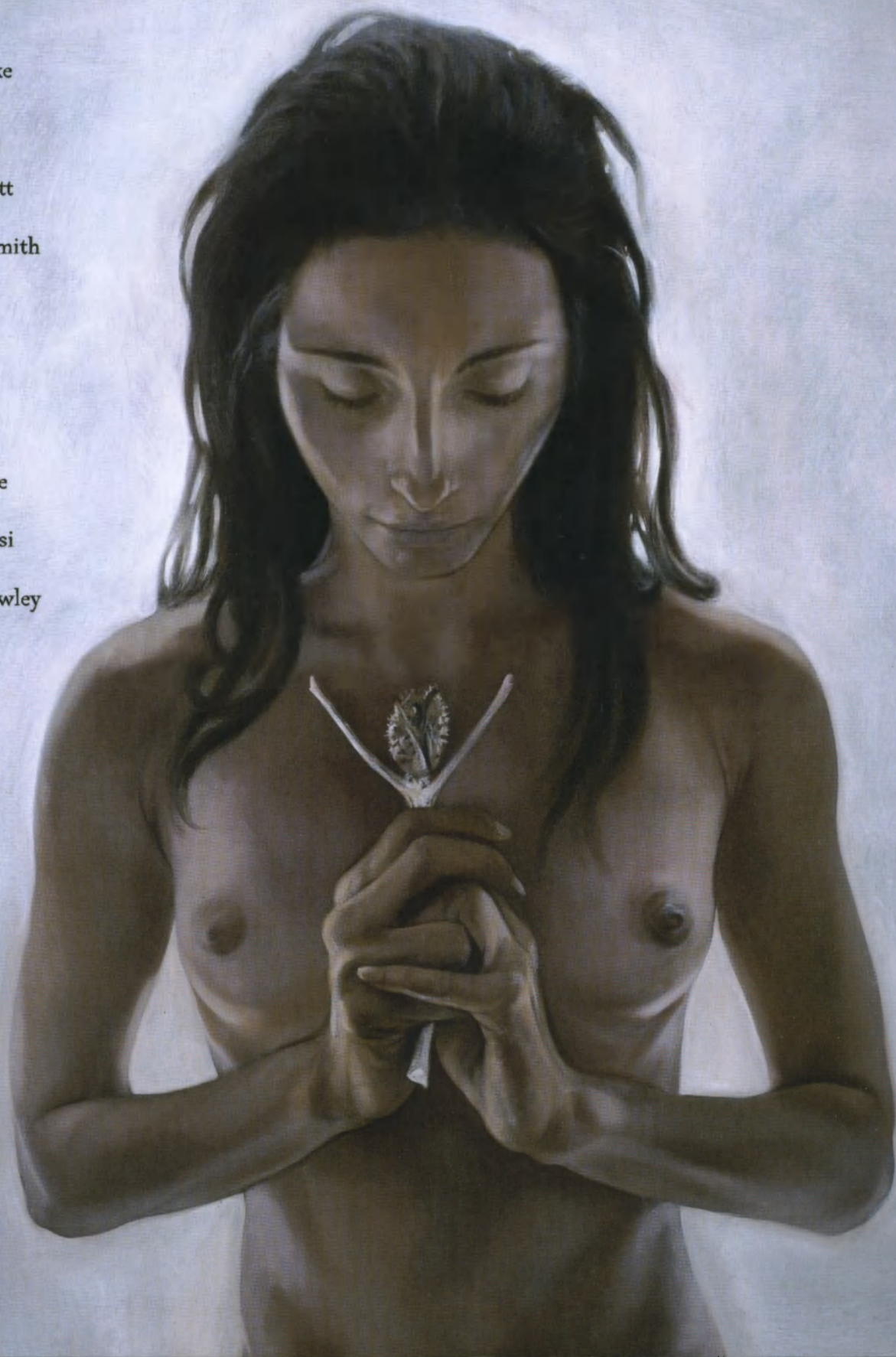


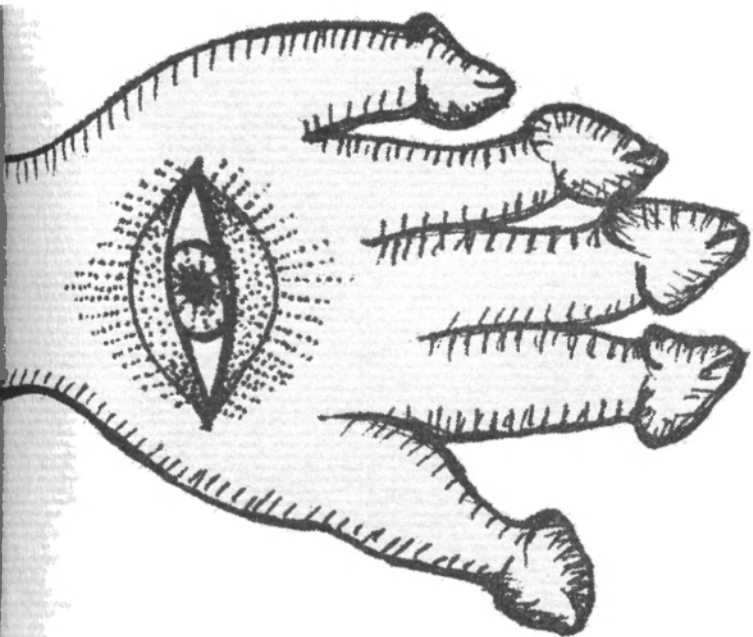
ABRAXAS

An International Journal of Esoteric Studies

no.1 Autumn Equinox 2009

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Roberto Migliussi
Dolorosa
and Aleister Crowley

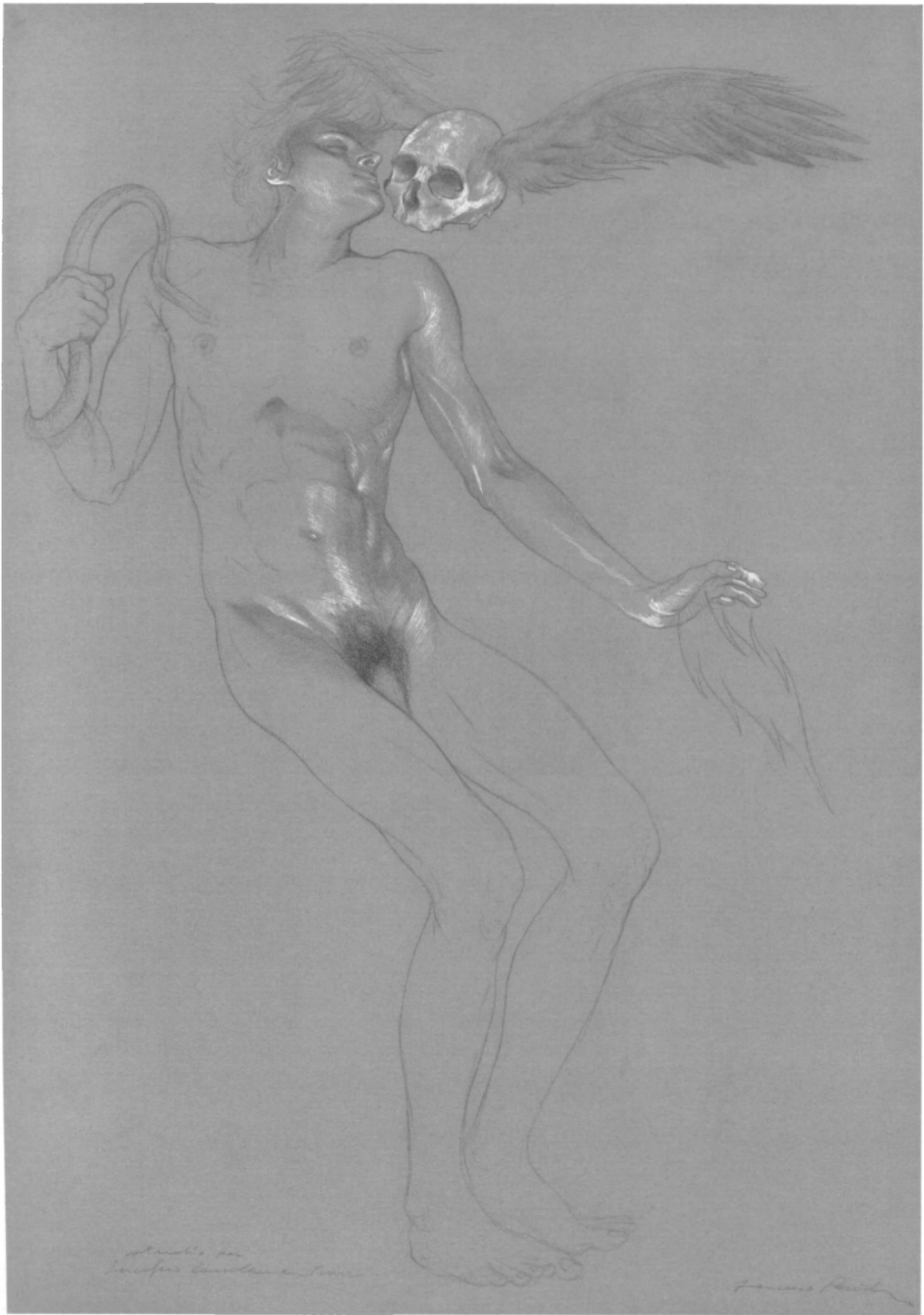




Manifesto

Seek thee not answers, but ideas?
Hark then, for I embrace all, yet hold none.
Fact and fiction are my Janus
Silent shall they roar my creede,
Virtues past do I defend
Yet the vice of future seede,
Seek not to know me, for I am nexus.

Verily, my fecund germe pollutes this sterile ocean
I am the worlde, I am you, I am Abraxas.

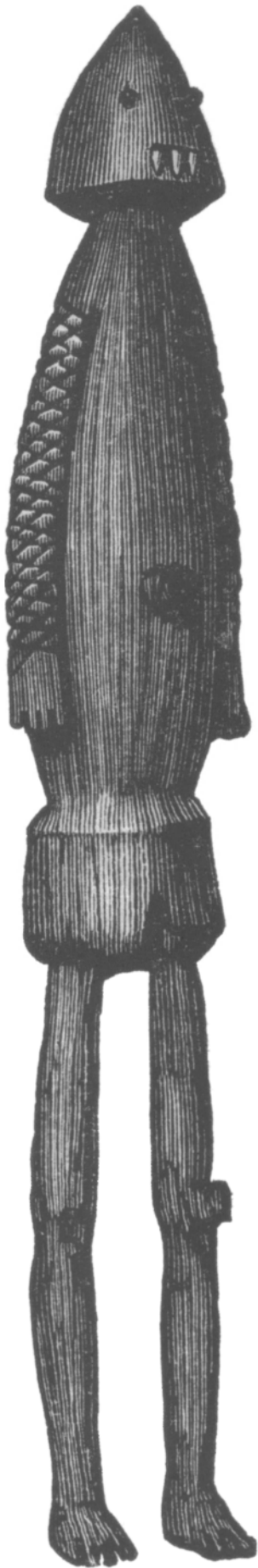


No.1

Abraxas

International Journal of Esoteric Studies

MMIX



Editorial

Welcome dear reader, to *Abraxas*.

The journal you now hold is the tangible result of a bold collaboration between writers, artists and editors from across the world. The quality of these contributions will no doubt speak for itself, but given this is our inaugural issue, it falls upon me to say a little of how *Abraxas* came to be manifest.

Nearly twelve years ago, while reading the typescripts for *Zos Speaks!* I found myself absorbed by plans between Austin Spare and Kenneth Grant to launch an esoteric magazine in the early 1950s. It was to be 'essentially a coterie of adepts' affirmed Spare, and 'a work of art as a production' with 'the best typography and reproduction of drawings.'¹ This seemed to me such an excellent idea that it was easy to become inspired, but the practical challenges against starting such a lavish venture in the late 1990s were daunting. With a curiosity tinged by caution, I looked to those esoteric magazines already in circulation, searching I suspect, for some kind of affirmation.

One of the major strengths of the periodicals available from the early 1970s onwards, such as *Sothis*, *Talking Stick*, *Chaos International*, *Starfire*, *Mezlim*, *Agapé* and many notable others, was the sense of fostering a community identity; be that Thelemic, wiccan or for the emerging Chaos movement. Now fondly remembered, these publications contributed substantially to the development of these initiatory paths, offering us a place to stop, reflect and converse with others. Given the value of this role, it seems perhaps surprising that by the mid 1990s many readers noted a decline in both titles and circulation. Rising production costs and difficulties in distribution placed severe challenges before the most enthusiastic of editors. Homogenous competitors began to appear, backed by commercial companies. The paucity of reliable distributors forced editors to rely ever more upon word-of-mouth, their existing subscriptions, and the few dwindling specialist shops that would stock such material.

1. Kenneth and Steffi Grant, *Zos Speaks! Encounters with Austin Osman Spare* (London: Fulgur Limited, 1999), 63-64

In London, the Compendium Bookshop in Camden was one such oasis; Skoob Books in Sicilian Avenue another. Despite these, the commercial climate seemed hostile for any new project, let alone launching an experimental and costly esoteric journal. Needing more experienced counsel I wrote to Kenneth Grant outlining my idea. Quite sagely, he dissuaded me, citing many reasons all too familiar. I was naturally disheartened, but ultimately his advice proved timely, for within a few years new esoteric communities began to emerge online, providing – in ways scarcely dreamed of in the early 1970s – a virtual forum for exchange.

Could it be then, that in the wired world of today the idea of a quality printed esoteric journal is really an anachronism? I am reminded here that sometimes an answer arrives long after you have forgotten the question, and so it was that many years subsequent to my first enquiry with them, a chance conversation with Steffi Grant provided a moment of insight for me. We were talking of Surrealism and of London in the 1940s, when suddenly it became clear just how inspirational Albert Skira's great Surrealist journal *Minotaure* had been in earlier days. It was important for them (and for many others) not just because of the art content, which was utterly extraordinary, but because of the *way* it represented *what* it represented. And here I will suggest there is an interesting distinction between a magical book and a magical journal: that of their *modi essendi*, or modes of being. We might say they are both talismanic objects which express the substance of ideas in printed form, but whereas the essence of a book is singular, immutable and finite, so then a journal is multiple, mutable and infinite. We may consider it as a *living continuum* where each part evolves in word and image, while the whole endlessly becomes. Quite simply, the magical journal is a threshold of paper in perpetual metamorphosis, and through it are born our visions, dreams and ideas. In this respect *Minotaure* shares something vital with Crowley's occasional endeavour *The Equinox*, first published 100 years ago. For anyone who has held an original copy of either journal, the sense of immediacy, or *import* as Kenneth Grant might say, will be resonant.

And here we approach something interesting about human nature, for despite the creeping encroachment of the digital revolution, we remain fundamentally a tactile species. When we reach out and touch, do we not seek to know? And when we decide to grasp, are we not seeking to possess? Intimately, there seems to reside in us an ancient vestige which renders all that can be touched above abstract criticism and theoretical values. We might yet succumb to the novelty of the flickering screen, but let us never doubt the magical transitivity of the printed page.

Yet, it is a strange irony that the manifestation of this particular idea has only been made possible *now* by the very digital revolution that once overshadowed it, for today we are connected as never before. Diverse and inclusive, our community is visibly global. So let us again stop, reflect and converse. Let us seek to know, and grasp bold ideas. Let us embrace metamorphosis.

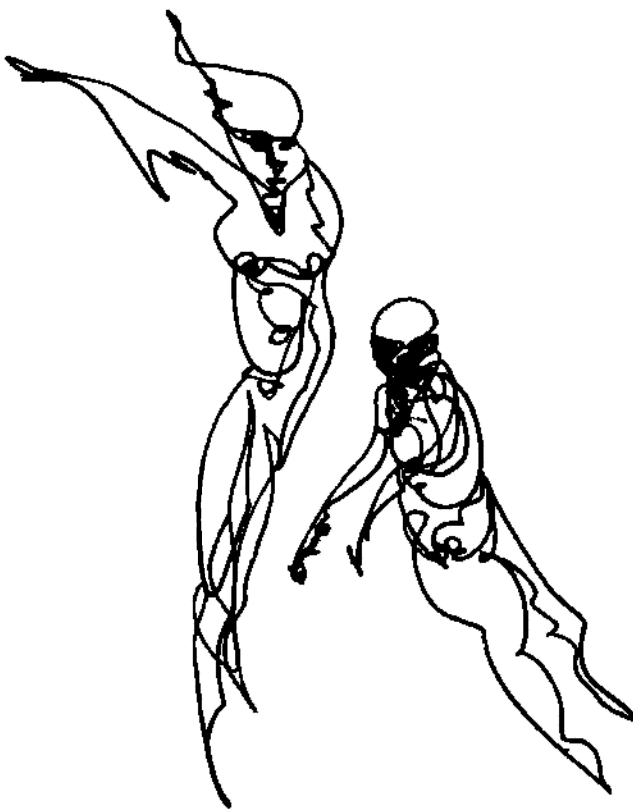
Here then is our first international coterie of adepts, their work brought together and birthed as a living truth. Our first issue leans towards witchcraft, but also includes Crowley's previously unpublished poem 'Babalon' and material from the anonymous author of *Liber Niger Legionis* amongst other gems, carved in the black of night.

But whatever your interest, Christina and I hope *Abraxas* ultimately inspires, for this collection of essays, poetry and art was made for you.

Robert Ansell

August 8th 2009

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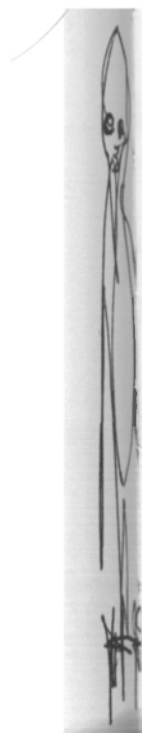
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The Green Intercessor

Tutelary Spirits and the Transmission of Plant-Magic

DANIEL A. SCHULKE

And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants.

1 ENOCH 7: 1-2

In the Introduction to his 1970 book *Mastering Witchcraft*, British author Paul Huson ascribes the origin of witchcraft to ‘that mysterious dark angelic fire which first breathed life into the clay of this world,’ citing the so-called fallen angels as the intercessors of this power.¹ While not the first to identify these luminaries as the source of witch-magic, the book was unique in its stance of sympathy toward the practitioner of witchcraft (and the exiled angels), as well as its receipt of wide distribution. This inclusion of fallen angel lore may be considered a counterpoint to contemporary books defining witchcraft as ‘Wicca,’ as opposed to other ‘traditional’ currents of witch-lore, and to contemporary Wiccans’ uneasy relationship with the Judaic components of their religion.

Huson quotes from the third-century *Book of Enoch*, which gives a descriptive account of how a group of rebellious angels, called ‘Watchers’ were exiled from Heaven, married human women, and taught the arts of magic. This story, also found in Genesis 6:2 and various extra-biblical sources, was widely read in ancient times and was also adopted by Christianity, though the Coptic Church is the main congregation which presently regards it as canonical. The Enochic lore of angelic descent was spread by early Christian authors such as Origen, Ireneus, and Tertullian, who ascribed the origin of evil to these beings.

Augustine, who with great relish expanded the fallen angel narrative to broaden Satanic influence upon it, was ironically a Manichaean before his conversion — a Gnostic religion whose canonical *Book of Giants* has recently been shown to be derived from, or share a common origin with, the Watchers sections of *Enoch*.²

In addition to the angels’ fall, the *Book of Enoch* records about twenty specific names of the most important angelic commanders. In addition, several of the angels are named as patrons of specific types of magic taught to humankind, including geomancy and astrology. One magical art so-taught was the knowledge of plants and the ‘dividing of roots,’ attributed in some sources to the Watcher Shem-hazia, the leader of the reprobate host.³

These matters of are of personal interest to me because as a practitioner of magic I share a background in occult herbalism and traditional witchcraft. The former acknowledges an active spiritual dimension to plants and herb-magic; the latter has transmitted to me both occult herb-lore and magical teachings concerning the Watchers. My perspective is thus that of an occult practitioner interested in the historical and spiritual cartography of certain aspects of these arts, specifically the angelic or spirituous transmission of magical plant-knowledge. In the absence of a satisfying theological or anthropological term which encapsulates the dynamic of magical knowledge of plant-origin, I have in previously writings called it *phytognosis*, or gnosis arising from plants.⁴ However, before considering the *daimon* of the plant itself as

LEFT
Petrodulia
Daniel A. Schulke

1. Paul Huson, *Mastering Witchcraft* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1970), 11-20. Charles Godfrey Leland’s controversial *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches* (London: David Nutt, 1899), considered a foundation text of the modern witchcraft revival, must also be considered for its inclusion of Lucifer.

2. John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1992).

3. In variant texts the leader is also named as Azazel, goat-headed patron of metallurgy, cosmetic adornment, and sorcery in general.

4. Daniel A. Schulke, *Art Philtron* (Chelmsford: Xoonon Publishing, 2001), 9, 137n.

the intercessor of direct occult power, I would like to examine the role of angels and other spirit-beings.

In Jewish lore, the Watchers were also called Sons of God, or *Benei Elohim*, and similar in some ways to the Muslim *djinn*, created of smokeless fire and inferior to angels, who are said to be created of light. The fourteenth-century *Chronicles of Jehremeel* of Eleazar ben Asher ha-Levi speaks of the Watcher Shemhazai (Manichaeen *Shahmizad*) as the revealer of the ineffable name of God. This he spoke to the human woman Estirah; upon uttering it, she ascended; became fixed in the Pleiades.⁵ This juxtaposition of the giving of plant-knowledge and the revelation of the Most Holy Name bears similar transgressive contours to the revelation of the powers of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to Eve. In both cases, it is a plant-power given by a wayward angel to woman, as well as a direct and personal transgress against God.

As bearers of magical knowledge, some angels are regarded in Jewish lore as dream-giving intermediaries. Sometimes called 'The Dispenser of Dreams,' the *Memunch* is the guardian angel of man 'who molds his sleeping thoughts to apprise him of the will of God.'⁶ In some cases such dreams involved the direct transmission of knowledge from the plant realm. Consider the following extract from the Dead Sea Scrolls:

I, Abram, had a dream the night of my entry into the land of Egypt. In my dream, I saw a cedar tree and a date palm growing from a single root. The people came intending to cut down and uproot the cedar, thereby to leave the date palm by itself. The date palm, however, objected, and said, 'do not cut the cedar down, for the two of us grow from but a single root.' So the cedar was spared because of the date palm, and was not cut down.⁷

The notion of secret knowledge delivered by angels to humanity in Jewish lore also occurs in non-transgressive contexts. The *Book of the Angel Raziel*, said to have been delivered to Adam by the Angel Raziel, contained a number of treatises on angelology, kabbalah, gematria and astrology. In this cycle of lore, the authorship of the magical knowledge is said to be God himself.⁸

A modern exemplar with curious parallels to the lore of the Watchers is the *Zar* spirit-possession cult of Muslim North Africa whose practitioners traffic with *djinn*-like beings. *Zar* (pl. *zayran*) refers to the possessing spirit,

though the faithful refer to the spirits as *aryad* or 'masters.' The *Zar* ceremony bears ritual features of ecstatic dance, music and singing, ritual suffumigations, and spirit-offerings including animal sacrifice, resembling in many ways the *bembé* or *mange loa* of Voudon, and the primal ritual patterning of the Witches' Sabbath. Though it appears the *zayran* are not regarded by all *Zar* practitioners as *djinn*, they possess several of their attributes, such as incorporeality, and ability to possess the human body. In other demonological-angelological constructs *zayran* constitute a third class of *djinn* (after the benevolent 'white *djinn*' and malevolent 'black *djinn*') which are red, characterized as capricious, ambivalent, and pleasure-seeking. Recalling the legend of the Watchers, most *zayran* are considered to be male, and their spirit-mediums or 'brides' are female; indeed the *Zar* cult is dominated by women. Additionally, the *zayran* fulfil a tutelary function within the rites, revealing specific songs. Gerda Sengers, who studied the cult in Cairo, notes that in present-day Egypt, understanding of the nature of demons includes beneficent and malevolent beings; good *djinn* are referred to as 'earthly angels.'⁹

Christianity, with its complex and sometimes contradictory traditions of demonology and angelology, degraded not only heathen gods to the status of demon, but all fallen angels. In the syncretic streams of European magic, these were to resurrect anew as the Goetic spirits, the operative powers animating the Solomonic systems of sorcery. Not surprisingly, the *Goetia* assigns at least five tutelary demons to bestowing knowledge of plant-realms; the spirits Bathin, Morax, Foras, Stolas and Bifrons specifically teach the virtues of herbs. A text linking the old Levant traditions of magic with the later European necromancer is *The Testament of Solomon* (dating from third century AD). Here Solomon compels the demon Asmodeus to reveal the power which thwarts him; a formula for a magical suffumigation using the liver and galls of a fish, and a branch of storax.¹⁰

Apart from demonological and angelological sources of Near Eastern origin, there are a number of tantalising antecedents in European folk-magic for spirits revealing magical knowledge of herbs in ritual contexts. Some of these may partake of the Jewish Watcher lore, but other cases clearly represent a spirit-cartography outside of that context. Carlo Ginzburg notes that in certain witchcraft trials in Ragusa in the latter half of the seventeenth century, defendants referred to themselves as *Villenize* and had learned their curing and magical herb-arts from the Vile, arboreal and

vegetal spirits.¹¹ The night-traveling *bona gens* or ‘good people’ were condemned by the Milanese Inquisition in the late fourteenth century for consorting with the spirit-divinity Madonna Oriente, who taught her subjects ‘The Art’ and ‘the efficacy of herbs.’¹² Wolfgang Behringer notes that traditions of folk-healing in Greece, Bulgaria and Dalmatia recognise illnesses of supernatural origin, which can only be successfully treated by healers who have received their powers from supernatural beings such as nereids.¹³ Concerning the spirit-cults of Eastern Europe, Éva Pócs cites an example of dream-derived herbal knowledge of Hungarian fairy-healers.¹⁴ In Russian lore, wormwood (*Artemisia* spp.) is associated with serpents, especially their queen, who bestows the ‘power of speech and uses of plants.’¹⁵ Russia is also the source of a legend explaining the origin of wood-sprites as remnants of the legions of fallen angels.¹⁶

Gustav Henningsen has documented in Sicily an important night-traveling cult which represents in some ways an inversion of the diabolism typical of the European Witches’ Sabbath. Resembling in many ways the oneiric spirit-cults investigated by Ginzburg, Behringer and others, the ‘fairy-

sabbaths’ as described by its attendees bear some of the classic attributes of the witch-ceremony such as feasting, music, dancing, and ventry. Also present were celebrants riding goats, a feature of the Sabbath similar to the riding of the sacrificial ram within the *Zar* cult. Yet these ritual components, as well as the *Donna di fuori* (the ethereal spirits in attendance), are cast in a beneficent and ecstatic light, contrary to usual Inquisition documentation. Notably absent are the cannibalism, obscenity, pain, phantasmagoria and ritualised Christian inversion common in many ecclesiastical accounts of the Sabbath.¹⁷

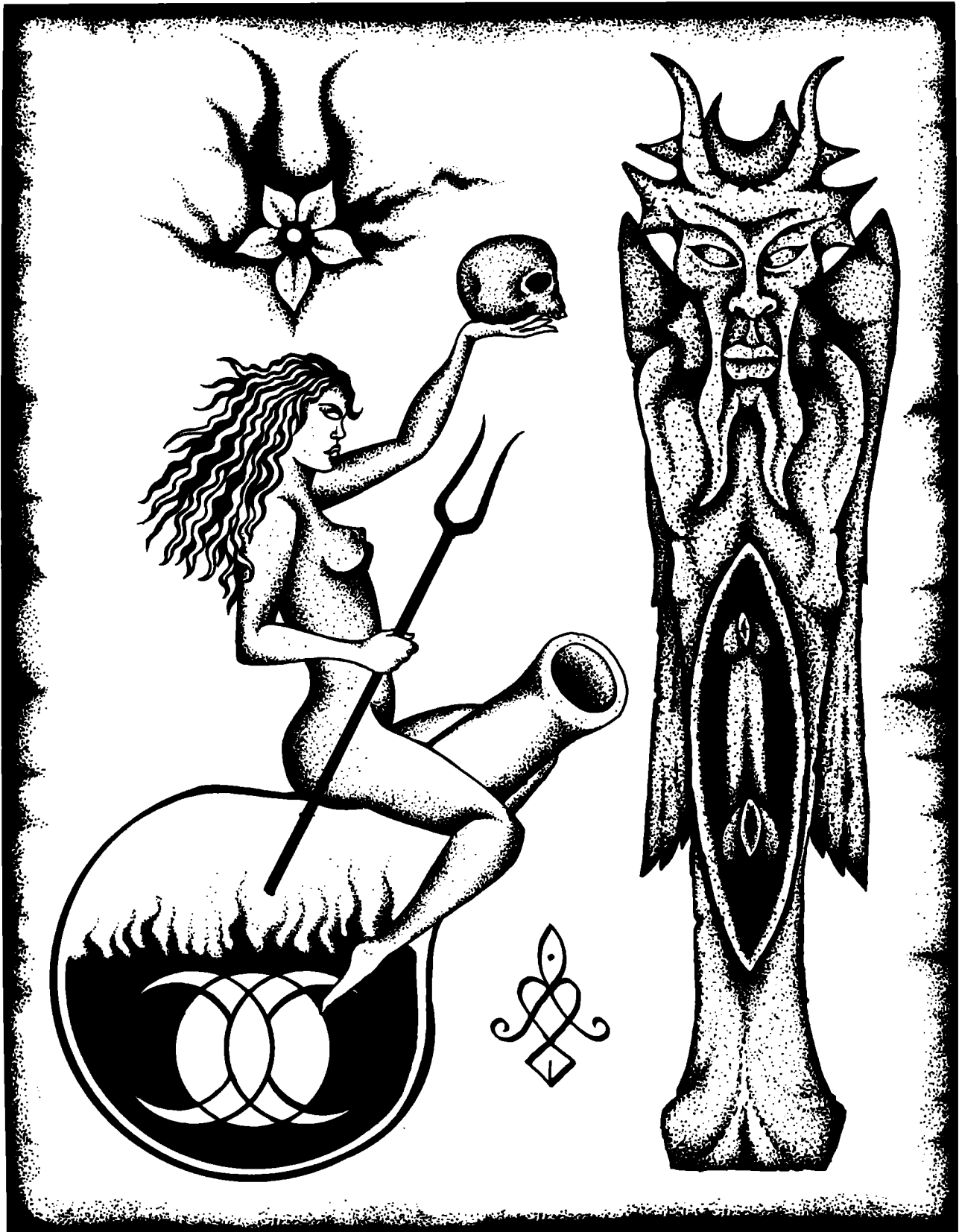
As evidenced in the previously-cited Russian lore, fairies and nature-spirits have been explained as the progeny of the Fallen Angels. This is in accord with rabbinical tradition, which explains the spirits known as *lutins* and *faes* as the offspring of female demons and Adam, conceived 130 years after his expulsion from Eden.¹⁸ Perhaps more relevant to traditions of witchcraft in England, the *Carmina Gadelica* records the lamp-lit song and dance of the Hebridean fairies:

Not of the seed of Adam are we,
Nor is Abraham our father,
But of the seed of the Proud Angel,
Driven forth from Heaven.

It bears mention that in much of British fairy-lore, the race of Elphame are not the pleasant and whimsical creatures of Victorian paintings but malevolent beings capable of bringing mischief, disease and ill luck. Much of the rural magic involving them consists of propitiation to avoid human offence and protect farm and family. Some have been ascribed the quality of bestowing herbal knowledge to mortals, such as the Lady of Llyn-y-fan-Vach of Myddfai, from whom is derived an entire hereditary tradition of Welsh folk healing. Also present, however, is her power to withdraw from congress with humans if not approached correctly.¹⁹ The stories of the Fallen Angels was also in popular currency in England from the early Middle Ages on, bearing peculiar Old English Saxon features, such as the use of the words *scufan* (‘shove’) to describe the angels’ expulsion, or *wlite* (‘brightness, beauty’) to describe their radiance.²⁰

It would seem from cursory examination that the Watchers and fairies are part of an array of tutelary spirits providing magical knowledge to chosen humans, in some cases magical knowledge of plants. The difference in how this

5. *The Chronicles of Jehreemel*, trans. M. Gaster (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1971).
6. Joshua Tractenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004 [1939]), 235.
7. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, ed. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg and Edward Cook (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 79.
8. *Sepher Raziel Hemelach*, ed. and trans. Steve Savedow (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000).
9. Gerda Sengers, *Women and Demons: Cult Healing in Islamic Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 102. Trance-possession cults invoking the *djinn* have also been documented by Vincent Crapanzano in ‘Saints, Jnun, and Dreams: An Essay in Moroccan Ethnopsychology,’ *Psychiatry* 38 (1975).
10. *The Testament of Solomon*, 64.
11. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft & Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth & Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 142.
12. Wolfgang Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Conrad Stoekhlin and the Phantoms of the Night*, trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 53-54.
13. Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf*, 88.
14. Éva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 153.
15. Charles M. Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Flowers, Trees, Fruits and Plants* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1911), 299.
16. W.F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: Magic in Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 37.
17. Gustav Henningsen, ‘The Ladies from Outside: An Archaic Pattern of the Witches’ Sabbath,’ in *Early Modern Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, ed. B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 203-204.
18. Tractenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 29.
19. Ann Ross, *Folklore of Wales* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001) 113-117.
20. Catherine Brown Tleacz, ‘Heaven and Fallen Angels in Old English,’ in *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro (Boston: Brill, 1998).



knowledge was recorded varies greatly, but this would be of little concern to the recipients of the intercessory power. In Enochic lore, the dispensation of such knowledge is ultimately regarded by the chroniclers as a transgression against God and a polluting influence upon humanity. In the case of the Sicilian fairy-sabbaths, the regents of the fairies give their faithful 'remedies for curing the sick' and 'did not wish them to do evil things, but to heal [people].'²¹

Emma Wilby has made a thorough study of the classes of spirit-intercessors in early modern British witchcraft, particularly the witches' familiar, drawing parallels in the magical audience of such beings with shamanism.²² Of particular interest to our study are the 'fairy familiars' of the cunning-folk. The mid-seventeenth century exemplar of Anne Jeffries of Cornwall reveals that the tutelary relationship between spirit and magical practitioner involved not only medical diagnosis of illness but also prescribing cures. Records of the time indicate Jeffries' renown was such that people came from as far away as London to be cured by her.²³

The sexual component of angelic magical transmission is also of note, for like the Watchers account, the accounts of the Witches' Sabbath bear sexual activity alongside the transmission of plant-lore. Among the sabbatic rites of the *Donna di fuori*, the spirit-attendees engage in festive 'love-making' two features of which are great pleasure and frequency of the act, Henningsen contrasts this depiction with the usual Inquisition narrative of depraved orgies and painful sexual congress with demons.²⁴ Though the genders are reversed, this union of starry wisdom with the green earth evokes the perpetual connubial embrace of the Egyptian sky-goddess Nut with the terrestrial God Geb, whose body is often depicted green. The presence of sexual activity in the context of spirit transmission of plant-knowledge may be a remnant of sexual ritual activity with agrarian deity worship, or may function, perhaps, as a magical cipher of the process of spirit-possession itself. The attainment of gnostic states via sexual trance is also part of the corpus of teachings in my own tradition of witchcraft, and in some witch-lineages in both Britain and America, the transmission of witch-power from initiator to initiand occurs exclusively during a sexual rite, and can only be passed female to male or vice-versa.²⁵ Ida Craddock, the nineteenth-century American occultist whose astral sexual relationship with the angel Soph is detailed in her treatise *Heavenly Bridegrooms*, made use of these magical formulae and astral *dynamis*. Aleister Crowley, in reviewing her work, affirmed

the initiatic nature of the knowledge she attained, saying *Bridegrooms* was 'one of the most remarkable human documents ever produced' and was 'absolutely sane in every line.'²⁶

Moving from an externalized source of wisdom-intercession, one might consider the plants themselves as angelic emissaries. Dale Pendell, who has written extensively about tutelary plant-spirits, employs the term 'allies,' as did Castaneda, to describe a plant's tutelary mask.²⁷ In my own work I utilize *genii* in accord with the Latin components of some forms of witchcraft.

When considering the corpus of Watchers legends, we are obliged to seek the trees of Old Eden as tutelary divinities and reservoirs of spirit-knowledge. Trees, particularly those bearing nuts, were considered in Jewish lore to be gathering places for demons²⁸; this recalls the notorious Walnut of Beneventum about which the *Striga* notoriously gathered and danced by night. *Sepher Hasidim* warns that trees bearing drippings resembling candle-wax, presumably exuded resin, are gathering-places of the *lilith*, night-demons associated with Lilith, also an important figure in witchcraft. On a number of occasions, both in England and America, I have been taken by teachers of widely-differing magical traditions to certain trees which I have since come to refer to as 'showing-trees.' Their purpose, not initially disclosed to me, was to reveal certain aspects of a person when they stood near to the tree. As such, the trees acted as a nexus of power serving to 'unclothe' the person or lower his psychic guards; with at least two examples, I have witnessed this repeated times at the same tree, even when this was not the practitioners' purpose. Such individual arbors, usually of solitary grotesque form or considerable age, have included hawthorn, elder and oaks.

In the context of my own witchcraft practice, it is traditionally taught that the magical power of a tree or herb arises from its unique 'virtue' (*virtus*). These virtues comprise a

21. Henningsen, 'Ladies from Outside,' 196.

22. Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005).

23. Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 68.

24. Henningsen, 'Ladies from Outside,' 197.

25. Vance Randolph, *Ozark Superstitions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 266-7.

26. Ida Craddock, *Heavenly Bridegrooms: An Unintentional Contribution to the Erotic Interpretation of Religion* (New York: privately printed, 1918). Crowley's review is to be found in *The Equinox* Vol. III No. 1, 280.

27. Dale Pendell, *Pharmako/poia* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1996).

28. Tractenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 14.

LEFT
Transmission of the
Asterism of Poison
Daniel A. Schulke

distinct sphere of the plant's power and are coterminous with, but differ from, its spirit. Though this virtue is not specifically transmitted to the witch by a spirit exterior to the plant (*daimon*, angel etc), the practitioner may 'borrow' or gain access to it by various forms of entreaty, ritual harvesting, and charm. Additionally, in the context of English folk magic, use of the archaism 'virtue' to describe plant powers is suggestive of something more. 'Virtue' has occasionally been used in traditional witchcraft circles to describe the quintessential witches' power, especially in the West Country. The term was so used by the traditional witch Robert Cochrane, who noted its transient and motile qualities, as well as its specialised witchcraft meaning beyond common usage.²⁹ The passage of virtue from one witch to another mirrors not only the egress of *virtus* from herb to practitioner, but also from tutelary spirit to sorcerer.

Plant-spirits as the sources of direct transmission of magical knowledge is a feature of the shamanic world, and a rich tradition of plant-allies endures in the magical teaching of indigenous Americans. A South American corollary with spirit-flight or spirit-possession cults are the Peruvian specialists of plant-magic known as *vegetalistas*. Their ritual imbibition of the *ayahuasca* decoction for healing, divination, prophecy, spirit-travel, and necromantic communion is accompanied by spirit-emissaries known as 'little doctors.' These spirits convey specialized magical knowledge, especially in relation to the magical use of plants. Like the *Zar* rites of the *Zar* rites, the little doctors also teach unique songs by which the spirits may be called and their power commanded.³⁰

'Dream-helpers' which assist the shamans of many North American tribes, bear many similarities to the witch's familiar, and many arrive by the direct intercession of plants. Often the helper is an animal soul, such as coyote, frog, or owl; but it can also be an elemental such as water. Like the witches' familiars, these intercessors provide specialized power to the shaman, such as the poisoning power provided by rattlesnake. The Chumash people, as well as other California tribes, have long sought the tutelary spirits by drinking an infusion or decoction of root of *Datura* (*Datura* spp.), a potent visionary plant of the nightshade family known in European witch-lore as thorn apple. As with the little doctors, dream-helpers of the *Datura*-vision could convey unique magical songs, knowledge of plants, and specialised powers.³¹

In my own practice, I have identified many modalities of spirit-tutelage in working with plants, wherein the linkage

between the practitioner and spirit-intermediary occurs through specified 'roads' including dream, trance-possession, waking vision, votive offering, and consumption of plant corpora as an empowered eucharist. Each bears a unique signature of the plant in question, as well as a distinct manner of tutelage; one exemplar I will discuss here in brief. Though these signatures are consistent with both old lore and modern reports, the experience of them within the circle of enchantment is unique to each practitioner.

A fortunate straying on my magical path many years ago led to instruction in the visionary use of belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*), a plant which I had long studied and grown but, out of both fear and respect, never sacramentally imbibed. Belladonna is a plant of considerable toxicity and a member of the nightshade family, a group of plants with ancient ties to witchcraft in both the Old World and the New. My initial experience with the plant involved a compression of the physical sensorium. This sense of restriction is well grounded in biochemistry: hyoscyamine, a tropane alkaloid which belladonna possesses in considerable concentration, is utilized in medicine for drying up excessive fluid, and is responsible for the side-effect of a parched mouth. In these initial stages of being overshadowed by the plant, I was unaware of any presence I would call 'spirituous', though a number of curious characteristics were noted, chiefly my inability to stay out of trance, the very definition of a narcotic. A sense of increasing restriction and numbness overcame me, and compression of my consciousness narrowed to a singular, finite point. The room was suddenly awash with shadows and I felt the weight of an ancient spirit-column above me, a great tangled mass of souls. The suddenness of its appearance and its monolithic nature further reduced my perception, leaving my immediate reckoning in a floating mist of anaesthetized terror. Before this black edifice I shuddered, beholding the moment of my own death, and the soul's eclipse. A sense of panic and terror, however, only arose when, in fear of expiration, I raised somatic defences against the genius. However, when I embraced her awful power, and the inevitability of my imminent demise, the mask of the goddess shifted from wrathful to tutelary. It was

29. Robert Cochrane, 'A Witches Ebat,' *New Dimensions*, 2:10 (1964/65).

30. Luis Eduardo Luna, 'The Concept of Plants as Teachers among four Mestizo Shamans of Iquitos, Northeastern Perú,' *The Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 11 (1984), 135-156.

31. Jan Timbrook, *Chumash Ethnobotany* (Berkeley: Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2007). See also Pendell, *Pharmako/Gnosis*, 248-249.

as if the genius was insistent I behold her as she truly is, within the ambit of her own dominion, rather than according to what I had read and presumed.

For the next several hours my consciousness and corporeality was pierced by the flight of umbral shades swarming about a central 'column of atavism', attended by a clamour of whispers, shrieks, and groans. Though the voices spoke in what sounded like an internally-consistent language, it was incomprehensible to me but for its intuited qualities. Subsequent contemplations after this virginal congress seemed to indicate that the central black column was the shade of the Beautiful Lady herself, and the souls which formed her swarming mantle were those of practitioners, who in carnal form had used belladonna magically. In subsequent years, the appearance of the Lady has shifted forms, like the glamour of the witch, but her manner of communication has not, marked as it is by great horror and beauty.

The spirit-intercessors of the herb-sorcerer, lurking as they do in the green vales of every magical tradition, will no doubt continue to reveal themselves to their chosen, whether they be practitioners of the magical art or respectful academics. Within the purview of magical practice, it is hoped that it is not simply the *source* of gnosis that is emphasized, but the trinity of practitioner, point of emanation, and spiritual congress between them. The result of this magical trine is the ecstatic state known to some as the Witches' Sabbath, the co-mingling of souls and flesh wherein the gates of heaven and hell are thrown wide. Yet this is but one perspective, that of a practitioner of traditional witchcraft. Given its applicability to spirit-given plant knowledge, perhaps a better term for this state is Hildegard of Bingen's *Viriditas*, the divine vitality of the green world. At once applicable to the Ancient Ones of light, first smitten by woman, and the ethereal princes and queens of the Dominion of Faerie, it evokes the both power and mystical potentials of the hidden granary of Eden.

LEFT
Daimon of Virid Effulgence
Daniel A. Schulke



Transmutations of Good and Evil

Alchemy, Witchcraft and the Graal in the work of Arthur Machen

Edward Gauntlett

G. K. Chesterton said somewhere that if a critic could not find more in a novel than the author thought he had put in it, then he was not doing his job. But the author, in this case Arthur Machen, might read a learned thesis on the various bits of the esoteric tradition that inform his stories and remark, as he does in *Things Near and Far*, 'it seems to me wonderfully plausible... It is all nonsense, of course.' Machen drew on some very arcane traditions in the writing of his tales of transmutations. Whether he *believed* that these traditions had any basis in reality is a moot point. But I think it is clear that he did believe in the possibility of positive transmutations of people, through the descent of grace, through such traditions as that of the Holy Graal.

In his story 'The White People,' one of the characters argues that if there are great saints there must be great sinners also, though these will be fewer than saints. Such people may not be conventionally bad, may never commit any unsocial or illegal act, yet nevertheless they delve deeply into the mysteries of evil. If Machen was using this character as a voice for his own opinions, then he must have seen the outcomes in his tales of the supernatural as possible in fact as well as in fiction – at least to some extent. And evidence suggests that his fictions did affect events.

