

Valiente, Doreen

Often regarded as the "Mother of Wicca", Doreen Valiente (1922–1999) is arguably the most influential figure in Wiccan history after Gerald Gardner, having made a signification contribution not only to his Gardnerian tradition but to the Wiccan movement more widely. Born as Doreen Dominy in Surrey, southern England to a lower middle-class family, her early life appears to have been somewhat unhappy (Heselton 2016, 13–37). During the Second World War she worked in the code-breaking centre at Bletchley Park and married twice; after her first husband was declared missing in action she wedded a Spanish refugee from whom she gained her trademark surname (Heselton 2016, 39–54).

While living along the southern English coastline in the post-war period she developed her interest in occultism by reading widely on the subject and practicing Golden Dawn-style ceremonial magic with a friend after procuring the notebook of an Alpha et Omega member. After a press article brought Wicca to her attention she contacted Gardner and was initiated into his Gardnerian tradition at Midsummer 1953. She soon became the High Priestess of his Hertfordshire-based Bricket Wood coven, through which she helped to bring in new initiates. She also took an active interest in the liturgies and poems in his private Book of Shadows, aiding him in the rewrite of much of it. However, frustrations with Gardner's incessant publicity seeking resulted in a schism within the coven. In 1957 Valiente and fellow coven member Ned Grove split from Gardner to establish their own short-lived group (Valiente 1989, 35–40, 54–72).

Keen on bringing together Wicca's disparate traditions, which she believed were scattered survivals of an ancient pre-Christian witch cult, Valiente became president of the short-lived Witchcraft Research Association (WRA) in 1964 (Hutton 1999, 312). It was through the WRA that she first promoted the "Wiccan Rede" as a moral guideline for the religion's practitioners to follow: "An' it harm none, do what ye will" (Doyle White 2015, 156–59). In the mid-1960s she also became an associate of Robert Cochrane and his Clan of Tubal Cain. Although impressed with Cochrane's mystical approach, she was angered by his consistently hostile

attitude toward the Gardnerians and left his group shortly before he committed suicide (Valiente 1989, 117–136).

After being widowed for a second time in 1972, Valiente lived alone in a Brighton council flat and became a prolific writer, producing several widely-read books on Wicca and related esoteric topics. She became a friend to the Alexandrian Wiccans Stewart and Janet Farrar, and supported their controversial publication of the Gardnerian and Alexandrian liturgies in 1984. In a subsequent work she endorsed the practice of self-initiation into Wicca, thus helping to further the rapid proliferation of solitary, self-initiated practitioners.

Valiente remains a well-respected figure in the Wiccan community. Her books are still in print, the Rede is a widely accepted ethical tenet, and the liturgies and poems that she composed make regularly appearances in Wiccan ritual. The Doreen Valiente Foundation, founded in 2011, helps to conserve her ritual tools and promote her legacy.

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