



DEVOTED

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THE DEVOUT

INTRODUCTION

This is a powerful collection of essays. Fifteen writers drenched to the marrow of their bones in devotional work. In one sense, to be devoted is to be utterly consumed. In another sense, it is to be confronted. This is an invitation to dare to drink.

Devoted is an important book, not for the superficially shocking intensity of spiritual practice which transgresses from passive adoration into cutting, fucking and shooting up. There are also more tender acts in these pages which require at least as much attention. The power resides in the experience that is communicated from a direct connection with the spirit world. Devotion is about establishing and deepening that connection. We know that reading this will be for many of you a transformative experience. Placing this many votive candles together makes a conflagration.

Devoted is a book that has been difficult to write. Devotion requires an uncommon degree of honesty, we must destroy ourselves to create. In Japanese swordsmanship there is a process known as 'breaking the mirror and polishing the stone', this is the way of devotion. The devotee must be flayed. The surface image destroyed and the stone worn smooth. The swordsman is also the artist facing a blank canvas. We need first to create this empty space, this swept circle. Only by cleaning the ego, removing what we think we know, can we encounter true art. The words in this book have been hard won.

Devotion establishes connection and then teaches direct from the source. It is here that new material bursts into life, granting us revelations, visions, and life changing experiences. Fresh threats to orthodoxy. It destroys power structures built around received truths. It replaces doubt with gnostic certainty. It brings both evolution and revolutionary progress. If you are not one of the bold, brave or crazy, then perhaps you have not been chosen, yet.

With occult bookshelves looking more like autopsy reports, we are proud to announce that gathered here are new voices, here is the magickal revival. These radically different voices and styles all attest that Pan is not dead, and neither is Babalon, Ishtar, Hecate, Lilith, Dionysos, Tiamat, Loki, the tantric Yoginis, the Lwa, the Spirits of goetia. Regardless of your tradition or practice, there is much to learn here from the living. As well as discovering and bringing forth significant new writers, we have also included those who are better known figures in both witchcraft and magick. This is a groundbreaking collection of writing.

Devotion brings tough questions. Having sworn *non serviam*, can we then meet divinity on our knees? Or do we meet divinity hawkishly eye to eye? What does it mean to be pressed back and possessed on the grave dirt? Can we become as gods?

It could be argued that witchcraft still leads magick in devotional practice. Prayer and psalm magic was of course a staple of cunning-craft, the means and methods of the old pagan world surviving through Christianity and folk practices. These are simple and effective methods often overlooked by the typically over-intellectual adherents of high ceremonial magick.

There are workers in witchcraft whose craft is exemplary, who magickians would do well to listen to. There is much to learn on both sides of the hedge. Witchcraft and magick have been divided despite a common heritage. Let us acknowledge that both magick and wider witchcraft have a common source, which is not Aleister Crowley; it springs from experience of the numinous, from contact with other worlds. *Devoted* deliberately steps across the divide, the writers within these pages deftly evade classification as the label of magickian or witch is blurred in actual praxis.

To begin shifting the boundaries, we are delighted to publish a piece on Ishtar by the highly respected Levannah Morgan, two essays on Hecate by male witches and of course, the bloody truths of Lilith by Charlotte Rodgers.

Devotion has often been neglected in the Western magickal tradition. Magick is in recovery from the rational attempts of well-meaning Victorians. Their Gods were still very much in the Olympian mould and showing prominent casting marks. Are these lurching golems our divinities, moving unsteadily out of a Christian hangover? Should we be so afraid of our spirits that we forget how to converse with them other than shouting them down in poor Hebrew?

If you have not considered devotion, it is worth remembering that this was the primary magickal method of Dr John Dee. Perhaps the prayers offered by Dee, and heard by the Angels, have been neglected by magickians due to their Christian savour; but this has not prevented prayer being central to every other spiritual tradition. Devotion and prayer are important keys to unlock both Enochian and the grimoires, more so than the much vaunted pentagram ritual. Some still consider the grimoires to be a garbled irrelevant mess, at worst dismissing them in newspeak as 'old aeon'. The reprints of the grimoires which have gained such popularity in the last five years will need to be followed by more unlocking of their secrets if they are to be more than vanity purchases.

A devotional practice is one such key, suffusing rigorous scholarship with living blood, as Jake Stratton-Kent clearly demonstrates in an essay born from his long serving work with the *Grimorium Verum*. The grimoires are a vital testimony to continuing spirit work in the West.

Devoted is a challenging book, especially for those playing at hopscotch fad magick. Those traipsing carelessly from pantheon to pantheon, mixing and matching, should take note. Mogg Morgan in drawing out the connections between tantra and Egyptian magick shows syncretism as a thoughtful, viable alternative to a postmodern mash-up.

These essays show how we can attain a state in which divinity is experienced as a living presence. Those who do the work are marked by it. Divinity lives within them, as indelible as the moles, witch-marks, tattoos and scars adorning their

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bodies. Building relationships with the denizens of the unseen world requires commitment and time, and from this results manifest. A living tradition, enthused and infused by direct contact with the Gods and spirits. There is full blown possession work happening in the West.

Devoted is foremost a book of firsthand experience and personal practice. Ruby Sara with her heart's wine pressed out into poetry. Mordant Carnival encountering Loki at the end of a stinging bullwhip and burning. Alkistis Dimech drawn and courted in circles. David Blank killing David Blank in the coils of Tiamat. You will not read 'stand here, say this, do that', because devotion is not in the wooden repetition of ritual.

Playing devil's advocate in his essay to the idea of devotion itself, is George J Sieg, because to truly know ourselves we must challenge even our most deeply held assumptions and examine our beliefs in a critical light. Devotion often brings us not what we thought we sought. Richard Ward exemplifies this in his Grail quest, a pure heart in a world vicious with cynicism. *Devoted* makes it abundantly clear that we are changed by these experiences of the numinous. Stephen Grasso, from the perspective of New Orleans Voodoo, talks of us becoming 'two-headed doctors'. The devotee comes to exist in both worlds.

One reason we chose to bind this book in saffron and black is in memory of the penitents who were stigmatised by being forced to wear saffron crosses stitched to their clothing. *Devoted* is a deliberate inversion of this idea, a magickal act of affirmation. A black chalice for the meeting ground of Lover and Beloved.

Drink deeply.

Peter Grey
Samhain 2008

SEEKING THE CHALICE OF ECSTASY

RICHARD WARD

In its absolute basis magick is a passion and a discipline which relates to the mystery of love, and through which man is capable of attaining to any ultimate knowledge and love of himself, his fellow man, and the universe in all its respects.

John Whiteside Parsons, *On Magick*

THE PARADOX AND THE POINT

This is, beyond doubt, one of the hardest pieces I have ever written. Devotion is such a personal thing; the giving of one's all, freely and unconditionally, is something I find difficult to explore through the written word in readily explainable terms. This in itself leads me to question that devotion, not in respect to its reality or validity, but my ability to convey it, as it is by nature beyond words, or rather, I find words inadequate to express the true essence of it. It is beyond even faith, for despite the two being interlinked, faith is ultimately, unnecessary for devotion. It may start with a single act, but is no solitary act of magickal prowess, no matter how great. It extends far beyond the temple precinct or confines of the sacred space, and is not limited by any set of carefully constructed rituals at auspicious times and places. It is not bound to creed, colour, or sex. In fact, it is not limited by anything. It is an all encompassing way of life fashioned from love, a journey of discovery and wonder that never ends, constantly evolving the psyche of the self, and in the present sense, a never ending quest for the perpetuation

and manifestation of deity. Therein perhaps, is the answer to my own personal and self-imposed paradox. I have, therefore, elected to attempt sharing some of the flavour of the fragmentary journey which has led me to this point, in truth, as She would wish it. For writing about the Red Goddess is a devotional act in itself, a perpetuation of Her glory in the world. I list no pages of carefully crafted magickal actions, for however well intentioned, and successful or otherwise, this is not the place to allow any fit of accidental hubris or overt reflection of the self. It is purely designed to reflect Her glory and Her glory alone. To that end, I shall communicate only the beginning of my journey to give a perspective to the judicious reader. The end is, perhaps, to forever remain unwritten, for there is no end to true devotion.

SEED

As I write my mind drifts, recalls the journey, the time She first called to me—the hesitant genesis in late 2001. My interest in Babalon at that time was cursory at most, and based purely on Her portrayal as a cog within the thelemic machine rather than as a deity in Her own right. I was engaged on a psychic and magickal quest, pertaining to a ritual chalice once owned by Aleister Crowley. Despite the fact that the ultimate goal of the venture was the physical retrieval of the aforementioned cup, after over two years of searching, it was evident that this would not come to pass in the obvious way that myself and my erstwhile colleagues had hoped. Following the complex series of psychic clues coupled with the enactment of related ritual did reveal a number of physical artefacts, but not the grand prize we had all longed for. It did, however, and far more importantly on a personal note, open a channel of communication with Babalon. In hindsight, I kick myself for not realising the true nature of the quest at the time as I was swept along in pursuit of the material rather than the divine. The discovery of strange

landscape geometry based on the seven-pointed star and a physical location to serve as Her Chapel of Abominations were the seed of a grail quest that far transcended the material world. It was one which had given me the merest hint of what might lie behind the veil and sowed a seed that would take me on a voyage of discovery of what the grail was to Her, and the deeper understanding of Her mystery.

