

HAGITUDE: Reimagining the
second half of life
by Sharon Blackie (2022)

"In the oldest known cosmology of my native lands, it wasn't a sky-bound old man with a beard who made and shaped our world. It was an old woman... How thorough we've been taught to forget." ♡

- 1
- ✓ the ones who hold the myths and the wisdom stories
- ✓ the ones who know where the medicine plants grow - and what their uses are.
- ✓ who serve as guides for younger adults
- ✓ who serve as caregivers and mentors for the community's children.
- ✓ They know when to speak out and say [what's what]
- ✓ their focus is on giving back - and bringing out for the sake of the earth, the hard-earned wisdom.

The Alchemy of Menopause ♡
the hags call, crossing over the threshold

The Cailleach - in Gaelic = "the old woman"
she wasn't a character to be messed with.
The Bone Mother, Great Grandmother 2

Hagitude = hags w/attitude.
Feisty, aging women who refuse to be buried, silenced, made invisible, or relegated to the shadows

the overculture would so like to pretend we're not here.

I'm quite prepared to be inconvenient.
I have no intention of being invisible.

* * * * *
The ways we think about aging *
depend on the stories we tell *
about it. How we think about aging *
women depends on the images *
we hold of them. * * *

Stories teach us everything we know, and their lessons are deep and rich. Stories can reveal to us longings that we never knew we had, fire us up with new ideas and insights, and inspire us to grow and change.

What would it mean, instead of being an elderly woman, to be an elder woman?

3
Older women, when we're not rendered completely invisible, are still trivialized and marginalized and often actively ridiculed.

→ implies something different —
it implies authority — a leader or senior figure of a tribe or group.

"little old ladies"
"old bags"

♀ → 60+ are now fastest growing segment — and majority of them are women

Q: So how do women transition from becoming elderly to becoming elder?

STORIES can be our primary inspiration

they'll help us conjure up sharply honed images of who exactly it is that we might want to become

- they are spells — they change things.
- they hook us and reel us into their magic
- they will save us

Not just the stories we read and tell, or the stories we want to be in, but the ones that live inside us and the ones we live inside.

Our failure to understand or embrace aging is also related to the fact that we are increasingly and profoundly cut off from nature and from natural cycles + rhythms.

The Alchemy of Menopause

"I don't really have the mood swings that some talk about. I have just one mood. Rage."

Whatever else it does, it

TORCHES
TABOOS

"Society's aversion to menopausal women is, more than anything, the result of our intolerance for the expression of female anger"

5 - Germaine Greer

Men who express anger:
Strong, decisive, powerful

Women who express anger:
difficult, over-emotional, shrill

"In the fury of women comes the power to change the world." - Rebecca Traister

Q: So if these are the stories men are telling about us, where are the stories we're telling about ^{our} selves?

Stories + research

one of the main reasons why women fail to see menopause as part of a natural - even desirable - life transition is that it has been thoroughly and effectively medicalized - been presented as:

rather than: {
✓ a disability
✓ a disfunction
✓ a set of symptoms
A natural and necessary entry point into the next stage of life

6
"The woman who is willing to make that change must become pregnant with herself, at last. She must bear herself, her third self, her old age." - Ursula Le Guin

We shapeshift all the way up to the end, casting off certainties like a selkie casts off her seal skin.

this was about accessing a new kind of power - crone power, hag power - the power of fusion or fission. Elemental. Atomic.

Q: what kind of power might potentially release in aging women if we could consciously access it?

"incandescent" - to glow
↳ kindled from within
↳ fire, properly tempered, is the element of creativity, illumination of the life force that burns brightly inside each of us.

Crucibles = fireproof vessels in which the first stages of alchemy occur.

that's what menopause is... if we allow it: A profoundly alchemical process, designed to transform us from the inside out.

Alchemy = the art of transformation

↳ Nigredo - the work of blackening - is the longest + most difficult phase of alchemy

↳ "the dark night of the soul" - what we pass through when we're enduring deep change in our lives.

↳ this is what is happening during menopause

↳ we are stripped to our bare essence, our most essential parts. ↳ unconscious

"Mortification" - facing our dead parts

Purpose:

to get the REVEAL buried treasure inside/within



the unknown

low shadow

8

Menopause = A LIMINAL time

- a time between stones
- we hover on the brink of transformation
- we've been broken open
- we let the crucible do its work

Menopause =

- A call to autonomy - a response to the need to define ourselves
- A sacred pause in the hurtling trajectory of life.
- An earthquake shaking us to our deepest foundations
- Systematically strips away all the trappings of womanhood and sexuality we've clung to.
- the cleaving to end all cleavings
- a chance to honor integrity
- an uncovering of new wisdoms
- a freedom - no longer a slave, a machine with parts. [9]
- a time to pull back from relationships and begin to evaluate who we imagine ourselves to be outside the frameworks set by others
- A "room of her own" intense longing for time alone.

"I was growing new bones."

"There can be a certain perverse pleasure, as well as a sense of rightness and beauty, in insisting on flowering just when the world expects you to become quiet and diminish."

I remember asking myself again and again what it meant NOW to be a woman

↳ the clues are there in the pieces
↳ Feeling our way into whatever story might be offering itself to us next. [10]

↳ Women's Mysteries + Magic

"I think, as women grow older, that we miss mystery. We miss magic... But deep down, part of us knows the mystery still exists - and that it's not out of reach."

Something inside us knows that the cultural mythology which tells us what an aging woman should be is not only misguided but pernicious. It knows that we're missing something essential; something we badly need.

Something that the CULTURE badly needs.

"As the bleeding stops, the fire goes within"
- Lakota elder
Paula Gunn Allen

THE MEDIAL ♀

Wise old woman
Cailleach
Grandmother Spider
Baba Yaga
Bridges between the personal + universal

II
← Indigenous cultures have always recognized the new creative power that women have access to as they pass through menopause.