The 'nonsense' Machen mentions is from notes for piece (never published) on 'The Aryan Kabbalah,' keeping, he says 'the requirements of occult magazines strictly in view.' Machen thought he had made up the subject 'The Aryan Kabbalah' and that it was totally ludicrous, implying that one can write pretty much anything for occultists as long as it is dressed up in the right phraseology. Occultists are not alone in this regard, of course. In 1996 physics professor Alan Sokal successfully

Edward Gauntlett

passed off a parody of post-modernist writing onto 'a fashionable American cultural studies journal.' In his article he asserted that the western intellectual outlook, namely 'that there exists an external world, whose properties are independent of any individual human being and indeed humanity as a whole; that these properties are encoded in 'eternal' physical laws...' is simply wrong and this alleged external reality is nothing more than a social and linguistic construct.¹

Machen would have noted, I expect, that post-modern theorists, like occultists, have a habit of picking up half-understood (or wholly misunderstood) nuggets of current scientific theory and incorporating them as supports for their flights of fantasy. Occultists have the added pleasure of being able to say, 'we knew all this long before the scientists ... but we kept it secret.'

Sokal undoubtedly did believe he was writing nonsense, but there is a long philosophical tradition arguing that we can have no direct knowledge of the external world, and I suspect that those post-modernists who are dubious as to its reality do have a point. Twenty years ago Ramsey Dukes argued that we lived in what would now be called a 'virtual' reality and suggested that the reason there are fewer miracles in modern times is that we are now better magicians: modern man 'has more thoroughly tamed his reality.'

Our modern way of life would be unbearable if we could not depend on metal to behave itself. Sometimes when I was driving I used to think of Uri Geller and wonder whether my fears about the front wheel linkage might not create just the right mental state to cause the metal to snap by telekinesis. It never happened, but rather than accept this as evidence against telekinesis, I took it as evidence that it was my Unconscious Will to survive.²

We have developed out of chaos a tamed and rigid 'reality' that is expected to conform to certain 'laws.' Machen's stories indicate ways back to the untamed chaos.

Post-modernism originated, as a term, in the artistic circles of New York in the early 1960s and was adopted by Europeans (particularly the French) a little later. That places Pauwels and Bergier's classic *Le Matin des Magiciens* firmly in the frame as a text both influenced by the incoming current of thought, and influential upon it. This book draws together a mass of disparate material towards the conclusion that 'the

science of the future might be altogether more like magic.'³ In it, as in Surrealism, there is an underlying promise of access to mysterious worlds proximate to ours, worlds we cannot see but which potentially influence us. 'According to the authors of this strange work, human beings could step out of the cramped limits of their 'historical moment' and stretch up out into space.'⁴ One of the themes of *The Dawn of Magic* is the mutation of the human race, partially by scientific experiments. This has resurfaced in novels by Michel Hœllebecq, such as *Atomised* and *The Possibility of an Island*, where it is combined with obsessional sexual fixations.

Pauwels and Bergier devote a few pages to Machen's novella *The Great God Pan*, quoting Maeterlinck's comment on its being 'the first time an attempt has been made to combine the traditional, or diabolical brand of fantasy with the new, scientific kind, and that such a mixture has produced the most disturbing work I have ever come across.'⁵ They go on to quote letters from Machen to his French translator in which Machen says that subsequent to his writing *The Great God Pan* and *The White Powder* he underwent experiences that convinced him 'nothing is impossible on this Earth.' I think it might be significant that these experiences came *after* writing the stories; perhaps the effort and formulae involved created similar, if less dramatic, effects in Arthur Machen's life as those in the lives of his characters. Machen goes on to say, however, 'I need scarcely add, I suppose, that none of the experiences I have had has any connexion whatever with such impostures as spiritualism or theosophy.' Then, 'it may amuse you to know that I sent a copy of my *Great God Pan* to an adept, an advanced "occultist" whom I met in secret, and this is what he wrote me: "The book amply proves that by thought and meditation rather than through reading, you have attained a certain degree of initiation independently of orders or organizations."⁶

LEFT

Cover design from
The Great God Pan
Aubrey Beardsley

1. A. Sokal and J. Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures* (London: Profile, 1999), 199.
2. Ramsay Dukes, *Blast* (London: The Mouse That Spins, 2003), 59.
3. L. Pauwels and J. Bergier, *Le Matin des Magiciens* (1960); translated as *The Dawn of Magic* (London: Anthony Gibbs and Phillips, 1963). Gary Lachman, *Turn Off Your Mind* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 2001), 14.
4. Lachman, *Turn*, 15.
5. Pauwels and Bergier, *Dawn*, 140 - 145.
6. Pauwels and Bergier, *Dawn*, 144.

The Golden Dawn and the Welsh Hills

The advanced occultist was, I understand, William Wynn Westcott, a head of the celebrated magical order, The Order of the Golden Dawn.

Machen was briefly a Golden Dawn member, but one finds little, if anything, in the way of direct inspiration from its teachings in his fiction. R. A. Gilbert says, 'Arthur Machen was little influenced by the Order. His stories of spiritual horror were more concerned with the perversion of spiritual alchemy than with magic and were mostly written before he entered the Order.'⁷ Machen said, 'I had experienced strange things – they still appear to me strange – of body, mind and spirit, and I supposed that the Order, dimly heard of, might give me some light and guidance and leading on these matters. But ... I was mistaken; the Twilight Star shed no ray of any kind on my path.'⁸ His disillusionment with the Golden Dawn could not have been more complete.

But as for anything vital in the secret order, for anything that mattered two straws to any reasonable being, there was nothing of it, and less than nothing. Among the members there were, indeed, persons of very high attainments, who, in my opinion, ought to have known better after a year's membership or less; but the society as a society was pure foolishness concerned with impotent and imbecile Abracadabras. It knew nothing whatever about anything and concealed the fact under an impressive ritual and sonorous phraseology.⁹

To get an idea of where Machen's experience of 'strange things' started we have to go back to his childhood, to the sense of wonder he felt during long periods of solitary wandering about the lonely Welsh countryside that was his home. In terms of magic, taking that word in its widest sense, it is the countryside that inspired him; his connexions with landscape and place were profound.

I shall always esteem it as the greatest piece of fortune that has fallen to me, that I was born in that noble fallen Caerleon-on-Usk, in the heart of Gwent ... For the older I grow the more fiercely am I convinced that anything

which I may have accomplished in literature is due to the fact that when my eyes were first opened in earliest childhood they saw before them the vision of an enchanted land.¹⁰

That feeling of magic in the landscape stayed with him no matter how much he wandered the hills and woods around his home. He never felt jaded with them, and it was that sense of enchantment which he attempted to transmit in the first chapter of *The Great God Pan*.

Down in the valley in the distance was Caerleon-on-Usk; over the hill, somewhere in the lower slopes of the forest, Caerwent, also a Roman city, was buried in the earth, and gave up now and again strange relics – fragments of the temple of 'Nodens, god of the depths.' I saw the lonely house between the dark forest and the silver river, and years after I wrote *The Great God Pan*, an endeavour to pass on the vague, indefinable sense of awe and mystery and terror that I had received.¹¹

These wanderings are also reflected in the long walks described in the young girl's journal in *The White People*.

Occultist William Gray, in *Western Inner Workings*, emphasized that 'our roots are rural' and instructs anyone attempting to establish a strong working connexion with the ultimate sources of the magical tradition to take long solitary walks in remote areas and seek out ancient buildings, standing stones and the like.¹² Machen, who seems to have had a natural tendency towards experiencing the numinous through nature, spent a large part of his youth doing just that. The Roman remains that he came across, being dedicated to deities such as Nodens and charged with who-knows-how-much ritual activity, would have put him in direct contact (acknowledged consciously or not) with the sources of a tradition, established long enough in Britain to count as native, that is now generally covered by the generic term 'witchcraft'. In 'Nature', one of the prose poems of *Ornaments in Jade*, he writes, 'I always told you that the earth too, and the hills, and even the old walls are a language, hard to translate.'¹³

Machen had, then, received glimpses and had experienced some wonderful realm beyond the mundane – the sort of

thing, perhaps, adumbrated in surrealism, in *The Dawn of Magic* and, latterly, in some post-modern ideas. He was awestruck by the countryside and therefore drew his inspiration directly from the natural roots of the esoteric tradition; the rituals of the Golden Dawn, however, just did not do it for him at all.

This is probably just as well. Too great a reliance on 'the trade jargon of modern "occultism"' as H. P. Lovecraft refers to it, usually works against the effectiveness of a weird tale. It has, I think, a restricting effect on the imagination of a writer. The problem with hermeticism in this respect is summed up by Glen Cavaliero in *The Supernatural and English Fiction*:

The urge to belong to some body of secret gnosis, in order to assert and define one's own identity, provides frequent instances of how the concept of the supernatural can be distorted by human insecurity. Such aspirations are materialistic at heart, for they attempt the systematizing of the immeasurable.¹⁴

So Machen turned away from the Golden Dawn, with its Knowledge Lectures and Tables of Correspondences. These would, in any case, have told him nothing he didn't already know. Around 1884 Machen had taken a job described in a biography as 'hackwork of a literary kind' that was 'the task of cataloguing a number of books on the occult ... the foundation of his knowledge, lightly carried but far-reaching, of occult matters and those who concern themselves with them.'¹⁵ This is not quite right, since Machen had, as a youth, found and read a series of 'well-informed and enlightened' articles on alchemy at his home in Wales. But of his hackwork he has this to say:

It was as odd a library as any man could desire to see. Occultism in one sense or another was the subject of most of the books. There were the principal and the more obscure treatises on Alchemy, on Astrology, on Magic; old Latin volumes most of them. Here were books about Witchcraft, Diabolical Possession, 'Fascination,' or the Evil Eye; here comments on the Kabbala... Secret Societies of all sorts hung on the skirts of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons, and so found a place in

the collection. ... In a word, the collection in the Catherine Street garret represented thoroughly enough the inclination of the human mind which may be a survival from the rites of the black swamp and the cave or – an anticipation of a wisdom and knowledge that are to come, transcending all the science of our day.¹⁶

Such a job would have suited the hero (or victim) of a Lovecraft story who might have collated the contents of the library into a revelation that mankind was never meant to know, unleashing some interdimensional horror in the process. For Machen it meant that he had probably read as widely in the literature of occultism as Mathers and Westcott by the time of his initiation. Thus the fact that he did not shoot straight into the second order indicates what little interest the methods of the Golden Dawn held for him. Moreover, it seems significant that his attitude to this material looked both back into the archaic practices of our ancestors and forward to the rehabilitation of this wisdom.

Alchemy, Science and Pan

However low his opinion of contemporary occultists, he admired the alchemists of earlier times, who 'were engaged in some infinitely more mysterious adventure,' whose 'transmutation was a transmutation of man, not of metal.'¹⁷ These writers, Nicholas Flamel and fellow Welshman Thomas Vaughan, were the scientists and philosophers of their day, for whom occultism was a branch of the overall body of learning that would uncover the secrets of the world.

7. R.A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 87.

8. Arthur Machen, *Things Near and Far* (London: Martin Secker, 1926), 154.

9. *Things Near and Far*, 151-152.

10. 'Far Off Things,' in Arthur Machen, *The Collected Arthur Machen* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 91.

11. 'Far Off Things,' 97.

12. William G. Gray, *Western Inner Workings* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1983).

13. Arthur Machen, *The White People* (Hayward: Chaosium, 2003), 56.

14. Glen Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 57 – 58.

15. A. Reynolds & W. Charlton, *Arthur Machen* (London: Richards Press, 1963), 20 – 21.

16. Machen, *Things Near and Far*, 16 – 17.

17. Arthur Machen, *The Terror* (Hayward: Chaosium, 2005), 318.

Vaughan's *Coelum Terrae* and *Lumen de Lumine* seem to have been particularly inspirational. So the solitary child in the enchanted landscape saw a connected mystery in alchemy that may have helped him articulate the impressions received from the land.

With alchemy in mind, one notes that the subtitle of his book *The Three Impostors* is *The Transmutations*, though this often does not appear in recent reprints. All the linked 'novels' in *The Three Impostors* concern transmutation in one way or another. In the first chapter one of the heroes, Phillips, states that the highest skill in literature lies 'in taking matter apparently commonplace and transmuting it by the high alchemy of style into the pure gold of art.' To make gold, one must have gold to begin with, and the first incident in the book has Mr Dyson, Phillips's friend, acquiring a Roman coin – a gold Tiberius. The course of the novel itself transmutes ordinary London into a place of mystery and wonder. Machen had come to London as a young man intent on making himself a career as a writer. Essentially solitary by nature, he transferred his habit of taking long walks from the hills of Gwent to the streets of the city. His first visit brought him, via Paddington, to a small private hotel near Aldwych and the immediate impression was as profound as his childhood experience of Wales:

We went out for a short stroll before eating, and for the first time I saw the Strand, and it instantly went to my head and to my heart, and I have never loved another street in quite the same way. ... on that June night in 1880 I walked up Surrey Street and stood on the Strand pavement and looked before me and to right and to left and gasped. No man has ever seen London; but at that moment I was very near to the vision – the *theoria* – of London.¹⁸

As a young man during his first sojourn in the city he would, however, go for long walks in search of some countryside and often encounter, to his horror, one of the new red brick suburbs. He conceived a particular loathing for Harlesden, making it the home of the evil (or misguided) doctor who, in the story 'The Inmost Light,' extracts his wife's soul through some undescribed medical experiment.

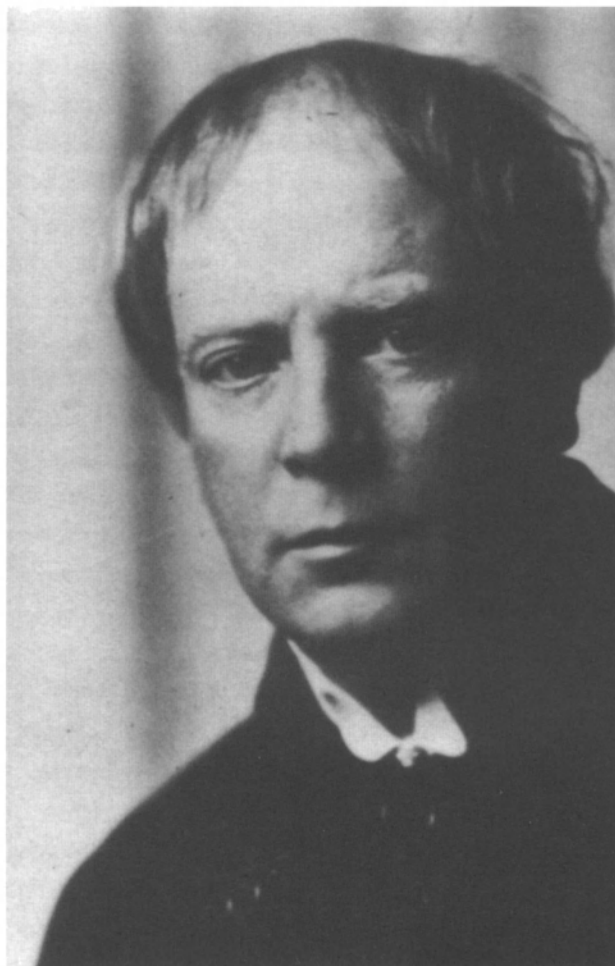
The central feature of *The Three Impostors* is that the said impostors waylay Dyson and Phillips around London and regale them with stories of their misfortunes and encounters with dark forces; and that they are all lying, for they are engaged in an elaborate charade aimed at entrapping the young man in spectacles. The book is fiction, and the fictional characters within it make up stories with some supernatural elements (in the case of the female impostor). I think there is a valid critical line to be taken in suggesting that the entire story is actually the product of Mr Dyson's imagination and so, even in the novel, none of it is real, it is lying about itself, taking the deceptions to yet another level. I suspect that this idea has been thoroughly aired in critiques of Machen's work. Gerald Suster pulled off a similar trick in the afterword to *The Devil's Maze* which forms a sequel to, and a pastiche of, Machen's novel. But if Machen was double- or triple-bluffing us with his tale of transmutations, then it can be said that the trick rebounded, as he describes in *Things Near and Far*.

Certain characters in *The Three Impostors* showed signs of coming to life, a feat which, perhaps, they had failed to perform before. I was once talking to a dark young man, of quiet and retiring aspect, who wore glasses ... and he told me a queer tale of the manner in which his life was in daily jeopardy. He described the doings of a fiend in human form, a man who was well known to be an expert in Black Magic ... This monster ... had, for some reason which I do not recollect, taken a dislike to my dark young friend. In consequence, so I was assured, he had hired a gang in Lambeth, who were grievously to maim or preferably slaughter the dark young man... I listened in wonder, for there are some absurdities so enormous that they seem to have a stunning effect on the common sense And soon ... another character from the book appeared, and like her prototype discoursed most amazing tales, was the heroine of incredible adventures, would appear and disappear in a quite inexplicable manner...¹⁹

The dark young man was Yeats and the expert in Black Magic was Crowley. I have not identified the woman.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein turns to the alchemists in his quest for the secrets of life, and from

them discovers the principles that enable him to create his monster. I think a fairly direct line can be traced from the alchemists, through *Frankenstein*, to Machen's earliest weird tales: *The Great God Pan* and 'The Inmost Light.' In Machen, as in Mary Shelley's tale, we have lone scientists working at strange occult experiments that, though rooted in the physical world, are attempting to gain access to another realm. Success at this did not seem as unlikely then as it might do nowadays. During the second half of the nineteenth century it was widely felt that we would soon know everything as far as the physical sciences went. James Jeans wrote that in the period from 1701 to 1897 'the studious and talented amateur could still accomplish scientific work of the highest value, for a single mind could carry a good working knowledge of a substantial part of science, the days of immense stacks of literature and teams of experts had not yet arrived.'²⁰ The main areas for discoveries and names to be made lay in biology and research on the brain, closely linking with philosophy and psychology. This, of course, found expression in both *Frankenstein* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.



RIGHT
Arthur Machen, c.1900

Machen thought well of Stevenson, and spends some time discussing *Jekyll and Hyde* in his *Hieroglyphics*. There Machen tells us what makes literature as opposed to mere reading matter: the vital ingredient 'ecstasy.' He allows *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to qualify as literature 'by the skin of its teeth.' The problem he has with *Jekyll* is that once it has been read and 'the trick' revealed, the book loses appeal; it depends upon the shock of revelation. Perhaps partly for this reason Machen often avoid stating explicitly what happens in his stories; we are left to piece it together from the fragmentary and more or less reliable testimony of a number of witnesses, who often refrain from describing what they read or witnessed. In many instances they break off on the brink of revealing the ultimate honor and one is left to decide for oneself what it is that is left unsaid. I myself often feel I am missing something, and sometimes fear that my assumption that it is sexual says more about me than it does about Machen. But what are we to make of just such a passage near the end of 'The Red Hand'?

...and he pulled out a small piece of curious gold-work and held it up.

'There,' he said, 'that is the Pain of the Goat.'

Phillips and Dyson cried out together in horror at the

revolting obscenity of the thing.

'Put it away, man; hide it, for Heaven's sake, hide it!'²¹

On the other hand, this leading up to and then breaking off makes the reader work at trying to grasp a concept, which allows the implied fragments of esoteric lore to take root in the mind virtually unnoticed.

In the first chapter of *The Great God Pan* a doctor performs an experiment on his maid. It seems to involve the use of airborne hallucinogenic drugs in conjunction with trepanning. The girl is briefly anaesthetised and when she wakes she sees – something – and screams out in terror. Some time later,

17. Arthur Machen, *The Terror* (Hayward: Chaosium, 2005), 318.

18. Machen, *The Collected Arthur Machen*, 123.

19. Machen, *Things Near and Far*, 148 – 149.

20. James Jeans, *The Growth of Physical Science* (London: Readers Union, 1950), 230.

21. Machen, *The White People and other stories* (Hayward: Chaosium) 2003, 28.

when she has been sedated the doctor says, 'it's a great pity; she is a hopeless idiot. However, it could not be helped; and, after all, she has seen the Great God Pan.' But what, exactly, had she seen? And how had it made her pregnant? The implication is that the physical world is mere illusion – a linguistic construct perhaps – and the real world lies all around but unseen. Lifting the veil to perceive it was, according to Dr Raymond in the story, in ancient times given the technical name of 'seeing the God Pan.' And during the experiment the other man present fell under the influence of the drug-laden atmosphere of the laboratory, and experienced a vision of something that seemed to unite all things in itself but in which 'the sacrament of body and soul was destroyed.' Thomas Vaughan may be describing the aspect of reality to which the maid was exposed when he writes:

In this universal subject they found the natures of all particulars, and this is signified to us by that maxim: 'Let him who is not familiar with Proteus have recourse to Pan' ... For Pan transforms himself into a Proteus, that is, into all varieties of species, into animals, vegetables, and minerals. For out of the Universal Nature or First Matter all these are made and Pan hath their properties in himself.²²

This universal nature contains certain spirits which are pure in the celestial realms but which, once descended to the 'elemental matrix' are 'blurred with the original leprosy of matter, for here the curse raves and rules.'²³ The character Helen Vaughan, a child born of this strange union of the seen and the unseen, is an anomaly, only superficially human.²⁴ She 'corrupts' men who come into contact with her, and her presence also seems to have a physical and spiritual effect on her surroundings: one of the characters visits an empty house in which she had once lived and finds it debilitating and repellent. When we come to the suicides it appears that Helen reveals the unseen to her chosen victims and they find themselves unable to return fully to our world. 'Pan' is a symbol of 'the most awful, most secret forces which lie at the heart of all things; forces before which the souls of men must wither and die and blacken.' Her presence forms a bridge to the other, underlying reality, the denizens of which are the satyrs and other beings of classical

mythology, but given additional demonic weight. Any contact with them destroys the unfortunate human involved. Why should this be so? In *Hieroglyphics* Machen says, 'man is a sacrament, soul manifested under the form of body.'²⁵ Helen Vaughan and her playmates are not human. Therefore, perhaps, they are not manifested souls but manifestations of something else entirely. Their origins may lie in the abortive and qliphotic creations described by Berosus which were not formed of the usual four elements plus spirit, but 'hideous beings born from the twofold principle (Earth and Water) in the Abyss of primordial creation.'²⁶

One of the clues given towards the end of *The Great God Pan* concerns a stone pillar dedicated 'to the great god Nodens (the god of the Great Deep or Abyss)' by Flavius Senilis. According to Ron Weighall, Flavius was a fourth century priest who dedicated a mosaic floor depicting sea monsters to Nodens, identifying him with Neptune, who is depicted as a Hydra headed monster similar to the 'Medusa' head displayed in the Roman remains at Bath and, through close resemblance, to images of satyrs and hence Pan and the Horned God.²⁷ In the cults connected with these the initiation of women took place in a sacred marriage with the god, as referred to in connexion with the pillar, the implication being that Helen's mother was so initiated. In Vaughan's *Lumen de Lumine* the narrator is led by some female being to a cave where spirits 'dabble lasciviously with the sperm of the World' and so produce 'monstrous generations.' The men Helen seduces, therefore, are brought into direct physical and sexual contact with something not simply non-human, but something fundamentally different to anything in the visible world.

22. Thomas Vaughan, *Coelum Terrae*, cited in Israel Regardie, *The Philosophers' Stone* (Woodbury: Llewellyn, 1970), 187.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Her name may have been derived from that of the alleged Satanist Diana Vaughan discussed in A. E. Waite, *Devil Worship in France* (York Beach: Weiser, 2003) or may be intended to direct the reader towards Thomas Vaughan's work.

25. Arthur Machen, *Hieroglyphics* (London: Unicorn Press, 1960), 81.

26. Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1970), 2.65 n.

27. M. Valentine and R. Dobson, *Arthur Machen* (Oxford: Caerleon, 1986), 14.

28. Vaughan, cited in Regardie, *Philosophers' Stone*, 77.

29. Machen, *Things Near and Far*, 21.

30. Arthur Machen, *The Three Impostors* (London: Everyman, 1995), 126.

31. Richard Payne Knight, *Discourse on the Worship of Priapus* (New York: Julian Press, 1957), 80-83.

In other, related tales, such contact sometimes also takes place through contact with the Little People, the ancient non-Aryan dwarf inhabitants of Europe that have not only survived into modern times but retained links with the otherworld. Any dealings with them are a retroactive procedure, taking humans back to another, discontinuous and ancient evolutionary track utterly inimical to the 'sacrament' that mankind represents. Apart from Machen's whipping up a horror of transgressive quasi-bestial sex, the point is that the two realities should not meet. Our illusory construct is too flimsy to withstand the impact of the underlying, archaic world that has no soul but far too much reality.

Machen was opposed to the materialism of his age, and his mystical bent made him aim for spiritual realities beyond matter. It is especially vividly expressed in the symbol of the Holy Graal, which features in his story 'The Great Return.' In his horror fiction, it seems, Machen inverts this and his protagonists find themselves faced with a reality not beyond but *before* matter. Humanity is seen as being, perhaps, in a transitional stage of a long alchemical transmutation – matter and spirit, gradually evolving towards spirit alone – having evolved from pre-matter. To try to traffic with beings from this pre-material reality is a *rebours* (which, however, is what Crowley says all Magick is, or should be). There is a warning about this in Thomas Vaughan's *Coelum Terrae*. Having explained that the visible universe was created out of the invisible First Matter or Chaos, he warns of the danger for imperfect men in trying to uncover its secrets. 'I am a poisonous dragon, present everywhere and to be had for nothing... but if thou dost not exactly know me thou wilt – with my fire – destroy thy five senses. A most pernicious, quick poison comes out of my nostrils which hath been the destruction of many.' And within this chaos, it seems, are 'certain fugitive spirits, condensed in the air, in the shape of divers monsters, beasts and men.'²⁸

The events in *The Great God Pan* are initiated by a doctor who is convinced that his experiment will result in a great revelation, but doesn't discriminate, until too late, between a revelation of something that will lead humanity on and one that will drag it back.

We must beware of taking Machen's knowledge of alchemical texts too seriously, as he advises, 'avoid all deep and systematic study of Crollius and Vaughan ... for if you go too

far you will be disenchanting.'²⁹ And enchantment was what Machen was about. One could argue on the other hand, of course, that he dismisses the alchemists in order to put people off discovering too much of the truths he had learned from their writings.

Witches

In one of the stories in *The Three Impostors*, 'The Novel of the White Powder' there is a similar dragging back, this time through a medical error. Here a drug has lain unused in a chemist's shop for twenty years before being prescribed; during that time it has undergone fundamental changes and is no longer a harmless tonic but the basis of the *Vinum Sabbati*, a secret 'of an evil science which existed long before Aryan man entered Europe.'³⁰ Through drinking this, the compound or sacrament that is a human is resolved into its constituent elements, one of which is a pre-human, pre-material being. Machen hints that at the witches' sabbath, drinking the *Vinum Sabbati* caused the composite human to separate into two or three distinct, differently gendered, individual beings. Then it completes the iniquitous and depraved descent back down into the primeval pit by having group sex with itself. Machen explicitly derives this from Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*. In that work Payne Knight discusses the initial creation of various mythical beings, and goes on to say:

Besides the Fauns, Satyrs and Nymphs, the incarnate emanations of the active and passive powers of the Creator, we often find in the ancient sculptures certain androgynous beings, possessed of the characteristic organs of both sexes, which I take to represent organized matter in its first stage; that is, immediately after it was released from chaos, and before it was animated by a participation in the ethereal essence of the Creator... If the explanation which I have given of these androgynous beings be the true one, the fauns and satyrs, which usually accompany them, must represent abstract emanations, and not incarnations of the creative spirit.³¹



LEFT
*The Mystic Marriage of
 Helen Vaughan*
 Francesco Parisi

Sylvester Prieras, writing in 1521, refers to demons 'who practice obscenity of every kind, add another most foul that is, an incubus demon makes use of a double penis so that he abuses himself simultaneously with both organs.'³² The wine of the witches' sabbath is intended to reduce humanity to this primal, pre-human state. And this is just what it does in Machen's story, where the man drinking it ends up as a 'mass, seething with corruption and hideous rottenness, neither liquid nor solid, but melting and changing before our eyes.' So too, Helen Vaughan's dying body wavers 'from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited ... [and] ... down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being.' In this primal state access to the realms of other orders of being – 'fauns and satyrs' – is achieved.

In his *Worship of the Generative Powers* Thomas Wright discusses a 1459 French account of the sabbath, where it was presided over by a demon; participants ate and drank then 'rose and joined in a scene of promiscuous intercourse between the sexes, in which the demon took part, assuming alternately the form of either sex, according to that of his temporary partner.'³³ Wright goes into more detail later, drawing on De Lancre's famed sabbath account (*Tableau de l'Inconstance des Mauvais Anges et Demons*, 1612) Here the meetings are described as huge with 'a hundred thousand subjects ... among these same subjects some are real, and others deceitful and illusory. Some are pleasing ... the others displeasing, full of deformity and horror, tending only to desolation, privation, ruin and destruction, where persons become brutish and transformed

into beasts.'³⁴ Elsewhere a witness is quoted as saying that at the sabbath 'some walked about in their own form, and others were transformed, she knew not how, into ... animals.'³⁵ He dwells at some length on the statements that the witches would dance in groups of three or more, back to back; also that sexual activity took place most often between relatives; this, of course, is meant to be especially sinful but may also conceal or symbolize sex between the exteriorized parts of a single person. It is notable that the girls supposedly interviewed and quoted in De Lancre were all in agreement that no one was ever made pregnant at the sabbath.

In this context, Austin Osman Spare's claim that the old witch Mrs Paterson could exteriorize part of herself in the form of a beautiful young woman seems relevant; so do his writings on the witches' sabbath. For example, 'the Sabbath is an inverse-reversion for self-seduction; an undoing for a divertive connotation: Sex is used as the medium and the technique of a magical act ... My own experience of many Sabbaths is that there is consummate exteriorisation and that subsequent memories are of reality.'³⁶ Kenneth Grant says that Spare 'not only visualized and projected vampires and succubi, but cohabited with them at nocturnal Sabbaths engendered entirely by his own exuberance. He cited such *orgia* as examples of *pan-sexualism* during which he experienced union with the Infinite and the consequent attainment of cosmic consciousness.'³⁷ And elsewhere he writes, 'the Witches' Sabbath, like the Alchemical process, was the veil of an ineffable sacrament deliberately misrepresented by its Adepts to preserve its secrets from the profane.'³⁸

32. G. Wellesley, *Sex and the Occult* (London: Corgi, 1975), 100.

33. Thomas Wright, *Worship of the Generative Powers* (New York: Julian Press, 1957), 157.

34. Wright, *Worship*, 169 – 170.

35. Wright, *Worship*, 181.

36. Austin Osman Spare, *The Witches' Sabbath* (London: Fulgur, 1992), 7-9.

37. Kenneth Grant, *Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975), 23.

38. Kenneth Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (London: Frederick Muller, 1973), 135.

39. Kenneth Grant, *The Magical Revival* (London: Frederick Muller, 1972), 181.

40. Christina Hole, *A Mirror of Witchcraft* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 77 – 79.

41. E.g. 'The Red Hand', 'The Shining Pyramid', 'The White People', 'The Novel of the Black Seal' and 'Out of the Earth'.

42. Berta Nash, 'Arthur Among the Arthurians', in *Minor British Novels*, ed. C. A. Hoyt (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 115-116.

43. Christina Hole, *A Mirror of Witchcraft* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 75 – 76.

Here we have an instance of what Machen depicts as a regression, but Spare and Grant see as a legitimate method of transcendence. It makes it look as if Machen was drawing on a genuine old tradition that has its roots in ancient practices, hints of which might be gleaned from the Roman relics that were unearthed from time to time in Machen's beloved Gwent. The separation or dissolution of the human into separate beings may also be the subject of some of Spare's witch drawings such as the 'Preliminaries to the Witches' Sabbath' reproduced in Grant's *The Magical Revival*.³⁹

Returning to Machen's tale, 'The Novel of the White Powder,' one may consider source influences. Whilst the emphasis on the powder's whiteness may allude to cocaine, there may be another, more occult, inspiration. Christina Hole cites *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677) where there is a case reported of a man tried on suspicion of witchcraft for 'doing cures beyond the ordinary reasons and deductions of our usual practitioners.'⁴⁰ These the man performed 'with a white powder which, he said, he received from the Fairies' when he entered their hall under a certain hill. Whenever his supply ran out he had simply to return to the fairies for more. The man was acquitted; the jury seemed to think he was harmless enough, but the judge was, nevertheless, tempted to have him whipped out of town all the way back to his fairy hill.

In many of his stories Machen uses a myth closely connected to witchcraft, namely that of pre-Aryan or pre-human Little People inhabiting the hills and mountains of remote countryside areas.⁴¹ These stories pre-date Margaret Murray by up to twenty years or so. One commentator, Berta Nash, has said that Machen used the Little People as beings that are superficially human but without any divine element, making them essentially the same as Helen Vaughan. She says that in 'The Shining Pyramid' they are, quoting Machen, the prehistoric Turanian inhabitants of the country, who were cave dwellers and that they represent 'the material wholly purged of any spiritual admixture. These creatures are not only evil; they are soulless. They are inhuman, and are not even animals. Animals at least are capable of evolving into higher forms but these have no such promise.'⁴²

She misses, I think, their non-physical attributes and access to monstrous realities. In 'The Novel of the Black Seal' the narrator reiterates the basic premise 'that matter is as really

awful and unknown as spirit, that science itself but dallies on the threshold, scarcely gaining more than a glimpse of the wonder of the inner place.' There the strange characteristics of the 'little people' do seem to be largely physical: Jervase Craddock, the half-fairy boy in the story, is essentially a reptile disguised as human. But the important point is surely that fairy lore and witchcraft are intimately connected, with witches deriving some of their powers from association with the little people and their access to another realm.

Folklorist Christina Hole referred to Murray's theory of a pre-Celtic race surviving in wild areas of Europe but, citing the variety of legends associated with them, says it is difficult to bring the fairies within any single theory. The belief in fairies seems to have evolved

from a medley of ancient beliefs in nature-spirits, ghosts and half-forgotten heathen deities, and confused traditions of vanished Neolithic peoples and their ways of life. For the devout cleric, remembering the old gods and the *faunii* and *dusii* of paganism, fairies were simply evil spirits ... In the folk tales they appeared ... as a separate race, not wholly spirit nor wholly mortal... This intermediate people dwelt in a mysterious kingdom alongside and under the material world ... they were creatures of alien origin, whose actions were unpredictable. As such they were dreaded by Christian folk, both for their enmity, which was deadly, and for their gifts, which were usually two-edged.⁴³

She goes on to say that some people who strayed into the company of fairies were drained of their vitality, 'became silent, morose, and melancholy, and did not live long after' – as happens in *The Great God Pan*.

Machen's use of the 'little people' seems not to allow any assertion that he had a particular theory in mind; he is not consistent and takes from folklore whatever fits with his immediate purpose. The only proviso is that the fairies occupy that same pre-matter realm to which Helen Vaughan acts as a gateway, and they can also, in certain circumstances, gain entry into our reality. In the late tale 'Opening the Door' the fairy folk do not seem to be malicious or evil at all, but rather are conductors to another world where time runs differently.

In 'Out of the Earth' they are simply cruelly mischievous and loutish, given to frightening small children and swearing at solicitors.

There is also an explicit connexion between fairies and witchcraft in one of Machen's best tales, 'The White People.' Here as in many of De Lancre's accounts, a young girl is introduced into a form of fairy or witch cult by her nurse and subsequently goes alone to meetings and ceremonies involving non-human entities. This story gives a definition of sin or wickedness as 'a certain rapture or ecstasy of the soul; a transcendent effort to surpass the ordinary bounds.'⁴⁴ Occultist Ithell Colquhoun glossed this as 'a passion to penetrate Otherness in an unlawful way.'⁴⁵ The tale seems to have been of particular interest to Aleister Crowley, who, according to Colquhoun, marked several passages and annotated his copy of it with

the figures 2 3 4 and the Hebrew letter *Gimel* combined as a sigil with the letter *Resh* (reversed) and a small reversed *Iod* between them. Read as a formula of the story's theme, it would indicate: 'Moon conjoined with Sun through the secret seed in Virgo' or, in equivalent Taro terms 'The High Priestess and the Sun with the Hermit as paranymphus.'⁴⁶

The reversal of Resh and Yod indicates the infernal nature of the ritual described. Going on from this, Kenneth Grant says that 'The White People' concerns 'traffic with elemental and reverberant atavisms' and that Machen showed that the 'fairies and little people of folklore were decorous devices concealing processes of non-human sorcery repellent to mankind.'⁴⁷

This theme recurs in some of Machen's prose poems, such as 'The Ceremony' and 'Midsummer.' The nurse initiates the girl in 'The White People' by telling her stories of the witches' sabbath and teaching her songs and how to make idols ('dolls') and work spells with them. The link between witchcraft, certain 'processes' and alchemy is made explicit in the epilogue to the story. The events the girl describes centre on an 'image' or statue of Roman workmanship that had been used in the witch rites the nurse described and in which she participated. In 'The Ceremony' the nature of the rite enacted at an ancient statue is quite clear, though not even obliquely described, and

is spelled out by Thomas Wright. Referring to 'priapic saints' he says:

It appears that it was also the practice to worship these saints in another manner, which was also derived from the forms of worship of Priapus among the ancients, with whom it was the custom, in the nuptial ceremonies, for the bride to offer up her virginity to Priapus, and this was done by placing her sexual parts against the end of the phallus, and sometimes introducing the latter, and even completing the sacrifice ... There are traces of the existence of this practice in the middle ages. In the case of some of the priapic saints ... women sought a remedy for barrenness by kissing the end of the phallus; sometimes they appear to have placed a part of their body naked against the image of the saint, or to have sat upon it.⁴⁸

L'Idole, among several of his pictures, by the Belgian Symbolist Felicien Rops provides an explicit image of what Machen hints at.

Kenneth Grant picks up themes from Machen throughout his Typhonian Trilogies and takes the view, as Westcott had done, that he knew certain secrets, and that he gives hints and adumbrations of genuine formulae for contacting alien entities. Grant says that these formulae, which are often concealed in descriptions of strange sexual activity, open doors to other dimensions and that one danger for humans is that having gone through they cannot easily get back. In Machen this fate befalls characters that have contact with 'fairies' in 'The Novel of the Black Seal' and 'Opening the Door.'

Grant also points to magical words appearing in Machen's tales that have direct connexions with his 'Cults of the Shadow.' One such is 'alala,' appearing in 'The White People' and later revealed to Frater Achad as the Word of the Aeon of Maat. Another is the name of the stone in 'The Novel of the Black Seal' – *Ixaxaar*. This word deeply affected Ithell Colquhoun, who found herself obsessed by it to the extent that she stopped reading and shunned the book. Grant notes that according to Julius Silenus (c. 3rd cent. AD), 'this stone has a secret unspeakable name; which is *Ixaxaar*, the number of which is 333, thus identifying the stone with the Choronzonic *q̄lip̄toth*.'⁴⁹ He goes on to say, 'the *Ixaxaar* Current was embodied

Angels and the Graal

in the Sixtystone before the human life-wave was established upon earth.⁵⁰ This stone apparently relates to the entity Lam and is a route to the Mauve Zone. The descent of some of Machen's characters into the pre-human abyss illustrates both a method and some of the dangers of entering the Tunnels of Set on the Nightside of the Tree of Life.

In *The Ninth Arch* Grant makes several references to Helen Vaughan / Mrs Beaumont (her married name in *The Great God Pan*) as an avatar of his own 'fictional' character, the witch Awryd, and of Spare's mentor, Yelda Paterson. It is mentioned, in passing, that Grant wrote that 'Machen knew the secret, but the Master [Crowley] did not.'⁵¹ This secret Grant relates to the Elixir of Life which Crowley, Grant says, had misunderstood until very near the end of his life. If Machen knew it this may explain the operation he performed following the death of his first wife.

I was beside myself with dismay and torment ... And then a process suggested itself to me, as having the possibility of relief I made my experiment [and] found to my utter amazement that everything within had been changed ... Everything, of body and of mind, was resolved into an infinite and exquisite delight.⁵²

The experiment is not described, nor is its nature hinted at. But Ithell Colquhoun, who was once a member of Grant's New Isis Lodge, asks whether it was 'an alchemical process, or some such psycho-sexual practice as indicated in the system of Austin Osman Spare?'⁵³

The overlapping of fact and fiction has led some commentators to accuse Grant of writing occult fiction disguised as, or misleadingly asserted to be, occult fact. It may be that Grant meant, in referring to 'fictional' characters, to denote the 'real' people they were based upon, but I doubt it. Grant has spent years demonstrating that 'fiction' is an aspect of reality and Machen's life had clear indications that it could very easily bleed into the external world. 'Fictional' characters, as Machen found, may very often 'incarnate' among us and perform their functions in the 'real' world.

The leaking of Machen's fiction into reality achieves its most spectacular example in connexion with what became, to his regret, his most famous tale: 'The Bowmen.' He was not pleased with this 'bit of a story' as he calls it, regarding it as 'an indifferent piece of work.' It was published as a morale-boosting filler in *The Evening News* in September 1914. To Machen's amazement the story quickly took hold in the public imagination, and the event described in it was confirmed by accounts from soldiers at the front. It has long since entered into the nation's folklore; A. J. P. Taylor, no less, gives the Angels of Mons a short paragraph in one of his books on World War One, describing it as the only well-documented instance of divine intervention in warfare, and he does not mention Machen at all.

'The Bowmen' also introduces another side of Machen's work that was more concerned with awe than awfulness. In some of the later tales he appears as himself: a jobbing journalist, reflecting ruefully on the effect the angels have had on his literary reputation, and narrating apparently factual accounts of mysterious events witnessed in the course of his newspaper assignments. There are two stories in particular, 'The Great Return' and 'The Happy Children,' both of which rely on ancient traditions for their material. The most impressive is 'The Great Return,' which tells of the brief reappearance of the Holy Graal and its guardians in a Welsh village. Machen has here moved away from magic and occultism, and though he is still dealing in phenomena he is entering mystical realms and endeavouring to impart something of the numinous. The transmutation of people in this tale is towards the spiritual; those affected remain essentially as they were but are 'enhanced' in some way and, to put it rather tritely, they become better people. In contrast to the tales of horror, in 'The Great Return'

44. Machen, *The White People*, 66.

45. Ithell Colquhoun, *The Sword of Wisdom* (London: Neville Spearman, 1975), 224.

46. Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom*, 225.

47. Grant, *Aleister Crowley*, 135. Kenneth Grant, *Cults of the Shadow* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975), 196.48. Wright, *Worship*, 52-53.

49. Kenneth Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time* (London: Frederick Muller, 1980), 215n.

50. Kenneth Grant, *Hecate's Fountain* (London: Skoob, 1992), 230.

51. Kenneth Grant, *The Ninth Arch* (London: Starfire, 2002), 33.

52. Machen, *Things Near and Far*, 134 - 137.

53. Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom*, 222.

we have a spiritual symbol, embodied in a physical object that is also a gateway to another realm, which reinforces and enhances the 'sacrament,' the unified soul and body that is humanity. In the horror stories this sacrament is compromised and dissolved, resulting in complete corruption, here it raises the sacrament towards a greater atonement.

Machen takes the view that the Graal legends derive, ultimately, from Celtic – and specifically Welsh – traditions, but he is quite clear that these are Christian. He dismisses, for instance, Jessie Weston's thesis that Graal legends were connected with fertility rites of pagan origin:

It is undoubtedly futile to make the story of the Sangraal a purely pagan legend, into which Christian Symbolism intruded at a late period. It is futile – to take one reason out of many – because the story of the Sangraal is essentially and chiefly a high, mystic, sacramental and Christian legend: take away its Christianity and it is merely a queer bit of folklore.⁵⁴

In Welsh Celtic traditions saints' relics were handed down a line of keepers and Machen sees the Graal as such a collection: a bell, a portable altar and a cup. Though the keepers appear among the people of the village in 'The Great Return,' neither they nor their relics are purely physical. Moreover, whilst their presence does cause some healings, their effect on the bulk of the population is spiritual. At the final Mass of the Graal the congregations of all the different Christian sects feel impelled to gather at the village's little Anglican church, setting differences aside, and this symbolizes the ultimate unity of all churches. It ought to be noted though, that Machen was sceptical about A. E. Waite's theory, derived from Eckartshausen, of there being a sempiternal, universal 'Hidden Church' subsisting behind all spiritual aspiration and as such the source of the Graal legends among other things.