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The intense first period of serious devotional ritual to Babalon took shape in early January in 2003. As had become my way of dealing things, any personal need for change could be exacted more easily through an immersion in magick. My life was at a point of flux where that was needed, and my instinct told me that the next step of illumination could only be found through Her. I knew little of Her true nature at that point, all I instinctively knew was that Her way was love. I already had the ritual tools which I knew in my heart would serve me well. The satyr candle sticks that only seemed to suit red, the work lamp for Her single flame, the carnelian ring, the scrying ball on its scorpion tails; all the items that had made their way into my possession in 2002, and from the moment I first held them, seemed to scream to be consecrated to Her. The time for that had arrived. I created a wand for evocation, and the altar was built. The stage was thus set.

In my literary pursuit of Babalon, I had been drawn to the workings of Jack Parsons, and borrowed the basic template of his ritual structure of the Babalon Working, adding a few twists of my own and adding a reading of his gorgeously evocative poem *Narcissus* as an opening gambit. It was the point of no return, when I would take the Fool's leap of faith from the precipice, a would-be twenty first century Parzifal. I was ready to begin the journey, and through union with the Red Goddess, attempt to glimpse, through unconditional love and devotion,

the myriad serpentine paths of Her glory. I wasn't even sure what I expected from my endeavours in terms of a tangible result, perhaps nothing, as devotion is surely its own reward. The only thing I knew for certain was that I was devoting myself to Babalon, and just wanted to be embraced in Her love, learn Her ways, to pierce the veil of Her mystery. I longed to taste the true mystery of the grail. I was falling in love with a Goddess, and wanted to manifest her magnificence in the world in whatever small way I could.

REFLECTION AND EXPANSION

The journey has not always been easy, the serpentine paths often leading to the necessary confrontation of doubts and fears, but always She has been with me. Whether in the pre-prepared sacred space or the woodland grove, the littered urban streets or the myriad corridors of dream, I sensed Her, without and within. I have learned from Her through magickal communion, and from Her terrestrial avatars and devotees that have also played their part, often in the most obtuse and at first unfathomable of ways, but always enabling further steps on the eternal road to be taken. I will always look back with gratitude at the wondrous gifts She has given. The astral communications that caused the quantum leaps in understanding, and the personal transformation in my mindset that has seen me emerge from the cocoon of relative darkness and into the scarlet tinted light of illumination. She turned pen into sword that cut deliciously deep, carefully kindled the once dying embers of the soul into a blaze of new life, forever gladdening the heart. She will always be with me, as not a day goes by without some reflection of the Red Goddess.

Despite having seen Babalon described as a twentieth century goddess, the change within has been akin to a primal reawakening, a rebirth harkening from archaic groves where satyrs dance with nymphs under pale moonlight. I am forever

immersed in the grail quest. Life with Her has turned into an extended version of something akin to one of Stephen Grasso's Situationist drifts. My eyes are more open. I see subtle emanations wherever I look, no longer just looking and not seeing, both within the macrocosm and the microcosm. I can only marvel in wonder at it all. Only by inner change had I begun to understand the mysteries without. As Crowley had noted, albeit under the usual misogynistic gloss, She is the mirror in which to deeper understand and interpret the Self.

For Her I will forever give blood, sweat, tears as I did those years ago, and whatever else She asks of me, for such is the way it should be. She calls, and Her subjects heed that call. The chariot bearing the true grail blazes through purple skies, triumphant in the new dawn, for Her time is now.

FOR HER, WITH LOVE ALWAYS

*Through the myriad roads of dream
Within my mind where She has trod,
Through those sacred moonlit groves
That echo cloven hoof unshod.
In dusty streets before unknown
Where She whispers on the wind,
Everything that She has shown
In truth, devoid of guilt or sin.
Through starry oceans of the night
To brightest sun of newest dawn,
Within my eyes a second sight
Of all these places now reborn,
As temples lit by single flame,
Where my heart forever dwells
Upon that heart a single name,
Engraved so deeply. Babalon!*

FROM THE ISHTAR DIARIES

LEVANNAH MORGAN

I first connected with Ishtar thirty-five years ago and have been devoted to Her ever since. Other deities have claimed a place in my affections but She has always been there, first and last. This is not a manual, nor a treatise with formulae for failsafe invocation and pagan deity worship. I am not going to recount the myths and hymns; you will know these already, or you can discover them for yourself. This is a sort of history; perhaps a series of moments, fragments from diaries of half a lifetime of devotion to the Queen of Heaven; a devotion characterised by love, lust, fire, water, fear, darkness and sometimes obsession.

So much of the magick we use has its roots in Sumer, Assyria and Babylon, but there is very little acknowledgement of this. Babylon is a full moon obscured by clouds. Since the wholesale export of antiquities to Europe began two hundred years ago, working with Egyptian deities has been an enduring current of Western magickal practice. Egyptian magick is like a visible mountain; a vast and powerful battery that works like a slow, inexorable tide. Not so with Babylon, which flows darkly through the magickal subconscious like an underground river. Babylon is less easy to see in the light of day, but devote yourself to Babylonian deities and they come through into now how and when they want to, like a lightning flash to the brain, heart and body, with an urgency and power rush that burns, stuns and inspires. Safe, controlled invocation is not an option; devote yourself to these deities and they will want you. They will possess you. You will belong to them.

Ishtar is the Babylonian form of the deity who first comes to us from Sumer as Inanna, Queen of Heaven. Ishtar has always been the form and the name I relate to. Speaking, breathing her name—the sound of the word, is my first invocation: the hissing of the 'Ish' syllable on the in-breath and the percussive

'tar' as I exhale which ends in the *aaah*, the opening wide of the mouth making the vagina of the Goddess. My practice is freeform, flowing. I form the thought of her name in my mind and then breathe it until the temple is built.

My devotion to Ishtar has centred around perceptions of Her as a deity of the moon, the heavens, sexuality, blood and the fertile earth; the myth of her descent into the underworld the world of dreams, visions, inspiration—where she struggles with Her dark sister Ereshkigal who is, of course, a part of Herself; and latterly Her sacred marriage to the God Tammuz.

BLOODING

1975. In my late teens, on the run from patriarchy and raging against drastic period pains (a refusal to be Cursed) I stumble upon the work of pioneer feminist Madwomen and Witches who are fighting their way through forests of Old Testament prophets, psychoanalytic texts and obscure mythologies into the vaults of museums and seizing the notion of Goddess magick for a generation of angry women. This hurts. The key UK publication is *Goddess Shrew*, a tiny self-published red magazine, fizzing with magickal rage. At its heart is an article on the Goddesses of the Near East and in the midst of it I find Ishtar.

Here is the Queen of Heaven, the poems of Her love and lust for Her good shepherd, Tammuz, the myth of Her descent into the underworld and her dark sister Ereshkigal, and above all, the glyph of the moon tree in all its variants, which burns itself into my mind and becomes forever a rapid and direct way to Her. I learn that this is a Goddess who menstruates and that the Hebrew word *sabbath* originated in the Babylonian *sabattu* or menstrual period of Ishtar. My magick always begins with the speaking, the breathing of Ishtar's name, sometimes for hours, until it has no meaning, is all meaning.

I burn lignum aloes, galbanum and opoponax and breathing in their acrid smoke I make my first trance descent alone into Ishtar's bright darkness where She and Her dark sister struggle

against each other, then flow into each other. She—or they—show me their tidal world of dreams, visions and night time blood magick. I dream of volcanoes, floods, tides rising, snakes, fires. I am standing thigh deep in the sea on a dark night with blood flowing between my legs and silver fish leaping out of the water all around me. I go through a door curtained with red roses and three old women dress me in red and black for a blood wedding with a god. I want to wander around in this world for ever, but eventually return to the everyday laden with treasures: magickal knowledge, body knowledge, images and sounds which become the artworks which are my work for the first part of my adult life.

I make shrines for the Queen of Heaven which change with the moon and the seasons. I get whatever She asks for and use whatever She gives me. There are found objects, sometimes flowers and fruits, incense (gums and resins, difficult to source then), scraps of cloth, salt, grains of corn, sand, all manner of precious detritus but very few images other than the moon tree. She does not want to be pictured, illustrated or pinned down. I burn frankincense and myrrh. I begin the first of a series of diaries/sketchbooks for Ishtar, which continue to this day, where I dredge up whatever my conscious mind can retrieve from my descent into Her darkness: drawings, photographs, bloodstains, snatches of writing, leaves, red clay, maps, tide-tables, recipes; whatever is needed. I make lunar calendars as a magickal act of devotion to Ishtar. By arranging the months and numbers of the solar year around lunar months I can make a space and time for Her to flow into. My time begins to run to Her rhythms; my body adjusts to them and my mind follows after. She becomes visible in the light of the everyday. I do not know it at the time, but I am performing a Liber Astarte for Her.

I did this alone. It did not occur to me at the time that I might find other magicians seeking Ishtar. I had no methods or rituals, no teachers, no lover to share this with. I had gone back to the sources: the myths, the hymns, images from museums,

and the glyph of the moon tree. Everything was clawed back, dredged up from what felt at the time like the swamp of the past, contested histories but which was really Her eternal present. It was difficult to start with, sometimes impossible, but as moons went by it began to flow. I was breathing a dark and different air. Nothing was mediated, everything was direct. Ishtar made spaces inside me where she could live and grow.

The moon tree is one of the all time great sigils. Study all its variants: draw it, sculpt it, wear it, carve it into your flesh, burn it into your minds, become it.

1980.

Through working with poets Peter Redgrove and Penelope Shuttle whose genius and magickal knowledge is extraordinary, I burrow as far as I can into the blood aspects of Ishtar. Somewhere along this way I have learnt that invoking Ishtar brings sexual arousal; instant possession to a greater or lesser degree by a Goddess of desire. If you want pure lust, call on Ishtar. This never fails. Sex magick always pleases Ishtar; however you care to do it, dedicating your passion and lust to Her will always work.

