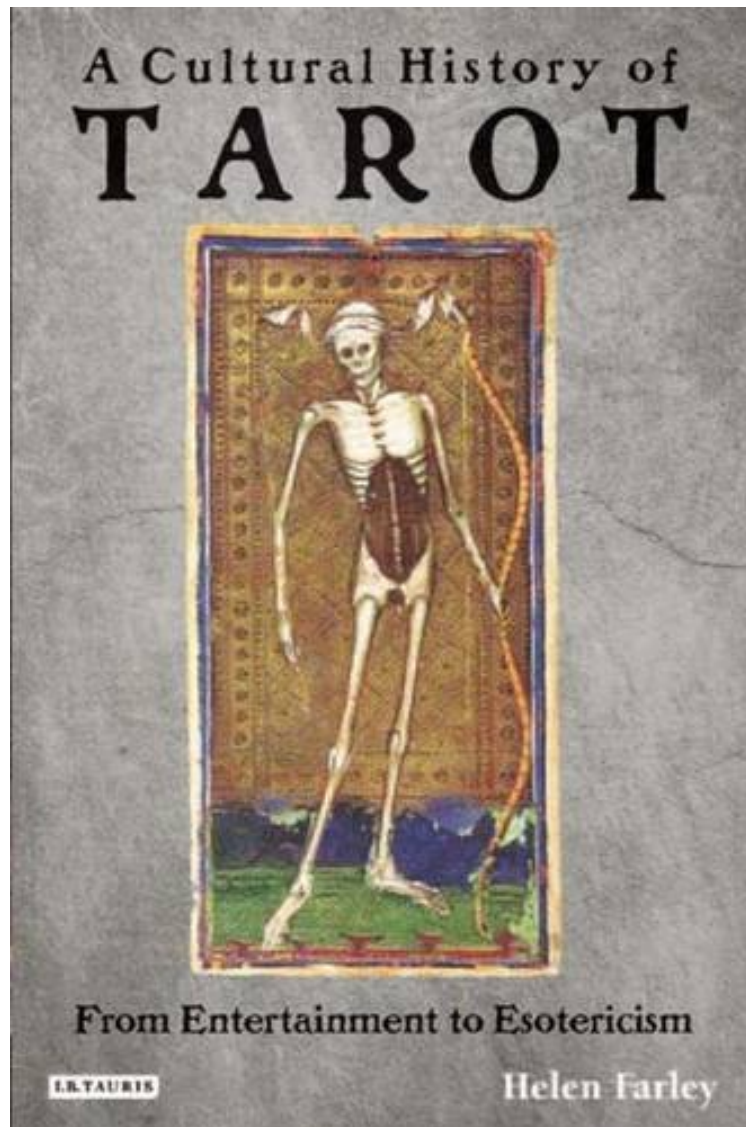


(Download free pdf) A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism

# A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism

*Helen Farley*

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**Helen Farley : A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. deeply researched, erudite, and highly useful By Uke Enthusiast  
A Cultural History of Tarot is deeply researched, erudite, and highly useful to those interested in the history of tarot. It is also very much an academic work (it seems to be a reworked doctoral dissertation), and might prove a bit of a slog for some readers. That said, I would recommend Farley's book to anyone sincerely interested in reading about the history

of tarot. Farley's research includes archival study in Milan and London; examination of earlier histories, including Dummett; consideration of the theories of other scholars, including popular studies like O'Neill; and examination of what is perhaps easiest labeled the New Age tarot phenomenon. Farley is at all points a scholar first and an enthusiast second. The point of her book is to understand the development (if not evolution) of tarot from game to esoteric/divinatory device to tool for personal transformation. Her extensive bibliography is terrific. So five stars it is, even if I am willing to acknowledge this book might not be for everyone.<sup>4</sup> of 4 people found the following review helpful. A well-researched history for experts and novices alike