One can see from the foregoing the main themes in Machen's fiction – the supernatural in pre-human, pre-material demonic form and in mystical Christianity – and the effects on people who run into manifestations of these, either deliberately or by accident. If I have dwelt on the demonic rather than the mystical it is because the weight of the fiction is with

the former. The latter is harder to convey whilst in fact being the simpler concept. Machen himself had some strange experiences which, typically, he does not describe, but which must have enabled him to understand supernatural incursions into ordinary life, and so weave them into his fictions, along with their horrific or enlightening effects. It is possible that some idea of what he experienced might be gleaned from the semi-autobiographical novels *The Hill of Dreams* and *The Secret Glory*. His knowledge of old occult literature and ancient traditions was so profound and so thoroughly digested that it inevitably informed his writing without being superficial and obvious in the stories. I suspect that this grounding in actual traditions may have meant that in creating the tales he called something into the world as one of his characters might have done.

54. Machen, *The Secret of the Sangraal and other writings*, (Leyburn, Tartarus Press) 2007, 14

Song for Sleeping Souls

Zachary Cox

Time stands still on the brink of Life –
What does the Dæmon see?
What does a kitchen chair become
In the eyes of Eternity?
A seed, a tree, a heap of ash,
The heart of a shrunken star –
For in and out of the things that seem
Are dancing the Things that Are.

The World of Men is rent in shreds,
A fragile and fading flower;
And ragged and frayed is the Robe of Light,
Frayed with a bristling power;
A world immersed in the fires of Hell
Dissolves in a swift decay –
The threads of Reality stay serene,
Knowing no future or might-have-been,
Wreathed in celestial evergreen
That shall not pass away.

Into the dark the Dæmon strides,
And senses, with aching love,
The warp and woof of the Cosmic Tides,
The wanton world-stuff wove;
The planets strung on a rope of tears,
The Great Suns weeping red –
The silent throb of the yearning years –
The sobs of the sleeping dead.

They dance in rows, they dance in rings,
They shimmer with deep delight;
Where the ear is deaf and the fingers numb,
And distance drowns the sight;
Demigod, Demon, flitting Faun,
Angel and Elf and Man,
Nebula, Neutron, Galaxy,
Follow the hooves of Pan.

Time stares in the Fire of Life,
What does the Dæmon see?
What does a kitchen chair become
In the eyes of eternity?
A warrior-thought from the battle spawned,
The soul of a striving star –
For in and out of the things that seem
Are the dancing Things that Are.

Skip Witches, Hop Toads

Stephen Grasso

There are magicians, and there are witches. The magician is solar in nature and deals in regions that can be seen, while the witch trades in the unseen, the ephemeral, the buried and the forgotten. One seeks to influence nature, the other is nature.

Magicians are self-made. They know, dare, will and keep silent. It's an age old business. A deck of cards and a top hat, a white tipped wand and a stick with curious properties. Producing canaries from one's jacket pocket. Running things at the crossroads. Twenty one batons in the air at any one time. Thirteen moves ahead of the other players. Sharp suit and silver patter.

Witches are born. It's in the blood. You lose your temper and a crack of thunder breaks the sky. You hear the sound of drums. The earth talks to you. The sea is your mother. The rivers nourish your heart. You move to old rhythms and live by instinct. Teeth bared in the night. Spiders in your hair. The corpse of a frog buried in a secret place. Iron cauldron filled with dirt and sticks and bone and spirit. A pact with the Devil's grandmother.

It's a mistake to think these two ways of being are mutually exclusive. I came to London and learned how to be a magician, but I'm a geordie sea witch at heart. The North Sea was my first teacher. When there was a storm, I would skive off school to go down to Cullercoats Bay by myself and inhabit it. I didn't know what I was doing or think of it as magic. I just needed to be with the waves. Walking out too far on the pier, rain lashing my face, soaking my clothes, ice cold north wind turning my fingers numb.

I knew magic. I had been studying it. Learning how to banish with geometric shapes and intone sonorous words in mangled Hebrew. That sort of thing. It was interesting, and did stuff, but it didn't move me. It didn't grab me, like the sea, and drag me into visionary space for hours at a time.

I wanted to learn magic, so I did. Dug through the crates and found a killer 45. Cut deals here and there. Entered into business. The role of a magician is not one to be sneered at or played down in an essay on witchcraft. They are simply two points of assemblage and in practice can both be occupied by the same individual, and often but not exclusively are. You generally find that you have a talent for magic if you have a bit

of witchblood in you, and a magician that shuns the wild hunt and cannot listen to the Moon is not a terribly well rounded magician.

You will often meet natural witches that have not and probably will not ever practice magic or identify as a magician, but are clearly witches. There are plenty of magicians that don't have a feel for the witchcraft and are not strong upon that point, but are formidable upon other points in the spectrum.

However, in many cases there are witches practicing magic who have become so absorbed in accomplishing their art, that they are not listening to the night. Their yearning for magic is itself an answer to The Moon's subtle whisper, but this quality of themselves is so denied them that it finds expression only through the magician's vaudeville act. The variety performance goes on, but there is somebody in the audience that demands your attention.

Witchcraft is denied us. Seared out of our culture in the image of a burning witch. Banished from the village. Yet what escaped the farmers with pitchforks and fled into the wilderness is still out there. The wilderness is a second home for a witch. They eternally occupy the liminal spaces and embark on extended sojourns into what is known and what is unknown. A witch lives by the hedge, and is known in two worlds. A long exile in the wilderness will not weaken a witch, but provide an opportunity to deepen the roots and grow in potency.

With the repeal of the witchcraft laws in England, it didn't take long for witchcraft to re-establish itself on some level. You get a lot of magicians who sneer at Wicca, but don't really understand what they are looking at and its primacy. When I read Ronald Hutton's *Triumph of the Moon*, what became immediately apparent to me was how revolutionary Wicca actually was in the context of post-war Britain in the early 1950s. Into the grim austerity of bomb damage and rationing, after French poppy field and Burmese jungle ran red with blood, and with half of London in ruins, came an upsurge of witchcraft to administer to the abscess. Someone followed a will-o-the-wisp in the night. The drums started beating again.

Hutton makes a concise argument that examines the evidence of high magic and low magic in British history in search of 'The Old Religion of Witchcraft,' and makes a very convincing case for there never having been such a thing. He identifies witchcraft as a modern phenomenon, and traces the various thematic and literary roots that caused this impulse to arise in the mid-20th century. On one level, he is absolutely correct, but it also feels a bit like looking for a guild of

poisoners or assassins in the historical records and failing to find one. Citing the absence of any organised or administrative body as evidence that this sphere of human activity did not take place before a certain date.

I'm relatively sure that there was no Old Religion of Witchcraft, *per se*, which functioned along the lines of the Christian church, or a trade guild, or a secret society on any grand scale. But I am also fairly certain that people have always responded to The Moon, and have felt the call of the sea, and have encountered the spirits of the woods. This is my understanding of witchcraft. It's a night flower. It doesn't come out in the Sun. Turn a spotlight on it and it slips into flickering shadow, but cats and dogs and foxes know a witch when they meet one in the night.

At a certain point in his book, Hutton begins frequently to describe the phenomena under scrutiny as 'British Witchcraft,' which makes it sound a bit like cricket. 'Good old fashioned British Witchcraft,' said in a BBC accent. As much a part of the culture as baked beans on toast and talking about the weather. I feel that there is a real phenomena of witchcraft which people can experience. It is a way of being within nature, fully inhabiting one's landscape, feeling the rotation of the Earth beneath your feet, responding to the turn of the seasons every bit as intimately as a plant or tree, and in full awareness of The Moon and the influence of her tidal currents upon all.

When you live this, all the time, it seems an absurd suggestion that nobody else has ever naturally encountered these mysteries prior to the formation of Wicca in the early 1950s, and the proliferation of popular witchcraft that has ensued afterwards within our culture. I think Bruce Lee said it best in *Enter the Dragon*, quoting Buddhist teaching: 'It is like a finger pointing to The Moon. Concentrate on the finger, and you miss all the heavenly glory.' The narratives of popular witchcraft, from Gardenerian Wicca to Silver Ravenwolf to Chumbley's Sabbatic Craft, are essentially fingers pointing to The Moon.

It doesn't really matter whether these structures have any historical provenance or lineage. They are simply vessels that have arisen to give shape and form to a need, not the thing that is hungered for. There is a lack of confidence in the validity of magical experience in western culture, and a tendency to try and shore up one's faith in a practice by reference to claims of a continuous tradition. However, in reality, it doesn't matter one bit whether you are using the same incantations and ceremony that your highly suspicious ancestor Old Betty Clusterfuck once used to have a conversation with The Moon,

if you are having a conversation with The Moon. It's lovely to honour your ancestors by carrying on their liturgy and traditions, even if they are semi-fictional, but what actually matters is the direct contact with the witchcraft mysteries that is accomplished, and what takes place upon that midnight stage, moreso than the specific actions employed to stimulate that contact.

The only legitimacy that is required is whether it works or not. If direct contact with the mysteries is taking place, your contemporary experience of that is no less valid than the experience of an ancestor who may or may not have done something vaguely similar at a previous point in time. You might even be doing it better. We are here to build on the work of our ancestors, not recreate a historically accurate simulacrum of that work. If you genuinely have something going on, you will be led directly by the spirits and learn everything you need on the job. True understanding of anything can only ever arise out of the crucible of your living practice, and all gradings and initiation ceremonies are then best understood as markers of that daily development, not bestowers of a special prize. Everything you get, you work hard for it.

Talking about one's legitimacy as a witch is a bit like holding forth on your legitimacy as a martial artist. Gradings, and titles and coloured belts serve a certain purpose, but what really matters is how well you get on in a bad situation outside the kebab shop after the pubs have shut. There are teenage girls that might never pick up a book on the occult, but are tight with The Moon all the same and work the witchcraft in their own personal way, even though they might not think of it in those terms. Just as there are individuals who bill themselves as high priest or high priestess of this or that, but for whom The Moon might as well be a streetlamp on the roadside for all the sense of connection they aspire towards.

Witchcraft could not be less about paperwork, or charters, or belonging to an exclusive club. Witchcraft is what happens when you go out at night and have traffic with certain powers and spirits.

We are culturally conditioned to overlook The Moon, and it can take time to attune oneself to an awareness of her currents and their influence. Especially if you happen to be male, and your body is not so obviously physically subject to a monthly cycle. It probably took me around a year of practice before I began to really apprehend the cyclical magnetism of the lunar current and begin to move in step with it myself. Living with a witch whose body is attuned to the 28-day cycle certainly helped in observing this tidal ebb and flow, an observation that recalls certain Indian tantras that prescribe the

reverence of the menstrual cycle — your own or that of your partner — as a sacred mystery and a key of magic.

Simplicity of practice is often best, and the core of witchcraft as I understand it is fundamentally just about going out beneath The Moon in its various phases and allowing space for communion to occur. You soon start to notice that you are not alone in this. Go out under a Full Moon and you hear dogs barking their own tribute to Our Luminous Mother. Foxes fucking and fighting in her radiance, drunks howling in the street. Go out when she is Dark, and witness her barren and carnivorous form, pitch black magic and toadfish, cauldron of blood and hag ridden dreams. Go out at the first sight of her crescent and bask in her freshness and virgin grace. Move with the cycle of The Moon, and its drawing in and drawing out. Wax and wane to the ceaseless rhythm of her tides. Stand close to a body of water, a river or the sea, and feel how it responds to The Moon, acting as an amplifier of her radiance or her darkness. Understand how the water that constitutes our own bodies is no less subject to this primal influence.

The Moon is ancient and abides in space, and it is her prerogative to conceal or reveal her face according to her quarter. In Yoruban she is known as Oshukua, in Mexican witchcraft and New Orleans Voodoo, she is called Madame La Lune. You won't find much written down about her. Hers are not mysteries to be picked at, talked about or exposed. You meet her in the night. She has as many roads as there are Sacred Ladies of The Moon throughout the world, and her human children carry a silver dagger concealed in their clothes. Frogs and toads are also her children, howling dogs and feral beasts and creeping crawling things. What comes out at night is subject to her influence, and she is a most ancient mother and ancestor.

You hush up your mouth when it comes to saying anything more about her than that. A witch could be defined as an individual who has a deep relationship with these mysteries, and draws upon the influence of The Moon within their practice. It is someone who feels a sense of kinship with the lunar orb and understands that they are one of its creatures. Yet congress with The Moon requires firm roots in the earth and bare feet upon the ground. A witch is no different from an animal. Her silver knife a fine talon. Naked and without shame in the Garden of Eden as one of God's creatures.

We venerate the Beast, and recognise our own animal identity in his priapic bearing, horns and cloven hooves. We meet the Devil at the crossroads, and are not puzzled or confused by the nature of his game. We are subject to the testing of the

Devil no less than Christ in the wilderness. Papa La Bas, the man in black, the God of the Witches, Das Teufal, Eshu Elegbara. He goes by many names, and is understood in many ways, and each of those iterations has its own integrity, but the magic of almost every culture recognises the crossroads as a place where something is met. Witches have a pact with him, and he teaches many things, virtuoso guitar skills being but one. He opens the way, and rules over one's inherent animal ability to perceive and traffic with the world of spirit.

Witchcraft is an old animism felt in the heart. It is non-verbal, and cannot be described in language without its substance getting lost in translation. It can only be alluded to and suggested. The lens of science will never observe an undine or a dryad, but these terms are a convenient and poetic way of describing the very real congress that takes place between human consciousness and the manifest mysteries of nature, when you approach the latter in the mode of a witch.

There is an urgency here. When you outlaw witchcraft, perhaps not legally, but still culturally to a large extent, you effectively criminalise and take away the necessary structures for communion and dialogue with nature. We lose our narrative for containing these swathes of experience, and are trained to shut them out as we grow up. The brass tacks of our reality is that we exist as a fleshy part of a marvelous living pulse of being, that encompasses weather patterns, magnetism, planetary bodies, the journey of the Earth around the Sun, the growth cycle, fire and water, wood and iron, smoke and mirrors, love and passion, birth and death. Witchcraft is a medium for fathoming those things and coming to an understanding of them.

Without a deep intuitive relationship with these conditions of existence, within which our whole experience is ultimately embedded, we have less chance of survival. If you have built a culture based upon principles that are patently destructive to nature as we know it — to the point where it becomes a roll of the dice whether or not your species will be able to survive within the atmosphere for much longer — it suggests that you could well be missing a trick somewhere along the line in your favoured conceptual model of existence. It is vital that our species strives towards a healthier and more sustainable framework for comprehending our role, relationship and responsibility to nature. The basis for such an understanding is as old as the talons of the first witch, preserved in the blood of her children, and can be heard in the night.

The visionary faculty is a lens for emotionally intuiting an animistic understanding of the conditions of existence. Magic is a technology for transforming the manifestation of those

conditions. Witchcraft is about understanding oneself as a condition of nature, immersed in an interplay of other powers and forces of the natural world and subject to the influence of the luminous orbs above.

If you have this internalised, and live this each day, it becomes difficult to glibly bulldoze a forest or cheerily pollute a river. Witchcraft cultivates an intimate and instinctive understanding of our symbiosis with the environment at large. The natural world is not a resource to be stripmined, but a miraculous process that we are obligated to participate in more responsibly, more sustainably, and with more awake awareness, if we wish for our species to survive.

You sometimes encounter certain types of magician who think there is something twee about a nature-based practice, but there's nothing twee about drowning in an environmental disaster or running out of food. There is nothing twee about contracting a strain of flu from a species of animal that you have mistreated all your life. Crammed into foul murder factories where diseases are bred, as if they were unfeeling slabs of meat, flesh shrink-wrapped for sale or served in a bun with HP sauce.

Witchcraft is revolutionary, in that a side-product of its practice is a fundamental shift in how one formulates a sense of our place within nature, our living terrestrial experience, and the universe at large that our planet is itself a component of. When you get deep into the witchcraft, you encounter the woods, the sea and the thunderstorm as something wholly different from how the western secular perspective habitually conditions us to observe and relate to these conditions, or rather trains us not to observe and not to relate to them. In this sense, even the tackiest, most cash-in book on popular witchcraft is a searing revolutionary tract if it encourages someone to go out into the night and have a confrontation with The Moon.

There have always been witches, in every culture. It's not an organised religion or a secret society, it's just people accessing what is in front of them, all about them, and above them in the night sky. It's not something that you believe in, it is something that you are. A way of being on the planet. Witchcraft would not still be around, or be so prevalent in all corners of the world in various forms, if there was not an experiential phenomena behind it, and the true value of that phenomena could well be a matter of life and death.

The Moon perches among the stars like an owl. Frogs leap through space carrying messages to and from their ancient mother. We are enveloped by and live in symbiosis with the Green, growing in the fluid medium of time as a fleshy



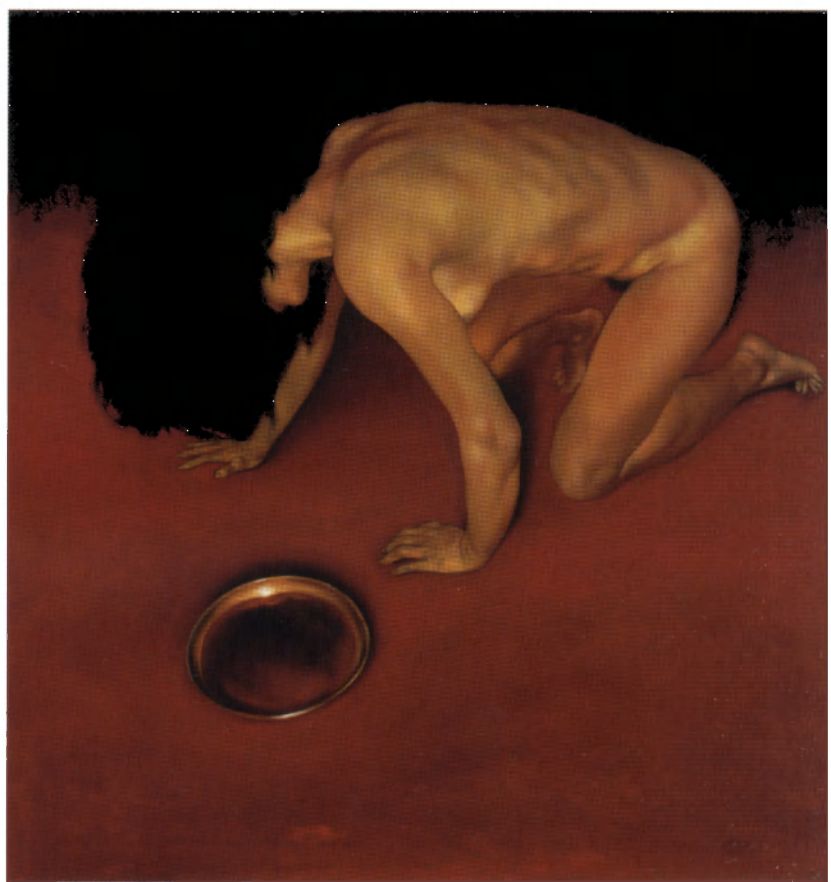
branch of the great tree of being. The voice of the wind through the trees at night carries the whisper of our ancestors. The ghost woods border on the land of the dead. Gran Bwa is master of the island below the sea. Deadly sirens haunt the urban tributaries of the river. Deep Ones are our family and kin. Sticks harvested according to old custom provide versatile allies and possess diverse properties. The blacksmith has great power and has been known to outwit the Devil, but wielding iron has a cost and comes with an obligation. The debt must be paid. Naked in the forest as an animal, the lustrous radiance of the Devil's grandmother penetrating the back of the skull, secrets are revealed and the work is apportioned. When the silver knife is given, so is the license to weave a necessary spell.

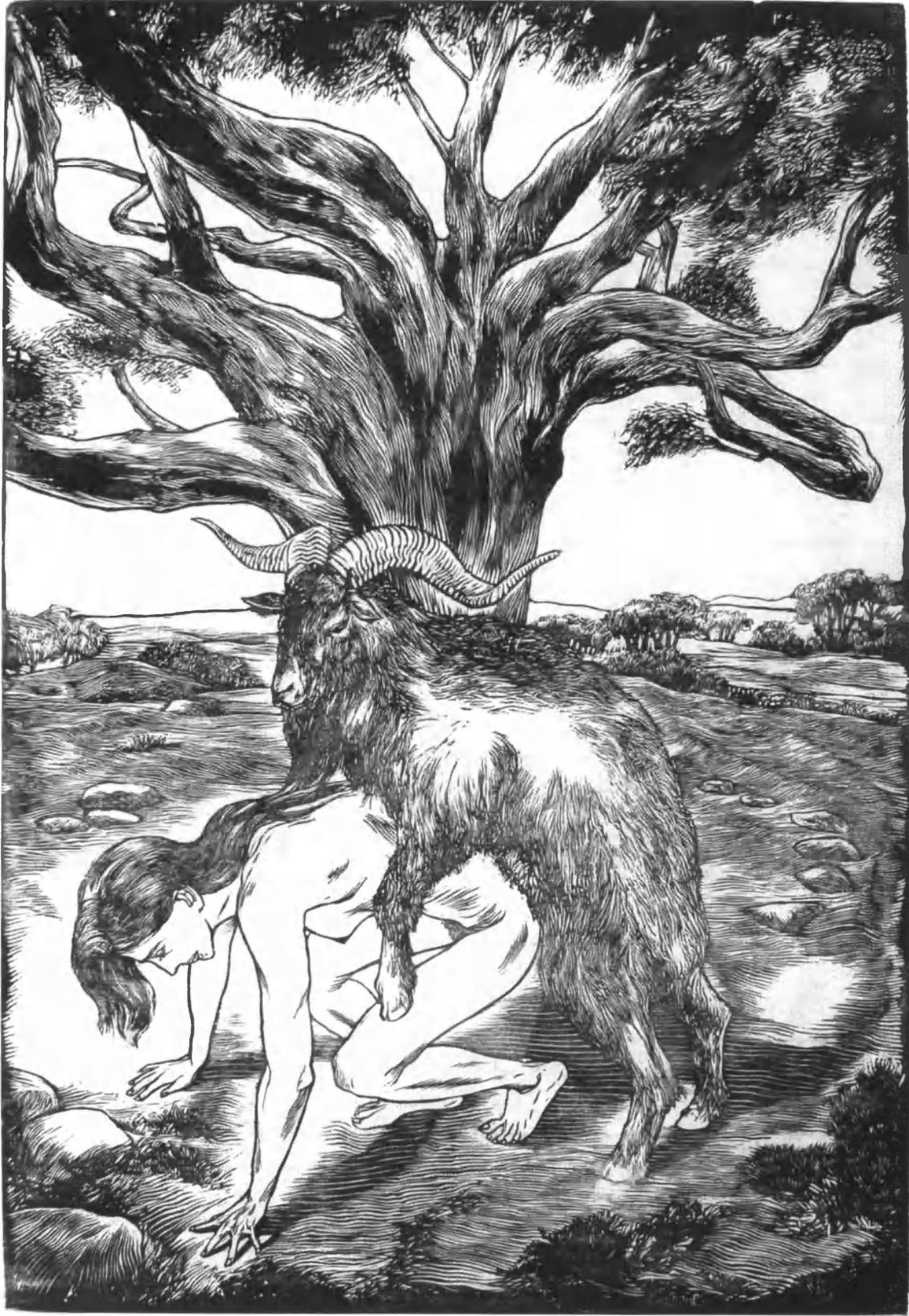
RIGHT
The Devil's Grandmother
Stephen Grasso



Lucifer in Starlight

An Interview with Francesco Parisi







Francesco Parisi was born in Rome in 1972. In 1995 he held his first one man exhibition at the Gallery Guy in Paris, a city where he lived briefly in the late 1990s. Later he returned to Italy and deepened his study of the wood-engraving technique. In his paintings and engravings between 1998 and 2002 he explored themes and subjects related to Dionysus. In 2002 Emanuel Bardazzi curated an exhibition of Parisi's prints at the Gabinetto delle Stampe of the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Cagliari. In the same year Francesco gained a grant for engraving at the Kultur-Institute Villa Romana Florenz in Florence – once the studio home of the German engraver Max Klinger. Between 2001 and 2004 personal exhibitions followed in Italy and abroad.

In 2005 a catalogue raisonné of his engraved work was published, edited by Arianna Mercanti and with a preface by Maria Teresa Benedetti. In 2006 the artist moved to New York for a year where he taught wood-engraving technique at the Centre for the Book Arts, while preparing for an exhibition at the Caelum Gallery. In his exhibition of spring 2009 he presented his paintings of the last three years. In preparation is an exhibition of his graphic works to be held in October this year at the Galleria Simone Aleandri Arte Contemporanea.

Francesco writes regularly and is the author of essays and articles in specialised magazines and catalogues on Italian and European graphic art of the early nineteenth century. His prints may be found in the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des estampes et de la photographie, Paris; the Royal Museum of Fine Art, Antwerp; and the British Museum, Departments of Prints and Drawings, London. He lives and works in Rome. Here he is interviewed by Robert Ansell.

Previous
Equinoctium (triptych)

Left
Anasurma

These and all subsequent
images in this interview
are by the artist.

RA: Do you remember the first work of art you experienced that inspired you creatively?

FP: During my formative years, first at the Liceo artistico then at the Accademia di Belle Arti, teachers almost exclusively gave us the Great Masters – such as Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Gauguin and the like – to look at, to increase our artistic knowledge and inspiration. None of these really touched me deeply. From the beginning I must have had a sort of 'aristocratic' vision of artistic creation, more exclusive and secluded. I then, so to speak, left the Great Masters to my

fellow students and made my own way, looking up in public libraries and other book collections for more interesting and inspiring artistic characters. In this way I must have encountered the drawings of Parmigianino in a splendid volume by A.E. Popham and a book on the complete works of William Blake, whom I could not understand fully at that moment, but whose mysterious allegories struck me deeply and had a profound impact on me. Oddly enough, the two artists that from the beginning had a marked influence on my *sensibilità artistica* were, respectively, a magnificent draughtsman and a capital etcher.

RA: Both these artists were known for having an interest in esoteric themes: Vasari speculates Parmigianino held a fascination for magic, and Blake's visions are well documented. Was this element a part of the fascination for you, a sense that the graphic work represented a deeper truth?

FP: Not really in a strict sense. I have always been an avid reader: when I was sixteen I was reading almost anything I found: from poetry to literature to philosophy. Later on I had the chance of 'heretical' encounters with authors such as Ernst Junger, Bruno Schultz, Franz Rosenweig. I preferred reading *In stalthgewittern* by Ernst Junger, rather than *The Little Prince* by Saint Exupery; poetry by Paul Celan and Stefan George rather than by Prevert... I then had a first approach with issues relating to transcendence through the writings of Gershom Sholem and Julius Evola. All this gave me the opportunity to develop a way of thinking and of looking at things not in conformity of what was common to the majority of my fellow artists. Literature has been and is an extremely important component of my art. Every artist pursues his goals, bringing with him the load of all the 'tools' that can help him in finding his way: with Parmigianino must have been alchemy, with Blake reading the Bible and Swedenborg. Naturally, when I was sixteen I could not grasp these complex symbologies, but I was able to see though in these artists something that went beyond the simple formal shape of their work. I believe it must have been precisely the literary element, the value added that I detected in their compositions. In later years I found in a precious theoretical booklet by Max Klinger (another capital etcher...) titled *Malerei und zeichnungen*, the analytical foundation of this very notion, 'black and white is the technique that more than any other is apt to illustrate the spirituality of things, because it leaves to one's soul the ability to give colour to form.' A good enough reason to induce me to pursue the graphic arts.

RA: Clearly Böcklin and Klinger are also important influences for you. Do you think that the protagonists of the Symbolist movement were more successful in illustrating the mystical and spiritual nature of things than those artists that embraced the later movement towards abstraction in art?

FP: I had my first approach to German symbolist painting relatively late, when I had already decided to dedicate the most of my resources to engraving and to *bianco e nero*. When I was twenty, I frequently went to Paris (I spent almost two years there) and was fascinated by some of the artists of the Belgian and French milieu. I read the works of Josephin Peladan, the writer and poet who founded the Salon de la Rose & Croix and I was struck by the paintings of Jean Delville. But besides Rops and Rassenfosse who were etchers, for the most part French symbolists were almost exclusively painters. At the time when my interest for *il colore* began to decline (I still consider painting a 'secondary' part of my artistic activity) I shifted my attention towards the Middle-European tradition. Klinger was naturally the star in front of me; the most shining star. From each of his works one could derive an endless list of suggestions and technical points. What was then striking in his work, and still is (as well as a source of influence and inspiration for me) is that peculiar mix of realism and dream-like vision typical of his art. A nude body by Klinger may well express the higher vision, in the same way as a dark forest by Böcklin may fully express all the suggestion and evocation of myth. Böcklin and Klinger but represent the mountain top, the highest point of symbolism reached by Middle-European art: they belong to those kind of artists that with their *canto* can influence or 'change the course of stars in the sky.' I am quoting by heart here Stefan George, I believe. My personal approach to all this, as a person and as an artist, has been and still is rather complex and conflicting. I have always preferred to look at the followers of the great artists: their interpretations having softened and reduced the aura of the unattainableness of the Great Masters and, at the same time, they could suggest – strangely enough – more radical solutions. That is why I have been studying and collecting the works of German artists such as Otto Greiner and Sigmund Lipinsky, both students and followers of Klinger. The evocative power of Klinger's oeuvre, as well as that of his followers, lies precisely in the representation of the human body: the ideal vehicle of representation for divine as well as for earthly instances. This is, in my opinion, the limit of abstract art. And this is the very reason why this movement, so vast that its results are almost impossible to circumscribe, has never

Right
*Notturmo a villa
Pamphili*





really much interested me. I have always considered as incomplete and defective the effort of representing the mystic and transcendent aspect of things only through perceptive elements such as 'colour' or 'sign' disjoined from form.

RA: As a powerful figurative artist perhaps Austin Spare would have agreed with you, because in the 1950s he referred to modernism as 'the dark sanctuary of incapacity.' You have written an interesting essay on Spare's graphic work, but I am curious to know your thoughts towards his designs for wood-engravings, particularly as they were carved by someone else, W.M.R. Quick?

FP: My first encounter with Spare occurred while I was studying at the German Academy in Florence. The Academy was located in a beautiful villa that had previously been the house of Max Klinger. I had won a scholarship for engraving and I almost never went out, but spent practically all my time in my atelier or in the Academy's archives and library. There I found a small book on the ex-libris of *primo Novecento* that reproduced two pieces by Spare. I was struck not only by the beauty of the lines but also by the short note that described Spare as an obscure character, connected to drugs and black magic. This brief caption and the intense and darkly fascinating self-portrait of the ex-libris (1908) drove me to investigate the artist more deeply. I felt that to explore the work of such a peculiar artist as Austin Spare one should enlarge the examination to the whole artistic and philosophical milieu in which he operated, more from the point of view of the art historian than from the point of view of the esoteric zealot. In Spare I found that the artistic element prevailed: and I personally believe that after the war Kenneth Grant must have contributed to give consistency and a systematic treatment to his mysticism by delineating the Zos Kia Cultus. At times Spare's ideas stemmed directly from Blake: in his reading of *The Four Zoas* and in his drawing (see for example the pastel *The Vampires are Coming* taken from Blake's colour printed drawing *The Triple Hecate* at the National Gallery of Scotland), but Spare's uniqueness lies in his extremely fluent use of line. This peculiarity has, I believe, precluded Spare from the possibility of practicing engraving, as this technique has in itself an element of *meccanica*. This is the reason why Spare practiced only lithography, which allowed him to produce 'graphical' but not 'engraved' works of art. Even his extremely beautiful drawings engraved by Quick exhibit very little of the character of real woodcuts. Quick was an ordinary commercial engraver with that impersonal technique that allowed him

to reproduce without any further interpretation the extremely detailed drawings by Spare. The best results stemming from their partnership remain the wood-engravings that illustrate Captain Fuller's article 'The Black Arts' published in *Form*. One in particular, *Satyr with Dead Baccha* inspired my woodcut *The Garden of Pan*, once in the collection of John Balance.

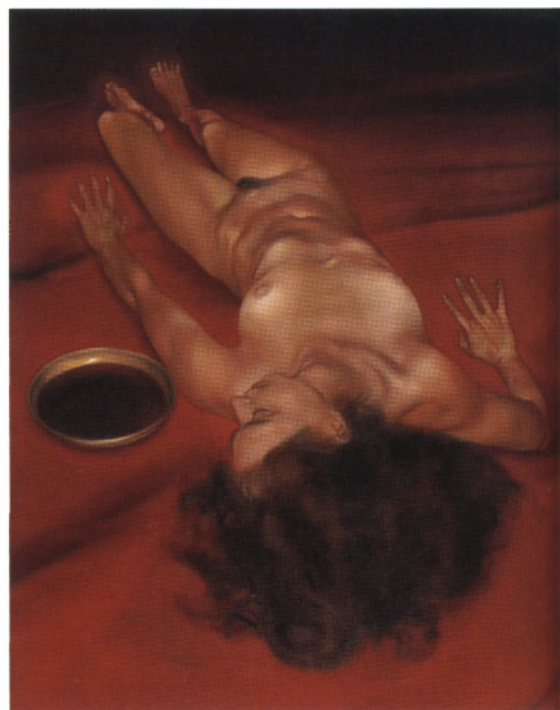
RA: Occasionally in Spare's work we see a lightning bolt extending from the eye, perhaps symbolic of his interest in the Stoic concept of vision through the 'flash of the soul.' The lightning motif is also something we see in your own work, I am thinking here of your woodcuts *Omnes Visiones* (2004) and *Visio corporea et suprema* (2004), among others. What were you exploring here?

FP: In 2004 I derived the lightning motif from Spare's representation of visions. I adopted the motif for a set of four woodcuts inspired by reading *De Theologia Mystica*, a fifth-century treatise by Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite. This treatise is typical of others of the first period of Christianity, adopting neo-Platonic issues and themes, as is the case with the notion of the nuptiae, the mystical wedding, the visions and encounters between man and god. I was particularly struck by the phrase in the treatise that stated which vision could be considered 'holy' and how much: "Visio corporea est infima, visio imaginaria est media, visio intellectualis est suprema". Thus, I published three woodcuts in an original artist book, inverting the hierarchy of the captions and making the lightning come out from the sex in *Visio corporea et suprema*, from the eye in *Visio imaginaria est medi* and from the head in *Visio intellectualis est infima*. I then added a fourth woodcut that was thought for the union of the three, and titled it *Omnes Visiones*, all the visions.

Left
Ascension

RA: Talking of symbolism, we mentioned Blake earlier. How has your appreciation of his work changed since you first encountered it?

FP: Through time it has become clear to me that the fully vital content of Blake's art cannot be grasped without a very serious, thorough and prolonged investigation. Consequently, I now consider that my adolescent approach to Blake must have been as much sincerely enthusiastic as inevitably superficial. Fundamental at the beginning have been the books by David Bindman and also Samuel Foster Damon (I now have an entire section of my library dedicated to studies on

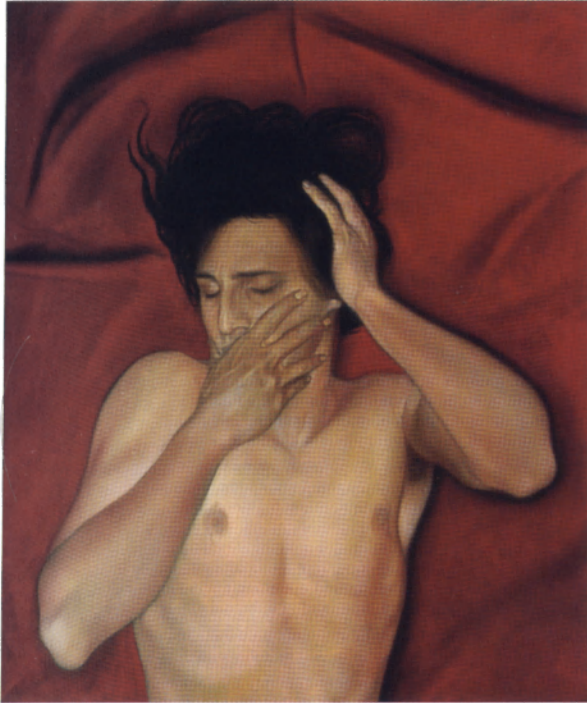


Blake...), as these works introduced me to the pure ingeniousness and originality of William Blake. Initially I have been fascinated by *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and particularly by the 'Proverbs of Hell' (translated by the great poet Giuseppe Ungaretti), not because I could be attracted by the infernal themes – with their sequence of stereotyped paraphernalia – but rather because I found those 'memorable sayings' to be the right integration to Nietzsche's speculations, that I was reading at the same time as I was reading Blake. But *The Marriage* shocked me deeply and impressively only later on, when I bought a facsimile edition with the reproduction of the illuminated pages. The whole of Blake's work is in fact based on a treatment of reality that becomes autonomous and fully expressed only through unity in the right proportion between the written and the figurative poetical elements. What really still attracts me in Blake's art are the 'inexpressible'

themes and the tension between their inexpressibility and the aspiration to express them through the use of the human figure. Through this the spectator is involved in the perception of an anthropomorphized space, such being the entire of Blake's visionary world. Blake, as well as Spare – although in a minor and late way, has abolished and dismantled the myth of the divine origin of the psychical element, showing its zoological genealogy, its descent from an 'inferior' sphere: man. It is this tension that still is of continuous spur to me.

RA: Blake was a pioneer in alternative processes of etching and lithography. Have you ever considered experimenting in this way yourself?

FP: Technique is a very individualistic 'private' experience, that we only acquire through personal exercise and applica-



tion. The procedures used by Blake for his 'Illuminated Printing' was in fact the most extravagant and fantastic version of his technique: bitumen inks and superimposition of plates. This type of process and result, complex to the point of excess, was actually a development of his approach to technique from his personal mystical vision. Trying to travel over again that specific artistic path, that stemmed from an extremely 'private' psychological disposition, would be as much paradoxical as impossible. This is the reason why, I believe, not one of Blake's pupils, known as 'the Ancients,' ever tried to replicate that type of technique. On the other hand, modern artists have tried to follow Blake in his graphical experiments, such as Miró (who with Rutwen Todd and Stanley Hayter succeeded in 'breaking' the procedures invented by Blake); but with results that I personally find rather dull and self-indulgent. The sense of tradition that I

have always felt very strongly, never allowed me to get lost on that kind of path.

RA: I am interested to know your thoughts towards his followers, 'the Ancients' as they were called, particularly Edward Calvert who was very interesting both philosophically and creatively.

FP: Among the artists known as 'the Ancients', Calvert has been – without any doubt – the nearest to Blake for intellectual and formal reasons. I have been strongly impressed by his writings on music and colour, but most of all, his spiritual attitude has interested me, always in a sort of balance between paganism and Christianity. The 'naughty disobedient heresies' by Calvert and the poems by Palmer inspired me much more than their figurative compositions. From the formal

Left
Lucidità Erotocomotosa
(triptych)



point of view I must say that other artists that were immediately antecedent to Blake, such as John Hamilton Mortimer, James Barry and Alexander Runciman, have been for me much more inspiring.

RA: After Blake was re-discovered, there was a revival in romanticism, particularly in print-making in the 1920s. I am thinking here of the early work of Graham Sutherland, that of Robin Tanner, and others. Do you feel you are part of this tradition?

FP: No, in this I remain deeply locked in the Italian tradition. But I might have taken some elements from the revival of printmaking immediately before the 1920s. The line of Charles Ricketts as well as that of Charles Shannon, for example, are now inspiring some of my latest woodcuts. But if we consider carefully these British artists we find that they were great admirers of Italian art (Shannon, for example, was particularly taken by Tiziano) and that at the foundation of their work as illustrators lies one of the most beautiful books in the world: the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* printed in Venice by Aldo Manuzio in 1499.

RA: The work of 'the Ancients' reflected a very English idyll, particularly the Shoreham period, but many who have visited Italy will glimpse the magical quintessence of the Italian landscape in your oil paintings and wood-engravings. In what way do you feel connected to this landscape and what does it mean for you?

FP: A full and true comprehension of my *pittura di paesaggio* would need a personal and direct knowledge of the real object of my paintings. It is not a question of 'places dreamed of' but of real places; as much substantially real as emotionally capable of evocative suggestions. Among all the variety of the Italian landscape the Roman one remains the more mysterious and deeply fascinating: its horizontal lines broken by small hills and mounds are not found anywhere else and under the small terraces one always seems to foresee the shadow of some ancient tumulus or the appearance of the vestige of an ancient civilization.

RA: I agree with you completely on the vestiges of the Roman landscape, and they suggest perhaps also an echo of strange ancient rites. But you have also lived in New York, that must have been quite different inspirationally?

FP: A period spent living in New York is a must for every artist, particularly when New York is still felt and known as an idea and not as a real place. Prior to my staying there, I had only a sort of 'cinematographic' notion of the place and my impact with its reality was devastating. I lived for more than one year in a limbo, until the day in which I had my personal exhibition. New York to me remains a large megastore: I bought an immense quantity of books.

RA: You have some interesting projects in progress, particularly one working with an Italian private press, tell us what you plans are for the future.

FP: I have just finished printing *The Secret Supper*, a book edited by Colophon in Belluno. It is an artist book with 4 woodcuts and a text by the title of 'Interrogatio Johannis' that relates to an ancient ritual of the Catar Heresy. I am also on the verge of finishing the woodcuts for an edition of Charles Algernon Swinburne's *Hymn to Proserpine*. We do not have too many private presses in this country, and although this limits my activity as an illustrator, it actually favours my production of woodcuts unlimited by restrictions of size and subject. Finally I am also collecting iconographic material for a set of woodcuts of large format on Shabbetay Tzevi, the Jewish heretic messiah lived in the second half of XVII century: perhaps the most demanding and engaging of my artistic projects.

Left
Iris

RA: We shall look forward to that Francesco, thank you.

FP: Thank you.







Catalogues, articles and essays on prints and printmakers

- 'Bruno da Osimo' in *Area* n. 50 settembre 2000, Roma 2000
 L'oro e l'inchiostro, la prima guerra mondiale nelle incisioni del Premio della Regina 1935, Edizioni Novecento, Latina 2004
 'Lucifer over London – l'opera grafica di Austin Osman Spare dal 1904 al 1927' in *Ex Libris*, n.29 (n.2 nuova serie), Milano 2004
 Alberto Martini' in *Area* n. 93 luglio agosto 2004, Roma 2004
 Immagini della Grande Guerra nelle incisioni per il "Concorso della Regina", Aa. Vv., A 90 anni dalla Grande Guerra-Arte e storia del conflitto, Roma 2005
 'La collezione Tabarroni' in *Area* aprile 2004, Roma 2004
 'Gino Barbieri' in *Grafica d'arte*, n. 61 gennaio-marzo 2005, Milano 2005
 Duilio Cambellotti xilografo e illustratore, Edizioni Novecento, Latina 2007
 Duilio Rossoni, incisioni e disegni, Edizioni Officine Vereia, Roma 2007
 Duilio Cambellotti disegni per le *Romanae Fabulae*, Edizioni Officine Vereia, Roma 2008
 Leonardo Castellani, Duilio Rossoni, Nunzio Gulino. *Tre incisori e l'anima del paesaggio*, Chieri (Torino) 2008
Tecnica e tradizione della xilografia, Edizioni Officine Vereia, Roma 2009

Selected Solo Exhibitions

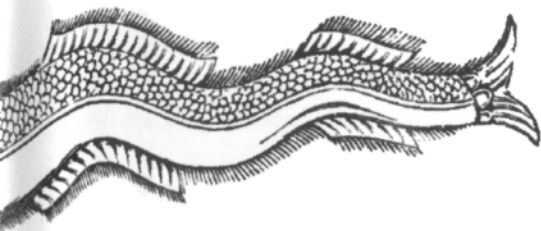
Previous
Valle di Grottarossa
 (diptych)

Left
Pantocrator

- 2009 Francesco Parisi, Incisioni, disegni, ceramiche, Galleria Simone Aleandri Arte Contemporanea, Rome (in preparation)
 2009 Francesco Parisi, Dipinti, Incisioni, Pastelli 2006-2009, Galleria Russo, Rome
 2008 Francesco Parisi, Xilografie e disegni, Centro per la grafica Formello, Rome
 2006 Francesco Parisi, Recent pastel landscape, Caelum Gallery, New York
 2006 Francesco Parisi, disegni e incisioni, Studio Morbiducci, Rome
 2006 Francesco Parisi, xilografie disegni incisioni 1999-2006, Galleria il Quadrato, Chieri (Torino)
 2005 Francesco Parisi, Xilografie e opere su carta, Galleria Edizioni la Conchiglia, Rome; Museo Aldo Manuzio, Bassiano; Villa Romana Florenz, Florence.
 2004 Francesco Parisi, Paesaggi e simboli, Galleria Russo, Rome.
 2004 Francesco Parisi, Das Antlitz der Gotter, Galleria Muenchener Hausbau, Muenchen.
 2003 Francesco Parisi, opera grafica, Galleria Russo, Rome.
 2003 Francesco Parisi, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Contemporanea, Ciampino.
 2002 Francesco Parisi, Xilografie, Villa Romana Studio Max Beckmann, Florence.
 2002 Francesco Parisi, Xilografie, Galleria Comunale d'arte moderna e contemporanea, Cagliari.
 2002 Francesco Parisi, Xilografie e opere su carta, Galleria Lydia Palumbo Scalzi, Latina.
 2001 Francesco Parisi, Oli e disegni e incisioni, Spazio Interno 9, Rome.
 1998 Francesco Parisi, Galleria Caillot, Paris.
 1997 Francesco Parisi, Galleria Danae, Paris.
 1996 Francesco Parisi, Galleria Eralov, Rome.
 1995 Francesco Parisi, Galleria Guy, Paris.