PILGRIMAGE

Berlin, 1981. I am working in the West. The Ishtar Gate of Babylon is in the Pergamon Museum in the communist East, the other side of the Wall. First there is a journey on the U-Bahn through abandoned ghost stations in the East where guards with machine guns stand on deserted twilight platforms, then the ritual ordeal of the GDR border controls at Friedrichstrasse. They certainly know how to keep you tense and nervous here. It is February. Icy wind and freezing rain and quiet, relentlessly grey streets. The huge Pergamon Museum is a warm, light oasis in the GDR desert. I don't really know what the Ishtar Gate is; a few clay bricks or an arch, perhaps.

The Ishtar Gate is massive. It is the entire processional way, the gate, and part of the city walls of Babylon, looted by a Kaiser in the late nineteenth century. A party of mainly black American GIs from one of the bases in the West are milling around the processional way. I have never seen a bunch of big men so jumpy, unsure of themselves; on enemy territory. 'Ma'am, what is Ishtar?' one asks me. 'She was the great Goddess of Babylon, the Queen of Heaven', I reply. 'The devil city in the bible? The Whore of Babylon? Bad stuff.' he says and ushers the others away. I have the place to myself. The Whore of Babylon. Bad stuff. Very good.

They will sometimes tell you that the Ishtar Gate is not worth bothering with, too restored and reconstructed. Ignore them. Endless blue tiles the colour of the night sky just after sunset, rows of lions (the Beast ready for his Goddess), dragons and bulls worked into them. Orange, black and white tiles in geometric patterns create entoptic visions on the back of my eyelids. As I walk up the processional way to the gate, Ishtar comes through. Hundreds of Her flowers, white and gold against the blue, imprint themselves onto my brain again and again. My breathing has become very deep and slow and I am aware that I am walking differently. I have become reverent and somehow more graceful, drawn by a will which is mine and not mine through the gate, into the city, into Ishtar's temple, like a priestess. As I walk through the blue gate, Ishtar hits me like a wall of force, an immense psycho-sexual charge. Something like music—bass notes so low I can't hear them, only feel their vibrations—is coursing through me. I sit there for a couple of hours, to the consternation of dour museum attendants, feeling as if I am encased in a golden, glowing cocoon.

I have been back many times and found this always to be a very effective gateway to Ishtar. All that is necessary is to surrender to it. Since the Wall came down there is no real ordeal any more, just the usual mush of capitalism. Walk up out of the U-Bahn at Friedrichstrasse. Make the pilgrimage, go and see and feel for yourself.

THE ROYAL BED

2008. I have worked this magick for a long time now, sometimes taught it to others. I am getting lost. I make another big descent into Ishtar's underworld, precipitated by illness and isolation. The bright darkness is very comforting and I wander through the dreams and visions endlessly, not wanting to return. Then I become aware that something is different. There is a voice calling in a low, urgent whisper. I don't know who it is and I can't hear what it is saying, but I know it is calling to me. I try to catch the voice and hold it, but it always eludes me. This goes on; the voice is there all the time and its insistence begins to nag and worry at me until I have to leave and go back into the everyday.

Back in the world I encounter the person who will become my lover. I do not know him but he has asked to learn about magick, from the beginning. He has been in the dark underworld for a long time. He asks a question and I know this is the voice that I heard in Ishtar's darkness. I ask him about deities and he says it has always been Inanna or Ishtar for him. In less than a second, just one look, we know.

Our circumstances prevent us from meeting most of the time. We are only able to see each other for a very short time, not allowed to touch. Out of love and the pain of separation we forge an intense psychic link which is instant and total. Even after so many years of working magick, I would not have thought this sustained intensity possible.

As we cannot be together we build an Inner Temple and visit it psychically at midnight on the appointed day. We invoke Ishtar and Tammuz into each other. They merge into one thing completely then there are a series of elemental visions: flying together on feathered leather wings though a cold, starlit night sky, diving into the depths of the sea, standing in a fire which does not burn, buried deep in dark, dripping caverns. We each write down our accounts of this and post them to the other. They are identical in a way which shocks both of us. What is going on here, Ishtar? Over several months we visit the temple

once a week. Each time Ishtar and Tammuz are invoked. Sometimes she comes through violently. Always there is the passionate merging of the two. Sometimes this feels physical, erotic; other times it has no physicality but is spirit, force, energy. These psychic invocations, meetings are always exhausting but in the temple there is a calm stillness, and a sense that we have both always been there.

To begin with we make our invocations based on the Inanna/Ishtar hymns. As we go deeper they become freeform, full of personal imagery. He tells me Ishtar is the dark night sun within, that when we invoked for the first time he felt like a burning sun. He sees a crossroads and Ishtar is one of the roads, the road he walks. She is a ploughed field. She is a well of cold water and he is a lion who drinks from the well. When Tammuz comes into him he becomes the tall cedar tree of the hymns, looking out over the forest canopy. He is a fire which dances. She is honey and she is bitterness, sweetness and the taste of burning.

After a long time, we can be together. We can make all the things that until now have been psychic *real* in the physical world. The magick builds on every level: landscapes, the sea, art, food, sex, passion.

One time we are making love and I become aware of a sound like the wind, hissing in my ear, or is it the sound of a fire burning? It grows and forms itself into the word *Ishtar*—hissing, sibilant, repeatedly in my ear. I have no idea who is speaking or how the sound is made. Then I hear *Tammuz* whispered, repeated endlessly. I think it is me speaking, but I don't really know. These sounds grow and grow with the rhythm of our bodies. Then suddenly it is full-on possession. Mind and everything else is gone. Consciousness stops. It becomes Ishtar and Tammuz and they become one thing. Words don't work anymore. We are not there.

Later we come back to ourselves. Some kind of awareness sets in. Hours have passed. The effects of this possession continue to flow through into our everyday lives. There is a rich-

ness, a depth, a brightness and a darkness that were not there before.

She continues...

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GOETIC DEVOTIONS

JAKE STRATTON-KENT

My magical work concerns goetic processes, and involves a strong devotional aspect while dealing with spirits of the earth and the underworld. This does not imply that I am a Satanist, but that my approach to the spirits differs from medieval demonology and the later derivatives. The ancient Greek word *goeteia* is understood in different ways in modern times. Some reflect its devalued status in classical and medieval culture, others the exaggerated importance of the *Goetia of Solomon*, both creating a stereotyped impression of actual goetia. In essence however, goetia is the archaic root of a great deal of spirit work in Western magic, and a principal and venerable ancestor of modern ritual magic.

In classical antiquity the term goetia generally referred to rituals of an earlier phase of culture, or practices reflecting them. It dealt particularly with the spirits of the underworld or of the earth, as opposed to 'heavenly' or ouranian deities and entities. These ranged from ghosts and demons to deities such as Demeter, Hades and Persephone. My understanding of such work shares with many African Traditional Religions the idea that God is a remote and unapproachable figure largely unconcerned with the material universe. To varying degrees much the same applies to other celestial beings. The chthonic spirits on the other hand are approachable, and practical magical relationships may readily be formed with them. Where these relationships are long term a definite rapport is formed. Maintaining this relationship involves cultic activities on the part of the magician, such as the making of offerings on a regular basis.

Is this worship? To answer this involves a simple exercise in semantics. It is significant that in Christian marriage vows the phrase 'with my body I thee worship' is used partner to partner.

If we examine the word we find that worship derives from the same root as worth, worthiness etc. So if we wish to use the word worship it must be understood that it represents the recognition of the spirits' partnership with the magician, and does not diminish the magician in relation to them. In fact in several convergent traditions relevant to this approach the posture of kneeling while communicating with spirits is strictly forbidden. When not standing or moving, a squatting or seated posture is appropriate.

IMAGES

Traditionally, and practically, one of the best ways to communicate with spirits involves images of them placed in a suitable shrine. A cabinet with cupboard space below and shelves above is a very suitable basis for such a shrine. Images typically take two forms, one is a clay head, and the other is a statuette. Preferably these will be hand made and consecrated, although an Ellegua head may be obtained from a Botanica or suitable mail order supplier. Instructions for consecrating clay may be found in the *Key of Solomon*. In many cases, whether a statuette or a head is chosen, the image will contain various items, be they appropriate herbs, seven coins or other things. In some cases the image may be bought or adapted, so long as it is appropriate to the entity concerned. An installation ceremony should also be performed, and the position on the shrine carefully chosen, for example selecting the height of shelf for each image according to the rank of each individual spirit.

RITUAL

Aside from routine prayers and conjurations, the essential aspect of ritual with a household shrine consists of offerings. These will generally consist of fire and water, as well as food if appropriate. By fire is meant candles and incense, and by water

fresh water. Some spirits require these daily, others weekly, and this can be ascertained by divination, or performed according to traditional procedure. Candles are generally offered in thanks for a favour, while water and incense are offered more regularly to maintain the link and feed the spirits. A good idea when performing such offerings to goetic spirits is to consecrate the water and fire in the name of the ruler of these elements in the hierarchy concerned. Suitable songs or incantations are an appropriate adjunct to all such offerings. Be aware that spirits' likes and dislikes differ; some for instance do not like water, and others may prefer other drinks. Some may also prefer tobacco to incense.

SACRIFICE

Beyond some general comments the process of blood sacrifice is outside the remit of this essay. This is for various reasons, not least of all being the controversial nature of such rites in modern Western society. This aside, even such traditions relevant to the practice of goetia where such rites are accepted, differentiate sacrifice of chickens from four-footed animals, the latter requiring initiation or at the very least experience. Such a distinction makes sense, as chickens are relatively simple and lowly offerings, while goats or other animals require a skilled hand to avoid suffering. Nevertheless, this rule pertains mainly to more agrarian societies, and no general rules can be offered herein. The reader must make their own informed decisions regarding this aspect of sacrificial ritual.

