

# Messenger from the Otherworld – The Owl as Omen, Guide, and Guardian - Nettle's Garden - The Old Craft

*Crowhag*

The way we see an animal is often influenced by what our culture has taught us it means. That is why, in many cultures, a single glimpse of an owl can summon centuries of old beliefs, superstitions, and stories passed down through generations. Owls have long been perceived as symbols of mystery. Some hear an owl's hoot and believe it's an omen of misfortune or death. Yet others consider the nocturnal bird a wise guide into the unknown. Either way, it can be considered a messenger delivering insights from the Otherworld.

## The Owl and the Witch



The owl is a nocturnal bird whose symbolic wisdom comes from its ability to see in the dark.  
Foto: [Flickr](#).

Throughout Central and Eastern European folklore and witchcraft traditions, the owl and the witch have a profound relationship. Witches are often believed to transform into owls to move unnoticed, perform secret rituals, spy on neighbors, or watch over their surroundings. In fact, one of the Romanian terms for witch is *striga*, which also means barn owl. The Greco-Latin root *strix/strigis*, likewise, gave the Romanian word *strigoi*, referring to nocturnal revenants and witches believed to suck blood.

The owl also symbolizes wisdom and heightened intuition, often associated with witchcraft. Just as the owl sees in the darkness where human eyes cannot, so too does the witch perceive knowledge beyond ordinary understanding. The liminal symbolism of the owl is thus extended to the witch as a mediator between the visible and the invisible, between this world and the Otherworld.

The association between owls and witches can be seen as a transformation of the owl's earlier connections to the goddesses Athena and Minerva. In classical mythology, these goddesses personified wisdom, strategic thinking, and skilled craftsmanship, and were often depicted alongside an owl. Over time, this image expanded beyond its original context to encompass broader themes of feminine power and esoteric knowledge.

During the Renaissance, the owl's status as a death omen was consolidated by [Agrippa](#) in *De Occulta Philosophia*. He placed the owl under the patronage of Saturn, the planet of time and discipline. The saturnine classification drew on the owl's solitary nature, nocturnal vision, and association with hard-won wisdom. He further drew upon superstitions, adding that:

*“The bird was heard singing at the Capitol when Roman affairs were troubled at Numantia, and also when Fregelia was destroyed following a conspiracy against the Romans. Almadel says that owls and night-ravens, when they appear in unfamiliar places or houses, are signs that death will come to the people of that land or home. These birds are drawn to dead bodies and seem to sense death before it happens. This is because dying people are closely connected, in a way, to the dead.”*

In Western esoteric thought, these saturnine attributes made the owl a fitting emblem for the initiate who navigates darkness to gain knowledge.

## Owl Symbolism and Superstition



Minerva with Armor and Owl. Gods and Muses and Young Women, by Marcantonio Raimondi, after a design by Raphael.

In classical antiquity, the little owl, or *Athene Noctua*, was often depicted on Athenian coins and pottery as a symbol of Athena's patronage. It was believed that if a little owl flew over the battlefield, it was a sign of victory. However, its cry was also thought to foretell death.

Athena was known as the goddess with "flashing eyes" and was believed to have exceptional eyesight. As such, the presence of owls around Athens, along with their ability to see in the dark, made them the natural symbol of Athena's wisdom and watchfulness.

In ancient Egypt, the owl hieroglyph represented the sound "m." While it was often used in texts to mean "to decapitate" and "to mourn," and thus seen as a symbol of death, the owl was also a solar symbol meaning "to see." It was believed that owls had eyes "inlaid with the sun," which gave them sharp vision even in the darkest places and made them symbols of the Sun god Ra.

Across diverse cultures today, the owl continues to embody supernatural foresight, often inspiring superstitions about death and sorcery. Among some Bantu and Swahili-speaking communities, the sight or call of an owl is feared as a sign of illness or a curse.

The same is true in various Native American traditions, where the owl is connected to death and the spirit world. The Cherokee believe that if an owl flies overhead during daylight, a loved one will die within a week. Mexicans also say, "*Cuando el tecolote canta, el indio muere,*" meaning "When the owl sings, the Indian dies." Likewise, throughout the Mediterranean, it is believed

that if an owl cries near the house of a sick person, death is imminent.



Witch Nettle and her Spiritus Familiaris at dusk

## The Owl's Mystery

The meaning of an owl depends greatly on the context in which it appears. In Romanian folklore, it remains a funerary messenger and bird of the dead.

Its large, unblinking eyes and eerie night call by one's house are believed to herald the imminent arrival of Death. Yet, like other prophetic creatures, it can also foretell the weather or changes in fortune. It conveys hidden insights from the Otherworld and is revered for its liminal status.

To those who read signs, "*owls are not what they seem.*" They are creatures of vision, whose appearance is never meaningless in folk beliefs, but a sign that something is demanding to be seen.



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