Mermaid Surgery

Allyson Shaw



The preoperative marks are made. Bells
ring. I'm pried from the bow
of a ship, dredged from the forgotten half
of a waking sailor's dream: woman with tail
born in the shallows, twenty feet
deep, sans legs, song

in throat. My body knows this song.
It's in me, as peals in bells,
the prettiest in the sea. But I wish for feet.
You know, that bow
of arch, little toes, to be rid of the tail,
this scaled end, my heavier half.

So went deeper than my birth-reef, to the half
of sea no one sees and traded my song
for legs. Down deep I met old Gravy Tail
in her lair strung with bells,
ringing, ringing. She's earless and wears a bow
on her head to hide it. *So you want feet?*

she squeaks. Her serpents howl *Feet! Feeeeet!*
I say: *I'll give you my voice, the high half
you can hear.* I scrape and bow,
plead with her. But she wants the whole song,
certain she could add to her bells,
cure herself. *Take my tail,*

too. I notice her trophies, many a tail
mounted, used as feet
for the table, hollowed for bells.
I am boxed. She saws me in half,
a good magician. Song
gone, my will and wishes bow

to Her Imperial Deafness. I dream I'm bow-
pinned, painted wood, my tail
decorating the hull of a burning ship, my song
a disaster; men fling themselves, feet
first, over head. They drown. My hair's at half
mast as they ring the sea. Rings spread: a bell's

plangent song, sinking. Now I watch tail bow,
arch and wriggle without me. New feet, half-
healed already, bleed. Unlike the loud bell of tail.

Caveat Anoynter!

A Study of Flying Ointments and their Plants

Sarah Penicka-Smith

Before they are carried to their meetings, they anoint their Foreheads, and Hand-wrists with an Oyl the Spirit brings them (which smells raw), and then they are carried in a very short time.¹

The concept of flying ointments (hallucinogens which make the intoxicated believe they can fly) holds a rational appeal for the fabulous myth that witches flew on broomsticks. Yet like many more of the accusations laid by inquisitors against their victims in medieval times, there is a strong case to be made for such ointments being no more real than the Black Sabbath itself. Although it is not my intention to argue for or against the definite existence of flying ointments, consideration of the various arguments surrounding them provide a background for the study to follow: namely: the histories and mythologies of those plants most closely associated with the stereotypical witch. All of these plants have flourished on their somewhat dubious reputations in religion, superstition and in all art and literature which chooses to reference this dank part of European ethnobotany.

The most titillating hypothesis regarding flying ointments suggests they were hallucinogenic compounds applied to the mucous membranes of the vagina with the handle of a broomstick, hence the popular belief that witches flew on broomsticks. While this is an entirely charming proposition, it is difficult to substantiate; most ingredients listed in recipes for flying ointments are harmless. Only deadly nightshade and possibly hemlock are truly hallucinogenic, and these are also highly toxic – generally more so, one could argue, than their shamanic counterparts in the Americas especially. Aconite is included in recipes but is not hallucinogenic, however, neither henbane, mandrake nor datura were used in flying ointments although all three are hallucinogenic.² Datura had not yet arrived from the New World and mandrake's *mythos* had already reached Europe before the herb itself arrived, but there seems to be no good reason why henbane, which came to be associated with witches at a later stage, was not mentioned at

this point. As these are the most poisonous plants available throughout Europe it seems a definite possibility that they were recognised in connection with witches not because they were widely regarded as hallucinogenic, but simply because they were deadly. This would also seem to be the primary reason why some of the herbs turned up in flying ointments while other, more effective, possibilities did not.

Those with a more syncretic bent argue that in light of shamanic practice elsewhere in regard to sacred hallucinogens, it seems unlikely that Europe could own several such potent plants and have them remain both unrecognised and unused for this purpose. It does seem entirely possible that pre-Christian religious practices could have utilised the hallucinogenic properties of these plants. However, for the argument that they remained in use throughout the Middle Ages to be valid, one would have to maintain, following scholars such as Margaret Murray, that there was a continuous witch-cult which preserved pagan practice from the ancient past. This is a theory which most scholars are long past upholding.

The proportion of those transcripts from witch trials that give detailed descriptions of flying ointments is not great, although there are numerous examples of witches applying a flying ointment before departing for the Sabbath. In such cases the ointment, or at least the appropriate recipe, was usually provided by the devil himself. It is the continuous presence of this ointment which gave some credence to the concept of flight which was hotly contested as early as the tenth century CE; and no doubt it is still under examination today only because the possibility of a hallucinogenic ointment somewhat tempers rational disbelief in the subject. The proposal of the *Canon Episcopi* that if witches flew, it was in their imagination, was overruled in the fifteenth century by the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which labelled such views as 'heretical' and 'altogether false,' as it allowed witches to go unpunished.³

1. Testimony of Elizabeth Style, taken from the Somerset witch trials, 1664 as found in Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult In Western Europe*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 101.

2. Richard Evans Schultes and Albert Hoffman, *Plants Of The Gods*. (Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 1979), 49.

3. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1928), 104.

4. Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. (London: John Rodker, 1584), 105.

5. *Ibid.*

Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie Of Witchcraft* of 1584 is the most forthcoming text in terms of recipes, much of which Margaret Murray lists in her *Witch-Cult In Western Europe* as 'hearsay evidence' – in other words, she does not follow up on, or even provide, Scot's sources. Scot in fact quotes from one man, Johannes Baptista Neapolitanus, who was 'cousened by an old witch' from whom he learnt that witches

[take]... the fat of yoong children, and seeth it with water in a brasen vessell, reserving the thickest of that which remaineth boiled in the bottome, which they laie up and keep, untill occasion serveth to use it. They put hereunto *eleoselinum*, *aconitum*, *frondes populeas*, and soote.⁴

Of these ingredients, only *aconitum* (aconite, or monkshood) could have any noticeable alterative effect, and monkshood is not generally recognised as hallucinogenic. The effect of *eleoselinum* depends on its definition, commonly thought to be parsley, although a strong case can be made for the aesthetically similar and hallucinogenic hemlock. Poplar and soot are about as likely to be hallucinogenic as baby fat. However, another recipe calls for the mysterious

[s]ium, *acarum vulgare*, *pentaphyllon*, the blood of a flitter mouse, *solanum somniferum*, & *oleum*. They stampe all these together, and then they rubbe all parts of their bodies exceedinglie, till they looke red, and be verie hot, so as the pores may be opened, and their flesh soluble and loose. They joine herewithall either fat, or oile in steed thereof, that the force of the ointment maie the rather pearse inwardly, and so be more effectuell.⁵

In this case the effective ingredient is no doubt *solanum somniferum*, or deadly nightshade. Although not all ingredients are readily identifiable, nothing else seems to be alterative in effect. This same Johannes Baptista Neapolitanus also reports the tale most used in support of truly effective hallucinogenic flying ointments. This is the account of a witch falling haplessly into his hands, who promised 'to fetch me an errand out of hand from farre countries,' whereupon she undressed, 'froted hir bodie with certeine ointments' and slept soundly (all this in spite of the fact that Neapolitanus and his accomplices took it upon themselves to 'beate hir exceedinglie'



beforehand). Upon awaking, the witch 'spoke manie vaine and doting words,' claiming she had flown to distant places, although of course she had been within plain sight of them all along.⁶

Murray of course appends her quotes from the *Discoverie* with the comment, 'Scot is, as usual, extraordinarily inaccurate in his statements,'⁷ and provides adulterated formulae in an appendix. This appendix gives three recipes for flying ointments, presented by Murray as being definitive: (i) parsley, water of aconite, poplar leaves and soot;⁸ (ii) water parsnip, sweet flag, cinquefoil, bat's blood, deadly nightshade, and soot; (iii) baby's fat, juice of water parsnip, aconite, cinquefoil, deadly nightshade and soot.⁹

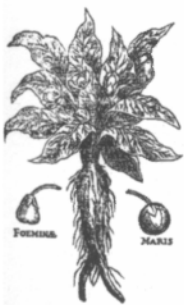
Murray's colleague A. J. Clark, the composer of this appendix, considers the above compilation to 'show that the society of witches had a very creditable knowledge of the art of poisoning,'¹⁰ since aconite and deadly nightshade are two of Europe's three most toxic plants, the third being hemlock, which closely resembles the otherwise innocuous water parsnip. Unfortunately, aconite is not hallucinogenic; in fact, the only hallucinogen definitively mentioned here is nightshade. This appears to be a small fly in the ointment to those who would claim that there was free and easy knowledge of hallucinogenic plants in the counter-culture of medieval Europe.

However, it does lend credence to the theory that such herbs were associated with witches more because of their deadly poison than the fact that they were regularly employed as hallucinogens. For by the time of Jonson and Shakespeare, those herbs most freely associated with witchcraft include nightshade, hemlock, henbane and mandrake. Over the last few centuries, *datura stramonium* or thornapple has gradually joined the ranks, coming as it did to Europe from America in the seventeenth century.

Of the several plants in flying ointment recipes which have no known alterative effect, perhaps the greatest surprise is parsley (*petroselinum sativum*). The fact that the umbelliferous hemlock bears some resemblance to parsley may account for this, but it is interesting to note just how widespread the infamy of this kitchen savoury was. It was a herb of death for the Greeks, who decked their tombs with it, and Plutarch describes the flight of an entire army on sighting an ass encumbered with parsley. In Europe a young girl sowing parsley courted sex with the Devil.¹¹ In Devon, parsley is considered

a plant of evil omen, making it unlucky to either plant or transplant, leading one country gentleman as late as 1940 to state that he would not transplant parsley for a hundred pounds.¹² Even a paper on the cultivation of parsley given in 1897 before the Devon and Exeter Gardeners' Association lapsed into folklore, restating the common belief that 'it is one of the longest seeds to lie in the ground before germinating; it has been said to go to the Devil and back nine times before coming up. And many people have a great objection to planting parsley, saying that if you do so there will be sure to be a death in the family within twelve months.'¹³ The number of times parsley goes to the Devil before sprouting seems to vary from province to province; in Notham for example, it only visits him three times. Various countermeasures were put in place to allow parsley to be planted safely: in Hartland, it could only be sown by a woman; in Newton Abbot and Tavistock only when church bells were ringing, and in Shillingford and Totnes only on Good Friday.¹⁴

Death and poison go hand in hand with the devil in rural Britain and when it comes to plants whose connection with the darkness is slightly more pronounced, henbane receives the appellation 'devil's eye,' *datura* is 'devil's apple' (or sometimes 'devil's trumpet' in contrast to its more elegant relative brug-



6. Ibid.

7. Murray, *Witch-Cult*, 100n.

8. This list is clearly from Scot, only Murray has omitted the baby fat.

9. Murray, *Witch-Cult*, 279. My translation of the original French presented by Murray: (i) du persil, de l'eau de l'Aconite, des feuilles de Peuple, et de la suye; (ii) de la Berle, de l'Acorum vulgaire, de la Quintefeuille, de Morelle, et de suye; (iii) de graisse d'enfant, de suc d'Ache, d'Aconite, de Quintefeuille, de Morelle, et de suye.

10. Ibid.

11. William A. Emboden, *Bizarre Plants*. (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 55.

12. Anne Marie Lafonte, *Herbal Folklore*. (Bideford: Badger Books, 1984), 64.

13. Lafonte, *Herbal Folklore*, 63.

14. Ibid.

15. Lesley Gordon, *Green Magic* (London: Ebury Press, 1977), 51.

16. Emboden, *Bizarre Plants*, 59.

17. Ben Jonson, 'The Sad Shepherd,' in *Three Centuries Of Drama: English 1751-1810*, ed. Waldron (New York: Readex Microprint, 1961), 47.

18. Ibid.

19. Kate Greenaway and Jean Marsh, *The Illuminated Language of Flowers*. (London: Macdonald and Jane's), 42, 22, 54, 34.

20. Gordon, *Green Magic*, 97.

21. Christopher Jakob Trew, *The Herbal of the Count Palatin*. (London: Harrap, 1985), 36.

22. Emboden, *Bizarre Plants*, p145.

23. Gordon, *Green Magic*, 36.

24. Charles Daubeny, *Lectures On Roman Husbandry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1857), 275.

25. Daubeny, *Lectures*, 257.

mansia, the 'angel's trumpet') and hemlock 'devil's flower.'¹⁵ Even the Devil's genitals are catered for by mandrake fruit as his testicles and *phallus impudicus*, a kind of foetid fungus, as his penis.¹⁶

The reputations of the above mentioned 'hexing herbs' as the group domain of witches was well established in Shakespeare's time, with playwright Ben Jonson associating his character Maudlin the Envious, the witch of Popplewick, with

The venom'd plants

Wherewith she kills! where the sad mandrake grows,
Whose groans are deathful! the dead-numming nightshade!
The stupifying hemlock! adders tongue!¹⁷

These herbs were also frequently used in drama to create an atmosphere of horror or deathliness, as is the case in Jonson's 'Sad Shepherd', where Aeglamour laments the loss of the fair Earine with an apocalyptic vision made all the more horrific through the use of dark botanic imagery:

Cold hemlock? yew? the mandrake or the box?
These may grow still; but what can spring beside?
Did not the whole earth sicken when she died?¹⁸

Shakespeare was also a master in the art of these botanical references, as we will see a little further on.

All of these plants remained in the repertoire of Victorian lovers well versed in the complicated language of flowers. Originally, this language arose among the upper classes as an elegant way of passing love letters between wooing couples. Over a hundred and fifty floral dictionaries were published in that time, resulting in a detailed and often contradictory language: a gift of mandrake, for example, signified 'horror;' belladonna signified 'silence'; datura, (listed in the floral dictionaries under 'thornapple') symbolised 'deceitful charms;' but the most poisonous message of all comes from hemlock, meaning 'you will be the death of me.'¹⁹

Perhaps the herb with the greatest proliferation of legend is the mandrake, whose chief claim to fame is the vague resemblance its thick root bears to the human form; indeed, early herbalists distinguished between a male and female species. It is native to the Mediterranean although uncommon, and is nowadays considered endangered. Early references to

mandrake favour it as a powerful aphrodisiac and promoter of fertility. The most famous instance of this can be found in Genesis 30:14 where Reuben brings mandrakes to his mother, Leah, which prompts Leah's sister, the barren Rachel, to beg, 'Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes.' Leah reluctantly strikes a deal with her barren sister, and the childless Rachel does indeed conceive from eating of Reuben's mandrakes.

Such powers were recognised by the Babylonians and the Egyptians, in whose country mandrake has strong ties although it is not a native. Mandrake roots were found in the sixth row of Tut Ankh Amun's floral colarette²⁰ and Egyptian myth makes good use of the stupefying properties of the mandrake as seen, for example, in the tale of Ra and Mator. Mator was sent to earth by an angry Ra in order to punish mankind, however the plan backfired when Mator massacred so many people that Ra eventually forced him to drink the blood of his victims mixed with mandrake root which drugged him so that he slept until he had forgotten his purpose on earth.²¹ Both Pliny and Dioscorides record use of mandrake as an anaesthetic for surgery.²²

Mandrake was known to the Greeks as mandragoras (*μάνδραγορας*, lit. 'hurtful to cattle'), and it, along with deadly nightshade, is one of the candidates for the pig-producing brew of Circe in Homer's *Odyssey*. It was dedicated to Hecate as Greek goddess of magic and sorcery, as were deadly nightshade and aconite.²³ The Vienna manuscript of Dioscorides includes a macabre drawing which encapsulates the myth of the mandrake neatly. The Goddess of Discovery is seen presenting a fully formed male mandrake root to Dioscorides. Each are smiling pleasantly at their imagined audience while a dog suffers its death agonies in the foreground.²⁴ The unfortunate canine formed a vital part of the mandrake's elaborate harvest ritual, for the screams of the plant when disturbed were believed to be so piercing as to be fatal. The historian Josephus (37100CE) in his *Wars of the Jews* records that mandrake harvesters

dig all round the root, so that it adheres to the earth only by its extremities. Then they fasten a dog to the root by a string, and the dog, striving to follow his master who calls him away, easily tears up the plant, but then dies on the spot.²⁵

The mandrake arrived in England in 1562, first cultivated by the herbalist Turner,²⁶ although Jonson's and Shakespeare's familiarity with the plant would suggest that its mythos had travelled from the Greeks long before. In Jonson's *The Masque Of Queens* (1609) twelve 'Haggies' meet to discuss their evil-doings:

I, last night; lay all alone,
o' the ground, to heare the Mandrake grone;
And pluckt him up, though he grew full low,
And, as I had done, the Cock did crow.²⁷

Jonson's notes to the masque show extensive research, including reference to Pliny, and adding that 'the forcing of it up is so fatallie dangerous, as the Groner kills, and therefore they do it with Doggs.'²⁸ A further 'Hagge' refers to Hemlock, Henbane and Nightshade, which Jonson explains as 'the most common veneficall ingredients; remembered by Paracelsus, Porta, Agrippa, and others.'²⁹ Oddly enough, by the time the mandrake was actually being cultivated in England, John Gerard's damning *Grete Herball* of 1526 was already in print. There, Gerard dismisses most of the current knowledge of mandrakes as 'ridiculous tales ... of old wives or runnegate surgeons, or phisick mongers.'³⁰

Shakespeare also uses the mandrake to provoke horror in his audience in both *Henry VI* and *Romeo and Juliet* where, at IV.iii.45-8, Juliet laments her impending incarceration in the Capulet monument:

Alack, alack! Is it not like that I
So early waking, what with loathsome smells,
And shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad...³¹

In sixteenth century Germany, the mandrake reappeared as the *alraun*, a central ingredient in the spells of the forest magicians known as *alryuminae*. This myth appears to have had its origin far further back in Germanic myth.³² After the Middle Ages, it had become entrenched in the household custom of treating mandrakes as human to the point of keeping them well-clothed, fed and bathed, the bath water being used to protect all within the household. The safe-keeping of an *alraun* led to immortality, wealth, protection and power; to lose one was to court agonising death.³³

By the seventeenth century it was believed that mandrakes sprang from the drippings of gallows corpses – male mandrakes from men, female plants from women.³⁴ A connection was made between mandrakes and oaks as companion plants, with mandrakes said to grow under *quercus robur*, the original gallows tree for criminals. This myth claimed oaks used for gallows as the property of the Devil.³⁵ This conception of oaks seems to have been an attempt to link the mandrake with the gallows, and it is a connection frequently made in mythology but with no clear origin. This connection between mandrake and oak, however, appears to be a later myth due to the late arrival of mandrake in Europe, thus missing the Middle Ages altogether.³⁶

Despite its category of worth and definite hallucinogenic properties, mandrake was not included in flying ointments, no doubt for reasons of accessibility. However, it is clear that it is one of the herbs most commonly associated with witchcraft. For since mandrake's reputation had far preceded it, it was relatively easy for it to slip into European thought not as a great cure or a godly herb, but as a plant belonging to the devil; it had no need to rely on being a flying ointment in order to gain its position or its power.

Atropa belladonna, however, is another story. Both *hallucogenuc' auct' itulai, ut' ut' adly' or' em' chantes' s' nigh' s' l' ad'* received its botanical name from the third of the Fates, Atropos, who cut the thread of life when it was ended.³⁷ In Chaucer's day it was called 'dwale,' a term of troublesome etymology, perhaps coming from the Latin *dolere* (to suffer), or, more probably, from either the French *deuil* (grief) or Scandinavian *dool* (delay, sleep).³⁸ In Germany, it is known as *Tollkraut* and in France, *morelle mortelle*.³⁹

Belladonna has had a strong reputation as a poison since antiquity, where it seems to have been the poison of choice for military tactics. Plutarch gives a graphic account of the effects of belladonna on Marcus Antonius' soldiers during the Parthian wars, and in his *History of Scotland* (1582) Buchanan claims that Macbeth's soldiers under Duncan I poisoned an entire Danish army with dwale-tainted liquor under truce. Suffering under the strength of such intoxication, the invaders were easily murdered in their sleep by the Scots.⁴⁰ This is paralleled by an earlier tale of Hannibal's victory over African rebels. The Carthaginian soldiers staged a retreat, leaving behind mandrake wine, which stupefied their enemies, thus allowing for easy slaughter.⁴¹

Tradition holds that belladonna is the devil's weed and he takes especial care of it, trimming it and tending it to while away his leisure hours. A further connection to the supposed evils of witchcraft comes with the suggestion that belladonna gained its name for its occasional ability to transform into a beautiful enchantress who was dangerous to look upon. However, the most likely derivation of its name is from the habit Italian ladies had of dropping a tincture of it into their eyes, as even a small amount is able to dilate the pupils.⁴² Unlike belladonna, seemingly the drug of choice for poisoning en masse, hemlock has, since antiquity, been reserved for disposing of the individual. It was the finest form of capital punishment reserved for the upper classes, with Socrates being one of the most noted figures to die of legally administered hemlock. Hemlock was known to the Greeks as *konium*, derived from the word *komas*, 'to whirl about,' for the plant causes vertigo and death. In 1737, Linnaeus restored its name to *conium maculatum*. *Maculatum* meaning 'spotted' was added referring to the purple streaks on the hemlock plant's stem, which old English legend chose to associate with the mark of Cain.⁴³ The chief symptoms of hemlock poisoning are narcosis and paralysis with loss of speech, followed by depression of the respiratory system until death from asphyxia. However, the

mind remains clear until point of death. Death has resulted from consuming both the upper parts of the hemlock plant and the highly poisonous root of its cousin cowbane, the water hemlock (*cicuta virosa*).⁴⁴ It is this latter plant that may have been meant by the 'water parsnip' in the flying ointments provided by Reginald Scot which I outlined earlier.

Although not a known hallucinogen, aconite (*aconitum napellus* or monkshood) was probably mentioned in flying ointments because it is extraordinarily deadly. It has been pointed out, most notably in Murray, that cardiac arrhythmia produced by aconite may, when combined with the delirium of belladonna intoxication, produce a sensation of flying. However this may merely be a case of grasping at straws, as it seems more likely to suppose aconite was included in flying ointments simply because of its highly toxic and therefore suspect nature. Although not a native, it was known of in England since at least the tenth century. The Anglo-Saxons in particular recognised it as *thung*, which seems to have been their generic term for any extremely poisonous plant. The name aconite (an anglicisation of its Latin name) followed, but it has also been called wolfsbane, monkshood and helmet-flower. As with hemlock, the mind of one suffering from aconite poisoning remains clear.⁴⁵ Aconite's unsavoury reputation includes being created by Hecate from the slobber of Cerberus, and was supposed to have been the poison Medea prepared for Theseus which the old and infirm men of the island of Ceos were condemned to drink when they could no longer contribute to the State.⁴⁶ It has little to recommend it for a hallucinogenic preparation and therefore must have found its way into the recipes by some other route; namely: a very poor reputation.

Some researchers have found it necessary to settle debate on the efficacy of flying ointments by trialling a recipe themselves. This was the case in a modern trial conducted by Erich-Will Peuckert at the University of Gottingen. Drawing upon several medieval recipes, Peuckert tested on himself and a colleague a flying ointment that contained deadly nightshade, thornapple, henbane, wild celery and parsley in a base of hog's lard.

The ointment caused the two men to fall into a trance-like sleep for twenty hours, during which each had nearly identical dreams of flying through the air to a mountain top and participating in erotic orgies with monsters and demons. Upon awakening, both men had headaches and felt depressed.



26. On Tumer, see M. Grieve, *A Modern Herbal* (Twickenham: Tiger International Books, 1931), 510.

27. Ben Jonson, 'The Masque of Queenes,' in Waldron, *Three Centuries*, 5.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Ben Jonson, 'The Masque of Queenes,' in Waldron, *Three Centuries*, 7.

30. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 511.

31. *The Arden Shakespeare* (third series) ed. Brian Gibbons (New York: Routledge, 1980), 205-6.

32. Jeannine E. Talley, 'Runes, Mandrakes and Gallows' in *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity*, ed. G.J. Larson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 161.

33. Emboden, *Bizarre Plants*, 153-4.

34. Trew, *Herbal of Palatin*, 59.

35. Emboden, *Bizarre Plants*, 61-62.

36. Talley, 'Runes,' 161.

37. Gordon, *Green Magic*, 36.

38. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 584.

39. Gordon, *Green Magic*, 100.

40. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 484-5.

41. Emboden, *Bizarre Plants*, 152.

42. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 585.

43. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 392.

44. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 393-4.

45. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 8-9.

46. Grieve, *Modern Herbal*, 9.

Peuckert was impressed with the intense realism of the dreams.⁴⁷

Note that the inclusion of thomapple, or datura, is not authentic, as this particular herb is not mentioned in connection with flying ointments and only arrived in Europe from the New World in the seventeenth century. Datura's connection with witchcraft is far more recent, and its current notoriety is probably due more to the efforts of Carlos Castaneda than the Inquisition.

If flying ointments truly were part of an ancient pagan past, then their legacy in modern witchcraft fares poorly, being chequered at best. Gerald Gardner, the father figure of the modern witchcraft movement, claims that flying ointments are non-existent, insisting that he knows of no twentieth-century witches who have ever used ointments of any kind. To explain the testimonies of mediaeval witches, Gardner offers the staid hypothesis: greasy unguents were to keep naked witches warm during outdoor rites, or even to make them slippery when caught.⁴⁸ The fact that Gardner makes no mention of the hallucinogenic nature of several of the plants involved suggests an ignorance of the subject that becomes a recurring theme among modern witches, most of whom acknowledge the power of hallucinogens to alter states of consciousness, but claim they are better able to do so without the help of drugs.

This is well captured in an interview between self-proclaimed 'practising Witch, Rock-Goddess and freelance journalist' Fiona Home and two members of western Sydney's Elder-grove Coven, the High Priestess Hawthorn and High Priest Lawrence. In response to Home's enquiry about drugs and coven meetings, Hawthorn makes it clear that drugs play no role whatsoever:

[t]here are specific ways for altering [one's] state [of consciousness] for rituals – meditation, trancework and raising power alters states. Drugs are not recommended, it is the last method you should turn to and only then under very strict supervision, and never at open meetings.⁴⁹

47. Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. (New York: Facts on File, 1989), 255.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Fiona Home, *Witch: A Personal Journey* (Sydney: Random House, 1998), 223.

50. Home, *Witch*, 125.

51. Home, *Witch*, 126-7.

52. Emma Restall Orr, *The Principles of Druidry* (London: Thorsons, 1998), 66.

Similar opinions are expressed by the solitary practitioner. Home herself dedicates an entire chapter of her *Witch: A Personal Journey* to 'magickal [sic] drugs,' suggesting that although it can be constructive in the evolution of the spiritual self to experience the effects of certain drugs in a magickal [sic] environment,⁵⁰ she herself does not use hallucinogenic drugs or attend rituals where others use them. Home ensures that her audience is clear about the fact that no witch is forced to take drugs by fellow covenors, and she stresses the view that drugs are an optional extra rather than an integral part of witchcraft. She warns specifically against using aconite, deadly nightshade and hemlock, insisting that they 'should only be used by experienced and trained Witches' due to their poisonous qualities.⁵¹

Despite druidic connections with shamanism and indications that their forefathers indulged in psychedelic activity, modern druids echo the opinions of modern witches in their stance on drugs, as Emma Restall Orr makes clear in her *Principles of Druidry*:

The use of illegal drugs is not encouraged in any part of modern Druidry, not even the shamanic. It might be acknowledged that hallucinogenic drugs were taken by our ancestors in the tradition in the same way that certain plants are still used today in tribal religions around the world. However, most traditions within Druidry now teach the abilities to break through levels of consciousness, reaching trance states and ecstasy, using just the powers of the mind.⁵²

The implications contained within this statement, and in the sentiment expressed by Fiona Home and others, are staggering. For in effect, modern druids and witches claim superiority over their ancestors (albeit perhaps unconsciously) by claiming to be able to perform all rituals necessary to their traditions relying solely on their own unenhanced abilities. Note that Orr is careful to avoid specifying which plants tribal religions still use, and note also that her statement opens with reference to 'illegal drugs.' Either Orr does not want her readership to know which drugs feature in tribal religions, or else she is herself ignorant not only of what these drugs are, but also of the fact that most of them actually are legal. Indeed, modern witchcraft's assertion of the relation between hallucinogens

and illegality is quite pronounced, and would suggest a general ignorance of the possibilities contained within the scope of flying ointments.

So it is that after several centuries of flourishing under reputations both dubious and glorious, including a brief blossoming during the witch craze of Western Europe, the hexing herbs are fading into oblivion. Their toxicity, the factor which catapulted them into the limelight of flying ointments and general devilry, is now largely ignored by today's counter-culture, most notably the modern witchcraft movement, who ironically enough, are precisely the ones widely believed to be conversant with mind-altering drugs. The myths alone remain, and these are not myths widely revered or even understood by those who identify themselves as modern witches. Of the plants themselves, the mandrake is endangered; all the other herbs are regarded as weeds, and they have once again returned to the fringes of society.



The Uncertainty of Illumination

Gnosis and Epistemology in Traditional Craft

Stuart Inman



Within the teachings of various forms of Traditional Witchcraft, riddles, questions and enigmatic symbols are frequently employed as a imparting knowledge. These techniques are probably best illustrated by the 'Robert Cochrane Letters,' which are certainly among the best known examples of this method. In this essay I want to reflect upon my own experience as an ex-student of Joseph Bearwalker Wilson, founder of the 1734 tradition, in the hope that I may both to illuminate the landscape of this realm of thought and to reflect back at the strange trajectory of my training, in which much has been (and often remains) uncertain. In the seven or so years of my apprenticeship with Joe he was rarely, if ever, prescriptive when discussing approaches towards the practice of his teachings. There were certainly wrong methods and wrong ideas that Joe would argue against vehemently; he was happy to point out possible approaches that seemed likely to be fruitful, but these were not regarded as being the right way in any doctrinaire fashion, the only right way. For the most part the student had to find their own way, make it their own – *their* practice and hard-won wisdom. To a great extent this approach to teaching was based on what he had learned from his own teachers, including Robert Cochrane.

Although I have used the terms 'apprenticeship' and 'student,' these were terms that Joe rarely used himself. In fact it took me several years to understand the degree to which I had entered an apprenticeship. It was an almost-entirely informal relationship and, while Joe was obviously the elder and needed to express and impart his ideas, it was hardly ever done in a formal teaching environment. More than that, it only became an apprenticeship gradually. At first there was only one person who could be regarded as his apprentice and

also as his successor. Later, when their relationship broke down, he decided on a different approach which met the needs of the changed circumstances. All the time I had known Joe he had been seriously ill and his failing health gave the work a great sense of urgency. In the last months of his life he started to organise at great speed a small group of senior students to carry on his work, knowing he would soon die.

A few years before his death Joe Wilson explained his function within 1734 and his teaching method as follows:

Before I go too far I have to issue a disclaimer like the one both Sean and Roy gave me. In a way I'm not teaching you. I'm helping you, guiding you, to teach yourself. In 1734 there is NO hard and fast dogma, but sometimes I have to use dogma to explain things. The minute a person accepts that dogma at face value and chooses to make it the focus of their practices is the minute they have lost the 1734 spirit and moved over to something else entirely. People show me they are learning when they go beyond the dogma and show me its inner meaning – perhaps by giving me a different illustration with the same meaning. When you can do that you are following the spirit, the essence, of 1734.¹

I remember Joe saying on more than one occasion that when people approached him, looking for a teacher, he told them he no longer took students. Often they would then just vanish; this, he said, was the first test. People who were willing to stick around and discuss things with Joe would find that even if they were not formally students and very certainly not disciples, they had entered a relationship in which their understanding was challenged and in which they learned to

think differently. For many, such an approach is extremely frustrating. I have come across people, time after time, who have claimed to want to learn the 1734 system of traditional witchcraft and who have quickly come to ask: what are the rituals? How do I do this? Faced with a series of questions, glyphs, riddles, they have supposed this to be some kind of intellectual preliminary before being given the substance of a set series of rites. They fail to understand that those riddles have been a fundamental part of the system that can allow them to develop rites and other practices of their own, according to their own needs and orientation, within the wider understanding of the principles of the Craft.

The present essay is not my first attempt to explain the principles of this mode of engendering gnosis, but it is a first attempt to explain it in more intellectual and philosophical terms. As such it might seem at variance to a notion of 'traditional witchcraft' as a continuous line of peasants retaining a kind of unbroken folk tradition, but it is far more in key with both the ancient teachings of the *Hermetica* and with certain elements of modern and post-modern thought that sees such practices as fundamentally disruptive and subversive of established habits of thinking. Tradition thus becomes a kind of anti-tradition and what one had supposed to be rather comfortable and folksy reveals itself as a cousin to Zen. In setting this relationship to gnosis we also establish a complex relationship to epistemology.

At this point it is necessary to refer to Joe's own story of how he came to learn this system and of the relationship between the 1734 tradition and Robert Cochrane's Clan of Tubal Cain. According to the Wikipedia article on Joe Wilson:

Wilson joined the Air Force in September 1961, and in autumn 1962 he met another airman called Sean who introduced him to ritual practices designed to bring mental focus. Sean's wife also taught Wilson the use of roots and herbs to perform magic spells. Sean coached in a type of spiritual awareness which Joe felt was similar to, but not the same as, witchcraft Sean also recommended readings to him, of which the most influential were *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, *The Magic Arts in Celtic Britain* by Lewis Spence, and *The Golden Bough* by Sir James George Frazer, however Wilson found Sean's practical teachings more valuable than these written works.²

The article continues:

In 1964 Wilson started a four page newsletter he called *The Waxing Moon* which was "a journal of the old religion" or "a witchcraft newsletter". In 1965 an advertisement for *Pentagram* in *The Waxing Moon* put him in contact with Roy Bowers, alias 'Robert Cochrane', with whom he studied by mail until Bowers' death in 1966.³

In the last few years Robert Cochrane and his Clan of Tubal Cain have received increasing attention and interest, in marked contrast to the situation when he died, at which time he was seemingly fated to be forgotten. The writings of Evan John Jones and, more recently, Shani Oates have done much to explain the basis of Cochrane's tradition while still leaving much as a mystery for the individual to discover for themselves. It is this attitude of not succumbing to mystification but retaining a genuine regard for the mysteries 'hidden in plain sight' that is common to both traditions.⁴ Briefly, Cochrane claimed to be a hereditary witch, trained by an aunt in his Craft. This, clearly, is somewhat doubtful, although there are many indications that he did meet and learn from practitioners of various folk magical traditions, including the Horse Whisperers. He worked in various jobs, including as a blacksmith, and once lived on a narrow boat. Both these are possible sources of traditional lore.

In a series of articles, mostly published in the magazine *Pentagram*, Cochrane hinted that his tradition was a genuine continuation of the ancient mystery traditions. It is my contention that, although it is unlikely that this claim was true in the most literal sense (as an unbroken lineal tradition) yet in the broader sense, in terms of meaning and intent, this claim is precisely true. Cochrane used many riddles and diagrams, drawing on many sources to illustrate his meanings, most significantly among published sources, Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*.⁵ Although this work is ignored

1. Joseph Bearwalker Wilson, email to private list, 1998.

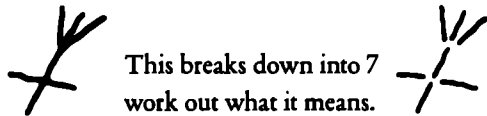
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Bearwalker_Wilson#1734_tradition [accessed July 2009].

3. Ibid. (These references are given for the sake of convenience as their own source; Joe's draft autobiography 'Wart and All' is not currently available on his own Toteg website. It can, however be found at the following url until the Toteg website is fully restored: <http://web.archive.org/web/20050909060705/www.toteg.org/Joseph/Warts.html>).

4. A good online source for a sympathetic overview of Cochrane: <http://www.clanofubalcain.org.uk/tctrad.html>.

by scholars, except scholars of Robert Graves, given its unreliability as a historical source, it is a wonderful compendium of mythical and poetic lore.

Here is the crux of the matter then: the essential method of these traditions is not learning by rote, performing set and established rituals, ticking the boxes, as it were, but wresting from these problematic sources a poetic insight that transforms mere information into gnosis. This gnosis, however, is not to be understood as content, but rather as a process and a relationship between informational nodes that allows them to radiate in a wholly different fashion. To a large degree, but not exclusively, ritual form follows insight, reinforcing it, rather than blindly following the ritual in the hope that it will eventually illuminate the practitioner. Early on in the correspondence, in the second letter from Robert Cochrane to Joe Wilson, Cochrane signs off with a curious glyph and a task.⁶



As you can see, it is composed of two main elements, a lower cross (+) and an upper shape of three rays (||/) resulting in this:



In the third letter from Robert Cochrane to Joe Wilson, he confirms that the glyph is '1734,' and all the clues to this answer had been discussed in the second letter above the glyph:

Likewise the order of 1734 is not a date of an event, but a grouping of numerals that mean something to a 'witch.' One that becomes Seven states of wisdom – the Goddess of the Cauldron. Three that are the Queens of the Elements – Fire belonging alone to Man, and the Blacksmith God. Four that are the queens of the Wind Gods. The Jewish orthodoxy believe that whosoever knows the holy and Unspeakable Name of God – has absolute power over the world of form. Very briefly, the Name of God spoken as Tetragramaton ("I AM THAT I AM")

breaks down in Hebrew to the letters IHVH, or the Adam Kadmon (The Heavenly Man). Adam Kadmon is a composite of all Archangels – in other words a poetic statement of the names of the Elements. So what the Jew and the 'witch' believe alike, is that the man who discovers the secret of the Elements controls the physical world. 1734 is the 'witch' way of saying IHVH.⁷

This is interesting in several respects: firstly in that Cochrane, while establishing a British context for his tradition, is not afraid to connect it to Qabalistic formulae of the Tetragramaton; and secondly – this is a point I will build on later – he is not simply applying Qabala, but using it *analogically*, establishing both similarity and difference. He is not using a Qabalistic system, but employing it to illuminate his own. The glyph now seems to embody an entire cosmology, but more than that, it can suggest, for anybody willing to focus on it and investigate it sufficiently, a ritual format and more. In a recent article, Robin the Dart, Magister of the Clan of Tubal Cain, has written about the ciphers used by Cochrane and explains that another element of the glyph is its origin as a bind-rune.⁸ Early on in my training in 1734 it was suggested to me that I try to use the glyph in the manner of a Spare sigil.

It should be clear by now that while in some cases there is a right or wrong answer to a riddle or a correct interpretation to a symbols, it is rarely the only valid answer. Typically, these symbols are polysemic, holding a range of meanings that might be quite different for some people and yet retain their validity. The question is often not, 'is it right?' but, 'does it work?' The essential method therefore is not of learning by rote, but of gaining insight to be applied by the practitioner in their own way. This does not mean that there can be no set practices, but they are secondary to the essential method of poetic insight. Joe expanded on this as follows:

As far as 1734 is concerned there is only one 'text book' that is necessary. This is *The White Goddess*, by Robert Graves. If you don't have it, get it. I'll seldom tell you to read anything in particular there. The book's primary purpose is to help you to think in a poetic manner, to expand your personal vision to include those things that you may not have considered connected before. To learn to rhyme not words, but thoughts, concepts, emotions, experiences and in so doing to blow your mind wide open

to the possibility of that which is beyond our conception. This is mystical, and yet is also practical, and down to earth. We must never forget our connection and our duty of involvement in our lives, our families, our communities.

Ok, that said I can say this:

I'm one difficult son of a bitch.

I don't teach in usual methods.

I'm most likely not going to teach you what you think I'm going to teach you.

What you'll be getting from me is the 'essence of 1734' the way I was taught it, and very much the same way.⁹

His first analogy was with Zen:

1734 is filled with riddles. In many ways these riddles are examples of the dogma I mentioned in the first paragraph. The riddles themselves have no meaning. The answers by themselves have no meaning. What does have meaning is what happens to a person who, in their search for Wisdom, is trying to figure out the riddles. The closest analogy (though it's not identical) is one from Zen Buddhism. In Zen there is a state of being called 'satori.' Satori is an 'ah hah!' experience that is similar to 'Enlightenment' – a glimpse of the state of No-Mind which, unlike Enlightenment, is not a permanent attainment. All that it really is, is a flash view of what Enlightenment has in store.

Zen Masters use many methods to help their chelas to reach enlightenment. Among those methods is the Zen Koan. A Koan is a question, such as 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' that a chela is given. It's a riddle to be solved, in many ways like a 1734 riddle. Knowing the answer means nothing. Arriving at and experiencing the answer means everything. The answer to all Koans is known and could be recited by most Zen students. However just reciting the answer does not give the chela that experience of Satori. For example the correct answer to 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' is to slap the Master across the face. Although just doing that might give the chela some pleasure (Zen Masters are not known for their gentleness and kindness with students) it does not give the chela that Satori experience.

It's pretty similar with the 1734 riddles. Just knowing a

particular answer, or all of the answers, isn't what it's about. You could read all of the 'correct' answers and it would really be meaningless to you. That's only knowing some dogma. I'm aware that some people claiming to be 1734 have made knowing the answers into some kind of dogma in itself. That's a sure sign that they have followed the Lapwing and strayed away from the essence of the tradition.

The way I was taught the ways of 1734 is a kind of alchemical process, and the practitioner is in the process of turning the dross of self into the alchemical gold via the crisis of the 'Ah Hah!' moments that come about by solving the riddles. Each moment is a step up the ladder to Wisdom. The riddles themselves are unimportant, and those contained in letters to me could easily be discarded while keeping the soul of the tradition alive.¹⁰

Quite a lot of this requires further explanation. For instance, why the reference to lapwings? This is not so very mysterious, the lapwing is a symbol of how the mind can become misled, seduced by the mystery (deliberately lower case) the romance and the glamour of the path, taking the aspirant further and further away from what they desire, either to remain englamoured and deluded or to awaken, desolate and embittered. The lapwing is discussed by Graves:

The Greeks called the lapwing *polyplagktos*, 'luring on deceitfully' and had a proverbial phrase 'more beseechful than a lapwing' which they used for artful beggars... At first I was fooled every time by her agonized peewit, peewit, screamed from the contradictory direction to the one in which her eggs lay.¹¹

5. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* ed. with introduction by Grevel Lindop (London: Carcanet Press 1997).

6. <http://www.cyberwitch.com/bowers/> (linked to the official Clan of Tubal Cain website, the same material is on the 1734 website at: <http://www.1734-witchcraft.org/lettertwo.html>). See also Robert Cochrane with Evan John Jones, *The Robert Cochrane Letters: An Insight into Modern Traditional Witchcraft*, ed. Michael Howard (Chievly: Capall Bann, 2003).

7. Cochrane, *Letters*, Second Letter to Joseph Wilson.

8. Robin the Dart, unpublished article to appear on the Clan of Tubal Cain website, see: <http://www.clanoftubalcain.org.uk/>.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Graves, *White Goddess*, 54.

I will return to the figure of the lapwing later. More importantly for our current concern is Joe's reference to *The White Goddess* which is described as a 'grammar of poetic myth.' It is fair to say that Graves' work has often been criticised for its fast and loose way with facts and scholarship and, viewed as a scholarly work, quite right too. It can seem sloppy, misleading, wrong, and even mad. But the purpose of the book is not primarily that of a scholarly work. It is rather as Grevel Lindop has cogently expressed it:

A second observation is that unless we believe Graves to have worked entirely unconsciously – a difficult thing to imagine of such a massively experienced writer as he was by 1948 – we must assume that he knew, broadly speaking, what he was doing, and that there is a deliberate play of the lapwing about all this: that Graves camouflaged the nature of his most important conclusions in an extremely artful way, putting them on the page for all to see and yet misdirecting the reader's attention in such a way that it was extremely difficult to realise exactly what was being said. The reader feels and intuits the message but cannot grasp it by processes of rational thinking. In other words, grappling with the book induces in the reader, willy-nilly, a state of poetic trance. Either that, or the reader rejects the book as unreadable. In short, *The White Goddess* is a book that makes poets; and it makes them by stimulating the non-rational, intuitive and mythically creative side of the mind.¹²

It is easy enough to see that Wilson and Lindop, who never had any contact with each other and no direct influence apart from Graves, are saying very similar things. Joe's version is more mystical, Lindop's is more concerned with the poetic and could be understood in a more materialist way; nevertheless, their understandings seem to be very close, and to complement each other in trying to come to terms with this uncertain poetic illumination. Perhaps the difference is this: Lindop recognises in *The White Goddess* Graves' intention to make his readers think poetically, to make poets of them. Wilson, influenced by Cochrane, finds an inspiration for a poetic method to make witches, or at any rate initiates of the mysteries. These might, of course, amount to the same thing.