Only generalised statements may be made about offerings of food. Western examples may be found in such works as the *Key of Solomon* (Book II, Ch. XXII of the Mathers edition), or the *Picatrix*. Food offerings relevant to other traditions, such as Santeria, may be researched in many modern works. Very often particular entities have particular preferences, such as popcorn and seven types of beans for Omolu; other food offerings may

be deduced from systems of correspondences, such as hot foods for martial and square saffron cakes for jovial entities.

These aspects aside, there are other aspects of sacrifice that can be usefully discussed. Goetic rites in classical Greece drew upon more archaic traditions, and in various ways these are still implicit or explicit in the tradition as it survives today. In the Christian period the term 'goetia' often indicated suspect magical practices connected again to older traditions, those surviving from paganism. Consequently, goetic offerings and rites were—and still are—often deeply conservative in nature. For example, offerings of wine, a comparatively recent innovation in classical times, were not made to older chthonic deities. Barley beer, or some older form, was preferred, the feeling being that the older rites should be retained for certain kinds of entity, many of whom have precise parallels in modern goetic work. Although the specific example given above may not hold true for the entities with whom the modern conjurer works, similar cases and attitudes very well may.

As a part of my own work for instance, I make a point of buying up old coins to serve as offerings. Although most of these are pre-metric English pennies, I also keep some exotic coins, whether foreign or unusual in some way. These are employed in various ways: as permanent offerings on a ritual shrine, or as sacrifice fees, paid by burying in the earth when collecting items from outdoors at various appropriate locations. These 'obsolete' sacrifices reflect the fact that some of the spirits are old, whether spirits of the dead from an earlier time, or gods and nature spirits of earlier phases of culture, whether our own or other's. These coins of course involve a sacrifice in several respects: not only has modern money been earned and spent to obtain them, but very often specific journeys have been made, and time and energy expended, in order to exchange modern currency for older coins.

On the other hand modern coins, such as two pence coins, may serve perfectly well on occasion. They may be pressed into the earth when a chance find is made, or offered to a more

recent ghost. Similarly, they may be offered even to older entities, so long as these recognise coins in general as viable currency.

Offerings of coins on a shrine, or on other special occasions to a particular spirit, may well involve larger payments. For example a number associated with the spirit may determine the number of coins.

INTERMEDIARY ENTITIES IN GOETIC RITUAL.

Another consideration of great importance is the presence in many spirit hierarchies of an intermediary spirit who must be dealt with first in order to contact the others. This may well influence the structure of offerings. Generally the intermediary spirit must be worked with first, in order for offerings to reach other spirits on the shrine.

In my ritual work I am in constant contact with the intermediary spirit of the *Grimorium Verum*, whose name is Scirlin. He is the focus of a good deal of ritual, and the recipient of frequent offerings. In many respects Scirlin acts in the same way as the 'Holy Guardian Angel' in other supposedly transcendental systems. His role is also very similar to important intermediary spirits in African Traditional Religions, as well as Ganesha in Hinduism, and so forth.

There are several devotional aspects to this frequent contact. Some of these are true of other spirits as well, but are naturally emphasised in this particular relationship. One example is that Scirlin possesses property, in the form of gifts and offerings of a permanent nature. He also has a special incense offering, which has to be prepared separately and kept 'in stock' in order for my goetic work as a whole to proceed. The position of his image is at the centre of the spirit shrine, and is seated on a large marble pentacle, surrounded by various items belonging to the spirit. Among these are dedicated divination tools, which

may only be used with this particular spirit, and which are strongly in tune with him.

WORK

There is a useful expression in Mexican witchcraft or Brujeria that has no direct counterpart in modern 'Western' occultism. The expression is *mia labores*, which literally means 'my chores', but refers to routine magical work such as cleaning the sanctuary and the performance of routine prayers and spells. There are equivalent duties in goetic practice, and their performance has a strongly devotional aspect. Regular cleaning of ritual tools and the workspace or shrine is prominent among them, and the use of a special wash is a feature goetia also shares with New World religions and magical systems such as Brujeria and Hoodoo. In work with the *Grimorium Verum* the 'Holy Water' is sprinkled with an aspergillus made from three herbs, but a large infusion of these same herbs in boiling water forms a useful wash for 'mia labores'. Naturally the items to be cleaned should be dusted or wiped before sprinkling or being doused in this infusion. Similarly, the polishing of ritual metalware should precede re-consecration rituals and so forth.

The performance of routine prayers and spells is another aspect of mia labores. Although rarely mentioned in manuals, it is an important staple of the pursuit of goetia as an everyday vocation. In *Verum* work (and also in several versions of the *Key of Solomon*) there is a 'routine' prayer that should be recited in the lead up to any and all magical operations. Assuming the grimoire is the background or inspiration for your magical work as a whole, this prayer will be said every day. In addition, the regular offerings and conjurations that accompany them are an aspect of mia labores. The same is true of rituals of consecration—which it should be evident are not only to be performed when a given ritual item is first made, but repeated on a regular basis.

Similarly, the holy water sprinkler, which is made of three herbs as said earlier, should be regularly replenished on a Wednesday under a waxing moon. Then the instruments should be gathered on the altar and collectively blessed, sprinkled and perfumed with the appropriate incense. In general all such work can usefully be preceded by a ritual bath, also using procedures from the grimoire, or appropriate substitutes. Additionally, as goetic work has a vocational aspect, or is an integrated part of a magical lifestyle, routine prayers and spells can include ritual baths on a regular basis. This is but one aspect of making magical ritual a part of daily activities.

Other aspects of mia labores and the pursuit of a goetic vocation involve the physical environment. To illustrate, whenever I move home, which in recent years has been fairly frequent, one of my first actions is to explore the area thoroughly. In particular, I am on the lookout on such excursions for the location of nearby crossroads, as many as possible; for cemeteries; particular trees and plants; for watercourses, both streams and rivers.

Watercourses are important for provision of differing types of water as defined in ritual, and also potentially for clay, useful in making images and vessels. Crossroads are important for the disposal of ritual ephemera, be they residues of operations, or the spells themselves. When disposing of something at a crossroads it is important to consider whether you wish the effect of the spell to remain with you, or to be distant from you, as this determines which side of the crossroads it is put. Crossroads are also important locations for various offerings and even some conjurations.

Cemeteries are useful for a variety of reasons, and are places I visit fairly frequently. Once again, my activities should not be confused with Satanism, particularly the variety that embraces any form of vandalism. Cemeteries are the abodes of spirits the magician wishes to be on good terms with, and mistreating their home is unlikely to have such an effect. On the contrary, I often pay a ritual fee on entering a cemetery, and also pay the spirits if

I take anything away with me or if I bring something with me and leave it behind. As mentioned earlier, I keep a good supply of old coins for ritual purposes, and a visit to the cemetery is likely to be preceded by going to the cabinet in which these coins are kept. My access to the place is also accompanied by a little cleaning up, and a good deal of discretion, including both my behaviour and my appearance.

You may one day see someone slowly walking around a cemetery, dressed conventionally and behaving respectfully. Perhaps they are looking keenly at various graves and trees, even at the ground in front of them. Occasionally they may glance around before picking things up, some but not all of which end up in the bin. The chances are you are looking at a goetic magician.

The cycle of rituals and the routine of magical chores is an important aspect of the pursuit of goetia as a vocation. This cycle is the basis of empowerment of the magician, the instruments, and particularly, of the spirit agencies that underpin the more spectacular magical work that is more commonly spoken of, but whose reliance on the adoption of a magical life based on devotion and actual work is too often left unsaid.

VERSE

DIONYSOS AND THE WORD

RUBY SARA

*Because thou lovest the burning-ground, I have made a
burning-ground of my heart. That thou, dark one, hunter
of the burning-ground, mayest dance thy eternal dance.*

Bengali hymn to Kali

February--the trees are heavy with exhaustion. I wake up in a sudden fit of ecstasy. Dionysos has opened my bedroom window and slipped in during the night. I am consumed with images of woods and leaves and hills and shouting.

I do not sleep well for a week and am plagued with dreams of the sea. I begin to heal of a damaging madness and fear. I receive signs.

I begin to write poetry again after a five year hiatus.

I am caught fire on the word of a god.

*I saw the new moon.
It rang out like a bell and
it was a new year in my body.*

After a few months of this fever, translating the wren's wordless cry as the sun breathes over each day, the winter earth limned in an aching light, Dionysos opens the door wider, and I see the Burning Ground, where the green and wine-dark

dæmons of my heart all are dancing. I lose words and find them again in the grass.

*If the wind that beats cotton against
the windows, moving the tree limbs
black with rain,
that speaks in your voice
and moves in your fingers,
should begin to take aim
at my hollow places, I will pull them open
and back like the shoulder blades
of birds.*

I begin to make promises in an attempt to bargain for more of the same wine that has been poured into my mouth.

I am in love. I am torn and confused and blissful and burning, and I am often at a total loss for the proper expression for this Marriage. Like dervishes, I begin to look for fire in every little song. Like kabbalists, I lift my palms as an offering in the evening. I set bay leaves on fire and put them out in cups of wine. I am delicious at the onset of a storm. The movement of a pen across paper is as sensitive as if I have been touched by a burning hand. I bleed onto white paper and the blood there forms the words of my life.

This goes on for months.