Whether we choose it or not, the veil between worlds often begins to disintegrate in menopause - and the Medial Woman archetype begins determinedly to assert herself ∪

The second half of life then, gives us the opportunity to rediscover the parts of ourselves that we've buried - to find the path we have lost. 12

Is being a true hag about being able to wear the power of your weirdness comfortably? ♡

"Weird" =
- being able to take a different view than the one that is usually required by the culture we live in.
- To have an uncomfortable edge
- To act beyond logic
- A mature talent ♡

"It was as if someone had lit
a candle in my soul"

I wanted more than anything
to catch fire again.

The practice of mythic Imagination
& its about being with images
that call to us, haunt us, ^{stir} moves
us — and letting them slowly
reveal themselves to us, and
so revealing something of
ourselves in the process. [13]

This is a world in which the
Medial Woman is absolutely at home.
She teaches us to court the
world soul and let the mystery in.
She's been waiting for years —
prowling in the shadows at the
edge of our vision — for us to
notice her.

3 Faces of the Alchemist:

- the Medial Woman
- the Mystic
- the Witch ← (FEAR)

- She is a woman
rooted in nature

- autonomous

- She finds her power in the land

the witch
wound is
dread at
speaking out
against
authority

You don't mess with a witch, ♡
and women today are bone-tired
of being messed with. So the
idea that we might find ways to
protect ourselves has its resonance,
to:

The new archetypal witch possesses
not only power, but a much-
coveted mystery; she's not [14]
easily known and hard to define.
She can teach us to not be
afraid and can lead us to the
places we need to go to unveil
our inner power and wisdom.


I've been thinking about the kind of elder I want to be...
Because I had a plan, of course I had it all figured out (LOL)

Q: How do we learn to stay steady and grounded in an aging body which is always threatening to break, and in [15] which we no longer feel safe?

When the menopausal storm settles, what's left of you isn't what it once was. Your body will have changed. It will need different things.

Yes, this aging body is a story; I haven't yet come to the end of its pages. ♡

The journey to elderhood actually begins with coming to terms with your changing body - we are shapeshifting creatures, through and through - until we arrive at our bones

The House of Elders 
→ exploring the roles of archetypal older women in myths, folk, and fairy tales has helped me hone in on the image of the elder I might someday grow into

The Dark Feminine - the expression of the sometimes ambiguous, but always very necessary, mix of energies that encompass the mysteries and magic of womanhood: [16]

- the chaos of creation + destruction
- the cycle of birth + death
- wrath, fierce compassion
- eroticism + spiritual ecstasy
- The transformative feminine

Wisdom comes from the darker places - and the creative impulse arises out of the friction which exists between the two (dark and light)

Hagitude = a comfort with the unique power they embody, a strong sense of who they are and what they have to offer the world, a strong belief in their necessary place in the ever-shifting web of life.

6 Elder women - each expressing a different aspect of Hagitude

Q: Which of these rooms in [17] the house of elders do you feel most called to occupy?

Q: How do we catch a glimpse of the truth of who we are?

Q: How do we construct an image of the elder we're destined to become?

We have to take responsibility for ourselves to uncover our own unique inner Hag - and extend her fearlessly into the world.

THE CREATRIX
① Old women weaving the world
Stitching, knitting, spinning - it's a symbol of all the ways women weave themselves and the world - back together again.
The warp = structures we build our lives upon (values, belief, sense of purpose)
The weft = everyday actions + experiences
The interaction between the two creates our own unique fabric... we're all Spider Women working on different looms.
Creative work of elder women making art to make the world a better place. 18

② A FORCE OF NATURE
Guardians and protectors of the

land
Cailleach "the veiled one" - the hidden one, the keeper of mysteries. An elder woman who stands firm, who holds strong against the plundering of the land and its creatures. Guardian of the natural world's balance - especially when it comes to the need to protect it against humans. To fight for the integrity and health of the wild places. Not to be messed with. To be an elder. To be strong, powerful - to remain alive.

③ FAIRY GODMOTHERS And purveyors of old wives tales

Elder women that foster wholeness in younger people - to deepen their appreciation of life. To push them beyond perceived limitations which define and confine what they imagine could be. An elder woman who embodies a wisdom and knowledge of the world - she can see potential and foster it. ~~fosters~~

19 ~~practically~~, but also for nonconformity
Diverts, subverts - they act as bridges

④ TRICKSTERS + TRUTHTELLERS Holding the Culture to Account

Shifts her identity in order to shine a light on deeply rooted human follies. A disruptor of the established order - upsetting it so that change may occur. Sweeps out old to make way for new. Holds up a mirror to all that is dysfunctional, hypocritical, and perverse in us or in the culture & challenges our deepest assumptions. Breaks something apart in an attempt to wake us up.
Apocalypse = revelation in original Greek.

⑤ THE WISE WOMAN Deep Vision

Acts as kind of an oracle - a prophetess, seer, and diviner. Fortune-telling as much as sense-making. Women with deep vision - listening, observing, watching. The elder woman - because of her age, experience + deep vision - can see ahead and can predict what might go wrong and how to put things right again. She is a living bridge between the visible world and the "unseen" realms. 20

⑥ THE DANGEROUS OLD WOMAN Corners of the Fire

She is a wild and primal force in the hard-as-steel, seen-it-all body of an old woman. She can see behind the ~~the~~ mask and beyond the veil. She requires us to go beyond our limitation, ask dangerous questions, to step outside the world of logic + reason. The guardian of thresholds - the ones we must cross to fulfill our potential. She tests our mettle, pushes us out of our comfort zone, challenges us. She is wild, free, and connected deeply.