I return to Joe's reference to Zen and the koan, 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' Some accounts of Zen seem to consider that the koans are random sayings, nonsense. They

are certainly paradoxical and cannot be solved rationally. On the other hand they are not random, but are, if you like, irrational examples of a philosophy that has a strong and definite logic to it. Zen is a part of Mahayana Buddhism and one important Mahayana scripture, the Heart Sutra, seems very relevant here. It opens, 'form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form.'¹³ In attempting to describe the underlying emptiness of all phenomena a dialectic of form and emptiness is set up and the opposing terms set in a dynamic relationship. In this context the one hand clapping can be seen as expressing the same idea, a hand of form and a hand of emptiness clapping together and producing a 'soundless sound.' Needless to say, this might reveal an underlying structure, but it does nothing to solve the actual koan! The koan can only be answered by dissolving one's preconceptions and arriving at a new insight but it is impossible, or at least incredibly difficult, to arrive at that insight without the proper context. A similar technique is revealed in an article by Peter Kingsley on the ancient Hermetic writers, 'Knowing beyond Knowing':

The way that this process works in the Hermetic tradition is clear... The scene opens on the disciple complaining that, in the earlier stages of the teaching, his teacher had never said anything clear about the highest truth but had just talked in riddles. Now, he insists, is the time for the great revelation. But the revelation doesn't come. Instead, the teacher talks more enigmatically than ever... When the disciple says he is so disoriented that he can't even find himself, the teacher laconically replies: 'If only that were the case!'¹⁴

As I have observed elsewhere, Kingsley points out that the whole process leads to one thing, 'a totally different dimension – a dimension beyond words, and a dimension of utter silence.'¹⁵ Kingsley's point, made in much greater depth and detail in his books is that, at the centre of the ancient traditions, and also at the roots of Western Philosophy, lies buried a tradition of contemplation centred on silence and stillness.¹⁶ I have aimed to show that a comparison can be made between the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the teachings of Robert Cochrane.¹⁷ Oddly enough, this ties in very well with a point made by Robert Cochrane. In his third letter to Joe Wilson he says:

So the Cauldron is Generation and Re-generation. Taliesin asked 'what two words were not spoken from the Cauldron?' A question I now ask you, giving these pointers. The Cauldron at this level means movement, a becoming of life – ever giving birth, ever creating new inspiration. There is within the Cauldron all things and all future – fate. Therefore, there is one state the Cauldron cannot be – What is it? In finding the answer you will come to understand the Cauldron. ...therefore the simplest way of expressing what the Cauldron is not is by saying 'Be Still.'¹⁸

I want to be quite careful here, for silence and stillness belong to a dimension of experience that is quite different to everything that belongs to life, to death and to all forms of knowledge except for this form of gnosis. The typical riddle is given to be solved and it might open up aspects of symbolism or ritual information, it might have a single right solution or not, but in any case many riddles are given, not in order to foster that single right solution, but as a provocation. For example, the so-called mystery of the Secret Name is based on the assertion by Cochrane that, '1734 is the "witch" way of saying IHVH.'¹⁹ Towards the end of his life Joe Wilson revealed his own working out of this conundrum:

I had similar disappointments when I tried to use the numerological system that Robert Graves discussed in Chapter 16 of his *The White Goddess*. Here I had some encouragement though. I didn't care for the association of 1=A 7=P 3=I 4=O because somehow 'Apio' just didn't sound pretty to my ears. And so I arbitrarily decided that the first two numbers '17' must be considered a unit not separate digits, and must therefore be associated with the letter H to which Graves did not assign a number. And of course the letter H isn't pronounced, so by extension 1734 would be HIO, and pronounced IO. That appealed to me. It also amused me that Io is the name of a Hellenic White Cow Goddess also identified with the moon.²⁰

In my own search for this name I had come across a quite different solution within the *White Goddess* that gave an almost identical result. When I pointed this out to Joe, he explained that he had arrived at his answer with the help of Norman Gills, an Oxfordshire cunning man who had known and worked with Cochrane. Although his solution was in line

with Cochrane's way of thinking, it had no affirmation from him that it was right. I commented that in that case perhaps my own solution could be the right one. Joe just replied, 'maybe,' and turned to something else. A further dimension to this riddle and its solutions came in discussion with the current Maid of the Clan of Tubal Cain, Shani Oates. She pointed out that the quest for a hidden name in 1734 had no part in the teachings of the Clan. Therefore in one sense this could be seen as an illusory search and an illusory solution, but she then insisted that this did not mean that it was actually wrong or meaningless. Although the name of 1734 had not been sanctioned by Cochrane or his successors, nevertheless it bore fruit. It revealed an insight into a poetic and mystical structure.

My contention is, therefore, that as I said earlier, the gnosis thus won is not a 'content,' a particular piece of information (although it might be that as well) but a process and a relationship. The actual information might be wrong or unreliable, but the process of seeking allows a new relation to arise that has as its foundation silence and stillness.

The tendency to chase after illusions and content oneself with illusory answers is called the lapwing, but while a real lapwing never wishes the seeker to find her nest, here the lapwing can become a potent teacher. In a previous article on 1734 I wrote:

Alternatively, we might become obsessed with a particular group or ideology, a convert and true believer who has never really thought very much about whether that system has any reality or truth, or indeed what that truth might be, we accept it as true because we believe it, even if next week we believe something different. To mix

12. Grevel Lindop, 'The White Goddess: Sources, Contexts, Meanings.' Lecture text.

13. The Heart Sutra, trans. Edward Conze <http://kr.buddhism.org/zen/sutras/conze.html>. [accessed July 2009].

14. Peter Kingsley, 'Knowing beyond Knowing,' <http://peterkingsley.org/pkofice/images/knowning.pdf> [accessed July 2009]. *Corpus Hermeticum*, Book 13, Hermes to Tat, in *The Way of Hermes, The Corpus Hermeticum*, eds. and trans. Clement Salaman, Dorinne van Oyen and William D. Wharton (London: Duckbacks, 1999).

15. Ibid.

16. Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Golden Sufi Center, 1999); Peter Kingsley, *Reality*. (Golden Sufi Center, 2003).

17. Stuart Inman, '1734 – Approaching the Mysteries: Part One: Those Damned Riddles,' *The Cauldron* 131 (2009).

18. Cochrane, *Letters*, Fourth Letter to Joseph Wilson.

19. Ibid.

20. <http://www.1734-witchcraft.org/riddles.html>. [accessed July 2009]

metaphors a bit, we are like moths drawn to a flame, but the flame is a will o the wisp. As long as our spiritual quest stays at this level we are “chasing lapwings” and as long as we are doing no more than chasing lapwings, we are wasting our time, victims of our own mind’s tendency to succumb to glamour.²¹

But once it is understood that the lapwing leads us in a direction diametrically opposed to that which we seek much can be learned from inverting the lapwing’s trail. Once one has seen through the illusions of the lapwing one has an understanding of the nature of illusion within all phenomena. From this perspective the content of our knowledge and its veracity can seem far less certain and this must lead us to a kind of crisis of knowledge. This then is why I have made a claim to an epistemology, because I have wanted to point to, not only a form of knowledge, but the basis and structure of that knowledge, its very nature, its status as a kind of knowledge, and why, in claiming that it was process rather than content, it could be called gnosis. The information might be unreliable and the belief erroneous, but still, if they bring us to the dimension of stillness our ‘knowledge of knowledge’ might become something embodied as a form of truth.

Most esoteric traditions regard themselves as possessing some kind of great truth within the information they impart to their initiates. Thus the Golden Dawn claimed to have the correct attributions of the Tarot trumps in relation to the Qabalistic Tree of Life. Aleister Crowley was to come to regard these correspondences as being flawed because of a line in *The Book of the Law*, ‘tzaddi is not the Star.’ The problem with this idea is that it seems to have not existed prior to the nineteenth century and the writings of Eliphaz Levi among others, hinting at such attributions. The roots of the Tarot would seem to be quite unqabalistic and thus the attribution is, at a literal level, illusory. Does this mean that it is without value? I would argue that if all one is doing is compiling a vast array of correspondences that have no basis in fact, then it is an utter waste of time, and such an attitude must seem commonsensical to many. But on the other hand, what if, despite this recent provenance of the idea, it is capable of emitting light? What if it has some practical application that overrides the seeming illusion?

21. Stuart Inman, ‘1734: Approaching the Mysteries Part 3: Lapwing, Dog and Roebuck: The Three Guardians,’ *The Cauldron* 133 (2009).

22. Shani Oates ‘St Uzec Menhir and the Mysteries of Tubal Cain,’ *The Cauldron* 132 (2009).

If some of the more traditional-seeming esotericists wish to insist on the literal truth of their correspondences, then some would be radical members of the Chaos Magic fraternity might see no problem in this, happily quoting, ‘if nothing is true, then everything is permitted,’ and deciding that if one wishes to ascribe strawberry jam to Kether then strawberry jam it will be. I really would not wish to parody all chaos practitioners equally, only that tendency of some of the less intelligent and less critical ones to be quite indiscriminate in their applications of what might be termed a magical theory of relativity.

It should be apparent by now that what I have been groping towards is such a trajectory: knowledge as a relation between things, connecting things and other ideas together. But in arriving at such a trajectory I find I can neither accept the positions of the literalists of tradition nor the inventions of the chaos wannabees. If truth, as fact, remains uncertain, that does not mean that it is unknown or unknowable or non-existent. It simply means that it remains uncertain, limited, and must be constantly challenged in order to allow a greater degree of knowledge. That knowledge will inevitably be experimental and liable to change. In a recent article on Robert Cochrane’s description of the menhir of St Uzec, Shani Oates writes, ‘Cochrane was keen to assert how symbols (can and must) change their meanings according to each group/era using them. His philosophy against the strictures of dogma in which he extols the necessity of evolution form the core tenet expounded throughout all his public and non-public teachings and works.’²² So once again we can see variability, uncertainty and innovation coming from a basis of tradition, tradition as an endlessly shifting vector rather than an immobile position. Uncertainty becomes less something to be overcome and more something to be embraced, thus allowing truth to remain open-ended, a realm of possibility rather than the territory of dogma.

You may chose to disagree with what I have written here, after all who am I? On the other hand, can you really dismiss my argument? After all, who are you?

Sorceries of the Threshold

Transgression into the Between States



Approach

What can be found in-between the ‘in-betweenness concepts?’ The concept of the in-between unavoidably implies endless proliferation of other concepts about it, in an infinite regress of idealized forms, and has the supreme value of having no meaning even in relation to other concepts, since its own meaning is itself merely relational. Without two poles, each of which that which is in-between them is *not*, there is no betweenness. Thus the in-betweenness concepts are *neither* these poles, *nor* that which is between them, *itself*, but rather *all the possible concepts* between *other* concepts. What remains in-between them but the in-betweenness itself, as *concept*? Not the void, since not negation, nor negation of negation. Prior to affirmation or negation, neither being nor non-being, the in-betweenness concept enables locational relation: it permits – and permeates – meaning, without meaning anything itself.

The Nine Thresholds of Sorcery

The Art and Craft of Reifying Desire via the Ids



Each of these Thresholds accesses a sorcerous concept between Aesthesis – the Absolute Belief – and the Great Doubt which informs all Technique. In their relations, arrangements, and alignments – secrets known only to the sorcerer through practical engagement with the Art – these concepts abstract the obsessional ids which form the pre-rational Body of Desire. In crossing these Thresholds, the sorcerer's consciousness embraces and interpenetrates that total Body, the Desires of which are the cynosures of carnal awareness: reified power enfolded. This Body – considered as a Whole – is itself the full potentiality of all the sorcerer's ability *at once* and *as one*, though its component concepts be either numberless, unnumbered, or both. Following the currents of shifting awareness between one Threshold and another, the motions of the sorcerous Body form the oblique angles which open into the hidden domains of atavistic consciousness.

THE THRESHOLD OF DELUSION

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Just between awakening and dreaming exists a condition of indeterminate lucidity generically accessible to all in frequent moments of inattention, distraction, or transition. Analogically and literally, it provides a sensory example of the condition of habitual delusion thrown into relief by its weirdness: a cloaked figure stands over one's bed, threatening, indistinguishable from nightmare save that one is actually awake and seeing one's own cloak, hanging. Likewise for most waking fears or terrors, even of death: they lurk in the dusky interstices between conscious thoughts but cast their shadows over their lucidity. Yet the waking dreamer might notice that with sufficiently precise attention, the sensation of apprehension and suffocating paralysis characteristic of being preyed upon by the emissaries of the wardrobe does not dissipate – immediately – upon the realization that it is a 'delusion.' Likewise, those invaded by the crawling horrors frequently attendant upon the fully waking nightmare of a 'bad trip' often remember exactly why these entities are crawling or slithering through their veins – and often to their greater horror.

Through their tangential reality, these shores of insanity offer a direct opportunity for anyone lucid enough to pay attention to experience the glamour and illusion of sorcery. The first successful crossing of the Threshold means control over one's insanity. Further crossings mean control over that of others.

The moment of greatest danger, and potential (power or confusion), is when 'sanity' and 'insanity' (the whole and the part) cannot be objectively distinguished at all. The moment of greatest clarity – and effectiveness – is when the two cannot be distinguished *subjectively* either. In simultaneity, these Moments of Transition indicate both objective madness (*wod*) and subjective illumination. More commonly, it is their relations and angles which allow the further sorcerous thresholds to be distinguished. Madness itself has no relation to sanity and insanity, being both, either, or neither as the moment demands – or allows. Subjective madness is the bane and greatest seduction of sorcery; objective illumination is its fail-safe and foil.

Functionally, sorcery works by reifying delusions. The sorcerer's madness comes to be sanity not through self-transformation, self-knowledge, or self-understanding, but rather the effective propagation of personal insanities into objective reality. It could thus be understood that sorcery is the exact reverse of psychotherapy: instead of bringing the subjective awareness back 'into line' with known conditions, it is imposed into known conditions to such an extent that belief in them itself becomes delusional. Therein also dwells the risk and seductive horror of sorcery: does the sorcerer *want* to make private and possibly demented fictions a living reality?

Thus the therapeutic applications of sorcery come into focus: self-ensorcelment offers not sanity but meta-sanity: a choice of sanities and insanities, objectively mad, but self-maintaining and self-illuminating – a darkly shining, internal fire in the psyche.

This 'meta-sorcery' also offers further risks: does the sorcerer wish to live in a world wherein all perspectives are known to be equally sane? Or rather in a dream-world wherein all perspectives are equally insane? Those whose affection for (or addiction to) liminality lead them to choose instead the fluctuating vagaries of a waking dream may find in its shifting relations – both further sanity and insanity.

In organizing the relations of the omnipresent delusions in-between waking sanity, waking insanity, and dreaming madness, the sorcerer may subjectively determine the reference points of sanity for each momentary awareness, seducing the madness into manifestation, or out of it, at will, by playing the oppositions of subjectivity and objectivity against each other – with the reified madness raging between them, driven on and fueled by the inner fire of sorcery, feeding on the flesh, as the sorcerer feeds the fire.

THE THRESHOLD OF FRUSTRATION

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When the dissonance between subjective expectation and objective perception becomes too great, the psyche's fragmentation offers new interstices for the egress of the will. Throwing off beliefs as excreta they breed autonomous ids invested with the sorcerer's own desires, fulfilling the conscious will unconsciously, as living embodiments of the evolutionary process. In this way the knowledge of the atavisms is a self-rehearsal of backward sorcery. The mundane experience the crossing of this threshold in the invention of new technologies unceasingly, but 'any technology distinguishable from magic is insufficiently advanced,' to quote Gehm's Corollary to Clarke's Third Law of Prediction.

It is in the exploitation of this dissonance that the sorcerer may turn compulsive instinct into Art. Sufficient mastery of sorcery grants a choice of frustrations; willed descent into obsession, extracting mutual autonomy in exchange for the angst of the flesh. Even sensation can be controlled by these means: will manifesting as perception, remanifesting as will.

The moment of transition can be felt, but only between attempts to look for it. These attempts empower the sorcerer's willed effort but simultaneously inhibit the result. This basic principle of magic itself derives from a more general principle of consciousness. Its bi-polar nature and innate duality necessitates oscillation between opposites in order for it to have sufficient momentum to turn upon itself: which is, itself, a primary criterion for consciousness. (All other consciousness is potential, the potential remembered atavistically as subconscious.)

Control and release of this remembered potential is the basic technique of all sorcery, whether itself conscious, unconscious, or subconscious. Mastery of all three forms permits the sorcerer's will to pervade waking, dream, and even sleep. While crossing the threshold of frustration gives the sorcerer subjective knowledge of these techniques, objective application of them involves either unlocking – or battering down – the barrier of frustration. The liminality here is between apparent self and apparent other. It is only with great care, or great force, but always (hopefully) great caution, that the sorcerer violates this supreme boundary, since recklessness leads away from sorcery into mysticism.

The forgetfulness of the sorcerer is akin to the repression of laughter, and generally functions as the lived equivalent of 'suspension of disbelief.' For the competent and conscious sorcerer, forgetfulness is itself actually the means of belief – but what the sorcerer is forgetting is also both belief (in self) and disbelief (in reality). Thus the will of the self and its power become autonomous while the sorcerer 'plays at living,' identifying fictively with an otherness remembered *as-if* it were a self, all the while forgetting the nature of the pretense. Thus *all the perceptions of this self are willed*, and all of its will is – merely the sorcerer's perception.

Ultimately the sorcerer is *neither*, but *has both*. The alternative is to be strangled by one's own hands after they gouge out one's own eyes. Woden hanged himself after sacrificing one. Loki didn't: but Woden still had him bound. He paid for his double-sight with constant agony, and he is only free between one reality and the next, while his brother's apparent autonomy ends in a wyrd kind of death.

Thus the sorcerer's 'twins of consciousness,' eye and hand, are each themselves possessed by the twin souls, being the cognisant psyche and the Body of Desire aforementioned – itself, always re-membered having been dismembered and forgotten (Woden, Lodur, and the Third disjoined the ancestral One).

Once recalled, and rejoined to the sorcerer's awareness, the shadow-body of desires, slain and risen, is always familiar yet slightly unexpected. Always the same continuity, ceaselessly transfigured by its descents into further flesh, the sorcerer's recognition alienates it from itself. In a tunnel of mirrors, each image remains discrete, only the tunnel broken when the mirror is shattered. Always the images stay isolated: the mirror only provides a field wherein they may be related. The sorcerer can therefore recognize the reflected shade, this double-self, in states of either sanity or insanity.

THE THRESHOLD OF CATHARSIS

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The relief induced by transgression becomes its own threshold through which continuity must be maintained, an interstice of consciousness wherein the will might be lost and the perception fonder. Yet it also opens into further fields of possibility riddled with well-springs of renewal. The descent into indulgence and pleasure remains a difficult opportunity to tap since discomfort tends to stimulate awareness as the flesh allows awareness that enhances its survival. The innate laziness of the sorcerer's horse may tend, then, to serve its rider only when the horse is prodded by some kind of desire. The trick to circumventing this, of course, is to de-condition the consciousness-pain association, through conscious indulgence in ecstasy.

Reflexively, then, the sorcerer may also utilize selective consciousness and selective attention to de-condition susceptibility to pain. While at its basis this is nothing more than simple self-hypnosis, when combined with techniques of willed automatism and the release of disassociate ids, it offers a powerful means of protection and banishment: the sorcerer's consciousness trains the Body of Desire to actively avoid discomfort habitually and without the aid of awareness, leaving the consciousness then free to entertain itself within the Body of Desire's Field of Potentiality. This, then, allows the bliss of mysticism to be partaken of with all the ruthless consistency of the survival-lusts. It even enhances the survival potential of the sorcerer's organism, since normally the death-instinct must eventually compensate for the tortured bondage of consciousness to flesh, by disrupting its continuity with a Great Forgetting that only the thoroughly abused may experience while the flesh remains carnally coherent. The sorcerer who has inverted this process, and applied the averse mysticism of conscious catharsis, will find that the death-id may itself then be turned to the useful task of disrupting anything inhibiting the sorcerer's pleasure, instead of disrupting the sorcerer's participation in it. Freed of obstructions, the sorcerer can actively increase the extent to which consciousness pervades the Body of Desire by the deliberate association of alertness, attention, and awareness (all themselves able to modify the others in a triple triplicity of consciousness) with pleasurable sensation.¹ Thus, the more the sorcerer indulges in the carnal ecstasies of the Body, the more conscious he or she becomes, in total reversal of the normal condition typified by bondage to survival-needs.

If the Threshold of Frustration can be experienced as an intrusive, shadowy darkness obstructing the flow of delusions coursing through the Seas of Madness, imposed into them by what seems the bluntness of objectivity, then the Threshold of Catharsis is an abyss in that Sea, a vast chasm of night opening into infinite dimensions of limitless pleasure. Clearly the risk of losing consciousness therein, is much greater: pain is safe. Pleasure is not.

Falling backward into this gap is often experienced by the sorcerer as sudden or catastrophic disappointment. Sufficient elegance, then, in crossing that threshold may turn disappointment into bliss. The reality of this can be known and studied in those situations of senseless despair sometimes following from great elation: the flesh provides a chemical analog for every arrangement and alignment of awareness.

Thus, the opportunity for reversal: when unchained from the linear limitations of carnal causality, depression must inevitably lead to ecstasy – of consciousness.

The gnosis of *melancholia* and its effluvia, the *lachrimae*, present a historical current which the sorcerer might follow backwardly, sailing up the current of black bile into the vast Sea of Sorrow which, like that of Pleasure and its sister Joy, mingles finally in the Ocean of Ecstasy which nourishes by its water the whole World of Bliss.

1. *Alert alertness* – 'Total' alertness, reflexively sensitive to its own fluctuations; a condition of complete readiness and preparedness not necessarily self-consciously so. *Alert attention* – Attention fixed, but prepared to shift at a moment. *Alert awareness* – Distinct from 'conscious' awareness itself, in that alert awareness is in preparation to perceive some stimulus. *Attentive alertness* – Alertness focused on a particular channel – or avoiding focus on a particular channel, but in any case, deliberately directed. *Attentive attention* – Willed perception, of anything. *Attentive awareness* – Awareness capable of purposeful perception. *Aware alertness* – Alertness capable of conscious increase, decrease, and modification. Self-regulating stress level. *Aware attention* – Self-critical attention, prepared to evaluate its contents. *Aware awareness* – Consciousness.

THE THRESHOLD OF IGNORANCE

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The crossing from innocence to experience so characteristic of gnosis, whether of flesh or spirit, admits transition in only one direction. The assumption that the same is true of ignorance and knowledge is both innocent and itself ignorant.

The ability to ignore things is vital to the sorcerer. All focused will, attention, and awareness depends on the possibility of negating some possibilities and stimuli at the expense of others. The confusion of consciousness itself, with knowledge and the faculty of knowledge, and most perniciously with 'self-knowledge,' is an extreme hindrance to the practice of effective sorcery.

Therefore the sorcerer should deliberately rehearse literal and feigned ignorance in a variety of areas, instead of engaging in the compulsive pursuit of 'knowledge,' or even worse – information. Without the ability to filter (that is, to ignore) not just raw noise but actual data, even potentially useful information becomes noise in its sheer lack of relation to the rest. Information can also be used to indoctrinate and control; totalitarian regimes rely on the usefulness of mass communication systems in 'educating,' or re-educating, the populace. The sorcerer's skills in glamour and illusion in part rest on an ability to control the perceptual ignorance of others, which first depends on one's ability to fool oneself and understand what it means to be fooled. The best con artists often – temporarily – believe their own lies, and the 'true believer' is often self-conned, although unconsciously. The effective fanaticism of those sufficiently skilled in the art of double-think and slight-of-mind to brainwash themselves into any chosen belief can be almost frightening to witness, since it combines the remorseless guiltlessness of arbitrary action with the reasoning conviction of the convert. This ability also rests on the capacity to deliberately ignore the truth.

Non-sorcerous magicians frequently underestimate the usefulness and power of the greatest skill of every mundane person: the ability to keep themselves in a state of thorough and continuous ignorance. Their sanity and health depends upon it, yet this is why disaster, chaos, illness, and death are so frequently associated – by the mundane – with magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. This effectively means that by the mundane definition, the 'magician' must be the opposite of the mundane person – that is, stark raving mad. By the magical definition, the sorcerer might then be and embody the ultimate in *sanity*. Which would require consistency of ignorance even greater than that of the mundane person.

Whether or not there is an ultimate Truth behind all the lies of the Dark Art, the sorcerer (as distinct from various priests, mystics, and so forth) *neither wants to know nor cares*. Even the nihilistic repudiation and denunciation of the Truth credits too much the primacy of 'knowledge' over ignorance. Both religion and science are characterized by their obsession with some sort of objective truth, and art with the subjective truth of beauty.

The crossing of the threshold of ignorance, from the vantage of knowledge, is a specialized form of the act of forgetting by means of Doubt. Skepticism is wrongly considered to be a magical banisher because of the use of Faith by materialistic pseudo-scientists against sorcery and magic under 'laboratory conditions' and other deliberately biased settings. Skepticism properly practiced as a technique of belief (and disbelief) suspension functions as a sorcerous tool relevant to conjuration as often as disenchantment, since it provides the free space of belief necessary to manifest even the most improbable probabilities. After all, anything *could* happen, maybe. When one forgets not only what one thinks one knows, but what one actually knows, one has the opportunity to learn *not* only something new, but also – more importantly – something different.

The crossing into knowledge, the natural progression of the incarnate mind (so often therefore assumed to be the best and the desired), presents the sorcerer with all the usual temptations of power and death. The ability to manage deliberately what is mainly an experience of involuntary shock successfully avoided by many until the last – possible – moment is of great benefit to the sorcerer who chooses to develop it fully. The sorcerer therefore learns how and how not to learn. The pervasive appeal of the Cthulhu mythos of H.P. Lovecraft in (post)modern sorcery seems to owe

much to the realization that the experiences of revelation and horror are intimately related: that which is numinous is often that which humanity was 'not meant' to know. The appeal of Gnostic sorcery seems to be based upon the sorcerer's frequent subjective experience that humanity was meant not to know.

The question of gnosis remains a significant one in the quest for sorcerous knowledge. The context of experiential and empirical understanding would seem to set it apart from 'revelation,' but mysticism generally situates its epistemology, however empirical, in a fashion suggesting catastrophic realizations of either salvific import, in the transcendentalist case, or corrective import, in the case of immanent 'nature' mysticism. This makes the actual significance of gnosis in sorcery all the more surprising; contrary to the mis-association of gnosis with Samadhi, dhyana, trance states, altered consciousness, and the rest of the plethora of manipulations to which the modern psychonaut is likely to subject the mind, the real relevance of gnosis to sorcery is that of innocence to experience. Particularly, sorcerous gnosis represents the loss or even the sacrifice of innocence. The veneration and cherishing of innocence as something to be preserved or protected is a peculiar and pernicious fetish characterizing a thoroughly decadent and anti-magical consensus which has generally demonized and vilified magic in general, and sorcery in particular, as a consequence of its infection by the hideous monotheistic death-cult which presents its horrific desire to eat, consume, cannibalize, or sacrifice children as a type of twisted veneration of 'child-like innocence' or worse, the Baby Jesus. 'Let the little children come unto me,' exemplifying the style of pedophilic invocation practiced by the archontic priests of more than one Ruler of This World (the media being as guilty as the Church). 'Innocence' as generally understood is not specifically or even particularly the province of children generally and still less associated with all the delights of 'child-hood' which the sensible sorcerer preserves into eternity along with all other delights available. And certainly not child-sorcerers, as one sees in *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, for example. Rather, innocence – for the sorcerer, at least – represents unspent currency of belief, belief not specifically free but rather inert in potential. It is the act of spending it which gives it its value, and the difference between the experienced sorcerer and the supposedly 'innocent victim' is that the sorcerer is wealthy whereas the innocent victim is merely a practitioner of pecuniolatry, or worse – a fetishist of Mammon. No child thinks of itself as innocent, venerates innocence, or sexualizes it. But most children (and adults, for that matter) are too ignorant to expend their innocence wisely and well. The sorcerer must be subtler than this, as like the serpent, in willfully pursuing damnation, and should constantly reflect and recollect that dying with unspent innocence is even more wasteful than dying with unspent money, since only the latter can be inherited by descendents.

THE THRESHOLD OF NOVELTY

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Sufficient exposure to madness will necessitate that the sorcerer discern some patterns which appear to characterize personal consistencies of perception. These will tend to manifest as apparent 'novelties' and personal idiosyncrasies and endow the sorcerer with a sense of artistic creativity. All of these rearrangements and juxtapositions of conscious perception and atavistic content will seem to constitute instances of the sorcerer's 'personal aesthetic.' From this alone can be derived the most potent techniques of individual sorcery. The methods of doing so are a series of meta-techniques combining the freedom of empty-handed, style-less spontaneity with the routinised obsessions characterising deeply ingrained habits. This literally liberates the beliefs bound into such routine patterns to become tools of sorcerous power.

This process has nothing to do with developing a 'personal perspective' on magic, nor of attempting to deduce technique from imagery – which might be effective, but rarely in a sufficiently personal context to aid in transmuting personal habits into tools of power. Rather, the sorcerer attempts to discern specific instances in which the general principles of sorcery become, or can become, spontaneously manifest as behavioral art – not only analogically or symbolically, but representationally or even literally. The whole field of life, every arena of the sorcerer's functions, mundane and otherwise, may provide further material for this ultimate Work of the Art. Considering each aspect in turn, the sorcerer traces the function of the original obsession involved, unraveling the bound belief and then re-raveling it according to its prior design, but along the line of new intent, binding all into a tapestry of power. Total crossing of the Threshold allows every act, even the most apparently inconsequential, to contain within it the patterns of a spell.

Nothing need, or should, be excluded from the process, which when complete provides the sorcerer with a totally personal system of techniques which also have the advantage of mundane familiarity. Considering the process in developmental order of primary atavisms, with respects to Leary and Wilson for the Eight Circuits:

Any 'bio-survival' activity offers immense potential for atavistic sorcery, especially when rendered aesthetic. Some common magical techniques rely on this juxtaposition at the outset: 'cooking up' spells to be consumed in a cauldron (or on the stove in the kitchen) or feeding the fire in the hearth. The whole battery of means by which basic survival needs are fulfilled can also be rendered useful to the similarly basic needs of sorcery, however: that which is consumed becomes part of the self, that which is excreted is banished. With sufficiently precise conditioning of the ids, any association – even a sorcerous one – can be imprinted deeply into these primal functions. The development of the 'favorite food,' the 'comfort food,' and the 'security blanket,' for example, engages on a physical level processes which are extremely useful in the transference and management of the ids for sorcery: enchanted foods, talismanic objects, fetishes, and so on, can be empowered through the deliberate engagement of bio-survival compulsions. Many physical compulsion-behaviors and addictions likewise offer potential for self-bondage and self-conditioning, a necessary prerequisite for anchoring permanent self-enhancements. Deliberate self-addiction is an extremely effective, although, costly means of effecting such transformations. Activities seemingly unrelated to this 'circuit of consciousness' but necessary to survival (such as a job or some means of employment) themselves offer a whole battery of possible contexts and techniques. Whatever is done in the context of the 'job' somehow connects to the atavistic survival urges, allowing interesting uses of specialized talents for very primal sorcery.

Likewise, all the emotional and territorial processes can become conduits of sorcerous power and dominance. The 'marking of territory' in any sense establishes the magical domain. Similarly, various forms of social posturing and command-activities already contain within themselves the necessary physical coding which is the material basis of the domination of the will of others through sorcery. It is not just that these scenarios provide a whole grammar for the art of domination, but rather that the *act of domination itself* can also be used as a conveyor of other more complex sorcerous intentions, or even as a focus of unrelated effects carried out through, upon, or with the psyche of the servant. The sorcerer might also choose to make use of opportunities to magically enhance forms of discipline, practiced upon self or others, ranging from going to the gym to participating in the military.

Whether or not symbolist methods of sorcery are used, the sorcerer will at least encounter symbolism minimally in daily life and the works of others. The sorcerer's spoken language and the glyphs in which it is written are as magical as any – if an underlying pattern can be discerned and the related techniques associated. Likewise with concepts of number. Similarly, means of communication, whether written, spoken, signed, or otherwise, suggest semiotic theories and practices of sorcery which remain above the threshold of the obvious and therefore fail to many to register as 'occult.'

For some practitioners, such functions, as well as any other less third-circuit 'media,' such as pictorial works (painting, drawing) or physical ones (dance) can become 'occult arts' which mirror the 'occult sciences' in their closeness to the consensual reality and their reliance on one end of the magical spectrum. In the same sense that the 'occult science' relies on thoroughly causal models – and therefore has an edge in the production of causal effects – the 'occult art' has such totally acausal applications, and functions in so non-linear a fashion, that its contexts of causal relation are actually inferior to those offered by the 'magical' arts generally, or even, generically 'the occult.' Thus, the 'occult artist' will often be perceived as closer to mysticism, or even to 'pure art,' than others.

These observations begin a commentary to the apparent incompatibility of Ramsey Dukes' suggestion in *SSTOBME* of 'magic' and 'art' as two different ways of looking at the world along with 'religion' and 'science', and Peter Carroll's proposition in *Liber Kaos* of three aeonic influences, science, religion, and magic. If Carroll's term 'science' were replaced with 'materialism,' 'magic' with 'esotericism,' and 'religion' with 'fundamentalism,' the models are easily combined by proposing that the Dukes model (which, he actually emphasizes, is best applied as four *directions* not necessarily at odds as are the Carroll influences) actually describes a coherent set of four dispositions *within esotericism* – which is itself always (ultimately) at odds with materialism (except when it can hijack it into 'occultism,' such as in Theosophy) and fundamentalism, which reverses the meritocratic elitism of esotericism's authoritarian religious wing and replaces it with either a theocratic or hierocratic, dogmatic authoritarianism. Since 'magic' as Carroll defines it should also have the weird advantage in his model that 'magicians' can pretend to be priests or scientists, but neither priests nor scientists can pretend to be magicians, this combination and revision of their propositions also resolves the failing of both models. While Carroll's model is so focused on the description of periodic change that it fails to account for why magic *seems* to function as a 'higher order' perspective, in Dukes' model magic *fails* to exhibit those 'higher order' characteristics even though magicians reading *SSOTBME* would assume it should. Materialism compensates for the advantages of the magician by presenting a consensus wherein *every person* can utilize the 'spells' and 'talismans' of techno-magic, and literally 'occult' (because, hidden) *scientists* (as distinct from materialists) have potential influence equal to that of an esotericist or mystic in what Carroll would recognize as a 'magical' aeon. These advantages are also a weakness since the consensus shifts when the 'occult' aspects of the 'science' become more widely apprehended. If 'esotericism' combines art, magic, science, and religion, 'materialism' combines art, technology, science, and philosophy. Fundamentalism compensates for the advantages of the magician by over-reliance on what the magician would recognize as 'spirits,' suggesting that a specific set of priests has innate authority within the fundamentalist consensus functionally equivalent to that of the esoteric mystic in the opposing aeon, or the 'occult science' or techno-magician within materialism. The advantage becomes a flaw when enemies of the priesthood discover that alternative cosmologies work just as well. Fundamentalism therefore combines art, magic, theology, and religion. Notice that *art* is the only thing all have in *common*, while a fundamentalist philosophy is inevitably a theology.

These observations also would suggest that all theology tends toward fundamentalist dogmatism somewhat, and exoteric philosophy tends toward materialism, as does technology. Science and religion are each *sharred* by two opposing aeonic dispositions, as is magic itself. One implication of this for the 'magician' is that 'pure magic' in aeonic terms becomes nonsensical, and suggests that it is *magicians themselves* who necessarily precipitate a shift from an esoterically-controlled aeon to an exoteric one. It also suggests that only an artist awakened to esoteric realities but not confined by them could possibly succeed in maintaining power through the two exoteric aeonic categories. Each language or style of communication may imply quite different specific applications, whilst the generic techniques of magic and sorcery have the quality of a 'meta-language' already. Similarly, 'symbolism' and representational, pictoglyphic communication has particular relevance to both ceremonialized sorcery and the 'magic of the apparent,' but should never be confused with the equally effective sorcery of the *apparently meaningless* (sigils) and the *actually meaningless* (analogical,

non-representational sorcery, or direct imposition of magical force in a sorcerous context; that is, direct communication or stimulation of obsessional ids). The significances of geometry, architecture, proxemics, and the various 'odd angles' typical of the 'sinister' sorcerous aesthetic all offer other opportunities for the practitioner to make use of apparently 'normal' aspects of life and communication to convey sorcerous intent.

Continuing along the circuits, the sorcerous importance of 'fourth-circuit' tribal, ethical, social, and sexual customs and mores is almost too engrossing for inclusion in this cursory, serialized list, but cannot be omitted. Many of the applications of this 'fourth-circuit' to sorcery bleed through across all thresholds in the same way that the creeping influence of hormones thoroughly overwhelms almost all adolescent processing and still manages to make many people unaware just exactly how many times per day they fantasize about performing some sort of sexual act. Indeed, the human habituation to a condition of almost total slavery to the reproductive mode of genetic replication is so thorough that the few situations that disrupt it can come as an incredible shock. The very fact that this circuit somehow appears to imprint basically all the functions relevant to 'culture' except for the actual arrangement of the power structure itself, simply on the basis of sexual patterning, gives a hint as to how sexual sorcery has almost inconceivably broad application. On the most gross level, absolutely every sexual act (or even sexual thought) of the sorcerer ought to be regarded as magically relevant since sexuality is a prime (some would say *the* prime) obsession, and no atavisms are free from it except atavisms so primal as to antedate sexual differentiation. This discovery has led to an over-reliance of some sigil magicians on orgasmic castings, but that is not the intent here. Every phase of the sexual process – including, and especially, denial and frustration, as well as the catharsis of the orgasm – is equally useful and relevant to sorcery. The purpose of sexual sorcery is rarely to have more sex. Rather, for the sufficiently obsessed sorcerer, the purpose of getting laid is to perform more sorcery. This situation immediately presents a sort of problem for some sorcerers, who think that sort of statement sounds 'transcendentalist,' until they realize that 'perform more sorcery' substitutes equally worldly intents. So, if in the popular words of *Soror Hannibal the Cannibal*, *Illuminate of Thanateros*, people get into magic (here, perform 'sorcery') mainly to get rich, get laid, and get even, the purpose of getting laid is to get richer and more even. By implication, the only reasons to get rich are therefore to get laid more and have more power, and the only reasons one would want power are to get rich and get laid. There seems to be some circular reasoning process here which might also explain why people get *out* of magic and into mysticism. Perhaps that sort of back-door entry into transcendentalism can be circumvented by instead utilizing the obsessions with sex, wealth, and power *against each other* rather than to *fuel each other* – thereby ensuring that none of the three possess the magician and exploit the system until mysticism is the only alternative. (Only addicts need to quit; everyone else quits when they feel like it.)

The sexual process itself also provides potential sorcery techniques; Spare and Carroll both in different ways suggested sex postures with particular technical application to sorcery. The sorcerer might go much further in discerning specific functions for all sexual tastes, preferences, and certainly fetishes. Similarly, sexual aversions also contain a great deal of atavistic power, which suggests the possibility that deliberate engagement in unappealing perversions, as opposed to supposed 'perversions' which the sorcerer actually likes, might be effective in a whole different context. As it is known that sexualized torture and humiliation are extremely useful in brainwashing, personality modification, and involuntary conditioning, there is no reason that the sufficiently daring (and, hopefully, skilled and precise) sorcerer cannot use these techniques upon the self. By way of example, Crowley and Spare both partook of ecstasies in the context of *that which they found hideous and ugly*. Similarly, the classic antinomian tantric practice of engaging in sexual contact with an Untouchable might seem racy, exciting, liberating, and politically correct to the liberal, egalitarian reader, but to many of the high-caste Indians to whom the practice was recommended as liberative of obsessions bound into the fourth (tribal, ethical) circuit, the idea of engaging in something perceived as so self-destructive and physically disgusting would have been truly horrifying. Nevertheless, the effect would also have been very different than the personalized sexual antinomianism of Crowley and Spare, since (at least in theory) the untouchable concerned could have been extremely attractive on a physical level (and this was often recommended). While non-racist people might still produce a similar effect by conjoining with persons 'forbidden' due to class difference, or membership in an enemy or oppressed group, or perhaps 'forbidden' due to being criminals (sufficiently low-class prostitutes are

probably included in this category), the only scenario probably comparable in shock value to the mind of the generally egalitarian reader would be engaging in such practices with a prostitute known to be, or suspected of being, diseased. Unfortunately this presents a comparable threat *physically* rather than *spiritually*, but such are the vagaries of an aeon still exiting its materialistic phase. For those sorcerers not confident of being able to magically protect themselves from microbes, another excellent alternative would be a partner who is insane, perhaps dangerously so, or at least horrifically so. Again, since copulating with someone who might stab you in the night (or the back) is probably unhelpful and unnecessary, those who are extraordinarily self-destructive present a much better option in this regard, particularly since the sorcerer then has free-floating attachments stranded *in-between* affection for (or obsession with) the attractive but flawed partner, and revulsion/dislike for the futility and uselessness of the relationship. For antinomian and criminal appeal, especially in societies wherein drug use is condemned, deranged addicts (particularly those who ply the sexual trade in order to feed their addiction) are probably as close to 'untouchable' as any sorcerer should get who still fears the power of the virus.

On a less antinomian note, the sorcerer may also find great power in exploring, releasing, re-enacting, and otherwise applying the obsessional imprint of first (and, perhaps also, subsequent) sexual experiences. The first orgasm is supposed to condition (imprint) the fourth circuit. The notion of Erotic Crystallization Inertia, being the imprinting of particular aesthetics relevant to phases of sexual development, was popularized by Anton LaVey in connection with the maintenance of youthfulness and acquisition of longevity, but there is no reason it cannot also be exploited for purposes of atavistic nostalgia, or as Michael Aquino has suggested, retroactive and (a)temporal sorceries. Such practices may also give insight into the origins, structure, and functions of the sorcerer's own cultural and ethical preference – and be useful in forming new ones. Similarly, the aeonic implications of sexual and erotic magic as cultural conditioners might be interesting for the sorcerer to explore.

Cultural activities and 'tribal' processes (whether 'sub-cultural,' 'ethnic,' or whatever) also offer a font of sorcerous possibilities, ranging from use of techniques of ancestral magic, to application of obsessions, beliefs, and ideas passed down the 'family line.' Whether a signifier of certain arenas of productive antinomianism (those things that just aren't right or should not be) or of areas of inertial power ('We've done it this way for generations and it always works!') or even of raw magical belief ('Every freckled red-head in my family has always been really lucky'), these patterns can be deliberately exploited by the sorcerer for a wide variety of purposes. Similarly, every culture and sub-culture will have a huge store of myths some of which already relate to sorcery, and come almost as paradigms 'ready-made.' However, stay away from techniques reducing these things to the symbolism. Even if it works, it is not sorcery – and so such methods are better applied in a very different context. An easy example: if you are obsessed with fantasy fiction, do not decide what the characters 'represent.' Instead, 'represent' or 'emulate' *them*. Especially the sorcerers, of course.

Finally, activities of fun and leisure (games, escapisms, hedonic pursuits), have been around long enough to function as imprints into a fifth-circuit of consciousness active in most developed populations. These things also have wide sorcerous potential, both as analogies, representations, and actual techniques of sorcery. Any game or simulation can be used as a magical tool or focus, as a simulation of *magic*, as a divination system (either through random use or through 'trial by combat'), and as a sort of symbolic analogy wherein spells can be cast either on oneself, on the environment, or on one's opponent/partner. The experience of doing any of this, as well as the fashion in which subtleties of technique should be applied, differs considerably between situations in which both (or all) players are magicians *aware of what is being done*, and those situations in which one or some of the players are either magicians unaware of what is being done, or are not magicians at all.

THE THRESHOLD OF CONTROL

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When the sorcerer fully accesses the capacity to believe *anything* at *any time*, the awesome disorientation resulting from this transition necessitates the development of a totally new faculty, *control of belief itself*. Since perceptors will tend to select according to expectation, selection of expectation combined with appropriate sorcery techniques will actually, at some point, transform into an ability to actually select entire 'reality lines,' which seem to be sets of inter-related timelines of possibility functioning according to certain inherent patterns. There does not seem to be a limit to the iterations of self-referential permutation which the sorcerer's consciousness can undergo within this infinite series. Fortunately mathematical set theory is capable of modeling greater infinities.

Many psychonauts advocate the use of chemognosis to activate and access the 'higher circuits' of consciousness, including 'neuro-genetic' and 'neuro-atomic' circuits as well as the metaprogramming circuit, but 'words are, of course, as Kipling said, the most powerful drug used by mankind.'

THE THRESHOLD OF CONTAGION

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With the achievement of sufficient autonomy the sorcerer's obsessional ids will become independently self-replicating. Like viruses and parasites, they will reproduce themselves remorselessly, infest everything, and ultimately kill whatever is not capable of functioning as their host. Attempts to interfere with this thoroughly amoral process make the sorcerer a bad host, and bad hosts don't tend to survive infection. Of course, there is no reason the sorcerer cannot attempt to refine the obsessions into better parasites, since the best parasite ultimately becomes a symbiote. Generally, this is not achieved by making one's obsessions and ids any less deadly, but instead by gently guiding them to become more useful. The cybermagical imagery of the computer virus, and thus the viral servitor, is one example; the dreaded 'cult of the Ku' which breeds pestilence and vermin in sealed vessels (often with 'fourth-circuit antinomianism' as described above) is another. The ids are deeper and subtler than the imagery – and often it is the sorcerer's obsessions themselves which *infest* and *infect* the imagery of chosen paradigms, seeming to warp them – but only to better fit the sorcerer's own power, even if this is not always immediately obvious at the time.