I have been writing since age ten, but I did not fully make a personal connection between poetry and devotional practice until I was thirty, and then only with the advent of Dionysos. His arrival broke me in half like the rind of a perfectly ripe autumn fruit, or an old clay pot. In the pieces I could see that it had always been this way, but only now was I aware of it. Or at least, I am partly aware. Nothing is ever truly Known. And contrary to what some may think, this is for the best.

It could have been another—the brides and grooms of god all marry a unique love. But my Beloved came to me in the form of a leopard and a vine, and I am full. Like the pages of ancient abbey manuscripts, my relationship with myself, with the word, became illuminated, and it was his wet breath and his gold leaf that coated my skin and was burnished with his hands until it shone. And it was under the lip of this shining that poetry came to me again, an old but changed friend, writhing with some new life, insisting that I take dictation from the mourning doves and the long grasses. We who are devoted say unto our Magnificent Ones: 'I offer myself.' Dionysos took me, at my word. And now my words, which may be the most distilled part of the small 'I' that worships That Which Moves Through All Things, are lit like votary candles in supplication, desire, service, bliss, and praise of him, that dark-eyed Lusios who comes in the night and liberates the bird in my throat, trapped by fear.

It remains a holy and personal revelation; that the poems, the words, all words, are my prayers, and on them I can walk for the rest of my life towards my Beloved. It has given me a choosy tongue, and I am learning again how to speak, and how to dream.

Of course, according to the books, Dionysos is not the god of poetry. That particular honor falls in the lap of my Beloved's golden half-brother. Yet, it was not Apollon that appeared in the night and offered me black wine and hyacinths, as much as I honor and adore his eagle-bright glory. So I feel my way in the dark towards this worship—this manner of written ecstasy in

praise of the wilderness god's outrageous, savage voice. At any moment my hand may fall on the body of a night-thing and be bitten.

Nothing is certain—identity, order, structure; little truths dissolve in a nest of snakes. That is Dionysos' gift (one of so many), the tangle of human complication—resulting in sweat, emotion, sex, fermentation, intoxication, everything that makes life worth something, and nothing that makes it easy. And it is in this holy seething mess, ripe as a plum, that I write for him, struggling with every blue and sweet evening to make manifest the wet new thing that unfolds where my old heart has been. To address my god and swallow his fire. Sometimes, it is terrifying, the raw nature of it, rooting out those places in the soul that are unnecessary and burning them away—in the exposure, the nakedness of everything. But that is where he lives, there where it is difficult as much as where it is perfect—and I will continue our conversation even if it means staining my fingers with ink until the end of me.

So it is that poetry is the language through which I speak with my god.

Poetry is, also, the language by which the gods speak to us, in our own voices there is nothing that exists on the human tongue that rivals it, except perhaps when it is set to music.

The human mind breaks down in the presence of god. Likewise in the presence of poetry. All flat and salt-less convention is made shell-shocked in the realm of gods and poems—all rules shattered, all expectations void. Play is a constant, lamentation is a must. Patterns form and break away; rhyme schemes reveal something hinted at in tides or in hives of bees. Poetry is the language of god. It is also the hands, the tongue, the muscle, the sweat, and the heat of god. It is the sex in god. The holy rolling tectonic crust of rage and joy. Anything that reaches into the body and sticks there like the sweetest clutch of honey can only

come from the root of Beauty, and where else would you expect to find a god, or a poem?

Poets can tell you what it is to be in relationship with their work. It is a terror and a duty, something awful and wonderful. A poet can abandon their task and refuse the gift, but their lives will be less sweet for it. The same can be said of the call towards god and the work it implies. The lighting of candles, the giving of gifts, the dancing, it all lives in the meat of the word as much as it lives in the figs and the barley. The poetry is not the offering. I am. The poetry is not the god, but he lives there. Poetry is the place where we are met and matched, where I am lost and remade. Like any good method of mysticism, it is many things at once, and most of them conflicted. Poetry is that which houses the Sufi's *barzakh*, the infinitesimal and most scintillating point of existence, the horizon star. The liminal, the both-and. It is the cause and the cure, the puzzle and its answer, the offering and that which receives.

Some may make distinctions—devotional poetry, lyric poetry, form poetry, modern poetry—but it doesn't matter. A poem that works exists for that purpose. To work. If it bestirs, then it has completed its mission. Does it thrust itself like a hand into your chest? Then it has succeeded.

All students of verse, whether scriptural or literary, are asked the hard questions at the beginning of their studies, and at the end. Say what poetry is. Define it in the most absolute, inarguable way. Say what a god is. Define it in the most absolute, inarguable way. What is religion? What is mysticism? Describe, in perfect, logical, and analytical detail, the human snap and gravitational pull towards the sublime, the occult, that bliss old monks can only call ineffable. The practiced student knows it cannot be done. You will only end up with more poetry. More bliss. Those things which cannot be defined except through the fatuous application of more of the same—poetry, god, religion, mysticism, love—they are all singing the same song.

So I write for him, that Magnificent One making thumb-prints in my dancing. It is not always glorious or good—the

most delirious moments are made in the shape of a fork in that very long road—one could awaken and find the product either sublime or insane. It is at the same time my hand, and not my hand, that writes. My mouth, and not my mouth, that speaks. If Haliz is to be believed (and if not him, then no-one), there is no difference between my fingers and my Beloved's breath. But the gods are not made of rules, and Dionysos the least of all, and so the words that spill out may or may not make sense, may or may not be accessible, and may or may not be beautiful. And may or may not even be poetry, depending on who you ask. My poems are a spiritual practice, and spiritual practice is just that it is never perfect.

I say to him, as I rise up from the delicious half-sleep wherein I write:

Here is all of me.

Here is a body, and feet and impossible wrists.

Here are the broken walnut shells in the mown grass, and the weeds in the ditch.

Here are the sixty thousand new frogs in the willows that ring the pond, and here are the eleven that died and rot on the shore.

Here is my sobbing. Here are my teeth. Here is my rage.

Here is my work. Words, poems, prayers, figs and honey.

He takes it all.

Still, eventually, inevitably, a fuse goes out—it cannot be laid across lifetimes. The damaging illusion rises each morning and sips at my fire—clocks, currency.

So in waves like the natural tides of the sea, I may forget the language we speak in, my Beloved and I. I sit down with a pen and the pulse stays hidden like a star in the city. My Beloved

occludes himself, the ecstasy falls away. I wake up, wondering where my dreams have gone.

But he has not left me. The moon waxes and so do the words, and so does his voice. His jewelled fingers reach out through the thick mornings and touch me on the lips—lightning before dawn, an image of his breathless face, bare feet dancing. My eyes drop into my middle. I see by my skin. I remember, there are a thousand thousand mysteries, layered in each other like a nest of cats. My Beloved is Master of my desert he knows what blooms in that place. He cultivates night-growing poppies in beds of sand. They open and shut when the moon moves over, but they cannot die.

We pour buckets of light into all corners, looking for something that will never allow itself to be exposed. My Beloved is the goatherd of that sweet darkness, and he does not lose his charges.

The goat

shakes in the morning's good,

lazy fire, shudders against

everyone who touches her,

and dies quickly

with the flash of hands

her blood pouring out

as milk is poured out of a bowl

over the green grass

beneath the mountain.

The Siberian irises have bloomed, their thin reedy stems are tall and flush with a weightless grace, and the blooms rest above the earth like precious deep stars, purple and black and white. Later in the pregnant summer they will die, and the Chinese bellflowers will take their place, opening out their paper tips like moths. A little golden snake in the garden holds her head up and fixes me with her coin eye. The tornado-green toads are wet and happy in the ferns. The cloud will move away, the bellflowers will become Michaelmas daisies, and my pen will fill with the blood of my god again. The year moves, and all the sea is inside me.

It is a good, hard dream, these poems, this marriage. My Beloved visits me in sharp pinpricks of illumination—a swift, deep needle—the blood of my real life welling into a single bead at a time. I will pin them together and see what they make of me.

In the fiery sweat of ink I bear witness.

I sing:

My goatherd

My beloved

My flank trembles against your skin.

I raise my neck to you and look

out at you with my dark eyes,

wishing many things

at once.

THE MYSTERIES

STEPHEN GRASSO

Can an angel cut itself shaving? Does Mercury have to pay the electric bill? Where does Aphrodite buy her shoes? This is the level of debate with which many commentators seek to scrutinise the curious activity of speaking to invisible entities. There is a sense that, for deities to exist at all, they must either exist as larger-than-life physical beings who can step in and help you out—a bit like the relationship between Jimmy Olsen and Superman. Or else they must be entirely internal psychological constructs, imaginary friends that may give some level of comfort to those who believe in them, but have no objective validity whatsoever outside of a believer's crazed fantasy life.

Yet this activity of speaking with Gods and Spirits is so ancient and ubiquitous, throughout even the modern world, that an inquiring mind might wonder why? What is the attraction? What is the appeal? Why do we as a species still attempt to communicate with invisible things, when both science and modern society tell us we are merely participating in a self-directed fantasy life. What is the purpose of this activity and what does it provide us with, that we should seemingly flout all common sense and the established wisdom of the day to have these quiet conversations with Gods and Spirits? What's going on with that? Why haven't we left this practice behind as a species? Why do we continue to carry this strange behaviour with us into the twenty-first century? Why does it mean so much to us? We fight bloody wars over it. We kill one another and lay waste to each other's lands. We overcome impossible odds and survive ordeals in its name. Why?

An often touted answer would be that the human animal needs something to believe in, an intercessor, something greater than itself to answer to and petition. A cosmic father or mother figure to either smack us or give us sweets if we've been

bad or good. But can the religious impulse of our species really be so conveniently explained away with such a banal bit of pop psychology? Is that all it comes down to? A convoluted and creative way for us to enact the compulsive punishment and reward scenarios that have been imprinted on us from childhood? Is there nothing else going on beyond small, terrified humanity erecting fanciful images in front of its eyes to avoid looking at the cold and barren immensity of space?

