not the form. Many women are disempowered during childbirth; many ritual initiations only feed the ego. The important thing is how you use initiation and the support you get in order to use it well.

Weren’t you initiated into the Faerie tradition?

Yes. And I was told by one of my very first Faerie teachers that I would start my own tradition. I forgot that until many years later. I never meant to start a tradition. Thank goodness I didn’t mean to. In retrospect I did all the things that create a tradition. I created a set of rituals, a cosmology to go with it, coupled with lots of rants on Wiccan ethics and so on. Bit by bit a whole tradition evolved until one day I turned around and realized there was a tradition and I was stunned that people all over the country and now the world were practicing it. I think the gods just kidnapped me and led me through this process; it was a good thing I didn’t know what was going on because I probably would have gotten in the way. It’s amazing to me to find Third Road initiates that I’ve never met because my initiates have made initiates and their initiates have made initiates. But it wasn’t me doing it, it was the Goddess.

What are some key elements of the Third Road tradition?

The embracing and honoring of chaos; the shamanic perspective; and the focus on the cleansing work. In part, The Third

Road got its name because it is an integration of two supposedly opposite paths: the path of humility, surrender, acceptance, and understanding one’s human limits, with the path of self-fulfillment, ecstasy, assertiveness, and recognition of self as God. These two paths are not opposite. The Third Road is not a path that is even seeking balance because that implies an opposition. These things need to be integrated and are all part of a whole.

The whole yin-yang symbolism is greatly misunderstood by the Western mind as two polarized opposites that balance each other. That was never the original philosophy. Another important part of Third Road is the wide variety of participants. Male, female, gay, straight, all types of professions, all sorts of class backgrounds. And not only is The Third Road about honoring all these different types, but I always say The Third Road is not a tradition you have to leave to do your own thing. A lot of the work we do is to wake up what is unique in each of us.

Wicca is becoming “standardized” according to some people and that makes me very nervous. As a Wiccan who is a mystic, I celebrate the chaos. I believe there is actually a blueprint under that chaos.

Is witchcraft still an oral tradition or has it all been written down?

The day you can write down a sexual encounter so accurately that someone actually experiences all of it, will be the day all Witchcraft has been written down. Wicca is innately oral. There are some things you just can’t teach in books.

How does one weave magic into their everyday life?

The ways are as many as there are moments in the day. But one thing you can do is to start recognizing the Goddess in everyone around you. Sometimes that might mean saying, “Boy, this person is a jerk, I don’t know how they could be the Goddess,” but at least you are trying. Another way is to believe that spirits are always dancing outside your window, because that’s a fun thought, if you realize I mean good spirits, happy, joyful spirits who are blessing you. Paganism is about being happy.

What are you grateful for?

The spirits. All the people who have allowed me to train them in The Third Road; I’ve learned much from them. The fact that I have an ability to work as a pastoral counselor with trauma survivors, and that makes me feel like I can do a little bit to help out. I’m also grateful for my friends who call me on my BS because it’s so easy for a human being to live in delusions. And I’m grateful for other mystics who will walk between the stars with me.

For more information about The Third Road School of Celtic Shamanism, Teleseminars, and Counseling, visit the Third Road website at <http://www.well.com/user/zthirdrd/>. ©

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