Of course, the most pervasive example of this process is a form of sorcery one can encounter on the internet every day: the meme. The most powerful meme is the concept of 'the meme,' a meta-spirit so pervasively subtle that in terms of 'meta-programming' it functions as if it were an absolute deity. 'Memetic monotheism,' the fundamentalism of a post-magical aeon.

Other examples of information transmission and replication relate: the reproduction of slang expressions, fashions, fads, and trends all depend on a process close to that of sorcery. The relevance of these forms and formulae to human reproduction and human wealth distribution is also something that should be exploited by the sorcerer.

THE THRESHOLD OF TRADITION

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The transmission of the sorcery-concept (the 'sorcery' meme) itself crosses another threshold of power. Initiated sorcerers already have become part of the perpetual crossing of the 'circles of time' by the sorcerous current, while those who are, or who are about to be, initiators may find themselves experiencing the threshold crossing as embodiments of the sorcerous current itself.

Such transmission has much less to do with the 'passing down' of information, ideas, and cosmological or mythical doctrines than it has to do with the direct communication of sorcerous experience. The 'imprint' of the initiator on the initiated will always be thoroughly personal, and there is no 'progress' since all transmissions are individual – even if practiced collectively. Often the 'way of practice' of the mentor, even the mentor's personality, is as (or more) initiatory than anything actually 'taught.' In some cases, what the initiate perceives may differ significantly from what the initiator focuses on presenting, as it is ultimately the sorcerous current itself – the combined momentum of the ids of the whole 'lineage' which does the initiating. Thus, the mentor's aesthetic taste, personal life, general attitudes, may themselves endow the student with particular obsessions which become gateways of sorcerous power. Likewise, imitation or emulation of the *behavior* of the best sorcerers, rather than the following of their instructions, seems to be so effective that a sorcerer could become initiated into certain magical currents (particularly deceptive, anarchic, and individualist ones) simply through this process of obsessional imitation or emulation. The same process may also work for the remanifestation of dead or forgotten traditions atavistically – and the generation of new ones.

The concept of 'novelty of tradition' itself suggests different directions of crossing the thresholds punctuating the circles of Time. A tradition might seem to originate at a 'moment in time,' either spontaneously or through the intervention of a Master – but it might also seem, or be presented, as having originated at a particular time in the past. Or, more unusually, from a particular moment in the 'future,' like the Omega Point, or the emergence of the consciousness of N'Aton, the Ma'atian collective. Which of these origin-points is 'real,' and in which sense?

Likewise, the authority and authenticity of 'antiquated' traditions immediately bifurcates between reconstructionism, traditionalism, and progressivism-with-continuity.

'Traditions' advocating a notion of magical progress are always suspect, and at best promoting a particular occult science. Often they are proto-fundamentalist religions in disguise advocating their particular New Aeon, new dispensation, new revelation, or some other sham novelty. However, traditions suggesting that their forms shift and change through time depending on the situation may prove powerful, adaptable, and – extremely well occulted.

Reconstructionism of lost or 'degenerated' traditions seems to have the interesting property of creating very novel and situationally specific 'traditions' purporting to be the exact opposite. The comments of Arnold Toynbee on the transmission and development of culture through and in response to the Time of Troubles are particularly relevant to these questions of magical continuity.

THE THRESHOLD OF AMBIENCE

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Obsession being a self-renewing, self-maintaining feedback loop of psychic processing, its role in sorcery makes that art particularly apt at maintaining ambient magical effects, particularly glamour. The continuous, subliminal attention which reinforces such glamour can be precisely directed and anchored so as to create magical effects which subsist in the background of consciousness, and possibly even provide a basis for other effects to be layered onto. Permanency is more difficult, but the process of totally splitting off an autonomous id, which can then nourish and sustain itself through various feeding processes, is usually effective. This 'splitting' can be accomplished through some radical disruption of the obsessive process in a way sufficiently sudden and sufficiently discontinuous to prevent its unraveling or loosening. It is very important that the disruption either penetrate below the threshold of conscious awareness, or occur entirely below it from the outset. Willed forgetfulness of the event to the point of repression is critical, but this can be achieved through the use of state-specific memory scenarios as well as more classical banishment by self-induced amnesia.

In general, the dis-identification of the sorcerer's own consciousness from the ids is a useful aid to this whole process, and the practice of allowing the ids and obsessions to become both fully autonomous and totally occupied with useful tasks liberates the sorcerer's awareness and attention for more conscious pursuits. Eventually, the sorcerer's Body of Desire becomes so resilient through the training, organizing, and the perpetual reinforcement of obsessional complexes that it becomes invulnerable to infection or invasion by unwanted urges, and capable of total self-maintenance and self-renewal. The sorcerer endlessly partakes of reified, carnal satisfactions with only the memories of forgotten traumas sacrificed to feed the hunger of the ids which sustain the adamant, immortal shadow form of the personal will, continued indefinitely beyond death through the repetition of obsessions so ingrained that they persist in compelling consciousness to re-collect itself in new flesh – and beyond it.

HOW TO BECOME A SORCERER

Follow your obsessions until you can train them to follow you.



Love Spell

You will make yourself loved,
as proven without fail, if you:
take something from
the person you wish to love you,
some thing from her body,
some saliva, some blood, or some linen
upon which she has sweated.
Commingle it with a like substance
from your own self.
Then wrap it up in a strip of red fabric,
which you have inscribed
with your name and hers,
in your own blood,
this:



Roll it up, so that the 'N.N.',
here replacing the names,
are touching one another.

Then take another strip of fabric,
and tie up your characters in love knots.

Enclose the whole thing
in the corpse of a sparrow.
Carry it under your armpit
Until it stinks.

Then put it in your fireplace,
building up a good fire,
to dry it out.

As it dries,
go out, find her.
You will find her
in a state of supreme arousal.

However coy she was before,
She will do anything with you now.
There is nothing is so certain and proven.

A Dream of Witchcraft turned to Nightmare

The Five Witches of Albrecht Dürer

John Callow



On the night of Wednesday to Thursday, 30-31 May 1525, Albrecht Dürer awoke, blanched and trembling, from a terrible dream. In his sleep, he had seen a vision of a great pillar of water falling from the heavens and striking the fields about four miles from the city walls of Nuremberg 'with terrific force and tremendous noise.' Upon impact, the deluge 'broke up and drowned the whole land.' The dream did not end there, for then

other waters fell and as they fell they were very powerful and there were many of them, some further away, some nearer. And they came down from so great a height that they all seemed to fall with an equal slowness. But when the first water that touched the earth had very nearly reached it, it fell with such swiftness, with wind and roaring, and I was so sore afraid that when I awoke ... for a long while I could not recover myself.¹

The image of destruction was so profoundly disturbing that when Dürer awoke properly in the morning he felt compelled to take out his watercolours and to attempt to record his nightmare exactly 'as I saw it.' His resultant picture of the apocalypse looks, to the modern eye, eerily reminiscent of a spreading mushroom cloud. To a burgher of Nuremberg – and to the sick and prematurely aged artist – the second flood was all too real. The wrath of God would cause the sun to go out, rains to lash the earth, and the stars to fall blazing from the heavens. The signs of a society unravelling at the seams were every where at hand, contributing to this general climate of terror amid the Reformation's cataclysms: famine;

sorcery; syphilis left in the wake of marauding armies; and attacks by roving bands of peasants.

It is therefore unsurprising that Dürer, with his lifelong sense of mortality, should be overcome by a brooding melancholia. It is equally unsurprising that he should give his depression figurative form to create one of his greatest engravings – or that he should have used his art to fashion two of the most potent and enduring images of witchcraft in the Western world.

For Dürer, the key to artistry was the ability to be the one who 'pours out new things, which had never before been in the mind of any other man,' and it was precisely in this vein that he approached all that appeared unusual, exciting, or unnatural. Thus, he sought out the bones of St Ursula, the Giant of Antwerp, the great fish washed ashore on the coast of Zealand, and the old 'man who was 93 years old and still strong and healthy,' who would later become his model for his *St Jerome*, seated in his study. Similarly, he drew the head of a deer with monstrous antlers and painted a freakish, bearded child.² He had his horoscope cast, noted the fall of 'blood rain' upon the streets of Nuremberg (possibly windborne sand from sub-Saharan Africa), and wondered at the stone or meteor which fell to earth just beyond the gates of the city. He embraced Renaissance humanism, loved nothing more than technolog-

¹ W. M. Conway, ed., *Literary Remains of Albrecht Dürer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889), 145; M. Kloss, *Albrecht Dürer: Bild- und Lesebeft für die Kunstbetrachtung* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Verlag, 1967), 30; C. White, *Dürer: the Artist and his Drawings*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1971), 214-215.

² J. Bialostocki, *Dürer and his Critics, 1500-1971: Chapters in the History of Ideas including a Collection of Texts* (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner Verlag, 1986) 27; Conway, *Literary Remains*, 144; and White, *Dürer*, 186, 214.

³ Conway, *Literary Remains*, 143.

ical innovation and new means of production, and was the first European artist to truly appreciate the aesthetic value of Native American art. Yet, he was also a man of deep Christian spirituality, for whom the age of divinely inspired miracles – and demonic interventions – was not yet past. On a single surviving page torn from his common-place book of 1503, he recorded:

The most wonderful thing I ever saw ... when crosses fell upon many persons [from the sky], and especially on children rather than on older people ... [One] had fallen into Eyzer's maid's shift, as she was sitting in the house ... She was so troubled about it that she wept and cried aloud, for she feared she must die because of it.³

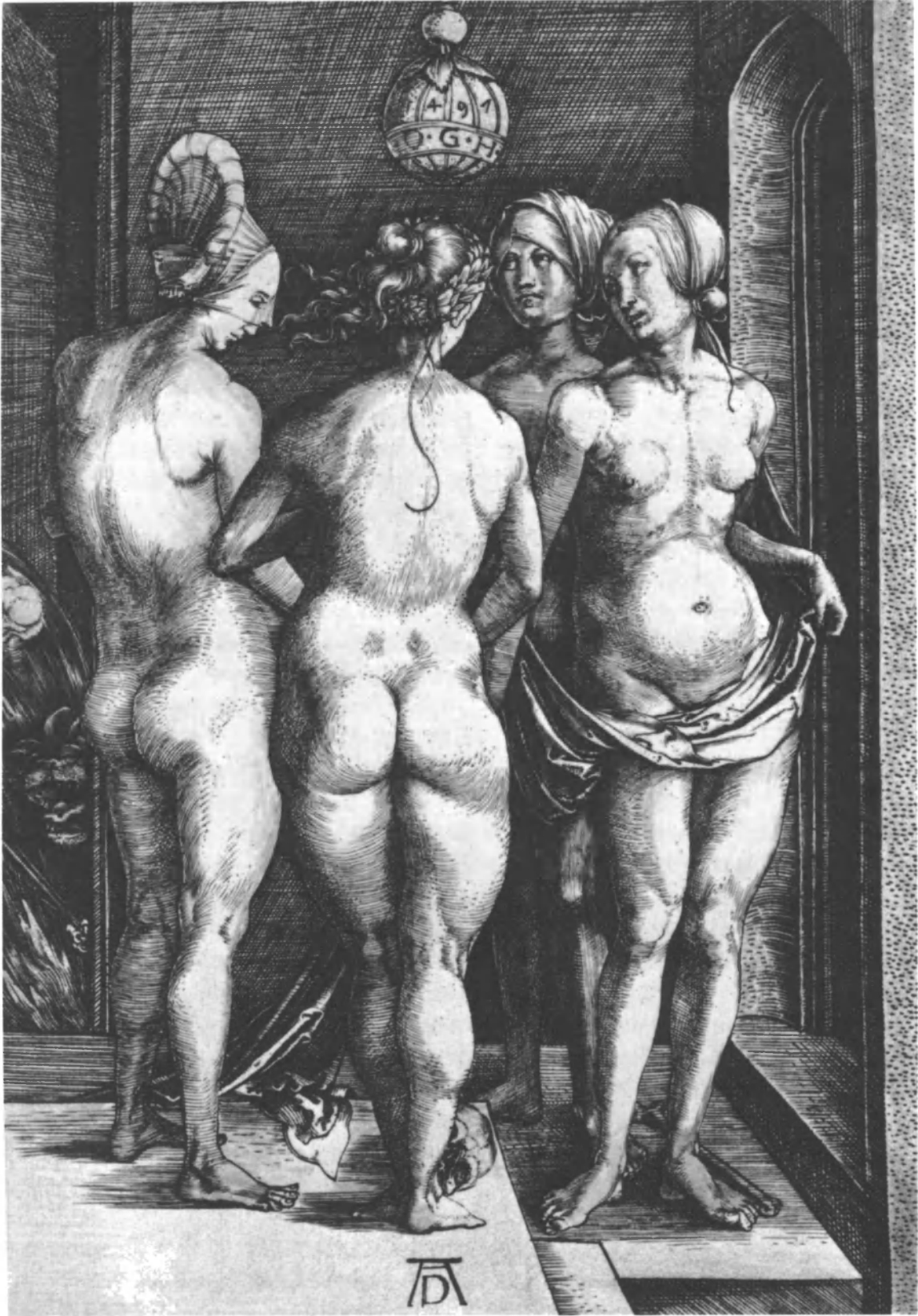
We know nothing more of the incident, or of what these crosses were made, or looked like, though Dürer does seem to link the event to the passage of a comet through the night sky, which he noted, with laconic brevity, on the same page. For the artist, the wind-driven crosses, fluttering down to earth, was a wonder, conveying a reassuring message of God's power and love, for his neighbour's maid, such unexplained phenomena were deeply disturbing and seemed to signify that she had been selected, by the Almighty, for an early death.

Dürer relished what he termed his 'dreamwork,' the composition of fantastical scenes, and from the outset of his career he possessed a firm grasp of those topics and themes that were capable of seizing the imagination of the public. Thus he could generate revenue through the sale of his prints. The advent of the printing press at the close of the fifteenth century had opened up entirely new audiences for the marketing of images. Religious scenes, once viewed largely within communal settings such as churches, wayside shrines, and saints' processions, might now be privately owned and thus brought into the domestic environment – and not just by the elites but also by artisans and tradesmen. Once, experiencing of a Biblical scene had been a shared experience, now it was possible for people to have an individual experience with a modestly priced, mass produced, work of devotional art. Not only was it possible, it was popular; people were eager for it. Quick to appreciate the potential of this new technology, the twenty-one year old

Dürer purchased his own printing press, in 1492. For a young man who had only just finished his apprenticeship, it was a bold move and a heavy financial commitment. Yet it demonstrated his determination, from the very outset, to control every aspect of the manner in which his art was conceived, produced, and distributed. So that his work might not be pirated by others, he created his own trademark, conjoining the 'A' and the 'D' of his initials, with which he signed each of his prints after the late 1490s. Unlike his predecessor and inspiration, the 'Master of the Housebook,' Dürer was determined to be seen as an individual, known for his mastery of his trade, intellectual insights, and his own unique personality. Moreover, he licensed the rights to sell his prints to some well-chosen and firmly-policed agents throughout Germany and the Low Countries; through this his brand name and style were both firmly established and vigorously maintained. Just as importantly, the artist enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with his customers by selling his work at markets and fairs – by his own wife, as well as by teams of retailers. Their faces and forms are reflected in his studies of market traders, fashionable young men, buxom cooks, and pear-shaped townswomen, who crowd his early engravings.

He understood also the public appetite for 'wonders' and images reflecting the contents of the latest newsletters. In an age where literacy was still limited, and culture was largely rooted in the visual and the oral, a well-chosen picture assisted greatly in the re-telling of a popular, and commercially marketable, news story.

The very first of Dürer's engravings to carry a date was his study of *The Four Witches*. Printed in 1497, it represents one of the seminal – and easily one of the most widely disseminated – images of the *practice* of witchcraft in European art. We have no clue as to why the artist should be so keen to signify the date of this work, and it has even been suggested that the picture does not actually represent witches at all but rather the Three Graces, joined by a fourth figure from antiquity, sometimes held to be Discord. Yet, while noting this possible alternative reading, one must also point out that Dürer's first great biographer, Joachim von Sandrart, writing as early as 1675, was quite clear when he wrote of the artist's engraving of 'three or four naked women, which some take to be the



Imaginal Precursors

Three Graces. I, however, take them to be witches because of a death's head, a thigh-bone, a Hell-mouth and the spectre of the Devil are shown in it.⁴ Modern writers and picture researchers generally concur, as the image has been widely reproduced to illustrate the figures of witches, most notably as the cover of John Updike's novel, *The Witches of Eastwick*. Modern-day Pagans use it as 'evidence' of a long-standing tradition of women working their magic 'skyclad,' or naked, as an expression of equality, sisterhood and democracy.⁵

The picture does, indeed, show four women, naked save for their headdresses, standing in a hallway, on the threshold of two doorways: one arched, one oblong. A grotesque, dragon-like, devil starts up from the floor of the adjoining chamber, his jaws open in full cry and his body shrouded in sparks, flame and sulphur. A spear, or stave, is gripped in his clawed fist. As he appears below ground level, and at the corner of the door, the women are oblivious to his presence, but there can be little doubt that their eventual fate is to be seized by him and cast down into his fires. They have entered the hall through the arch, but are destined to leave through an entirely different, and darker, portal that serves as the gateway to another realm, in this case one which will lead them straight to Hell. One woman, wearing a myrtle wreath, has her back to the viewer, while her hair streams out behind her, pulled out of her topknot and caught by a breeze. The faces of the other three can be clearly discerned, and each of them has their hair covered. The left-hand figure sports the elegant veiled headdress of a prosperous merchant's wife; she is the eldest and seemingly highest ranking of the group. A third woman, in the background, wears the turban and coif normally associated with a respectable matron. The right-hand figure is the youngest present; her hair is partially covered and knotted by a long scarf that wraps around her body, concealing her own genitalia and those of her companion, and trailing out behind her onto the floor. So far, it is clear that the women are of different ages and classes, with the two appearing on the left-hand side of the picture being wealthier to those on the right.

Dürer has borrowed the fashions from his earlier studies of the women of Nuremberg. The rich headdress sported by the senior partner in the crime is taken from an earlier engraving by the artist, *The Young Couple Threatened by Death*, but there is nothing whatsoever in that work to suggest that this coiffure is associated with anything save high fashion. Indeed, it is the girl's paramour who is leading her down a path of discovery to sex, and by extension in Dürer's mind, condemning her to sin and the ravages of the aging process. Similarly, the artist's sketch of *The Women's Bathhouse*, made in 1496, contains elements that were to be adapted and reused, twelve months later, in his *Four Witches*. The setting is a dark-panelled steam room, where six women – including a grotesque – are in the process of combing their hair and scrubbing themselves or each other. All have taken off their clothes in order to bathe but even amidst the steam, three of the women maintain their headdresses, caps, or veils. Their nudity, the heat, and the low-ceiling room, all echo the composition of the *Four Witches*. Even the presence of two small children, a boy and a girl, at their feet, seems to prefigure some of the thinking behind Dürer's later work: the little boy offers up an apple to his mother, in a reversal and reminder of Eve's temptation of the first man. Once again, the link is made between sensuality, pride of appearance, and the inevitability of decay and death occasioned by all such sin. Indeed, the fact that the young, high-status woman in the foreground regards the viewer with an inviting glance, while captured in the act of scrubbing the back of a chronically obese, and seemingly bald, crone displays the artist's concern to show us the inversion of social norms and the physical results of licentiousness. The bathhouse is certainly a place where the necessity for nudity encourages a form of egalitarianism, yet the retention of headgear would seem to demonstrate that even here the wives of Nuremberg's burghers were acutely concerned to emphasise their relative social status.

4. G. Bartum, G. Grass, J. L. Koerner, and U. Kuhlmann, *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy: the Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 227. E. J. Dwyer, 'The Subject of Dürer's Four Witches,' *Art Quarterly* 34 (1971), 456, 470. J. Poesch, 'Sources for Two Dürer Enigmas: the Four Naked Women or the Choice of Paris,' *The Art Bulletin* 64 (1964), 82.
5. J. Updike, *The Witches of Eastwick*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984); and T. M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (London: Picador, 1989, 1994), Plate 1.

Left
The Four Witches
Albrecht Dürer

The theme of the unobserved Devil found in *The Four Witches* is also invoked by the presence of a voyeuristic man, a heavily bearded 'peeping Tom,' pulling back the shutters from the street, and similarly unnoticed by the women, in order to gratify his – in this case masturbatory – lust. In this case the man is there to introduce the element of humour reflected in Dürer's companion piece, *The Men's Bathhouse*, also of 1496, where a hooked tap strategically placed in front of a bather's genitals comically evokes the form of the phallus it is obscuring.⁶ Whereas the men are pictured actively talking, drinking and playing musical instruments, their female counterparts are passive, mute and concerned only with beautifying themselves. When we think about witchcraft, and early modern attitudes towards women, it is significant that woman's fall from grace, more than man's, was seen to be occasioned through sex. The artist suggests that vanity results in sin, and sin leads directly to death and the Devil. Therefore, one may postulate a far closer link than previously thought between *The Four Witches* and *The Women's Bathhouse* – with its themes of nudity, pride and temptation. It is certainly more than a manner of just borrowing stock figures or poses, and adapting them to suit a new subject.

It is visible in purely practical terms as well. It is evident that from *Women's Bathhouse* Dürer used the arch of the back and the facial features of the woman handed the apple in composing the senior witch. Likewise the figure of the licentious girl (*Bathhouse* foreground) is used as the model for the youngest witch. All that is altered is their social status. Significantly, Dürer has chosen to swap their headdresses. The young girl now becomes the petitioner, rather than the social superior, of the older woman by the time the two figures are transposed into *The Four Witches*.⁷ Thus, he utilised the faces, fashions, and frames of the women who were his neighbours in Nuremberg for his *Four Witches*. They are not stereotypes or crudely distorted images of femininity. Rather, the four women he has chosen are full-figured, with broad hips, curvaceous thighs, and full breasts. Their faces are ordinary, even plain, and are not distorted in any way by traces of hatred or anger. They are not old, but in the prime of life, and – though naked – there is, at least to the modern observer, no sense of eroticism or pressing beauty inherent in either their appear-

ance or actions. Rather than archetypes of lustful or aged women, they are, in one sense, perfectly representative of the ordinary women of Nuremberg. As such, their very normality and homeliness would prove far more dangerous to generations of women suspected of witchcraft, than the later highly sexualised depictions of the witch as wanton or crone.

Before Dürer there were very few images of the naked witch; she was always almost clothed, and clothed in the fashions of the artist's own day. Ulrich Molitor's treatise *De Lamiis et Phitonicis Mulieribus* ('Concerning Witches and Fortunetellers') is typical: published in 1489 and widely republished in small, easy-to-read popular editions, it was illustrated with ten woodcuts showing the practices of witches. In these, men are as important as women in working harmful magic, and all the witches – of both sexes – are always fully clothed. In showing the witch naked, Dürer was breaking with artistic and demonological convention.

There is one notable exception: a painting that came to be known as *Der Liebeszauber* – 'Love Magic.' It is familiar to general readers today through its use as the illustration on the cover of Keith Thomas' seminal book, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. It may have been known to Dürer: it was painted at approximately the same time as *The Four Witches* was engraved by a now-unknown artist from the Lower Rhenish school. It seems to show a witch, naked but for her fashionably pointed shoes and gauze drape, working a charm before a roaring hearth. She is clearly a woman of substance, at home in a light and airy chamber, with rich furnishings, a pet bird and a lapdog curled up, at her feet, upon a velvet cushion. A Golden dish, a bolt of silk, and a spray of peacock's feathers decorate her sideboard, while the doors of a normally locked and bolted cupboard swing open to reveal shelves full of costly jugs and bowls. The witch is young, shapely, with pert breasts and long flowing, golden, hair. By the standards of any time she would be considered beautiful. She is in the act of sprinkling drops of molten wax from a phial onto a stylised human or animal heart, which is kept in an ornately gilded box. A young man, in the background of the picture, looks on unobserved from an open doorway, as the ritual is performed (similar to Dürer's Devil and 'peeping Tom'). Freshly-picked flowers are scattered across the floorboards and they, too, would seem integral to

the spell. There can be little doubt that the artist was keen to depict the practices of a witch, in working love magic.

All else must remain conjecture, especially as, surprisingly, witchcraft scholars have rarely made the painting a subject of critical examination. Yet, whether it shows evidence of actual magical practices common to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, or simply renders a tale of witchcraft from the classical age, it nevertheless is important in discussing ritual nudity in Dürer's own work. The man in the background may be the lover she has brought, through her art, to her door. He may simply be an inquisitive servant. However, it is worth examining the elements of the picture as a whole: there is a witch working love spells at the top of her house; the woman uses sympathetic magic and potions; she is nude; and a male intruder observes the rite. Doing this, one begins to observe similarities with a scene in Lucius Apuleius' Roman story, *The Golden Ass*, involving Lucius and the witch Pamphile. Certainly, the similarity is striking and, if true, means that the unknown artist was actually depicting a story from the second century BCE, rather than magical rituals that were being practised some thirteen or fourteen hundred years later. There are discrepancies, of course, but those that do exist, such as the enlarged heart, may simply result from the differences and difficulties in transforming a literary source into a visual representation. If this work is relating directly to classical models, then it may be that Dürer, too, was looking to similar sources for his inspiration, rather than trying to reflect the supposed practices of witches in his own time.

6. F. Anzelewsky, *Dürer: His Life and Art*, trans. H. Grieve (London: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1980, 1982), 58-59. White, *Dürer*, 66-67.

7. White, *Dürer*, 67.

8. Bartrum et al., *Albrecht Dürer*, 227; Dwyer, 'Four Witches,' 456 & 470; Poesch, 'Dürer Enigmas,' 82; M. Thausing, *Albrecht Dürer: His Life and Works*, trans. F. A. Eaton (London: John Murray, 1882), 214-215.

Witchcraft Indicators and the Hammer of the Witches

If we cannot be sure that *The Four Witches* were faithfully based on sixteenth century paradigms, then we also have to admit that their nudity, in the context of this engraving, does not seem to convey a sense of their equality. The two women to the left of the composition, those whose headdress and garland appear to mark them out as being of high social status, are standing on a raised ledge, and are looking down upon the other two, who wear more humble headscarves. A clear hierarchy would appear to be in place, with two of the women as supplicants, petitioners, or junior partners, and the other two as their superiors in terms of wealth, status, and magical skill.

The presence of a human skull at the feet of the dominant pair, and a human thighbone behind those of their junior partners, makes it clear that something dark and objectionable is about to occur. At least three of the four women appear to be doing something with their right hands – either holding an object or each other's outstretched hands – and that they have formed a circle, which can turn clockwise about a central axis marked by the skull below and the globe suspended above. The globe is cast in the form of a fruit, possibly a pomegranate, as a symbol of fertility, but it is certainly not a mandrake root as has previously been suggested; it bears not only the date of the composition but also the mysterious initials 'O.G.H.' Dürer left nothing among his voluminous papers to suggest what these letters signified, but later writers have attempted to provide answers, suggesting, among others: 'O Gott Hute' (May God Forbid); and (O God Protect); to 'Origio Generis Humani' (Origin of the Human Race); and 'Obsidium Generis Humani' (Enemy of the Human Race).⁸ With the exception of the third suggestion, which seems to be out of all context with the image shown, each is probably as good as the other, as from this distance we can never know for sure.

However, Moriz Thausing, writing in 1882, suggested that both the scene and its coded motto were inspired by the publication of the *Malleus Malleficarum*. Later authorities went further, and have sought to identify it with one particular case study recorded in the book. The incident in question is this one: the landlady an inn called The Black Eagle in Zaubern

near Strasburg told it first-hand. Whilst pregnant, she said, she refused the services offered by a midwife of 'bad reputation.' The spurned woman took revenge by breaking into her house at night with two accomplices; the three witches stole into her chamber and, using witchcraft, rendered her unable to speak or move a muscle. The witch leant over her and declared that: 'because she has offended me I am going to put something into her entrails ... she shall not feel any pain for half a year, but after that time she all be tortured enough.' Then the witch 'came up and touched my belly with her hands; and it seemed to me that she took out my entrails, and put in something which, however, I could not see.' After exactly six months had passed by, 'such a terrible pain came into her belly that she could not help disturbing everybody with her cries day and night.' Eventually, thanks to prayer, 'all those unclean things fell from her body ... thorns, bones, and even bits of wood.'⁹

How likely is it, though, that this account inspired Dürer's engraving? Yes, Dürer depicts four women and three of them could reasonably be said to be shown in the act of touching the belly of the woman in the myrtle garland. The *Malleus*, however, stipulates that only the witch reached out to touch her. Indeed, in that account her two accomplices were actually said to have urged mercy and actually dissuaded her from her first course of action which was to induce an abortion. Moreover, even allowing for a degree of artistic licence, the scene is clearly not set in a bedroom, let alone in an inn. Thirdly, the victim is far from paralysed; in fact, the garlanded woman seems not to be victimised, nor is she even the central figure around which the action revolves. Sympathy or pity is not elicited for any one woman at the expense of another within the composition.

If it is doubtful that this incident provided Dürer with the inspiration for his work, then it has also been argued to link the engraving with the *Malleus Maleficarum* on other lines, namely that he was inspired to draw witches because of it. After all, the *Malleus Maleficarum* was held to have sparked the persecution of witches in Nuremberg, Dürer's home town. This initially looks plausible. Editions of the books certainly were produced on the presses of Dürer's godfather, Anton Koberger, in Nuremberg, in 1494 and 1496, and it is difficult to believe that the artist could not have known of its existence

or the debate it produced.¹⁰ But seizing upon a current popular theme is hardly the same thing as understanding a text's theories, its implications, and the reasons it generates public interest. The *Malleus* was in Latin, and Dürer had barely a smattering of it, if anything at all. Would he have troubled to have grappled with a complicated, and at times convoluted, work which he could not have hoped to have understood in any great detail?

There was enough popular demand in the city for Koberger to publish a second edition of the *Malleus* within two years but, interestingly, Nuremberg's interest in witchcraft did not seem to have translated itself into a witch hunt, either judicial or popular. The city was not gripped by a 'witch mania' during the artist's lifetime. In fact, Nuremberg's council sought to define itself in contrast to other imperial cities which *had* instigated and directed witch-hunts (eg. Cologne and Bamberg).

Nor were the citizens of Nuremberg a fractious or overly superstitious people, though they have been portrayed as such. In F. Hope Fisher's fictionalised life of Dürer's wife, *Written in the Stars*, in which a Nuremberg mob turns on a poor Jewish widow, accusing her of witchcraft, of murdering her husband and giving birth to a devil. The mob corners her in front of Dürer's stall, drags her off to the Rathaus and summarily burns her upon a pyre without the benefit of a trial, because 'she was a Jewess'.¹¹ In reality, the city's civic power was not so weak in the early 1500s as to permit such lynchings on the mere suspicion of witchcraft; mob rule was far from the order of the day. Blood libels certainly were a feature of popular culture but in Nuremberg at this time Judaism was not equated with witchcraft such as to result in a capital conviction. In this novel, the use of witchcraft and anti-Semitism serve merely as shorthand to demonstrate how supposedly irrational, and different the people of the late Middle Ages were.

But if Nuremberg's trial records reveal little anti-Semitism as a cause for witchcraft allegations, then they do have a great deal on 'natural magic,' love charms, and disputes between neighbours. In 1471 the municipal court banished a woman for sorcery, on grounds of theft and poisoning, another was banished for love magic in 1474, while in 1477 a man was apprehended for 'knowledge of his parents' magical theft of a neighbour's milk.' In a far more sinister twist, in 1486, two

women were tried for 'taking potentially magical pieces of clothing from people executed on the wheel,' in order to practice *maleficia* or necromancy.¹² But this is not witch-hunt territory. The Nuremberg authorities handed down penalties that were surprisingly light. This moderate stance, moreover, continued into the sixteenth-century. Then, the city council opposed the Dominican Order's drive towards persecution and refused to accept the intellectual and judicial foundations for witch-hunting as laid down by the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Consequently, it is hard to envisage Dürer accepting the the *Malleus* as the inspiration for his view of the witch.

Pirckheimer and the Classical Witchcraft Connection

Perhaps, instead, his vision of *The Four Witches* was formed far closer to home, in the library of Dürer's closest friend, Willibald Pirckheimer. This vibrant, hulking man was one of the community's political and military leaders, who had travelled widely and spent seven years in Italy, where he had studied law and the humanities at the universities of Padua and Pavia. Though raised alongside Dürer, he was the son of a native patrician rather than an immigrant craftsman; in contrast to Dürer, his wealth and status permitted him leisure to pursue his interests and a freedom to flout sexual convention. He raised and led a regiment during the Swiss wars, fathered a prodigious number of illegitimate children, and was an avid collector of classical texts. Knowledge of Greek was still rare in the West, yet Pirckheimer boasted in 1504 that he owned a copy of every book ever printed in Greek.¹³

The two men frequented the clubroom at the Nuremberg Chamber of Commerce – or Waaghaus. In that atmosphere of financial well-being and relative intellectual freedom, the two friends discussed the latest developments in philosophy and religion, and both men embraced the 'new learning,' or Humanism, championed by Erasmus. They eagerly looked forward to the next discovery of forgotten classical texts or artefacts, and in this area they enjoyed a truly symbiotic relationship, whereby the interests and talents of the one complemented and informed those of the other. Dürer would find Pirckheimer rare artefacts and works of art for his collec-

tion, would produce his bookplates, and would illuminate the margins of his copy-texts. Pirckheimer, in return, was generous in lending Dürer translations of the works of classical authors, and keen in volunteering suggestions of cryptic or unusual subjects for his prints.¹⁴

We know that Dürer was introduced to the Roman writer Lucan through his friend's library, since he adapted many of the poet's themes in his own graphic work. Thus he almost certainly had read – or been read by Pirckheimer – Lucan's famed account of the destruction of the Roman Republic, in his *Civil War*. This account, of course, contains a fantastically famous scene of witchcraft: the necromancy of the witch Erichto.

Dürer probably knew another classical witch, one from Theocritus' *Idylls*. He illustrated Pirckheimer's copy of this cycle of poems, which describe Hellenistic, Ptolemaic Alexandria. One poem, entitled 'The Witches' (a label given either by the poet himself or an early editor), concerns a lady and her servant, neither of whom is a professional sorceress or a misshapen harridan. The lady Simaetha is heartsick after being abandoned by her lover, and commits an act of magic, which is empowered by her lust. This same lust, when unrequited, also causes her hair to start to fall out, her skin to become jaundiced, and her body to wither to no more than 'skin and bones.' Theocritus in the poem, then, equated sexual passion (particularly female), with physical decay, an equation also made in mediaeval Christian teaching and familiar to Dürer, who in his art consistently equated the sexual act with death.

Theocritus' account of the lady's magic is worth exploring further. Simaetha's passion is seen as being unnatural. She visits every witch's house in the area and 'pestered the homes

9. *The Malleus Maleficarum* of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, ed. and trans. M. Summers (London: John Rodker, 1928, repr. New York, 1971), 140. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart in his modern translation does not reproduce this passage. See: *The Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 166.

10. Bartrum et al., *Albrecht Dürer*, 227.

11. F. H. Fisher, *Written in the Stars: a Novel about Albrecht Dürer* (London: Museum Press, 1952), 178-181.

12. M. A. Sullivan, 'The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000), 352.

13. H. M. von Aufsess et al., *Willibald Pirckheimer, Feldobrist und Humanist* (Nuremberg: Glock und Lutz, 1969), 8-10; Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 7; and White, *Dürer*, 88.

14. T. Brehm, A. Fries, M. Hamann, C. Jahn & J. Tschöcke, eds., *The Dürer Tour: Discovering Dürer in Nuremberg* (Nuremberg: Tümmels, 2004), 53-55.

of spell-chanting hags' for advice and magical assistance. Finally her slave girl Thestylis brings the young man to her bed. In confiding in a slave she has debased herself, but there is also the sense – as in the story of Pamphile and Lucius – that female household slaves, though submissive and biddable, sometimes possess powerful magical insights. If the division of humanity into the free and the un-free is an unnatural distortion of human relationships, then the product of these relationships is bound to be dangerously unhealthy. Lady Simaetha, having gained her lover through magic, realises she has another problem: how to keep his affection once his lust is satiated. Another spell must be woven. She and Thestylis gather handy kitchen ingredients – bran, barley and bay leaves – and mix them with poisons – the herb coltsfoot 'which drives [horses] insane,' and the ground-up bones and blood of a lizard.

Their charm debases the normally-accepted conception of the domestic hearth (with its herbs like bay leaves), and corrupts familiar, life giving, grains of bran and barley. The poisons of the wild outdoors are brought into the home, where normally they have no place. The resulting paste created by the ritual is then to be taken, by the slave girl, and smeared on the man's body before dawn. Yet, for the charm to be effective, the concoction must be imbued with a magic that only the gods can bestow. Thus, a libation is prepared for the Goddess Hecate and prayers are offered up under a full moon, before the fringes lost from the lover's cloak are thrown into a roaring fire. 'Fine red wool' is bound around Simaetha's cup in order that she might 'bind my unkind lover to me' and wax is melted in a flame to seal the charm. The ritual in 'The Witches' fails to evoke the image of Dürer's *Four Witches*, but it does certainly recall the practice of the witch in the painting *Der Liebeszuber*, shown with her potion near a flaming hearth. More relevant here, it would have served to make Dürer associate witchcraft with love magic, or to reinforce such an association.¹⁵ Moreover, it also draws attention to the idea of the circle or wheel: Lady Simaetha's incantation implores, 'magic wheel, draw my lover to me,' and Dürer's understanding of witchcraft visibly contains the idea of the magic circle (though, admittedly, Theocritus is probably referring to the whirring circular disc spun while the slave girl sounded a bronze gong at the height of the ritual).

Dürer's inspiration for the *Four Witches* can thus safely be said to include archetypes drawn from the classical poetics and art, specifically Lucan and Theocritus. The artist appears to have seen witchcraft as primarily associated with love magic, and viewed it as primarily a female preserve, the product of a profoundly troubling outpouring of women's desire, and saw its inevitable consequences in decay, death and eternal damnation. Significantly, he does not take the view that witchcraft is confined to a narrow group of professional practitioners. Rather, it can be performed by ordinary women, including the bourgeois housewives of Nuremberg who bought his prints and passed him everyday in the street. Like Lady Simaetha, they could perform witchcraft just so long as they could acquire a modest source of arcane knowledge from a professional witch. This knowledge, and the power it gave over men, could be shared amongst women of various backgrounds ('circles' of magic-working) and could be used to the detriment of male-dominated society.

With all this in mind, it is possible to view the *Four Witches* as portraying the ritual working of love magic, based on classical literary sources; two – or even three – otherwise-respectable townswomen have come to a professional witch (denoted by her rich headdress), in order to utilise her power and magical skills for their own, ultimately diabolical, purposes. It is in the apparent ease of their of their art, and familiarity with one another (concord, sympathy and sisterly devotion), that would have made the scene so very threatening to a late fifteenth century audience. The witch really is the enemy within – by turns: ordinary, alluring and destructive – and it is this that makes her so dangerous and so fearful.

Visual Sources

Literary sources alone do not account for the whole story. We have emphasised that Dürer's audience was urban, rather than rural, and German humanists around the year 1500 were fascinated by the literature of the Greeks and Romans. Yet there was also a highly visual culture, and classical aesthetics and artistic ideals were increasingly receiving attention. Dürer had travelled to Italy, for the first time, in 1494. He went to visit his friend Pirckheimer at his studies in Pavia, but also to immerse himself in both the work of his Italian contemporaries and the world of antiquity. Consequently, his emphasis shifted away from the religious and courtly themes of Germanic art, and towards that of pagan mythology, as exemplified by the paintings and prints of Andrea Mantegna. During that one year, he produced three engravings – *The Battle of the Sea Gods*, *The Bacchanal with Silenus*, and *The Bacchanal by the Vat* – which were directly based upon the works of the Italian master. With these new sources of inspiration came the attempt to reintegrate classical form with subject matter.¹⁶ Thus, Dürer began to attempt to show the heroes, gods and goddesses of antiquity as they might have appeared to the eyes of the Greeks and Romans, rather than to the citizens of late sixteenth century Nuremberg. Whereas his old tutor, Michael Wolgemut, had drawn his *Minerva* clad in the late Gothic armour of Emperor Maximilian's knights, Dürer's goddesses came to be shown in the dresses, shifts and shawls of antiquity. It may just be that the *Four Witches* is a hybrid image, conceived within this framework.

Despite the rapid expansion of popular and scholarly literature, cataloguing supposed ritual practices and trial confessions, it is notable that scholars, magistrates and mobs, alike, paid little or no attention at this time to the nudity of

witches. The working of magic was, as we have already seen, not held to be synonymous with the abandonment of clothing. What nudity did denote, however, was the religion of pagan antiquity and, in particular, the depiction of the gods, goddesses and nymphs of Graeco-Roman tradition. In the words of Erwin Panofsky:

when the Renaissance discarded the modish dresses in favour of classical nudity or semi-nudity it unveiled not only the nature of the human body but also the nature of human emotions; it stripped man not only of his clothes but also of his protective cover of conventionality.¹⁷

There can have been few practices considered less conventional in Dürer's day than witchcraft. By identifying the crime with nudity he may have been signalling to the viewer that the portrayed scene is rooted in both the classical past and that it represents an inversion of normal modes of conduct.

It may also be a method by which an artist might hope to sell erotic prints to the popular market without arousing censure, or more importantly censorship. Classical nudity, revealed through the telling of moral tale – in this case the equation of magic with impending damnation – would cause far less concern than the portrayal of contemporary nudes, and contemporary crimes. In this light, a recourse to antiquity provided licence and a degree of artistic freedom to experiment with societal norms.¹⁸

The postures of three of the four women are clearly taken directly from classical versions of *The Three Graces*. Yet, Dürer is intent on including a fourth figure within the group, even if this means somewhat awkwardly shoe-horning her into an otherwise familiar and coherent composition. The fact that all of the women are nude, save for their headdresses – a seemingly incongruous addition to modern eyes – cannot similarly be a matter of chance. The artist seems to be suggesting that the meeting of the four women, their forming of a circle, and the social gulf that separates them into two halves, is central to his narrative. He also implies and that their working of magic, over human bones, can only result in disaster for them. They have already ventured, and lost their immortal souls, for the Devil literally waits in the wings, eager for his chance to fall upon them.

15. Theocritus, *Idylls*, trans. A. Verity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7-10, 88. See also: R. Muchembled, *Damned: an Illustrated History of the Devil* (San Francisco Chronicle Books, 2004), 96.

16. Bartrum et al., *Albrecht Dürer*, 107-108; Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 31; White, *Dürer*, 54-55; and E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, 1967), 122n.

17. Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 33. See also: R. Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, (London & New York, 2003), 193-194, 202-203.

18. Hutton, *Witches*, 203.

It is probable, though by no means certain, that the four witches are attempting to weave a charm about an intended lover. Love magic, as was noted, was prevalent in Nuremberg's witchcraft trial committals; also, medieval art had an existing tradition of representing love magic. And, as discussed above, he knew Theocritus' tales of amateur witchcraft. We cannot know, alas, if the death of an errant lover, or his unceasing devotion, are being sought here in *The Four Witches*. But we can seem to discern the dynamic amongst the women. The woman on the right seems to have just stepped in through the archway, bringing a friend for support, and she appears to be beseeching the two dominant figures (on the left) to share magical knowledge and to enact a ritual for her benefit. The forming of a circle, and the conjoining of their hands, are key to the artist's conception of magical practice, yet we cannot know how far this is rooted in anything more than Dürer's imagination and his acquaintance with classical witchcraft texts.

Whatever the sources and inspirations, *The Four Witches* evoked for artist and audience a world of temptations and erotic dreams inspired by the Graeco-Roman past, rather than the grim reality of the present: a late fifteenth century, with its claustrophobic courtrooms, informers, and suspicions of demonic magic as the catalyst for all bitter civil discord. It is, therefore, far more plausibly viewed as an image of poetic fantasy, representing the dark but fascinating side of classical literature, than as the product of the handbooks of witch hunters or of first-hand knowledge of an actual crime.

Riding Backwards

In *The Four Witches* Dürer had created one of the most enduring images of witchcraft. Yet, he returned to the theme less than a decade later, producing quite a different image, in *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat*. For every stereotype there must be an archetype, and Dürer's conception of the old, barren witch, with her sagging breasts and face distorted by hate, is precisely that. Our view of the elderly, haggard and frightening witch, flying by night, is so familiar that it is hard to conceive of a time when the image was fresh and challenging. Dürer's witch is, therefore, our witch: that which proved to be so potent and terrifying that it came to dominate

all others and became fixed in the European imagination over the next five hundred years.