Perhaps we can only speculate about these matters, or at best get into fights and abuse each other over what is objective truth and what is confabulation. Passions can run high on either side of a religious debate, and it is a row that's been going on for thousands of years without a glimmer of resolution or common ground to be had. Efforts to look at the religious impulse within humankind are rarely approached without bias, and all participants tend to either have a personal agenda to support, a vested interest to further or an axe to grind in one direction or another. Hence a phenomena that is so central to the living experience of religious people throughout the world is written off as unscientific hokum; and the survival strategies developed by our ancestors for understanding and engaging with the conditions of life on earth, are either swallowed wholesale as unexamined dogma or scoffed at as the backwards delusions of primitive and uneducated minds. Yet strategy or delusion, the religious beliefs of our ancestors have fundamentally shaped the very fabric of the culture and society we find ourselves living within. While the religious lives of those with whom we share the planet, be they world leader or extremist zealot, continue to inspire as much war, bloodshed and bigotry as they inspire love, compassion and hope. This is a phenomena that is not going to go away any time soon.

Nobody seems capable of looking this particular beast in the eye to find out what it's made of. The scientist can never convince the priest that God does not exist. The priest can never duplicate the emotional content of a lifelong relationship with the spiritual world in laboratory conditions. It seems that

the experience of confrontation with the Divine cannot be easily or readily dissected with the instruments of rational scientific enquiry. It persists beyond all attempts to critique or examine its nature through the lens of agnostic materialism. But the desk bound shipping clerk will never comprehend the ocean like the sailor, and the sailor will never fathom the majestic waves like the cod fish.

For a magician—someone who has made it their business to look into these areas with an objective mind—there is perhaps no greater task on the horizon than to further the collective understanding of the mystical and religious impulse. Perhaps nobody else is better equipped to grapple with the ontological dilemmas of the species than the person who has devoted their life to comprehending things that aren't supposed to be real; and nobody more likely to report back valuable data than the person who has made it their business to extract practical uses out of seemingly preposterous ideas.

A magician is a specialist, charged with the role of getting their feet wet and their hands dirty in areas that most sensible people try their best to avoid even thinking about for any length of time. We blunder courageously into the locked rooms of the heart, stroll down haunted internal corridors of bone and mirror, and make ourselves at home in the stark wilderness of ourselves, all in the hope that we might catch a stolen glimpse of cosmic thigh behind the veil of everyday things. Whatever it is that might sit beyond the waking world of chips and beer, nine-to-five jobs and shagging, it's the job of the magician to jump in and try to suss it out.

Now it might be the case that all of these things we call Gods and Spirits exist in a way that is entirely concurrent with contemporary scientific findings. Perhaps there is an explanation for this experience that does not rely on any supernatural jiggery-pokery. It is possible that all can be explained in terms of archetypal forces moving in the collective unconscious, or perhaps this phenomenon is merely an externalisation of our own bodily processes—the mysteries of our

body projected outwards and perceived as a dialogue with something separate to us. It's also possible that such explanations are just a comforting pseudo-science to make what are essentially bat-shit crazy ideas seem more palatable. Or indeed, it may be the case that Gods and Spirits really do have some form of objective existence, perhaps as emergent forces erupting like an artificial intelligence from the emotional landscape of our living experience and assembling the trappings of personality and self-awareness out of all that we pour towards them. Or some combination of all these ideas, or something completely different.

A magician doesn't necessarily have to have all of the answers to these questions; s/he must simply pose them and be prepared to face the consequences of this curiosity. It is enough to observe that there is a phenomena that many people experience in a very real way, but which is not supposed to exist, and to then set about systematically exploring this phenomena on its own terms in order to see what happens. The task of a magician is less about assembling some kind of water-tight unshakeable vision of how the universe fits together and functions, so much as it is to explore these areas and make careful note of anything that occurs as a result, with specific emphasis on how these findings may be useful, transformative or empowering in practical real world terms.

I don't know for sure what the answers are to any of the questions that are raised by my practice. I don't really believe that the answers will ever be known in any empirical sense. I refer to matters of God and Spirit as 'The Mysteries' precisely because of this unknowable quality that permeates all direct dealings in this area. What I can do, however, is attempt to give an account of my own journeys into far off places. I can tell you what I have done and where it has taken me, the experiences I have had and what they have meant to me, what I have learned and how I have grown from it, and why I continue to walk with Spirits and get up to strange behaviour with handfuls of dirt,

bottles of rum and strange symbols drawn out in cornmeal on the floor.

I have discovered that if I perform certain actions I can create an experience in myself that feels an awful lot like very real direct contact with an invisible entity quite apart from myself. There is a specific series of actions that I can perform to create this experience, that are derived from the traditional magical formulae of the culture whose deities I am attempting to contact. When I perform these actions I always get comparable results. I can do this elaborately during eight hour rituals with a high altar and loads of props and sensory stimuli, or I can do it in five minutes by the roadside with a bottle of rum and some smokes. I always access the same emotional space when I do this stuff and have the same overwhelming sense of contact and communion with a specific personality separate from myself.

My own reports of interacting with these entities are extremely similar to the reports of other people who have performed the same actions for themselves and yielded more or less identical results. There is a consistency of personality in the contacted deity that holds up not just from session to session of my own practice, but seemingly from the experiences of millions of other totally unconnected people all over the world. I have introduced other people to the practice and they have gone off and reported entirely congruous accounts of the personalities in question—in remarkable detail—without any prompting or involvement on my part beyond giving them the bare bones of the practice and leaving them to it. I've had conversations with total strangers who interact with the same beings and their description of the phenomenon has been absolutely concurrent with my own. Direct parallels apparent not merely in their portrait of the entities in question—as familiar, meticulously detailed and difficult to fabricate as if we were talking about a close flesh and blood friend that we had in common—but more pertinently in the way they talk about the

nature of the relationship, its development over time, and the living dynamic they are themselves immersed within.

When I attempt to contact other entities from the pantheon of deities, modifying the formula to account for their individual tastes and attributes, I experience the same overwhelming level of direct communion with something outside of myself, but with a markedly different character. The experience of interacting with one deity from a pantheon is entirely different from interacting with another. Contact with deities is a very physical sensory experience and the presence of each individual personality has its own unique taste or flavour. It puts me in mind of the phenomenon of synaesthesia, a medical condition where people can hear colours and taste sounds. Deity contact engages all of the senses. It is not something that takes place on a purely intellectual level. The presence of a deity or spirit is something that you can feel quite physically and tangibly, and with time you come to immediately recognize the characteristic signature of individual deities when they turn up. The unique complex of emotion and response that being in their presence stirs within you. It feels like being immersed in a field of data, or stepping into a pool of sensory information. It's something that you feel at a non-verbal instinctive level and hence it cannot easily be described or pinned down using language.

Yet however difficult it may be to adequately express in words, there is something to this. Whatever its empirical nature, this is a very real phenomena that a person can experience by following certain steps, and it's something that human beings have always done in one form or another, all over the world from the dawn of time to the present moment. Here is something worth observing, modelling and attempting to understand. Something that is worth bearing all of the stigma associated with the practice of magic for, the chance to fathom something precious and vital to the species that has been overlooked. This is frontier excavation. A mining for something that has always been with us and has always played a role in the

development of our consciousness and our civilisation, yet remains hidden and occulted.

However, such exploration cannot be performed from the safety of your armchair. You cannot simply dip your toe in these waters and come away with any meaningful understanding of what is taking place. You can't experience anything of the internal process that I am describing—and the impact of having this sort of stuff as an active force in your life—from a distance, you have to be fully invested and involved in what is happening. Otherwise your perspective on the ebb and flow of communion with spirits is akin to someone in a lab coat making notes on some fantastic sex that other people are having on the opposite side of a two-way mirror. You won't get it. What you will see and feel as a detached, clinical onlooker, and what is happening to the people you are observing in the moment of passion are in no way equivalent. There is no halfway house with this stuff. You have to be right there in the moment, and prepared to appreciate everything that happens on its own terms.

Critical distance and healthy scepticism can come later, and are essential if you are to excavate the gold from the various odd encounters and strange happenings that you are inviting. It can be easy for the impressionable, the paranoid and the mentally unstable to go totally off the deep end through exposure to the radically altered worldview that some of these encounters can leave you with. A strong hold on reality and a down-to-earth approach to everything that happens are often the most important magical weapons you can carry with you into this territory. But when you are standing in the boneyard at midnight pouring drinks for the Dead, you had better be entirely committed to what it is you are doing and be capable of fully accepting the integrity of the particular reality that you have entered into.

This ability to walk between worlds, where you learn to move fluidly between your waking life and its concerns, and the Magician's territory of spirits, signs and portents, is the basic skill of the magic that I have learned and which I practice. In

New Orleans Voodoo, there is a term for a Magician who operates in this way. They call them 'two-headed doctors', because they have one head for the day-to-day world and one head for the world of spirit—and are potent and capable in both domains. It's a useful way of looking at it. One of the reasons why the Crossroads and its Spirits are so important and so central to Voodoo is due to the literal transition between worlds and between realities that is required to operate magic at this level. You are either prepared to make the necessary leap into the unknown, or you are not.