By BRSI am far from being an expert on tarot. I have a few decks and I enjoy reading about their history and cultural development. In her book, Farley deals with these aspects of tarot in a scholarly yet very readable way. It is well researched: of the 270 pages, 176 make up the actual text, followed by more than 50 pages of Notes, and another 30 or so for the Bibliography. There are numerous citations throughout. I think anyone who might disagree with any of the points she makes, would certainly be able to find the source material that led her to her conclusions. Frankly, I don't see much of this kind of support in many other writings on the Tarot. So on the one hand it's well-researched and in-depth, and on the other it's perfectly suitable for someone with little or no background on tarot and its history. In the first section on the development of the tarot, there are sections where the reader can be overwhelmed by the quick, name and date filled histories of some of the Italian families, but it's not hard to keep an eye on the overall arc of Farley's view of the tarot's inception and development. And there are plenty of biographical citations to help a reader find more information about anything that seems to need more clarification that isn't directly related to the tarot's development (e.g. Renaissance Italian society, politics of the Church, etc.). Really, though, anyone with any interest in tarot would get a lot from this.<sup>12</sup> of 17 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but flawed

By Christopher Marlowe Much of what the author writes about here on the subject of the esoteric development of Tarot has already been documented in detail by other authors, notably Dummett and Decker in their "History of the Occult Tarot". The construction of her introductory chapters also rests on the thesis that the Visconti Sforza decks are definitely the "ur-Tarot" from which all later decks developed, which remains unproven. The book poses as an academic work, but the volume really does not seem to justify its high price. Suggestion: wait until it becomes available on Kindle!

The enigmatic and richly illustrative tarot deck reveals a host of strange and iconic mages, such as The Tower, The Wheel of Fortune, The Hanged Man and The Fool: over which loom the terrifying figures of Death and The Devil. The 21 numbered playing cards of tarot have always exerted strong fascination, way beyond their original purpose, and the multiple resonances of the deck are ubiquitous. From T. S. Eliot and his "wicked pack of cards" in "The Waste Land" to the psychic divination of Solitaire in Ian Fleming's "Live and Let Die"; and from the satanic novels of Dennis Wheatley to the deck's adoption by New Age practitioners, the cards have in modern times become inseparably connected to the occult. They are now viewed as arguably the foremost medium of prophesying and foretelling. Yet, as the author shows, originally the tarot were used as recreational playing cards by the Italian nobility in the Renaissance. It was only much later, in the 18th and 19th centuries, that the deck became associated with esotericism before evolving finally into a diagnostic tool for mind, body and spirit. This is the first book to explore the remarkably varied ways in which tarot has influenced culture. Tracing the changing patterns of the deck's use, from game to mysterious oracular device, Helen Farley examines tarot's emergence in 15th century Milan and discusses its later associations with astrology, kabbalah and the Age of Aquarius.

"Deeply researched and elegantly written, Farley's is by far the most important contemporary contribution to the academic study of the Tarot. No serious work in the history of Western Esotericism will be able to ignore the author's ground-breaking study. Engrossing and fascinating." Philip C Almond, Emeritus Professor of Studies in Religion, University of Queensland

"Helen Farley takes the reader deep into the diverse worlds of late Renaissance Italy, Enlightenment France, Victorian England and New Age America - and a host of other milieux - in her impressive study of tarot symbolism. She offers a comprehensive yet detailed study of the changing imagery in the cards as they emerged from their evolving historical contexts. Rarely does a book offer such a wealth of information over such a broad span of time in a way that does justice to its subject: but Farley accomplishes her task with thoroughness and diligence. A Cultural History of Tarot makes a welcome and valuable contribution to the body of recent scholarship on the history of esotericism. More than that, it provides a roadmap to show how scholars of art and culture can engage meaningfully with the fascinating esoteric strands of Europe's past." -- Christina Oakley Harrington, Proprietor, Treadwell's Bookshop, London

"A sound, clearly written, and richly documented book that makes an informative and enjoyable read" -- Journal of Folklore Research

About the Author Helen Farley is Lecturer in Studies in Religion and Esotericism at the University of Queensland. She is editor of the international journal *Kthonios: A Journal for the Study of Religion* and has written widely on a variety of topics and subjects, including ritual, divination, esotericism and magic.