The artist shows us a naked crone riding bareback and astride a leaping (or flying) goat. Fire and hail stones plunge down towards the earth. In her right hand she cradles a distaff, which she seems to stab deep into her crotch, meanwhile she wraps her left fist firmly around the goat's horn. Her self-abasement is all too evident: with one hand she pleasures herself with an instrument normally associated with a woman's domestic work, rooted in the security of hearth and home, while the other massages the base of the phallus-like horn. She is simultaneously masturbating both the female sex organ (in this case her own) and the male (the rippling goat bone). Here it is far more evident than in the engraving of *The Four Witches* that the witch attacks not fertility and, overtly, the sexual act, which she artificially stimulates, perverts, and thwarts.

The sense of inversion, reversion, goes even further: the witch is riding *backwards*; and, her bristling hair streams out behind her *contrary* to the direction of the breeze. Lastly, even Dürer's own monogram at the foot of the engraving is reproduced *back-to-front*. Given his pride in his mastery of the techniques of engraving, it is extremely unlikely that Dürer made an error in producing the plate. Even if he had, it is unthinkable that he would have permitted sub-standard work to be sold under his name, knowing as we do his attention to image quality and marketing. So, this reverse image is almost certainly intentional, indeed integral to the spirit of the tale. Even the artist's trademark has been bewitched, and twisted, by the power of the crone: it bows, bends, and inverts itself before her might.¹⁹

The witch has mastered the power of sex, but in the process has stripped herself of her own female sexuality. Her face is masculine, her breasts are shrunken, and her physique is muscular, powerful and taut. Un-sexed, yet sexual, violent and unpredictable, she flies over the earth, lashing it with fire and rain. So far, the portrayal of the witch is relatively unambiguous. Male sexuality and dominance has been appropriated by a female, though at a terrible cost, with the symbols of feminine labour and virtue distorted and thoroughly corrupted.

As Charles Zika has pointed, in the Middle Ages an individual – often a cuckolded husband or a troublesome, spiteful wife – was made to ride backwards through a baying crowd as

a form of punishment. Such a picture of public humiliation and savagery would thus have been familiar to Dürer and his audience, not least through public spectacle. Moreover, rough justice often applied through the inversion of customs: the rich rode a horse forwards with honour, so the poor and despised would be tied backwards on to a donkey, or a lamed animal. The latter would limp along the road and the crowd would offer a chorus of insults; surely this inversion imagery of disgrace was too potent for Dürer to ignore.²⁰

What is striking is that, taken in totality, *Witch Riding Backwards* becomes more strange, incongruous and problematic: it is suddenly difficult to read. Its component parts make far more sense than the whole. We have already described the top half of the composition, with the riding witch, but the bottom half appears altogether more benign, and oddly so.

The bottom section is filled with cavorting putti carrying staves, a globe, and an exotic, pot-bound tree. Two stand, while one bows down offering up his staff to his receptive companion. They appear to have been transposed from an entirely different scene and all seem to be oblivious to the witch and the goat vaulting over them. Zika has tried to associate the figure of the witch with Aphrodite Pandemos, the earthly Venus associated with lust and the night. If this is so, the four putti may plausibly represent her winged attendants. The goddess' flaming torch has simply been replaced by a distaff in order to set her within a recognisably Germanic, early sixteenth century context. Both she and her counterpart, the witch, sit astride goats, but she always faces forward rather than back.²¹ Admittedly the problem remains that the putti seem thoroughly disengaged, even inimical to, the main focus of the action, and even appear to be little more than an artistic whimsy; most commentators, Zika excepting, ignore them entirely.

The goat's curious physiognomy has also been consistently overlooked. Its genitals are obscured by a wing of one of the putti – and are, in any case indicated by its large horns – while its rear half is arched and curiously elongated. Its hind legs and tail are not shown at all. Once again, Zika offers an explanation that is entirely cogent and, to the mind of this writer, simply the best to date: namely that the goat represents the astrological symbol Capricorn. Capricorn is associated with the malign aspects of the god Saturn; he is depicted elsewhere



by Dürer, as he was by other late Mediaeval and Renaissance artists, as half-goat and half-fish or serpent.²² The curve of the goat's back, in the engraving of the witch, is strangely denuded of hair and seems to be narrowing to a point beyond the borders of the engraving. As such, it is entirely possible that we are seeing a representation of the star sign. The awkwardness of its form, not to mention its improbability, is masked by the artist through the appearance of the putti.

Right
*Witch Riding Backwards
on a Goat*
Albrecht Dürer

19. Bartrum et al., *Albrecht Dürer*, 27; and C. Zika, 'Dürer's Witch, Riding Women and Moral Order,' in *Dürer and his Culture*, ed. D. Eichberger and C. Zika (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 118, 120.

20. Zika, 'Dürer's Witch,' 120-121.

21. Zika, 'Dürer's Witch,' 124-125.

22. Zika, 'Dürer's Witch,' 126.

Combination, Innovation, and the Strikingly New

We know that Dürer was driven by the need to create entirely new imagery, and that his art combined both Italianate and Germanic forms, so it may be that *Witch Riding Backwards* is composite scene, like *The Four Witches*, combining familiar and foreign themes. The idea that witches flew upon goats was already being expressed in German popular culture in the early fifteenth century; pictures of both male and female witches riding wolves and fantastical animals appeared in Molitor's illustrated edition of *De Laniis* from 1490-91. This local motif could be combined with the nudity associated with a classical sorceress (or possibly goddess) to create an image that was truly, strikingly, new.

Similarly innovative were his juxtaposition of the witch figure with astrological forces, and his mixture of the Italianate putti with an old German countrywoman. All these points strongly suggest Dürer's intention to push the boundaries of his art, so the image that has come down to us reflects not so much the state of demonology as popularly understood in Nuremberg at the turn of the sixteenth century, but rather it is a fresh development in the portrayal of the witch, one that combined elements of classicism and the Christian tradition, and which demonstrates a sense of playfulness, even humour, that could flourish under spirit of humanism but which would be quickly excluded in an age of confessional crisis and religious war.

The meaning of an image is, after all, created not just by the artist but also by the beholder. The subtlety of metaphors used by the artist can easily be lost in the market place, where in-jokes and intellectual arguments might be taken simply at face value. This is seemingly what happened to the *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat*. The engraving and its mass-market prints were so powerfully popular that within a few years it came to represent for people not an *allegory* of sorcery, but evidence of its *reality*, right down to its shape and form. Copyists and plagiarisers of the work stripped it of its ambiguity, on account of their unequal skill and their need to appeal to the pleasures, preoccupations and prejudices of the widest possible client base. This image offered fear, topicality, danger and sex: tempting indeed for the entrepreneur who owned a

printing press and who dared break Dürer's hold on that which we now call copyright.

Given the care that the artist took to ascribe a particular date to his earlier study of witchcraft, it is surprising that *Witch Riding a Goat Backwards* has no similar provenance. It may well be that *The Four Witches* was, indeed, linked to some now forgotten *cause celebre* or that, working three years before 1500, Dürer was caught up in the millennial angst that shaped his fifteen woodcuts, of 1498, illustrating the Apocalypse for a book printed by his godfather. If this was the case, then *Witch Riding a Goat Backwards* was a general, rather than a particular study, rooted in no one incident but instead expressing widespread fears about social tensions and the end of the world. Art historians have located its composition to somewhere between 1500 and 1507, which would fit this paradigm and suggest that it was either the inspiration for Albrecht Altdorfer's *Witches Riding Animals through the Air*, sketched in 1506, or that it was the product of common anxieties about the practices of witchcraft.

Altdorfer's work neatly compresses the subject matter of both Dürer's *The Four Witches* and *Witch Riding a Goat Backwards*, ironing out discrepancies in the conflicting portrayals of the witch and her magic to forge a coherent, plausible whole. In the foreground of Altdorfer's work, four witches form a magical circle around a central point governed by an ornate phial or casket. A woman in the centre dominates the others and seems to be invoking the charm. She straddles a wooden rake, her femininity sublimated through her muscular physicality and her violent movements, both of which simulate sex (with rake as proxy). She summons up the power of the Devil by flinging her left arm wide. At her feet lies a skull (here cow or ox rather than human, as in Dürer). She and the acolyte crouching beside her have garlands or wreaths as headdresses, while the elderly witch beseeching her aid has flung her hair loose. All three are semi-naked, while the fourth witch wears the simple coif and dress of a housewife. A purse and set of keys hang from a string belt at her waist. Her full costume, rather than the headdresses of Dürer's women, grounds the scene in everyday existence. It suggests the presence of an outlandish enemy that lurks on the fringes of domesticity. To underscore the point, a row of houses sits on the crest of a hill, beyond the tendrils of the forest where the witches have come

to work their secret magic. Rising from the glade are a host of other witches straddling airborne goats. All carry domestic or farm implements of particularly female labour: the hoe, the rake and (again) the distaff. One fellates the horn of a particularly knowing, and self-satisfied goat, in a similar manner to that of the Dürer prototype.

Altdorfer's narrative, however is far more explicit. Here we witness harmful magic, worked at night, in a glade deep in the woods. Its object is to destabilise household life and the order of the ploughed hillside, shaped by man. The latter is visually contrasted against the wildness of untrammelled nature, as evidenced by the forest floor. The witches travel to, and from, their meeting on flying goats, borne upwards by the power of noxious gasses and clouds of smoke. They indulge in ritual practices, defined by the number four – as opposed to three in much later ideas about the structure of covens – and by a circle scribed in the earth. They are intent on doing harm and causing death, as indicated by the skull on the ground.

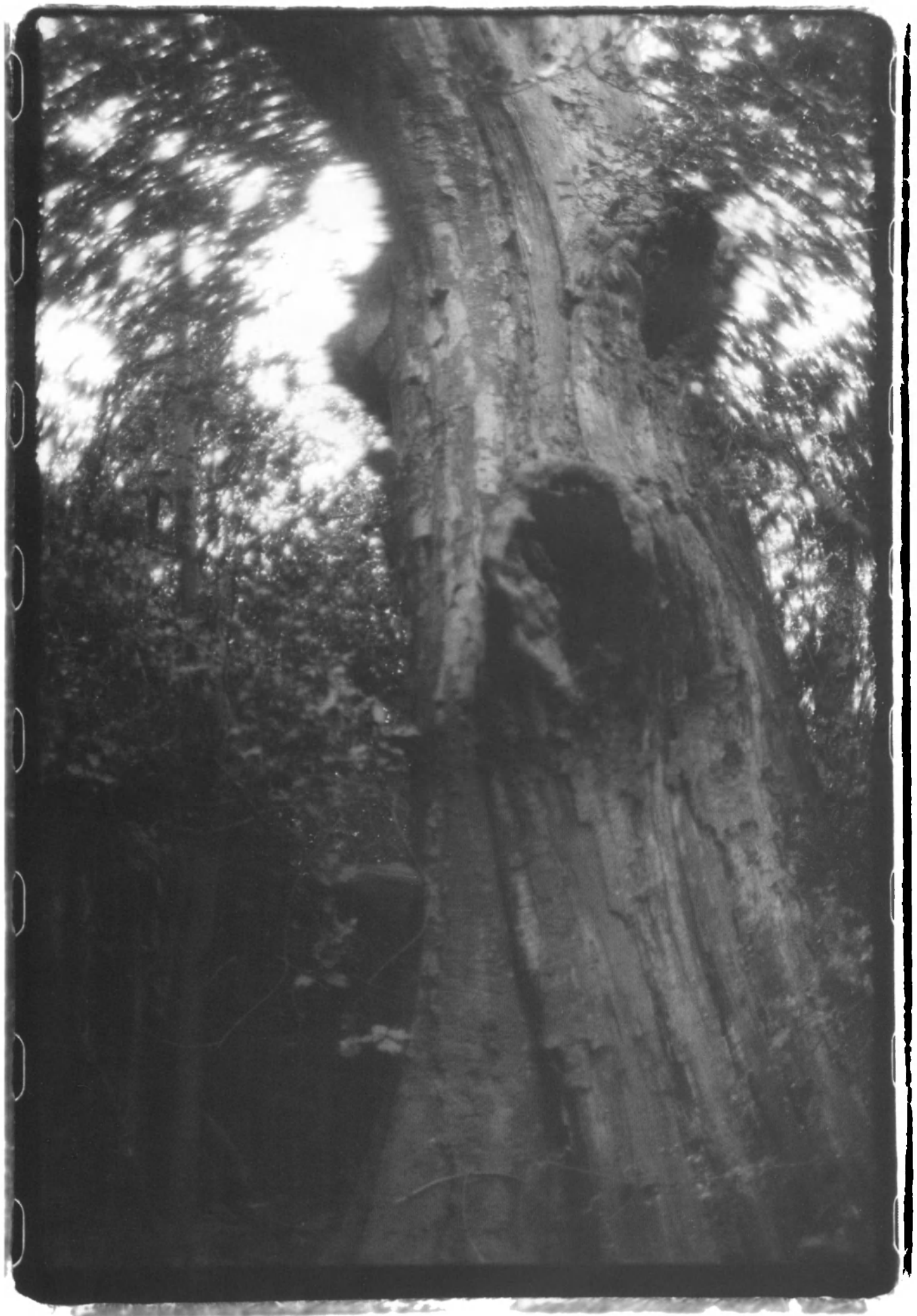
Whereas in the past witches had been shown practising love magic, now that idea is debased and sidelined. Long forgotten is the beauty of the practitioner in *Der Liebeszauber* and the comely sisterhood of Dürer's *Four Witches*. Instead, their sexuality has been brutalised. Artists faced a dilemma of how to portray an internal manifestation (lust) as an external force; now it is realised crudely, through the use of rakes and distaffs as dildos. Before, like Pamphile, the witch had used her magic to induce the love of a man; an unnatural recourse to secure a natural end. Now, the man is quite literally removed from the picture and the de-feminised witch is using an artificial substitute simply to pleasure herself. An unnatural instrument – the corrupted domestic object – is being used for auto-eroticism, once again an unnatural end. All suggestion of classical mythology, or sense that one of these women might represent a goddess, has been removed. The setting of the farmstead, on the borders of a Teutonic forest, gives the scene a contemporary resonance that Dürer's images lacked, with their high arches, stone vestibules, and mischievous putti. These are German women, in a German landscape, engaged upon the working of real magic.

The witch as envisaged by Dürer was, therefore, not a re-imagining but a fresh creation, and intended to be seen as such. The trouble was that the artist's genius and vision were so potent that they eclipsed all other versions of the subject and created archetypes – of the young naked witch working love spells, and of the withered yet still sexually active hag flying by the night – that would become general and accepted as representing actual practice. The anxiety of the age, which found powerful expression in Dürer's terrifying nightmare of an apocalyptic deluge on the eve of the Peasants' War, could just as easily turn inwards to focus upon those unfortunates at the very margins of society, who might be held to account for every ill and malaise. Unwittingly, Dürer had helped make this possible and made witch belief, especially among the elites, more credible and respectable. Yet, as he contemplated what had been lost amid the ruin of the artist's personal archives, Willibald Pirckheimer did not dwell upon such matters or evil dreams but recalled better times and unrealisable hopes. Dürer had once written that, 'often in my sleep ... I behold great works of art and beautiful things, the like whereof never appear to me awake, but as soon as I awake even the remembrance of them leaves me,' and Pirckheimer now recalled that 'he told us how sometimes in his dreams he seemed to live amongst things so beautiful that if such only really existed he would be the happiest of men.'²³ His witches may properly be considered among these 'dream works,' as the products of an imagination informed by the re-discovery of the Classics. However, an impending tragedy lay in the fact – unknowable by Dürer at the time he worked on his compositions – that one man's dream may constitute another's worst nightmare.

23. Bialostocki, *Dürer and his Critics*, 35; and White, *Dürer*, 40.

Gvyr^og

Bazelek





B A B A L O N

Aleister Crowley

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.
Rue not now guilt the Devil's dagger who draw!

I swear toward the West
On BABALON'S bold breast.
I swear toward the South
On Her mad merry mouth.
I swear towards the East
On Her Cup fiery-fleeced.
I swear towards the North
On Her Disk savage-swarth.
I swear toward the Height
On Her five fingers' Spite.
I swear towards the Deep
On Her soul's smiling sleep.
I swear towards the Centre
By Her and Him that sent Her.

I swear this Oath
Of Troth
To BABALON —
My own
Sister, and Scarlet
Harlot;
I am Her Priest
The BEAST,
To bring to birth
On earth
My word of awe,
The Law
Of Will, above
Its Love.
To BABALON
Alone
This tempered Oath
Of Troth
In Her chaste Cup
Seal up!

ON SAPPHO

James Butler

How do we talk about magic? We can talk about lines, figures, numbers, circles and stars; we can talk of barbarous names and formulae, the endless wheels of the merkabah, or the spectres that pass through the night of the imagination. But all these things have always seemed to elide another form of magic, one which can strike a hurricane into the heart and bring the voices of the dead to life: poetry. The magic of paganism is not a dusty enterprise, but one that shakes being at its very core, which breathes in the presence of its gods, which is rooted in the body, which is at heart concerned with love.

I want to speak here about Sappho, who loved Aphrodite and women in equal measure, whose hymns to her goddess are magical artifacts in themselves. They are not, to be sure, what you might expect – not recipes or formulae, but marks of passion, which, when read, come alive and call down the goddess in all her spangled fury.

What we possess of Sappho is not much: she lived in Mytilene, on the isle of Lesbos from about 630 BCE, and the time and circumstances of her death are unknown. Most of her poetry is lost, though it once, reputedly, filled nine volumes. They come down to us in fragments. But what survives has been enough to build her a reputation as the greatest lyric poet – for some, myself included, simply *the* greatest poet – of antiquity. We are not yet done recovering her work, and I hope to see more of her work unearthed on shards of pottery and fragments of papyrus in the future. But it is enough to know of her this story told by Stobaeus: Solon of Athens heard his nephew sing a song of Sappho's over the wine and liked it so much he asked the boy to teach it to him. When someone asked him why, he said, *So that I may learn it then*

die. Here I want to trace the marks of force which ride through Sappho's poetry:

. . ανοθεν κατιου[ς-
δευρυμμεκρητεςιπ[.]ρ[] . ναυον
ἄγνον ὄππ[αι] χάριεν μὲν ἄλσος
μαλι[αν], βωμοι δ' ἐνι θυμιάμε —
νοι [λι]βανώτοι

ἐν δ' ὕδωρ ψυχρον κελάδει δι' ὕσδων
μαλίνων, βρόδοιςι δὲ παις ὁ χωρος
ἔσκι[αστ', αἰθυσζομένων δὲ ψυλλων
κωμα καταιριον

ἐν δὲ λειμων ἱππόβοτος τέθαλε
τωτ . . .(.)ριννοις ἄνθεσιν, αἱ δ' ἄηται
μέλλιχα πνέοισιν []
[]

ἐνθα δὴ ζῶ ζυ.αν ἔλοισα Κύπρι
κρυζίασιν ἐν κυλίκεσζιν ἄβρωσ
ὄμμεμίχμενον θαλίασι νέκταρ
οἴνδειςα

here to me from Crete to this holy temple
here where lies your fragrant grove
of apple trees and clouded altars
smoking with frankincense

where cold water rills and rings through
apple branches, all of it shadowed
with roses, where down from light-waving leaves
sleep comes tumbling.

where a horse meadow has come into bloom
where young flowers and breezes
like honey are blowing
[...]

In this place, Kypris, you, taking up,
in the gold cups delicately
nectar mixed with festivity: *pour*

[Fragment 2]

Sappho survives in fragments like this, no complete work of hers is known to us.¹ Some of her poems come to us on torn pieces of papyrus, some from quotations in the texts of later writers who offer tantalising flashes and glimpses of poems otherwise lost to

us. This poem, one of the most complete we possess, is, it should be clear, a hymn: that is, it is a piece of devotional poetry to a goddess (Aphrodite) by the foremost pagan poet of her age.

Like all of Sappho's poetry, it is riven with longing, and the poem itself is a space in which a transformation is worked through sculpted and beautiful language. It should pour itself into us. And it should be unsurprising to us if poetry is close to, intertwined with, the magic of devotion, with Sappho's reaching out to her goddess.

Before looking closely at the line of desire that runs through this poem, we might pause to think what the urge is to craft and sculpt devotion out of language, what it is that leads Sappho to make a poem out of her longing – that is, to make a little machine to recreate desire on the page. Many people feel intuitively that spells and songs are closely interwoven, and such a fact is encoded also in our language – 'charm' from Old English *cearm*, 'lovely sounds.' The magical word 'glamour,' which describes the dappled texture of Sappho's poetry perfectly, comes from a Scots mutation of the word 'grammar.' What this tells us is that the traffic with language is two-way: poetry sends out a current to us, should make us live.

Sappho's hymn is of the type called by scholars *kletic*, which is to say that it is a hymn of calling. We might ask: what is it to call on something? To me, it seems that such calling is predicated on two facts, the first is the fact of longing, the second the fact of absence. Both are crucial to what Sappho is doing here: the poem is generated in the interplay between Sappho's desire for the presence of the goddess and her absence; it is a charm, it is a seduction. The traditional features of a kletic hymn are those of imprecation, naming the deity and the place to which they should come, flattering, honouring and finally charming them into presence. The text names the distance and then dissolves it through love. There is a certain kind of metaphysics in operation here, which tells us much about how Sappho is thinking about her goddess: the

1. For the Greek texts in this article, I have used Voigt's *Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak and Van Gennep, 1971) and consulted various translations for my own renderings, particularly those of Guy Davenport, Ann Carson, Stanley Lombardo and Willis Barnstone. For some of the readings I am particularly indebted to Thomas McEvelley's textual criticism, as well as the Lobel and Page edition of the fragments. Both Davenport's and Carson's translations are particularly commended for interested readers.

poem begins with an adverb of place, saying ‘here, to this place, hither!’ The poem, as it has come down to us, opens with longing. But what is interesting about this is that this adverb is usually found with an imperative, a verb that shares its mood of imprecation, but there is no such verb at the beginning of Sappho’s poem. Instead, the poem builds up a world full of waiting, a paradisiacal grove, bent around the longing for divine presence. This waiting world is the dream that constitutes the poem, built up not only in the images, but in the sounds of the words themselves: *aithussomenon*, the radiance-shaking, light-waving of the leaves combines the plastic, synaesthetic image of the dream with a whistling, whispering, empty sound. The sleep (*kōma*) granted in the grove is not of the normal kind, for this is a noun which refers to a deep kind of sleep, the trance-like sleep granted while listening to the lyre, or the stillness with which one awaits the coming of the god.

This dream-grove, the place of otherworldly stillness, is stretched over most of the poem, between the initial adverb and the final verb – that is to say, between *here* and *pour*. This is not simply a literary technique used to create a delicate, suspended, imaginary place, but a way of writing which tells us something profound about devotion. What we are witnessing is nothing less than Sappho’s inner world splayed out on the page before us, a fragrant, synaesthetic world poised before the appearance of her goddess. If we are to trace the passion which marks Sappho’s verse, it is in the piling of detail between the initial longing (*here*) and the final, dazzling appearance of the goddess in the soul of her devotee (*pour*) – the entire world still, bent towards a single desired and beloved deity.

What a word to choose for divine presence, not ‘to appear’ or ‘to come’ or ‘to reveal’ but ‘to pour.’ Pouring nectar into golden cups: this is the image of Sappho’s devotion, where the love of the deity becomes something that suddenly, dazzlingly fills and saturates existence, like a single drop from the heavens. But there is also a melancholy to Sappho’s poem, because it is a mark of the rift between longing and presence: that the presence of the divine is a presence that is marked by absence. Her poem is an artifact, one which opens into the world of longing and sudden presence of Sappho’s devotion, but one,

also, which records its transience, the feeling that the goddess is seen only darkly, or briefly.

Perhaps, reading Sappho closely we also see that the construction of a hymn, even a hymn of calling poised on the brink of overflowing divine presence, also mourns its absence, longs for its return. We return to the start of the poem again: *here, hither, to me*. ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruin.’

Sappho, like all lovers, is daring. The ancient literary critic Longinus in his riddling, infuriating and extraordinary book *On the Sublime*, preserves part of a poem of hers in which she describes an exaltation of jealousy, for, as so many lovers before and after her, she loves a woman who is unavailable. It is, perhaps, her most famous poem, and Longinus preserves it because of the force (sublimity) which screams from its hot syllables and exalts its reader: Sappho renders one of the basest human experiences, jealousy, into ecstatic form. This might be the most translated of her poems (Catullus, Ronsard, Byron, Tennyson, William Carlos Williams, to name a few), simply because of its power. Longinus quotes four stanzas and what seems to be the beginning of a fifth, but (for a reason eternally unclear) Longinus breaks off; in any case, it is the end of the poem that interests me here:

...ὥς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε' ὥς με ψώνη-
ς οὐδὲν ἔτ εἴκει,

ἀλλὰ καμ μὲν γλωσσο ἔαγε, λέπτον
δ' αὐτίκα χρωι πυρ ὑπαδεδρόμακεν,
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημμ, ἐπιβρό-
μεισι δ' ἄκουαι,

έκαδε μ' ἴδρωσ κακχέεται, τρόμος, δὲ
παισαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνακην δ' ὀλιγω 'πιδεύης
φαίομ' ἔμ' αὐται.

ἀλλὰ πᾶν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα

... when I dare to glance at you,
my words are shocked out of me

my tongue is broken and inside me
breaks a chill of subtle fire,
my eyes can't see, a drumming
a roar fills my ears

a cold sweat covers me, a trembling
grasps at me, greener than grass
I am, and dead, almost, I
seem to me.

But all is to be dared, for even a person of poverty....

[Fragment 31]

And here Longinus breaks off. It is consonant with his aims of course: he wants to show the subtle fire that can race through the body of the reader when Sappho's words lift off the page. But why preserve that last line? As other critics have noted, it seems the beginning of a new thought, a breaking-off from the sublime paroxysm of desire and jealousy which the rest of the poem both describes and recreates. To me, this final line is not simply a new thought, but one which is stepping outside of the condition of the thought which preceded it. We do not know, and cannot hope to know where the poem would go from here, but the little that the last line tells us might give us enough to understand why Sappho has always been considered a lover not just of women but of Aphrodite.

The line contains the two conditions of the lover: poverty and daring. One is a state, the other an action. Longinus, commenting on this passage, admires the 'confluence of passions,' but where Longinus sees the body of the text as an achieved whole, we also notice that Sappho's body falls apart – it 'freezes and chills, is mad and sane' (Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 10.3). For Longinus, the purpose of the poem is to convey the subtle fire of desire and jealousy, but Sappho's purpose perhaps goes beyond it, as revealed in that last line – to see what lies inside human beings after the vast tumult of desire and jealousy have broken through a body. One can read *tolmaton* in that last line equally as 'endured' as well as 'dared': it says that *despite this*, even a person of poverty must dare all. Why?

There is no way of knowing for certain what Sappho wrote after this, but I think that the poverty she refers to is not simply a question of social standing, or bank balance. It is instead a recognition that we all come to love equally impoverished, and that it is the condition of the impoverished to cling desperately to what little they have, that what little

they have (a stolen, daring glance) is of unimaginable worth to them. Some like to reach this as dialectic: once you have been hollowed out, you must offer even that hollowness into the unknown again, again into the ecstatic. For myself, I see it as something slightly different – Sappho is unquestionably the person of poverty here, but what she is doing is a very public act, forcing her innermost secrets out through her pen. She is loving in the face of the world, and in setting loose the fire that consumes her, the fire that she treasures, she becomes immeasurably richer.

In both the fragments I have quoted here, the fundamentals of Sappho's being – as a lover, as a devotee, as a writer – are called into being every time the poem is read. It is not uncommon to read Sappho's poetry as a poetry of dissolution, of ecstasy, but it is also a poem of withdrawing, the sort of poetry which knows its inspiring goddess too well, knows there is always some trace of selfhood leftover, and longs to trace it, too. Sappho knows there is something always out of reach; something always to be dared.

You could call the force that runs through Sappho's poetry *Eros*, the son of Aphrodite – the poet herself often does. But though she feels that force, she also knows who gave birth to him. In keeping with the double movement of fierce passion and loss, presence and absence we have seen in her poetry, there is an epithet of Aphrodite that opens the first fragment which can tell us much about Sappho's goddess: *poikilophron*. It is a compound adjective meaning 'of the dappled mind' (some editors prefer the reading *poikilothron*, 'of the inlaid chair'; to me it seems more likely for a poet of Sappho's power, in this intellectual dance between goddess and devotee, to be thinking of the mind.) The adjective *poikilos* is not uncommon in Sappho, and it can suggest many things, dappled, intricate, wrought, spangled, inlaid, abstruse. In Plato's *Symposium*, Pausanias speaks of the half-written ethic governing homosexual conduct between boys as *poikilos nomos* (183d), and this perhaps shows the tension we find implicit in Sappho: the phrase can mean an 'abstruse law' or a 'complicated rule,' but that adjective, *poikilos*, shifts like mercury, it always suggests change, an overspilling of convention. That is Aphrodite again, of the dappled mind, never quite in sunlight, never quite in shade: that haze and elusive intricacy is the mind of the goddess of love.

Lastly, I want to read a short fragment of Sappho which might seem, initially, inconsequential in comparison to the two more famous fragments here. It is a poem of two lines which sums up, to me, what Sappho does with love, why she is important to any person who has loved:

Ἔρος δηότῃ μ' ὁ λυσιμέλης δόνει
γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπητον

[Fragment 130]

I would translate the first line thus:

Again Eros stirs me, melter of limbs –

There is an almost unbelieving gasp of suddenness in *dēute*, the temporal adverb which I have translated as ‘again’ – the sudden eruption into life of the cycle of love that Sappho knows well, but which is irresistible and floods through her bones. The epithet she gives him, *lysimelēs*, means limb-melter, and recalls the phrase Homer uses to describe the deathdealing blow in battle, but she is also punning, since in the word *melos*, ‘a limb,’ we can also hear the echo of the verb *melō*, which means ‘to care, to have concern.’ The blow of Eros is a blow of death, but a blow which loosens care, stirs care into being, melts limbs. The second line, of three words, can be translated as something approaching ‘bittersweet contrivance who quietly appears,’ but such a translation occludes the novelty and power of Sappho’s invention. Since it is a line that means so much to me, I would like to translate it backwards, take each word in turn and look at them with my heart, taking the verb first:

Orpeton: To ‘quietly appear’ out of nowhere, yes. But more so, to creep in, to steal in. Eros stealthy, behind the curtains, weighting his new arrows, waiting for an eye to glance in a certain direction. This love is unexpected, irruptive. Stop. Consider it: the boy you have seen a thousand times out of the corner of your eye, across a crowded dancefloor or at another table and paid no regard. The eye falls suddenly, dropping, and the arch of a neck or a smile causes the weight of your entire being to fall through the floor of your stomach. Pierced unsuspecting by arrows. But then also the man you have seen day after day, to whom

you turn one one afternoon to find the sun standing behind him. All the while, silently behind the walls of your chest, Eros has been setting up his temple. He has *stolen in*, alarm untripped, so he can softly line your eye with gold.

Amachanon: ‘a contrivance, a device, an instrument.’ Related to the same word from which we derive our word ‘machine,’ and a poem is a machine for desiring. What is she saying here? An instrument is contingent, on its own it is useless. And Eros is contingent on so many things, an evanescent machinery of the spirit, not only on Aphrodite, his mother, but the arrayed complexity of the human body. He takes his form from our smell and taste, the way a hair falls or the endless novelty of skin. Eros is predicated on strangeness, the strangeness that sets up its residence on the interior, jerks and tingles up the spine... a thing created, a strange face turning up, a drive that always exceeds itself. Eros is overreaching, the spirit that fills our limbs to move them to another. It is his unmanageability that is the root of his strangeness – Eros is always painted with a smile, sometimes half-curved and sometimes fully mirthful, because at any moment he can reduce everyone around him, even the gods, to floods of obsession and madness.

Vitruvius says no temple can be constructed coherently unless it is built exactly as a human body is; Eros’ canon is the reverse – his temple is the falling apart of human bodies, their unity at the edges, their dissolution at the borders, their being in another. *Eros unmanageable creature*.

Glukupikron: a Sapphic neologism, this dazzling word, which we translate as ‘bittersweet,’ but a translation that does injustice through its overfamiliarity. Everything these days is bittersweet. Too tinged with irony or wistfulness. This line is not hollowed-out or blind either with joy or sadness. Our word for it telescopes the timeframe – Sappho’s word is actually sweetbitter, where the bitterness hasn’t overwhelmed the sweetness, where the sweetness is not simply an afterthought. As if, in ‘bittersweet,’ we thought the pain came first, though as if each isn’t tintured with the other... Why not place each adjective separately – ‘sweet and bitter’? Because the conjunction implies their separation – *glukupikron* is not simply both sensations, but a third, newly produced and different from either of its parents.

How many times have I done it? So often too tremulous to step over the boundaries because each warm morning with knotted limbs calls up the memory of loss, of the hollowness of leaving, of bags and boxes stacked neatly at the door. The silence of a hundred private desires slipping down under the weight of the future – the terrible daring required to hold your heart out to another, to know that love is always doublewriting, of presence and withdrawing. Yet we'll overstep, overspill. Our love acquires its gravity from our loss, to condense ourselves out of nothing into each other requires a heart pulled outward: *here, hither, to me, pour.*

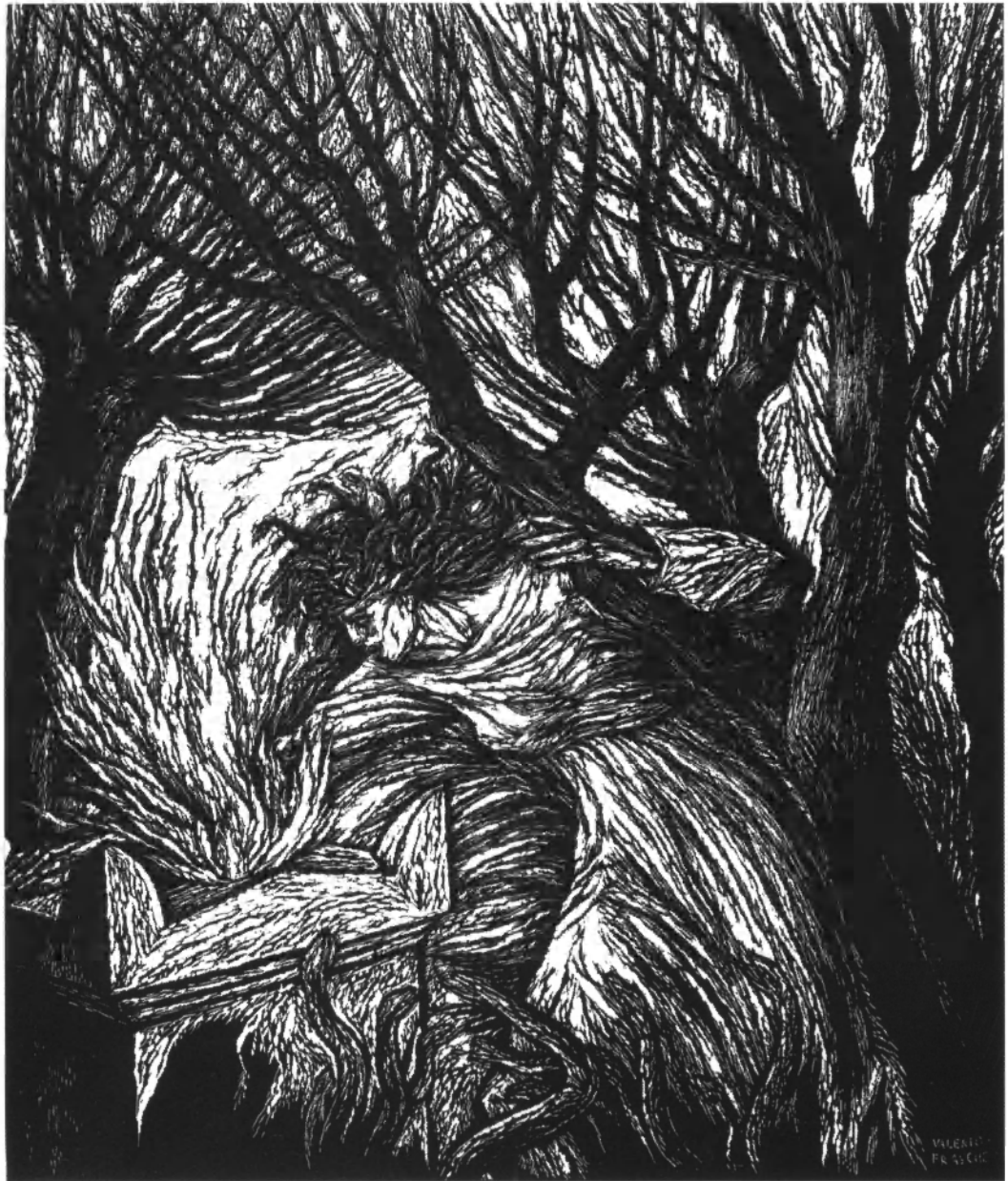
Once again, Eros, unmanageable creature, you steal in.

Apócrifo

Naagrom



f



Left
Inestinguibile Fiamma
Valerio Frascetti

Elegy

Ellie Hughes

We are people of the cities, of high streets, fast food, and all night supermarkets. Neon signs are far more likely to shine from our eyes than the stars. We search, reach for what's missing, the mind straining for that melody, blown by a hot puff of exhaust to the edge of forgotten. We know it can't always have been like this. The world can't be this simple, this explicable, this bright. We hark back to old takes, old ways, old things, reaching for that 'before'. Heard in folk songs, poems, the soft lines of pastoral water colours, seek it in cracked parchment, the sputtered writing of quills and dip pens, now printed in musty leather bound books. Once we were close to the land, close to death, close to blood and sweat. Now we are close to sofas, to fridges, to nine to fives, to convenience. Yet we look back, rosy, over what we lost: the smell, the poverty, famine, many births, many deaths, why. We seek the edges, the edge of life, the edge of dark, the edge of understanding, where lines are blurred and possibilities are opened out. We shield our eyes in this world so brightly lit by information. We lost the stars.

You can't see their procession now through the smog and reflected red glow of constant street lamps. There are no hedgerows to protect these ways, collect those softer medicines, same bitter poisons that so long served. Only railway cuttings, and waste ground between high chain linked fences. Each scatter of bird-song, each wild flower is made more precious by its rarity. Acceptance of these gifts, nature's abundance pressing up through the flagstones, tunes the mind to the call, sweet as the nightingale in the dark of the rumble of traffic, sirens and tarmac. We seek the dark, it can be heard better there. Close the curtains, rise at midnight, go softly by the sputtering match that lights candles, casting soft pools of light. We struggle to understand the world, read old words, cards, the ripple of imagination in a mirror of black glass. One night, in the solitude of the mind, and book, vistas open up from dust. Another the rising of the moon catches the heart and sings with the scent of jasmine flowing green and shining white over city walls. It is the same, it is different. There is more than there is, more than can be seen in the harsh light of reason, mystery more precious than fact.

The Cat who fell in love with a Mask

Stephen J. Clarke



The Third Eye

The Fantastic World of Lobsang Rampa

Phil Hine

1956 saw the first British publication of a book called *The Third Eye*, described in glowing terms by *The Times Literary Supplement* who lauded it as 'becoming a near work of art,' whilst *The Observer* called it 'an extraordinary and exciting book.' *The Third Eye* was the autobiography of a Tibetan, one Tuesday Lobsang Rampa, the son of a leading member of the Dalai Lama's government, born into a well-to-do home in Lhasa. At the age of seven, astrologers predicted the boy's future: that he would enter a monastery, train as a priest-surgeon, suffer great hardships, leave Tibet, and live amongst strange peoples.

The book relates a remarkable life indeed. We read that Tuesday did join a lamasery, in due course proved to be an exemplary student, and was selected by the abbots to receive the most esoteric teachings. On the boy's eighth birthday, priest-surgeons drilled a hole in his skull in order to create a 'third eye' which would allow him to see auras. After recovering from the operation, Tuesday was interviewed by the Dalai Lama, who had investigated the boy's past lives, and reminded

him of the role he would soon play in preserving the wisdom of Tibet. At the age of twelve, Tuesday took the examination to qualify as a medical priest. This, the reader is told, involved being sealed inside a stone cubicle, into which was passed written questions requiring written responses. The tests lasted for fourteen hours a day, for six days. After passing the exams with flying colours, Tuesday accompanied his tutor, the great Lama Mingyar Dondup, on an expedition to collect medical plants and herbs. During this expedition, they visited a monastery where the monks built box kites large enough for a person to fly in. Tuesday made several flights and also made suggestions for the improvement of their design. On another expedition, Tuesday and his teacher encountered the Yeti and found a garden of Eden-like paradise in a lost valley. At the age of sixteen, he was examined once again, and achieved the rank of Lama. The book closes with Tuesday receiving the rank of abbot - undergoing 'the Ceremony of the Little Death' and departing Tibet for China on the instructions of the Dalai Lama.

Publishing *The Third Eye*

The manuscript of *The Third Eye* was first given to several publishers, including Robert Hale and Collins, who rejected it out of hand.² The publishers E. P. Dutton in New York sent it to Hugh Richardson, a former officer-in-charge of the British Mission to Tibet, who had lived there for nine years. Richardson returned the manuscript with many corrections and offered the opinion that the book was a fake, using existing published works as a basis and 'embellished by a fertile imagination.' Dutton rejected the book on Richardson's recommendation. The manuscript was then sent to Secker and Warburg. The story goes that the author met Frederick Warburg and impressed him by reading his palm and correctly divining his age – and the fact that he had been recently involved in a criminal case. Warburg obtained a copy of Richardson's report and, further, sent copies of the manuscript to a battery of authorities on Tibet, including the mountaineers Heinrich Harrer and Marco Pallis, as well as respected scholars such as David Snellgrove and Agehananda Bharati. All declared unequivocally that the book was fraudulent. In the preface to the first edition of *The Third Eye*, the publishers acknowledge the reservations of the expert readers but noted that:

On many points of his personal life he [the author] displayed a discretion that was sometimes disconcerting.

1. Full references to all Rampa's works are provided in the bibliography at the end of this article.

2. Accounts of Rampa's publication history and biographical exposes are found in numerous sources. The most important of these for the purpose of this essay are those listed hereunder. Specifically on Rampa: Karen Mutton, 'T. Lobsang Rampa: New Age Trailblazer', *Nexus Magazine*, Feb-March 2006, April-May 2006; Sarah Penicka, 'Lobsang Rampa: The Lama of Suburbia', *Sydney Studies in Religion* (<http://escholarship.library.usyd.edu.au/journals/index.php/SSR/article/view/128/149>). On the wider context I am particularly indebted to the following: Christopher Evans, *Cults of Unreason* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974); Peter Bishop, *Dreams of Power: Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination* (London: Athlone Press, 1993); T. Dodin and H. Rather, eds., *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001); Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004); Donald Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Agehananda Bharati, 'Fictitious Tibet: The Origin and Persistence of Rampalism', *Tibet Society Bulletin* 7 (1974). (<http://www.serendipity.li/baba/rampa.html>) [accessed 02/08/2008].

... But Lobsang Rampa assures us that because Tibet is occupied by the Communists, he is obliged to maintain a certain discretion in order not to compromise the security of his family. ... We might sometimes think that that he stretches the limits of occidental credulity, although our understanding in this field cannot be held to be definitive. The publishers are nonetheless persuaded that *The Third Eye* essentially constitutes an authentic document on the education and formation of a young Tibetan in the bosom of his family and in a Lamasery.

The Third Eye quickly became a best-seller in twelve countries, selling some 300,000 copies in the first eighteen months of publication in the UK alone – and within two years, had nine hardback printings in the UK. French and German editions also appeared.

The Scholars Fight back

The popularity of *The Third Eye* drew an outraged response from the scholars who had given their testimony to the publishers. David Snellgrove described the book as 'shameless.' Marco Pallis stated that it was 'a wild fabrication and a libel on both Tibet and its religion.' Heinrich Harrer's review was so scathing that *The Third Eye*'s German publisher threatened him with a libel suit.

Hugh Richardson published a critical review in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post* in November 1956, declaring that 'anyone who has lived in Tibet will feel after reading a few pages of 'The Third Eye' that its author, T. Lobsang Rama, is certainly not a Tibetan.' In 1958, Marco Pallis, acting on behalf of a group of European scholars of Tibet, engaged the services of Clifford Burgess, a private detective, to discover the true identity of the author of *The Third Eye*. After a month of investigation, Burgess revealed that the author was one Cyril Henry Hoskin, born in Plympton, Devonshire in 1910. His father was a plumber, and he had been considered by those who knew him as 'an odd child.' He later worked for a surgical goods manufacturing company and as a clerk for a London company who offered education through correspondence courses. Burgess reported that during this period, Hoskin

became increasingly 'peculiar,' calling himself Kuan-Suo, shaving the hair from his head, and taking his cat out on a lead for walks. He then appeared in Bayswater in 1954, calling himself Dr Kuan-Suo. Burgess stated that until he moved to Dublin there was no evidence that Hoskin had ever left the UK.