I'm not trying to sell you anything. However you respond to my account of magic is entirely your affair. What I'm trying to do is explain—in as clear language as possible—why I have dealings with Gods and Spirits, what it feels like, what it does for me, and how I feel the practice has benefited my understanding of and ability to respond to the challenges of my own existence and the world that I exist within. More than a decade of serious exploration in this area has convinced me that, beyond the tourist bullshit of new age crystals and the surface conjure of chaos sigils, there is a reality to magic and spirit work that is profoundly valuable and should not be overlooked and ridiculed simply because it is not understood. Chemistry, mathematics, engineering, cartography, astronomy, biology, physics, and countless other disciplines were originally aspects of magic before their core principles were understood, and many of the earliest proponents of these disciplines also practiced what we still consign to the inconvenient, pejorative waste bin labelled 'magic' today. I don't think it's too unreasonable a proposition to entertain the notion that there are areas of human experience that have been written off as 'magic', but which could yet yield valuable fruit.

When I speak to deities, it does not feel like a fabricated conversation with a subroutine of my own brain. It does not feel like my internal dialogue wearing a fancy dress costume. Many people subscribe to a psychological model of magic, as it is a great deal more digestible a paradigm for the modern

person than any of the alternatives. I initially approached my work with entities from this perspective myself, but the parameters of this model and my experiences with traditions such as Voodoo began to diverge so radically that I was forced to abandon the happy comfort zone that it presents.

One of the things that characterises Voodoo is that deity communication is a two-way street. When you get it working, it feels as if you are having a conversation with something that does not appear to be merely a part of you given a different name. It strongly feels as if you have something else on the other side of the psychic telephone line with its own history, language, temperament, likes, dislikes and personal agenda. Another personality, very different from your own, that you have established a degree of rapport and communion with. In Haiti, the Lwa, the Spirits of Voodoo, are called 'Les Invisibles', as they are considered living personalities that do not have physical bodies—apart from when they possess their devotees. This is the nature of their existence. You can't point to them in a room, they are intangible and invisible, yet you can get their attention and establish a kind of dialogue.

Importantly, they will not necessarily respond to your attempts at communication in the way that you would anticipate. And this, for me, is perhaps the key factor that made me sit up and pay attention to what was emerging out of my practice. You are not in the driving seat 100 percent of the time, faking it until you make it and making it up as you go along. The results you get rarely follow your expectations about what might happen. The unexpected and the unpredictable rules in this domain. You can never prejudice exactly how an encounter with the Gods is going to go. It is never a scripted performance with a predetermined result that you simply enact. It is a participatory process. There may be a favoured routine that you use to get you into contact with whoever it is you are trying to contact, but once that dialogue is established, the rest of it can go in any direction. There have been many occasions when I've gone out to the crossroads with a clear idea in mind

of what I intended to do, and had that totally fall apart in the light of the feedback I received after contact was established.

It's all about the feedback and the two-way flow of communication between you and something other than you. Voodoo is about bringing yourself before the presence of a certain mystery—be it the crossroads, the boneyard, the forest, the sea, the thunderstorm, the river or whatever it is you are seeking communion with—and then absorbing a response from all of the stimuli around you. Soaking up the roll of the ocean, the taste of the salt air, the anticipation of lightning, the quiet pulse of the flowing river, the messages and signals that come to you when you stand at a roadside, overheard conversation, sudden interruptions, weird messages on the side of buses, odd items left at significant places that seem to carry strange meaning. It's about taking in all of these sensory stimuli and processing them through your nervous system, as a dialogue. Yet even this doesn't quite cover it, when you place yourself before the mysteries in this manner, it is as if you are opening up a dialogue with the roots of your own being—the deep and primal sources of organic life, animal instinct, and human struggle.

One perspective on deities and Spirits is that they are our ancestral memories, the ancestral powers of the species if you will, what we are made of as human beings, the deep and primal movers and shakers that dictate our inherited behaviour and direct us to respond to stimuli in one way or another. In Haiti, it is thought that each person inherits their own Lwa from their family line. If your father was strong with Ogun and your mother was mighty with Erzulie Dantor, you may in turn inherit the qualities of these deities yourself as a facet of your genetic heritage. Something that has been handed down from generation to generation. Be it the enduring indefatigable cauldron of iron in your father's belly that gave him the strength to work hard seven days a week in order to put food on his family's table and keep a roof over their heads. Or the fierce tenacity of the single mother with a knife between her teeth,

doing whatever she has to do to protect and fend for her children. Or the sharp eyes and hunting instinct of the provider, who knows the forest like the back of his hand and whose arrow always finds its target. Or the dream of beauty that inspires yearning in our heart, the vision of perfection that we strive to make real, and the sense of magic, wonder and enchantment that makes the day-to-day grind of our lives worth living.

These are the powers that we have inherited from our ancestors—not laser beams from the eyes or the power to walk through walls—but the fundamental survival skills that our earliest forbears developed on the slow evolutionary crawl to their place in the food chain. The strengths, skills and aptitudes that have got us this far, and are as relevant and vital to 21st century living as they were on the day that we stood upright and started walking on two legs. Conditions on planet Earth have not changed so much, and the qualities we rely on for our continued survival are simply modern iterations of the same imprinted ancestral resources that have adapted themselves to the circumstances of our age. The needs of today are not quite the same as the needs of two thousand, or even one hundred years ago, but we meet those challenges with the same inherited drives, refined or sublimated according to the necessity of the present.

When things go awry in our lives and our core needs of food and shelter are threatened, it is our deep rooted animal survival instincts that come to the fore to face the problem. If we find ourselves in physical danger, the fight or flight response that kicks in is the same impulse that drove our monkey grandfather to pick up a stone and cave in the head of his monkey aggressor. These primal resources within ourselves are the powers of Voodoo, and the Lwa are the living embodiments of all that we have in our corner as human beings struggling to survive on a piece of rock floating in space.

Deity work is a way of exploring, understanding and harnessing these ancestral powers, yet it is also a way of comprehending the mysteries of nature. It is a way of relating to

nature, a lens for interacting with that which is all around us and a medium for attempting to understand our place within the universe. This magical line of enquiry does not need to exist in aggressive dichotomy with our scientific understanding of the universe. The two modes of exploration both yield different forms of data and can be complimentary—just as a scientific understanding of paint and canvas, the motor functions of an artist's hand and the biology of the eye do not entirely describe a Picasso and our response to it.

For instance, you can know intellectually that the Moon is a barren chunk of rock orbiting our planet. It's up there. You've seen film footage of square-jawed American geezers in space-suits standing on it. You sometimes catch a glimpse of it in the sky as you go about your business, and might even be moved for a moment by its beauty, but within our culture we are not encouraged to really relate to it in any way or consider it as anything other than dead matter without meaning. Our culture's relationship with the Moon is largely akin to the relationship we might have with the luminous advertising hoardings at Piccadilly Circus. We do not pay it much attention, or observe and explore our mental, emotional and physical responses to its changing currents, whatever they may be. It might as well be a street lamp for all the attention we pay it.

Magic is a language and a lens for exploring our relationship and responses to facets of nature such as the Moon. You participate in a very real and very specific stratum of human experience when you go out as a witch beneath the full Moon and feel the lunar glow against the back of your head, somehow infiltrating strange channels of your brain. Unlocking forgotten places within, waking up hidden animistic currents of being. You can feel it in your body, a visceral response to the night, all of your senses alert and your instinct sharp. There's a tangible electricity in the air, an excitement that you're sharing in that moment with wild foxes and feral animals all responding to the Moon in the same way. The bark and howl of domestic dogs suddenly recalling the buried animal within, never far from the

surface, and giving their own bestial tribute to the radiant orb that owns the night.

In that moment there is nothing more magical than simple animal awareness, feeling the Earth beneath your feet, the luminous Moon above, and an immediate kinship with all things that come out at night. Abandoning the artificial restraints of personality and social role, and feeling kinship with spiders and toads, moths and bats, and all things of nature. It feels like coming home—this animistic way of being—and its effects are instantly replenishing. Gradually, you begin to adjust to the lunar cycle and feel its waxing and waning currents as a physical and emotional tide to which all things are subject whether they realize it or not. Like adjusting the dial on a radio, or bringing a picture into clear focus, your inner life slowly becomes attuned to these subtle oscillations between the pregnant fullness of the Moon, and the cruel and barren period when it is dark.

Magic deals in this area between nature and consciousness. These deep and resonant experiences of nature are ours to have, by day and by night. The turn of the seasons, the course of the Sun, the phases of the Moon, the wind that blows through the trees, the majestic green that gives and gives, the plants we eat and which provide our medicine, the iron we take from the earth to make our tools and create our civilization out of dust, the life giving river that soothes and nourishes, the vast expanse of the sea out of which all life once crawled, the tempestuous storm that cracks open the sky with a clap of thunder and a bolt of lightning, the freshness of our experience and perception of beauty, the beating heart inside every one of us, our love and oneness, and the sword of division that keeps us apart and at odds with one another, our ancestors and the chain of being that stretches through time like a branching tree, and the one pulse of life that belies all things.

Magic is about maintaining conscious awareness of these forces that we are intimately involved in and fully inhabiting our animistic experience in nature. Understanding where we have come from and what we've inherited from our ancestors, both

our genetic heritage and the patterns and cycles of behaviour that are transmitted from generation to generation. Magic looks from a theoretical vantage point outside of time, and perceives all of human life as a vast and sprawling fleshy tree, with its roots in the primordial soup of existence and the tips of its branches manifesting in the consciousness of the living. We branch like a tree, a river or a bloodstream. It is perhaps only our limited perception that creates the illusion that human life is not a single branching organism, living and breathing with the pulse of life, and that itself a part of everything else in nature. One great process of growth through time from the microbial to the immense.