Exposure and response

In February 1958, *The Scottish Daily Mail* broke the story with 'Third Eye Lama Exposed as a Fake.' *The Daily Express* followed with 'The Full Truth about the Bogus Lama' along with an article by Frederick Warburg, who reported that he had had a Tibetologist phoneticise the phrase, 'Did you have a nice journey, Mr Rampa?' which he read out to the author. When the latter did not reply, Warburg informed him that it was Tibetan. The author promptly fell to the floor in an apparent fit, then explained to Warburg that he had been tortured by the Japanese and had hypnotically blocked his knowledge of Tibetan to the extent that he had never recovered his native tongue. Even hearing Tibetan caused him pain, he said, and warned Warburg not to press him further.

In February 1958, *Time* magazine featured the story, 'Private vs. Third Eye.' Hoskin did not meet with reporters, it was claimed, because of his health, but his wife attested that her husband had written the book on behalf of a real Dr. Ku'an, whose family were in hiding from the Chinese communists. She later stated that these comments were a fabrication by the press.

When *The Third Eye* was reprinted, it contained a statement from the author which began: 'in the East it is commonly acknowledged that a stronger mind can take possession of another body.' He went on to explain that, late in 1947, Cyril Hoskin began to experience an irresistible compulsion to adopt eastern ways of living. He changed his name to Carl Ku'an, left his job, and moved to a 'remote location' where he experienced hallucinations and his own memories were gradually supplanted by those of an 'eastern entity.' In 1949 he sustained a concussion from falling out of a tree, and after this had no memory of his own early life, but gained the full memory, from babyhood, as a Tibetan. He claimed that he had papers which proved his identity, but that he had sent them away again so that they would not be 'sullied' by those who doubted

him. In response to the opinions of the 'experts' he responded that no two of them had been able to agree on any particular fault, and in any case, none of them had lived in Tibet as a lama, nor entered a monastery at the age of seven 'as I have done.' In closing, he stated that there is a great deal of Theosophical literature on the subject of possession and that his publishers have a letter from a swami in India stating that possession is quite common in the East.

Hoskin's statement was reinforced by one from his wife, testifying that since 1949 'his whole manner and make-up have been those of an easterner,' and that 'his general make-up and colouring have also shown a marked change.' The book also contains a statement from Hoskin that British and German newspapers had been conducting a campaign against him – and that he could not defend himself because of a heart condition. He stated once again that all his claims were absolutely true and that he did not copy from other books.

That, however, was not the end of the story. Undeterred by the critics, two other books quickly followed *The Third Eye*. *Doctor from Lhasa*, published in 1959, picks up the story of Lobsang Rampa in China, beginning in 1927. His many adventures include being recruited into a special corps of medical airmen in the army of Chiang Kai-shek; flying an air ambulance during China's war with Japan; being caught by the Japanese (twice) and tortured – although his training as a Lama allows him to resist this. He also enrolls in a medical college where he astounds his instructors by sketching a magnetic field, as seen through his third eye. He hopes, by combining his knowledge of Chinese and Occidental medicine, to reproduce a machine he once saw in the ruins of a prehistoric city in a hidden valley in the Chang Thang – a device for reading auras and predicting the onset of disease or mental problems.

The Rampa Story opens in 1960, in Tibet, where the High Lamas have discovered, through astral exploration, a secret network of caves which they are using to prevent their most sacred artefacts from falling into the hands of the communists. The abbots, aware of the impending Chinese invasion through their clairvoyant powers, have been secretly preparing this for years. By now, Rampa himself is living in Canada. The lamas contact him telepathically and give him the task of writing a book explaining how one person can take over the body of

another, with the latter person's full consent. The book recounts that Rampa, after drifting across the Sea of Japan (which was where *Doctor from Lhasa* ended), found himself in Russia. He is drafted into the Russian army but later arrested by the security police and tortured in Lubyanka prison. He is released and is deported to Poland, but on the way the truck he is travelling in crashes and is badly injured. Whilst in hospital, Rampa travels to the 'world of golden light' in his astral body, where he meets his former teacher, who has been murdered by the communists, and Sha-lu, a talking cat. The thirteenth Dalai Lama meets him also and urges him to return to earth and continue his work. The problem is that Rampa's body is in no fit state. The Dalai Lama tells Rampa that a body has been located for him in England, and that the present owner's aura has the same 'harmonic' as Rampa's. He is warned, however, that if he returns to Earth he will face disbelief, hatred and hardship, which is due to the force of evil which tries to prevent human evolution. Further adventures take Rampa across Europe to America, and then to India, where with the help of an old Lama he makes an astral journey to the Akashic Records in order to investigate the past of lives of the man whose body he is to inhabit. He meets this man on the astral plane, and he agrees to allow Rampa to inhabit his body. A month later, Rampa visits the man astrally again, and instructing him to fall out of a tree, Rampa and three fellow lamas sever the silver cord attaching the man to his body and attach Rampa's silver cord to the body. Now in the new body, he does a variety of jobs in England, and eventually writes *The Third Eye*. After completing the book he has a heart attack and moves to Ireland, an island which was once part of Atlantis. His old teacher contacts him again once more, and directs him to move to 'the land of the Red Indians,' where he has a final task to accomplish. *The Rampa Story* ends with the prediction of a Chinese nuclear attack launched from Lhasa.

Sixteen other books followed this initial trilogy, including *Living with the Lama*, which was written by (Mrs) Fifi Grey-whiskers, one of the lama's cats. It has been estimated that overall sales of the Lobsang Rampa series have topped four million copies worldwide by the time of Rampa's death in

1981. I have also seen claims on the internet that sales figures for Rampa's books is now in the region of 15 million copies worldwide. The Lobsang Rampa books remain in print to this day and there are several websites and internet forums devoted to the discussion and circulation of his ideas.

Assessing Rampa

Donald Lopez in his *Prisoners of Shangri-La* examines the Rampa phenomenon, and characterises Rampa as one of the great 'mystifiers' of Tibet, in the sense that he 'mystified Tibet, embellishing its various realities with his own mystical fancies' and also in the sense that 'he mystified his readers, playing on the credulity of the reading public.'³ Agehananda Bharati, never one to mince words, takes a similar stance:

Every page bespeaks the utter ignorance of the author of anything that has to do with Buddhism as practiced and Buddhism as a belief system in Tibet or elsewhere. But the book also shows a shrewd intuition into what millions of people want to hear. Monks and neophytes flying through the mysterious breeze on enormous kites; golden images in hidden cells, representing earlier incarnations of the man who views them; arcane surgery in the skull to open up the eye of wisdom; tales about the dangers of mystical training and initiation – in a Western worlds so desperately seeking for the mysterious where everything is so terribly accessible to inspection, where the divine has been bowdlerized or institutionalized, where it speaks with the wagging-finger lingo of moralistic nagging, the less hardy and the softer will seek that which is the opposite of all these turn-off factors.⁴

Most of the critical scholarship on Lobsang Rampa deals with him largely in relation to western idealisations of Tibet, placing him alongside other 'mystifiers' such as Madame Blavatsky. Lopez recounts in *Prisoners of Shangri-La* how he gave *The Third Eye* as reading to a group of his first year undergraduate students, omitting any clues to its provenance. The students, he writes, were unanimous in their praise for the book, finding it 'entirely credible and compelling.' He poses the question of

3. Lopez, *Prisoners*, 86.

4. Bharati, 'Fictitious Tibet'.

just why Lobsang Rampa's books have been so popular, in spite of scholarly approbrium, and frames his answer in a discussion of authority. Lobsang Rampa's initial authority, he opines, rested in him being accepted as a lama by his readers. Once Rampa was revealed to be Hoskin, his authority would have waned, were it not for the fact that the tale in *Doctor from Lhasa* and *The Rampa Story* show how Hoskin has become Rampa. He points out that by the time Rampa released *The Hermit* (1971) he was simply stating that his books were true and that 'some people who are bogged down in materialism may prefer to think of it as fiction.' To this Rampa adds, 'believe or disbelieve according to your state of evolution.'

In closing the chapter of *Prisoners*, Lopez says that he has met many Tibetologists and Buddhologists who told him that it was reading the Rampa books which gave them the initial fascination with the world he described that led to them becoming professional scholars and that some said that despite he was a fraud, he had a 'good effect.'

Rampa as a Demystifier

Having spent considerable time reading through many of Lobsang Rampa's books, I think there is a good case to make for Lobsang Rampa as a de-mystifier, of both Tibet and the esoteric subjects that he deals with. One of the things that impressed me (if 'impressed' is the right word) is that Lobsang Rampa's writing style is commonsensical, down-to-earth. Certainly he describes a wide range of odd experiences, but he does so in such a fashion as to render them unchallenging. He makes the unfamiliar unthreatening, in a sense. When he explains occult concepts, he invariably does so with recourse to common-sense analogies which would be familiar to a general western reader, and uses very few recognisably occult technical terms. Indeed, in his foreword to *The Cave of the Ancients* (1963) Rampa expresses his disdain for 'mumbo jumbo' and states that 'this is a simple book, without any foreign words in it, no Sanskrit, nothing of dead languages in it.' This, I feel, accounts for some of his appeal. The wisdom Rampa presents is remarkably self-contained; it is given 'as is.' He does not back up his statements by quoting other authorities; in fact, one gains the impression that, apart from himself, there are no other authorities. Moreover, although he talks about the importance of learning scriptures and studying

esoteric books in Tibet in his autobiographical reminiscences, he does not provide references, nor does he refer to specific texts. Only occasionally does he recommend other books to his readers.

Rampa also gives his views on a diverse range of esoteric subjects, much of it seemingly in response to letters he has received. We learn that he does not approve of fortune telling, absent healing or meditation in groups; the last item should be avoided as it can lead to nervous illnesses due to contamination from other – untrained people's – thought-vibrations. In fact, he recommends that his readers avoid cults or esoteric groups of any kind. Astrology he asserts to be genuine, but most of the people who advertise themselves as astrologers are fakes. Similarly, spirit guides and mediums are the target of Rampa's scorn; he wryly comments in *Feeding the Flame* that 'if everyone who claimed to have an Indian guide or a Tibetan guide was listed, there just wouldn't be enough Indians or enough Tibetans to go round.' In *The Saffron Robe* (1966) Rampa is told by one of his teachers 'not to bother with yoga' and that it is 'just a physical exercise, nothing more. Nothing spiritual.' Rampa is also rather dismissive of scientists and 'experts.' In a rare interview from 1958, he says, 'one should not place too much credence in "experts" or "Tibetan scholars" when it is seen how one "expert" contradicts the other when they cannot agree on what is right and what is wrong.'⁵ In *Chapters of Life* (1967) he states that scientists have little or no imagination, and that the investigation of subjects such as the world of anti-matter should be reserved for occultists, as 'the competent occultist can leave the body and get out of the body, and out of the Earth as well, and once out of the Earth he can see what this other world is like – as I have done so very, very frequently.' Rampa reveals that it is the anti-matter world which is responsible for phenomena such as the Bermuda Triangle and the mysterious loss of Flight 19.

5. T. Lobsang Rampa, 1958 Interview, transcript from the website of Karen Mutton (<http://www.karenmutton.com/rampa/transmigration.htm>) [accessed 02/08/2008]

6. Sheelagh Rouse, *Twenty-Five Years with T. Lobsang Rampa* (Toronto and Raleigh: Lulu.com, 2006).

Tradition/Modernity

Rampa's books can be seen as examples of books which glorify tradition and at the same time condemn modernity. The 1950s were a period of great change in British life, with the end of post-war austerity and the beginning of the 'affluent society,' visible in the rise of commercial television, colour magazines, cheap paperback books, and the advertising of luxury commodities. Establishment values also began to be increasingly questioned and ridiculed. Individual freedom and choice became an increasing cultural concern. Yet the new freedoms and liberties also brought uncertainties. Rampa's books, which span a period from the mid-1950s to 1980 (he produced one book a year between 1963 and 1973) articulate and express the tensions between tradition and individualism.

When not recounting his autobiographical adventures in Tibet or elsewhere, or explaining various occult matters, Rampa comments freely on the state of the world and what has gone wrong with modern society. Thus we discover that young people of today are 'dimmer' than their parents, and he directs particular scorn at those with 'long hair... and scruffy, tattered, rags of clothing.' He blames the state of young people today on television, cinema, and the phenomenon of both parents (particularly women) going out to work. He is irrevocably opposed to drugs such as LSD, as they can damage the astral body irreparably.

Rampa also makes it abundantly clear in *I Believe* (1976) that he has no time for so-called 'women's libbers,' who, according to him, are not really women. He opines that the rot started in the First World War, when women went to work in factories. Women should stay at home, and be wives and mothers, as Nature intended. He recounts that in the Akashic Records there is evidence of a long-vanished civilisation of people 'who wore purple skins,' and which became dominated by women. Men there were treated as slaves, or virile studs for the sole purpose of making babies. This matriarchy was 'unbalanced' and so ended. In *Three Lives* (1977) the Old Author (Rampa) recounts a dream in which a young woman, killed in an accident, finds out after her death that because she was a 'women's libber' her soul is now destined for the 'hellish regions.' Hell, in this narrative, has special stockades reserved for publishers, agents, members of the press, old Etonians and women's liberationists.

Rampa believes that modern society has reached a crossroads, and that the only thing which will ensure stability is the return to a religious life. It should be, he says, a 'fresh' religion, as the old ones 'have failed so miserably.' In *Candlelight* (1973), in answer to a question about violence in the world, he says, 'people are being given false values. Religion is being torn down. People no longer believe in the simple things of life. They listen to the radio, they watch terrible things on television, and they read the gory details in the sensational press.'

Although Rampa is critical of western science, progress and 'fallible machines,' it is noteworthy that the core of *The Third Eye*, the opening of Rampa's own third eye in Chapter 8, is a surgical procedure involving an instrument resembling a bradawl, rather than being an occurrence resultant from spiritual discipline, as one might expect. A continued enthusiasm for strange machinery runs throughout the books, and the device for reading auras, first mentioned in *Doctor from Lhasa*, becomes a central refrain. Rampa states on several occasions that his *raison d'être* for his writing is to create funds for his research into creating this device for the benefit of all humanity.

Sheelagh Rouse was his long-standing companion, and in her book *Twenty-five Years with Lobsang Rampa*, she says that in pursuit of his research in auric photography in Ireland, Rampa held that the female aura was 'brighter' than the male, having stronger colours, and that it was necessary to find female models who were willing to pose nude.⁶

Rampa uses characters to flesh out and give veracity to his opinions. In *The Thirteenth Candle* (1972), for example, his views on male and female homosexuality are verified through the device of vignette 'slices of life' from two sets of characters. We meet two women, Lotta Bull ('the epitome of the masculine woman') and her lover Rosie Hipp ('all feminine, fluff, and froth with hardly a thought in her vapid, blonde head'). There are also two men, Dennis Dollywogga and Justin Towne, whose purported letter to Rampa objects to his remarks on the cause of homosexuality in his previous book *Feeding the Flame* (1971), in which had written:

Being born is a traumatic experience, it's a most violent affair, and a very delicate mechanism can easily become deranged. For example, a baby is about to be born and throughout the pregnancy the mother has been rather careless about what she was eating and what she was

doing, so the baby has not received what one might term a balanced chemical input. The baby may be short of a chemical and so development of certain glands may have been halted. Let us say the baby was going to come as a girl, but through lack of certain chemicals, the baby is actually born a boy, a boy with the inclinations of a girl. The parents might realize that they've got a sissified little wretch and put it down to over-indulgence or something, they may try to beat some sense into him one end or the other to make him more manly, but it doesn't work; if the glands are wrong, never mind what sort of attachments are stuck on in front, the boy is still a girl in a boy's body.

If a woman has a male psyche, then she will not be interested in men but will be interested in women, because her psyche, which is closer to the Overself than is the physical body, is relaying confusing messages to the Overself and the Overself sends back a sort of command, 'Get busy, do your stuff.' The poor wretched male psyche is obviously repelled by the thought of 'doing his stuff' with a man, and so all the interest is centered on a female, so you get the spectacle of a female making love to a female and that's what we call a lesbian because of a certain island off Greece where that used to be 'the done thing.'

The vital thing is that one should never, never condemn a homosexual, it's not his fault, he is being penalized for something he hasn't done, he is being penalized for some fault of Nature; perhaps his mother had the wrong sort of food, perhaps the mother and the child were chemically incompatible. However, whichever way you look at it, homosexuals can only be helped by true understanding and sympathy, and possibly with the judicious administration of drugs.

To the above passage, 'Justin Towne' wrote in this reply:

Most homos are not the little pansies you see on the street, they are not the ones the psychiatrists and doctors write about because those are the emotionally disturbed ones. Being an adventurer I have worked in cities, farms,

some rodio work, etc., etc., and I know homos in all fields who are as normal as 'blue-berry pie' so to speak. So, they can be very masculine, they can think and act like men and do NOT think and act like women or have any of the feminine characteristics which so many heterosexuals seem to think they do. I wanted to stress TO the homo, what an important part he could play in this world, if he'd get off his behind and quit feeling sorry for himself. I don't believe in things like this 'Gay Liberation' thing where like all youngsters today they think they have to make a big issue of it, but merely go along and do one's own job well, with the tools they have (being their own talents etc.).

Romancing Tibet – The Third Eye as travelogue

Cyril Hoskin / Lobsang Rama was not the first case of an author *becoming* his literary personality. One can think of such notables as T. E. Lawrence or Richard Burton assuming the disguise of the native, or indeed Alexandra David-Neel disguising herself as a Tibetan in order to explore the forbidden kingdom. There is also the case of the supposedly Native American author and lecturer 'Grey Owl,' famed for his books and talks in the 1930s, who was exposed after his death to be Archibald Bellaney, an Englishman.

When Rampa's narrative turns to his life in Tibet, he is clearly drawing on what we would now recognise as cultural primitivist assumptions about the exotic nature of Tibetan culture, stereotypes existing in European popular culture, drawn from the writings of Theosophists such as Madame Blavatsky and Alice Bailey, and James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* – although Rampa always claimed that he had never read any Theosophical works. *The Third Eye* paints a rather idealistic picture of Tibet as an idyllic utopia, untouched but cautiously aware of the materialism and progress of the west. Tibetans do not have wheels, he says, for example, because wheels represent speed, and 'so-called civilisation.' Similarly, in *Doctor from Lhasa*, Rampa recounts with amazement his first encounter with a spring bed, running tap water, people smoking, and later, an aeroplane, which he first believes is 'one of the sky-gods.'

Donald Lopez, in *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, remarks upon the fact that numerous scholars had had their initial interest in

Tibet sparked by a reading of Rampa's books, and I find this particularly interesting. A trawl of internet search engines on the treatment of Rampa revealed several Tibetan aid organisations whose members included people stating that their interest in Tibet had been sparked by reading the Rampa books. I found also that several of the large Rampa 'fan sites' also had information about current events in Tibet and carried links to sites such as Tibet Online and the UK-based Tibet Foundation. *The Third Eye* was written after the Chinese invasion of Tibet, but before the 1959 Uprising and the subsequent diaspora of Tibetan religious leaders to India and the West. To some degree, one might argue that the popularity of Rampa's works, and the late-1950s controversy around it, heightened public interest in, and the desire to access, Tibetan Buddhism. It could also be argued that Lobsang Rampa also provided a window into events in occupied Tibet. Although Rampa does portray a romanticised picture of life in Tibet, he at least does not depoliticise the country's history; *The Third Eye* mentions both the 1904 Younghusband expedition and the Chinese military attempt to control Lhasa in 1910. *The Rampa Story* (1960) contains some retellings of astral visions of Chinese brutality against ordinary Tibetans and executions of monks, and recounts stories of nuns being raped and burned alive. I have been unable, however, to find any reference to the Tibetan resistance movements or the 1959 Uprising in his books.

In *Feeding the Flame* (1971) he opens chapter three of the book with an account of what life in Lhasa is like under the 'terror' of the Chinese. He describes the 'genocide' being practised upon the Tibetan people by the Chinese. He also takes this opportunity, however, to express his dissatisfaction with the Tibetan government-in-exile. He had hoped to 'speak as a representative of Tibet before the United Nations' but he feels that high-ranking Tibetans now 'living in comfort in India' are afraid to support him because of the way he has been portrayed by the press. In *As It Was* (1976) there is a long section dealing with 'predictions' made about Rampa's life by the Chief Astrologer, which at one point extols Rampa's own skill at predictions: 'he had made the prediction that there would be no real Dalai Lama after the Thirteenth had gone to the state of transition; there would be another but he would

7. Gray Barker / T. Lobsang Rampa, *My Visit to Venus* (Clarksburg: Saucerian Books, 1966).

have been selected as a matter of political expediency in an attempt to assuage the territorial ambitions of the Chinese.' The Chief Astrologer says of Rampa: 'it will be considered to the benefit of a people as a whole that he be disowned, that he be not supported by those who should support him, by those who could support him, and I say again that these are probabilities because it is quite possible for our own people to support him and give him an opportunity to speak before the nations of the world, so that first, Tibet may be saved.'

Evidently the apparent refusal of the Tibetan government-in-exile to recognise Rampa as a spokesman for Tibet rankled deeply. In *As It Was* he comments that 'it is mainly the *lower orders* of refugees who seem to be opposed to me' [*italics mine*]. He also claims to have a letter saying that the Dalai Lama is praying daily for his health. His followers sometimes claim that the present Dalai Lama's 'public denial' of knowing Lobsang Rampa is a sham, because he is 'playing the political field, prostituting (*sic*) his religion trying to appease too many people who wouldn't support him if he did.'

Do flying Saucers visit Tibet?

Lobsang Rampa also had an influence on the UFO scene. In 1966 there appeared *My Visit to Venus*, an 'unauthorised' anthology of Rampa's early writings from the mid-1950s was published by Gray Barker, author of *They Knew Too Much about Flying Saucers* (1956) and now recognised as the person responsible for introducing the 'men in black' component to UFO folklore.⁷ Rampa gave Barker 'permission' to continue to publish the book, provided he made some minor alternations to the manuscript and send ten percent of his profits to the 'Save a Cat League' of New York. The second edition of *Venus* also contains a foreword from John Keel. In *Venus*, Rampa recounts how he and six fellow lamas encounter a race of giant, telepathic humanoids in a lost city, which they discover, half-frozen in a glacier. These humanoids, it transpires, have been overseeing the development of humanity, and they take Rampa and his fellows to Venus, where they experience so many wonders that Earth seems a tawdry, drab place, in comparison.

UFO-related themes continue in Rampa's books throughout the 1960s. There are, for example, the Gardeners, a race of aliens who colonised earth billions of years ago, and

who periodically come back to check on humanity's progress. The Gardeners 'seeded' Earth with the human race, and although they are largely benign, they do occasionally abduct people and experiment on them in order to 'improve the race.' Humanity regarded them as 'gods from the sky.' There are also a race of advanced beings who live inside the earth, but who sometimes explore the surface using advanced technology, and interdimensional entities which can only be perceived by humans as patterns of lights. In *The Hermit* (1971), Rampa recounts what a classic alien abduction experience, complete with telepathic interchanges and bizarre experiments performed on him. He even offers a description of the now-familiar gray alien:

There I saw a most extraordinary thing, a dwarf, a gnome, a very very small body, a body like that of a five-year-old child, I thought. But the head, ah, the head was immense, a great dome of a skull, hairless, too, not a trace of hair anywhere in sight on this one. The chin was small, very small indeed, and the mouth was not a mouth the same as we have, but seemed to be more of a triangular orifice. The nose was slight, not a protuberance so much as a ridge. This was obviously the most important person because the others looked with such deferential respect in his direction.

Rampa's books have undoubtedly influenced the contemporary 'alternative science' movement, with their themes of lost technologies, underground cities, lost lands such as Lemuria and Ultima Thule, time capsules, and the recurring notion that conspiracies aim to suppress secret wisdom becoming common knowledge. Whilst some of these themes may not have originated with Rampa, he popularised them years before the publication of Erich Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods*. Indeed, the work of contemporary 'alternative science' authors such as Graham Hancock is seen by adherents of Lobsang Rampa as validation and proof of his ideas.

Some final thoughts

Lobsang Rampa is written off as a fraud by the educated mainstream, whilst those who follow his teachings do still

believe him to be the psychically-adept lama of his books. For the latter readers, the 'truth' of his writings has been suppressed by various forces: the current Dalai Lama, various governments, the scientific establishment, or western 'occult secret societies' who dislike the truths Rampa reveals. The impression I have of Rampa – from reading his books, and the testimonies of those who knew him – is that he genuinely believed that he was who he said he was (or rather, was host for) the spirit of Lobsang Rampa. His partner Sheelagh Rouse says that Hoskin's body was gradually completely replaced by Rampa's, and explains that her companion suffered actual pains, attributed to the tortures he had received at the hands of the Japanese.⁸ Her portrayal is of a spiritual adept, uninterested in having followers and disciples and somewhat reclusive, due to the persecution of the press and critics, yet willing to help the people who wrote to him with their problems and questions.

Rampa's works stand at the dawn of the 1960s, when Western fascination with Tibet, Eastern mysticism and other forms of esoteric wisdom took on new heights of popularity. It is rather ironic that Rampa's first book, *The Third Eye*, has achieved something of an iconic status as a key text for 1960s counter-cultural mystical enthusiasts, since Rampa makes it plain in his later works that he had no time whatsoever for hippies, young people, or the changes sweeping through Western culture during his own lifetime. *The Third Eye* remains to this day, one of the most popular and widely-read books on Tibet, despite continued scholarly opprobrium. At least some of the appeal of Rampa's texts is his ability to present 'esoteric wisdom' in a familiar, uncomplicated fashion, eschewing either complex terminology or conceptual formations; rendering both beliefs and practices into a simple approach that reduces uncertainty. In his course book, *You – Forever*, he writes:

Occultism is no more mysterious or complicated than the multiplication tables or an excursion into history. It is just learning of different things, learning of things which are not of the physical. We should not go into raptures if we suddenly discovered how a nerve worked a muscle or how we could twitch a big toe, they would be just ordinary physical matters. So why should we go into raptures and think that the spirits are sitting all

around us if we know how we can pass etheric energy from one person to another? Please note that we say here 'etheric energy' which is good English instead of 'prana' or any other Eastern terms; we prefer when writing a Course in a language to adhere to that language.

All the reader has to do is follow Rampa's guidance and believe that the exercises he recommends will work, and he or she too, will be able to begin to access the abilities that Rampa displays. His books also appeal to readers who are suspicious of authorities; 'experts' such as scientists and occultists often draw Rampa's disdain. He uses his cast of characters not only to illustrate his worldview and demonise the targets of his ire, such as women's libbers and the upper classes, but also to provide 'independent' assertions within the text which suggest to the reader that he is a sympathetic listener and can be helpful to those who feel at odds with their position in society. The interchange in *The Thirteenth Candle* between lesbians Lotta Bull and Rosie Hipp establishes that Rampa's opinions about homosexuality have helped Rosie understand herself – prompting Lotta to ask 'Is he ... ONE OF US – Homo?' Which of course, Rampa is not, yet he is deemed capable of offering useful advice.

Rampa's books also act to provide readers with a perceived privileged access to Tibet and other countries. His is not the world of the ordinary Tibetan, but the special insight of a superhuman elite. He repeatedly uncovers aspects of Tibetan wisdom inaccessible to ordinary people or so-called 'experts,' a Tibet that makes explicit the romantic imagination of an exotic, yet ultimately familiar, locale.

At times Rampa's autobiographical adventures in different parts of the world take on epic proportions; he can be likened to James Bond in his ability to move around the world freely, fighting the various forces of evil and deploying special abilities and technologies.⁹ Like Bond, Rampa's adventures are set against the backdrop of the Cold War; both visit exotic locations and uncover secret schemes and technologies. Both

8. Rouse, *Twenty-Five Years*.

9. For the culture and themes in James Bond, see Christopher Lindner, *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). Some of Rampa's character's names – such as Lotta Bull and Rosie Hipp for example, are reminiscent of Fleming's Pussy Galore and Honeychile Rider. I wish to thank Brian Paisley for drawing my attention to this.

belong to an elite class which grants them privileged access to secrets and intrigues. But whilst Bond's touristic adventures are set within exotic locations such as the Caribbean and the Mediterranean, Rampa provides a touristic gaze into spiritual geographies: hidden Tibet, the Akashic Records, other worlds, all places inaccessible to ordinary travellers – perhaps all too conveniently so. Given the scope and breadth of Rampa's adventures in various parts of the world, his eventual arrival in postwar Britain, into the body formerly occupied by Cyril Hoskin, is something of an anti-climax. The writing of *The Third Eye* seems to have been a last option for the transmigrated Rampa, as his adventures in England are rather less exciting than fighting, flying aircraft and performing medical miracles; they are mostly concerned with his attempts to secure employment and his problems with the Labour Exchange. Rampa the international adventurer is replaced by Rampa the reclusive author and teacher.

It would be easy to judge Cyril Hoskin/Lobsang Rampa as a 'hoaxer,' but I feel this is too simplistic. For one thing, he appears to have genuinely believed himself to be a Tibetan lama inhabiting an Englishman's body. Moreover, his books were, and remain, popular, for reasons that are more complex than mere credulity on the part of a supposedly uneducated and uncritical audience. Rampa's work played a key role in the formation of both the New Age movement and contemporary occultism. His place in history in the Western imagination of Tibet has already been assured. He also deserves more attention in his attempts to make the world of the occult explainable in everyday terms.

Books by Lobsang Rampa

The Third Eye (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956); *Doctor from Lhasa* (London: Souvenir Press, 1959); *The Rampa Story* (London: Souvenir Press, 1960); *Cave of the Ancients* (London: Corgi Books, 1963); *The Saffron Robe* (London: Corgi Books, 1966); *Chapters of Life* (London: Corgi Books, 1967); *Beyond the Tenth* (London: Corgi Books, 1969); *Feeding the Flame* (London: Corgi Books, 1971); *The Hermit* (London: Corgi Books, 1971); *The Thirteenth Candle* (London: Corgi Books, 1972); *Candlelight* (London: Corgi Books, 1973); *Twilight* (London: Corgi Books, 1975); *As It Was!* (London: Corgi Books, 1976); *I Believe* (London: Corgi Books, 1976); *Three Lives* (London: Corgi Books, 1977); *Tibetan Sage* (London: Corgi Books, 1980); *You – Forever* [course book/study guide] (York Beach: Red Wheel / Weiser, 1990).

THE DARK FLOOD

Rebecca Beattie

It is the appointed time. I tap on the glass like Kathy wanting to come in from the cold. A cloaked figure both familiar and mysterious opens the door and asks if I wish to proceed. I nod and croak, 'Yes.' I am given admittance. The door is closed behind us, and I am led though the dark inside and down the narrow staircase, where a seat awaits me in a room lit only by flickering candle light. Soft music plays in the background, lulling me into a momentary state of relaxation until the figure returns and asks me again if I would like to proceed. Again I nod and say yes. The figure bids me to remove the trappings of the outside world and be seated, and I am left alone again, wondering what will happen and wondering if I am mad to do this. I decide I must trust the process; for even the worst that could happen cannot be worse than where I have been living. I wrap myself in a cloak that has been left for me on the chair, and start to gaze into the flickering candle flame. Time passes. An hour. Maybe two. I have no way of telling. The figure returns again and reads me the words of the journey I must go on. This is the six of swords, the journey across water, a rite of passage.

Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
And the long journey towards oblivion.
Build then the ship of death, for you must take
The longest journey, to oblivion.

I welcome it, whole-heartedly. If this is what it takes to leave this scarred and battered self behind, I welcome it with open arms.

May the dark lord Osiris come for me now; I am ready.
And die the death, the long and painful death
That lies between the old self and the new.

Already our bodies are fallen, bruised, badly bruised,
Already our souls are oozing through the exit of the cruel bruise.

Already the dark and endless ocean of the end
Is washing through the breachers of our wounds,
Already the flood is upon us.

I hold my breath and try to steady my nerves. This is what I have waited for. This is what I have worked for. All of my life converges in on this moment in time, this place, this night. At last I can rid myself of her.

Oh build your ship of death, your little ark
And furnish it with food, with little cakes and wine

For the dark flight down oblivion.
Piecemeal the body dies, and the timid soul
Has her footing washed away, as the dark flood rises.

I lose my footing and allow her to tumble into the darkness, willing her to be gone. She has served me well and long, but now she must leave me in order that I can go on. If I am ever to find my Mother again, she must leave me.

We are dying, we are dying, we are all of us dying
And nothing will stay the death-flood rising within us
And soon it will rise on the world, the outside world.

We are dying, we are dying, piecemeal our bodies are dying and our strength leaves us,
And our souls cower naked in the dark rain over the flood,
Cowering in the last branches of the tree of our life.

We are dying, we are dying, so all we can do
Is now be willing to die, and to build the ship
Of death to carry the soul on the longest journey.

As I get into the little boat, darkness falls around me. I am blind now, helpless, and naked as the day I was born. There are no lies left, no masks, and nothing is hidden. Now there is only my cold, naked soul. I pray I am worthy. I pray I am worthy to stand before my gods and swear an oath to them.

Now launch the small ship, now as the body dies
and life departs, launch out, the fragile soul
in the fragile ship of courage, the ark of faith
with its store of food and little cooking pans
and change of clothes,
upon the flood's black waste
upon the waters of the end
upon the sea of death, where still we sail
darkly for we cannot steer, and have no port.

The boat seems to drift along of its own accord, steered by a current that I can't quite feel, but while all I can see is the darkness all around, I can still hear the gentle slapping of the water against the hull of the boat.

There is no port, there is nowhere to go
Only the deepening blackness darkening still
Blacker upon the soundless, ungurgling flood
Darkness at one with darkness, up and down
And sideways utterly dark, so there is no direction anymore
She is not seen, for there is nothing to see her by.

She is gone! Gone! And yet
Somewhere she is there.
Nowhere!

At last the boat scrapes upon the shore, and I can feel the sand and gravel beneath the hull bringing the boat to a complete standstill. I cautiously listen for sounds around me. A rush of anxiety washes through me, but I feel for the sides of the boat and get to my feet, hesitatingly, and set by step feel my way out of the boat. The gravel and cold water feel harsh against the soles of my feet, and my skin begins to feel painful momentarily, but as I make my way further up the beach, the gravel gives way to sand and gradually I cease to feel where my feet were, it is as if my body has left me.

And everything is gone, the body is gone
Completely under, gone, entirely gone.
The upper darkness is heavy as the lower,
between them the little ship
is gone

It is the end, it is oblivion.

Far away I hear voices start to chant; the sound starts slowly but then begins to pick up speed and the voices gradually get louder and louder. I try to pick out how many voices there are, but in the darkness and without the blessing of sight to help make sense of the new world around me it is impossible to tell. Things so simple in daylight are not simple now. I can assume nothing. I can pick out some of the words in the chant but they make little sense to me, but then the language shifts and it is no longer recognisable. My breath has started to match the beat of their voices, and my heart is thumping against my rib cage.

And yet I begin to sense I can feel someone next to me, their hand on my shoulder steadying my nerves, I can hear them breathing softly although I intuit they do not need to breathe for physical reasons. I catch a faint whiff of a familiar perfume, and the smell anchors me into a state of calm, of being held and of being nurtured.

And yet out of eternity a thread
Separates itself on the blackness,
A horizontal thread
That fumes a little with pallor upon the dark

The voices far away dissolve into what sounds like laughter, and despite my unusual predicament I find myself smiling. Then a rush of cold air signals to me that a door has opened, and someone steps in close to me. He is Hermes, the messenger of the gods, and he reassures me with a flourish of chivalry. He has come swift-footed to guide me the rest of the way. Finally he whispers, 'Your name?' The question hangs in the air for a split second before I speak, uncertain, testing, but I know now it is right.

'Violet,' I say. 'My name is Violet.'

Is it illusion or does the pallor fume
a little higher?
Ah wait, wait, for there's the dawn,
The cruel dawn of coming back to life
Out of oblivion

I get to my feet and allow myself to be led by my quicksilver friend, into a room which is warmed by the light of many candles, where I am awaited by those gentle souls who will take me away from my world of pure pain to a world of balance, a world where *life can be lived again*. *But this will not be without its trials*. I come to a stop at the gateway and a deep voice challenges me.

I take a breath to steady myself and, voice haltering, I speak the words I was given. Something in the atmosphere changes, a breath that was held is let go, and I am welcomed in.

The flood subsides, and the body, like a worn sea-shell
Emerges strange and lovely.
And the little ship wings home, faltering and lapsing
On the pink flood.

Finally, I speak the words that will be imprinted upon my unconscious mind for all eternity. A token has been taken lest I should weaken; my life is now given to my gods, willingly and with a full sense of what that might mean. It is no longer mine to squander. It is no longer mine to be surrendered in a pool of tablets and alcohol, even if I wanted it to be. By their bidding I must live it to its fullness.

At last the sun breaks through the cloud cover, just enough to remind me that it is there. I am anointed and blessed and presented to the guardians.

And the frail soul steps out, into her house again
Filling the heart with peace.
Swings the heart renewed with peace
Even of oblivion

Bonds are removed and my sight is restored. I look upon the faces around me, reassuring me, looking with love. I have found a new home.

Oh build your ship of death, oh build it!
For you will need it.
For the voyage of oblivion awaits you.

My name is Violet. I was born on the 3rd June at approximately 10.30 pm, eighteen months after my beloved Mother passed away. Loving hands coaxed me into my new life, whilst loving voices whispered and chanted words of encouragement. Afterwards we feasted together, and then in the early hours of the morning, I made my way home to my little flat and the warmth and safety of my bed.

CONTRIBUTORS

The anonymous author of 'Sorceries of the Threshold' and *Liber Niger Legionis: The Grimoire of Pharaon* is not affiliated with any particular magical, esoteric, or occult tradition, and prefers to remain neither a narrow specialist nor an avowed generalist, inhabiting the spaces in-between particular beliefs and the limits of their contextual fields. Eschewing the monolithic confines of singular identity, the selves become host to many.

Rebecca Beattie has spent many years learning and developing her creativity, having taken her earliest inspiration from nature and ancient traditions from around the world. She is a co-owner of Hedgewitches' Kitchen, which makes ritual soaps and bath products, and designs jewellery for her company, Bewitching Beads. She also writes stories. *Conversations with My Mother* is her second novel.

James Butler is a postgraduate research student at the University of Oxford, with an interest in the conjunction between philosophical and literary cultures, both ancient and modern. A practicing pagan for over ten years, he remains fascinated by devotion, poetry and the moon. When not writing, he can be found exploring the links between ritual, art, music and magic.

Stephen J. Clarke was born 1970, in County Durham. Largely self-taught, his art arises from a childhood fascination with myths and monsters. His work engages in various methods of automatism, which he sees as being analogous to the ideas and dynamics of alchemy and the notion of scrying into the Unconscious. Drawings, poetry and prose have been published in several international surrealist journals including *Manticore*, *Phosphor* (Leeds), *Analogon* (Prague), *S.U.R.R.* (Paris) and *Salamandra* (Madrid). Surrealist Editions published a collection of his poetry *The Bridge of Shadows* in 2007.

Zachary Cox was born in Folkestone in 1928. He has in the course of his life written poetry, studied magic, edited the celebrated occult journal *Aquarian Arrow*, and worked as a computer programmer. Since the late 1950s he has been practitioner of witchcraft, and has been known to refer to the Craft as 'a non-discursive reality.' He lives in Crouch End with his wife Jean and a household of magical cats.

John Callow is a tutor at the University of Suffolk, who has written and lectured widely on Witchcraft, popular belief, and the Early Modern era. He is the author of *Witchcraft and Magic in Sixteenth & Seventeenth Century Europe* (Palgrave Books) and is currently working on a study of the Bideford Witches. This winter will see him lecturing on Wicca at the 'Theatre Machine' in Northern Sweden.

Aleister Crowley. Poet, magician, mountaineer, bibliophile, legend, 1875-1947.

Dolorosa. My body is all eyes. Look at it! BE not afraid! I look in all directions!

Edward Gauntlett is lifelong student of magic, and holds an MA in Literature, Religion and Philosophy. Currently he is working on a study of the Secret Tradition in late 19th and early 20th century supernatural horror fiction. He is editor of the Charles Williams Society.

Stephen Grasso is a writer and artist based in London. His main subjects of interest are magic, Voodoo, psychogeography and buying lots of records. He is a founder and regular contributor to Liminalnation.org, has a blog called cleanlivingindifficultcircumstances.blogspot.com, and is still working on a long-threatened book about magic.

Phil Hine lives and works in London, where he practices a hybridised approach to Tantra. He has a particular interest in presentations of the occult and how they relate to wider cultural formations. He is the author of *Prime Chaos*, *Condensed Chaos* and *The Pseudonomicon*, and has contributed to a wide range of occult magazines. His archive of writings can be viewed at www.philhine.org.uk and he has a new group blog www.enfolding.org.

Ellie Hughes was born and bred in London, and decided she was a witch at the age of eleven. She became interested in the discourses of nostalgia and identity at SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies), where she is currently finishing a BA in history.

Stuart Inman studied with Joseph Bearwalker Wilson for seven years and is a Doyen of Toteg Tribe and one of three Virtue Holders of the 1734 Tradition of Witchcraft. He is an initiate of both Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca and has studied Tibetan Buddhism. He has also been involved with the International Surrealist Movement for over twenty years, has done original research into lesser known aspects of surrealism and is a founder member of the London Surrealist Group.

Roberto Migliusi is an artist and publisher who lives near Florence, Italy. For twenty years he has pioneered the Italian translation of important works by Kenneth Grant, Michael Bertiaux and Austin Spare, founding his own imprint 'Labirinto Stellare' to successfully promote their work. A natural artist working with collage and varieties of automatism, his book *Automatic Drawings* is due for publication in the near future.

Lily Moss is a young literature-obsessed BA student, an award winning photographer who has exhibited worldwide and one half of Wood-Moss Herbals, the purveyors of historically accurate magical potions and incenses. Having been raised pagan, she spends much of her time in London's physic gardens, various musty libraries or worshipping the sacred and the divine at her altars. She lives in London.

Naagrom is an old spirit in a young body. She was born, raised and is still living in a small place in the middle of the Mexican Republic, a land famous for its history, diversity, beliefs, cult of death and a ridiculously incoherent population. Naagrom has been interested in the fine arts since childhood, and at fifteen began to learn photography in a self-taught way, which developed into an interest in engraving and design. A flood of existentialism and illumination are the *pneuma* of her work, experimentation and mere light in all contexts the *soma*.

Francesco Parisi lives in Rome where he has a studio. He works primarily as a wood-engraver, but also produces finely detailed figure drawings with esoteric and symbolist themes. His large landscapes are evocative of an ancient, timeless, Italy. A voracious and keen reader, his library holds many obscure and fascinating volumes on art and philosophy. His work may be found in the collections of the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and Royal Museum of Fine Art, Antwerp.

Sarah Penick-Smith lives in Sydney, Australia with her wife, her very black cat, two fish and a disabled Jack Russell Terrier. She studied arts and music at the University of Sydney, where she is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Studies in Religion. Sarah's other life is as a choral conductor, and she has directed the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir since 2005.

Daniel A. Schulke is the presiding Magister of Cultus Sabbati, a magical order of traditional witchcraft initiates in England and North America. He has authored two books for Xoanon Publishing, *Ars Philtron* (2002, 2008), and *Viridarium Umbris: The Pleasure-Garden of Shadows* (2005).

Allyson Shaw is an award-winning poet, she is author of *The Bon-bon and Love Token*, a Powell's poetry best-seller. With Edith Abeyta she is co-author of *Salty: Three Tales of Sorrow*. Much of her fiction and poetry has appeared in anthologies and literary journals. She lives in London where she knits, brews beer and writes while trying not to lose her Californian-by-way-of-the-Midwest accent.

Abraxas

An International Journal of Esoteric Studies

Number 1, Autumn Equinox, 2009

Literary editor: Christina Oakley Harrington

Art editor: Robert Ansell

Abraxas is a new independent journal of historical and contemporary occultism from Treadwells Bookshop and Fulgur Limited. Here will be manifest the voices of working occult experience and the visions of esoteric artists, alongside keen insights of original scholarly research. *Abraxas* will offer the reader a rich resource of thought-provoking essays, vibrant art and poetic myth from some of the most inspirational thinkers, artists, writers, designers and practitioners working within the international occult community today. Here will be found perceptive articles, narratives of workings, mysterious photography, obscure magical text reprints, strange drawings and resonant lyric. *Abraxas* aims to be intellectually engaging, critically rigorous and visually inspiring. It will be a unique space where fresh insights emerge to feed the mind, imagination and soul.

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If you would like to contribute to *Abraxas*, please visit our website for submission details: www.abraxas-journal.com.

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Upper cover: *Noxia Stramonium* by Francesco Parisi

Lower cover: 'Venus' by Lily Moss

Driftwood Phantom by Stephen J. Clarke

171 copies have been hand-bound in grey cloth and contain an original wood-engraving by Francesco Parisi titled *The Garden of Proserpine*.

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