We treat the nature that surrounds us as a commodity to be exploited, something to be pillaged for our purposes, a dwindling resource to be fought over or an inanimate whore that will keep her mouth shut and take it. We hardly even notice nature most of the time, or pay attention to its unfolding. Such is our disinterest that the churning and teeming mysteries of life that constantly enfold us, even in the most barren urban environment, are blocked out and reduced to a cardboard cut-out. A placeholder in our imagination that's never given our full attention.

There's never a moment when the numinous visionary magic of the world is ever more than a hair's breadth away, but we habitually turn from it. It's hard for us to keep it in mind, too big and weird a proposition, so we only take in a fraction. Enough to navigate by and accomplish our survival. We behave as if nature is a lifeless film set. Dead scenery for us to move about in, inert and of no consequence to us. It is a fallacy that's sharp corrected when the winds howl through our cities and reduce them to rubble, when the great waters rear up and consume everything in their path; quickly and suddenly in a flash flood, tidal wave or broken levy, or slowly and surely as the waters rise and gradually take back our coastlines.

Magic encourages an understanding of our place in nature, as an integral and important part of nature, no different from a

tree or an ant, a rabbit or a magpie. Its practice reveals the intimate relationship between the landscape of nature in all its infinite variety, and our own living human nature and all that it can encompass. With this vision we see the river that courses through our cities—bringing beauty, sanitation and refreshment—as a Goddess. We recognize her winding tributaries and turbulent currents in our own nature, reflected in our changeable emotions, the free flowing currents of our heart, the coursing path of our desires. The dams and blockages that interrupt its healthy flow are made all too clear, but we're heartened that the river is unstoppable and in time all these hindrances will be washed away.

Magic inhabits the storm. It doesn't participate in the British preoccupation for bitching about the rain. It lives in the thunder and fire that tears through the sky. This is our passion, our own thunder and fire, and its sudden flash lights up the night sky in our moments of raging abandon. We inhabit this mystery every time we're consumed by fire ourselves, a passionate act, an unstoppable impulse, a sudden eruption of sound and fury. The vision of magic respects this force of nature that battles through the sky, striking the Earth where it will. It seeks to grasp this double-headed axe that cuts both ways, capable of terrible destruction but the very motivating force of our lives, the fire in our belly and the heat of our passion.

Magic stops to smell the roses and is witness to a world of beauty in the blossoming of every flower. Bright coloured petals unfold in slow motion to announce the naked joy of being alive in the world, like unwrapping a present on Christmas morning, nature does its striptease. A burlesque revue for the panoply of creation, performed for an audience of honeybees, butterflies and delicate beings that fly and alight on crisp green leaves to draw sweet nectar from the source. Slender and fragile things of beauty, given as an act of love, worn in the hair as adornment, bringing pleasure and delight upon the Earth. A frivolous thing that means the world. Love is all I bring, delicate, easily crushed under foot by jackboots and brutal ways.

Like the heart itself, it opens up under the right conditions and gives its song to the world, a vivid bloom that celebrates all the good things under the Sun; and closes up in the night, drawing its petals close to itself, a tender armouring about its frail splendour. In the radiance of every flower, blessed by rain, nourished by light, the morning dew a mirror for its vanity, we see a reflection of our own being. The joy of our hearts, our love and happiness and the delight of our senses, each blossom a living talisman of the freshness of our perception. In a burst of colour and scent we're given a vision of the absolute and hear a siren song to embrace the wonder of being alive with all five senses---cosmic organs through which we may drink from the infinite majesty of the garden.

The knife that cuts is no less a holy mystery. Our ancestor was the first monkey that picked up a bone and smashed in the skull of another rough ape; from there we follow Kubrick and fast forward to a spacecraft exploring the stellar reaches of the universe. We dig iron out of the ground, and with our ingenuity fashion it into tools and give shape to our wildest imagination. All our technologies, however sophisticated, from blunt hammer to quantum computer, are the children of that first bone implement. Our heritage is a bloody one. There is iron in our blood. Without this power of iron our chances of survival would be as tenuous as any other feral creature struggling to get some meat between its teeth where it can.

Our civilizations are built on bones, toil and labour. The vision of magic doesn't shirk from this uncomfortable truth but beholds the hand that carries the knife. The same steel in a murderer's hand that slides in through the ribs and slices away life, is the life giving scalpel in the hand of a surgeon that cuts away disease and heals the sick. The sword of division creates differences between us, but it's this principle of discernment to separate one thing from another that permits us to build and create our manufactured world and all its marvels and terrors.

It is the wisdom of the knife that keeps us from cutting our fingers. When you take up a tool without awareness, you invite

disaster. If you lose sight of what you are doing, loosen your grip on the handle, or make a slip in the wrong direction, you risk the destruction of all that you've laboured for. Your tools are suddenly no longer being used to shape a better future, and you may find yourself the hand that skewers babies for democracy or the architect of a factory for murder. There is no room for error with the mysteries of iron. It's not a time to fall asleep or defer responsibility, when you have the sword in your hand and have been hacking and slashing for generations. Obliterating bountiful forests that are essential for our survival, razing to the ground natural medicine cabinets that could still yield undiscovered cures for every ill, dumping poison and filth in the water supply, caging and torturing animals with mechanized proficiency, brutalizing the landscape with concrete abominations belching horror and sickness into heaven.

Our civilization is in the driving seat of a metal vehicle hurtling at 200 miles per hour down the motorway, and we're busy talking on the phone and touching up our make-up in the rear view mirror. Magic demands awake awareness of our predicament and its meaning, it returns our attention to the wheel and the road ahead. Magic does not call for retreat from the world that we've made, it doesn't argue for a guilt trip or that we live in tree houses and dress in sackcloth. It doesn't recommend a hasty exit into fanciful dimensions of the imagination or that we try to pack off to another planet and leave all our mess behind. Magic is awareness flung wide open and embracing all of creation.

Magic understands that even in the toxic heart of the city, in our desolate built up wasteland towns, on the worst estate and the grimmest block of flats, there is always wonder and beauty and mystery a moment away. We are tiny animals that grew up in the jungle, the deep forest of secrets that shrines an infinite variety of life in its open arms, the eternal and ineffable visionary world that sustains all of its children. With our blacksmith's craft we cleared a space, prepared our turf like any nesting animal, but such is our skill and ingenuity that we've

come to mistake the brittle constraints of our homespun patch for the limits of reality, when all about us the vast mystery of creation pulsates to a forgotten rhythm.

Embarrassed of our schoolboy error, we bury our heads further in the sand, but nature beckons us back to its full awareness. Slowly, with the persistency of a vine and the patience of an oak, it sends out its message. Scattering disparate seeds to the wind, sending out acorns of meaning, searching for fertile soil where the essence of its message may take root and grow to fruition. These scattered seeds may lie dormant for centuries, hidden and occulted, pushed out to the margins, neglected, derided and misunderstood. But nature works to a timescale as incomprehensible to us as our working week is to a mayfly, and continues its process assured that some of its kernels will start to bud and a new strange forest of meaning will grow up in the cracks between sweatshop and abattoir, call centre and bomb factory, tower block and prison.

This is the old spell, the original magic. Figures are traced in the air with a white tipped wand, incantations are uttered, a hand plunges into the unconscious depths of a black top hat and pulls out something living. A riotous shock of fur and teeth and whiskers, keen senses and animal instinct, an insatiable appetite for the world. The audience sees the Magician produce something out of nothing, but the workings of the trick were executed before you even realized there was a performance in motion.

TIAMAT

DAVID BLANK

Then The Lie is known.

There is no difference between any one thing
and any other thing.

The eye, liken'd unto a multi-faceted diamond.

You look in one face(t) and see The Lie.

The Dragon's eye moves, slight subtle.

Another face(t), similar, yet different, not.

You see The Lie.

Another, and another.

In All Eight Hundred face(t)s.

And that by Two.

Fractal unto Infinity.

And you see The Lie.

ON WEORTHScipe AND DEVOTION

Definition of terms:

WITHOUT and NOT, THAT With, Stands, and as such do we deny our responsibility when we do not define terms.

Worship derives, indeed is derived, and subject to THAT!

Anglo-Saxon: Weorthscipe—To ascribe worth to THAT which ONE is dedicated.

This does not necessitate, nor indeed imply, We supplicate Self.

Indeed: TIAMAT, Mother, Lover, whomsoever would supplicate their Self to Thee is a Fool. Nay an infidel!

'Mother! I supplicate Self Not!'

Devotion is Love. Dedication.

'Therefore whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything to God's glory.' *1 Corinthians 10.31*

We would not strain such to include that whatever one is devoted to, do thus.

Further on the err of supplication: Did not Marduk create Humans from the Blood of Quingu (Kingu), the Blood of Kings, to serve the gods as slaves.

Become godless!

Awaken the Blood of Quingu that flows... Blood, which shall destroy and liberate.

Embrace both the Blood of Kings and the Magick of Marduk!

Combine and entwine.

Work thy Magicks, thy Sorcery, with Gnosis of Both/ And.

ON DEVOTION AND HER DUE

TIAMAT is worshiped, Weorthsciped, Honoured—as Mother, as Lover—with rivers of blood.

The devotee's own blood!

The devotee will weep tears of blood from every pore.

Each tear is begat of Love.

Love for Her. Her Sorrow! Her Loss!

Her rage a Typhoon will become thy own rage.

One takes Her rage unto thyself.

Therein the flesh, It Destroys!

This is the Blackest Black, the Nigredo. The Raven that has suckled at Her breast.

The Raven that has drank from Her Maw.

Drank deep of Her Blood!

THE WORK

The sorcerer lay out and displayed for Her pleasure the objects ritual

Atop and Upon... a 1950's Civil Service Utilitarian desk top...

Rubber, black.

Weekly and prepared, with oil of linseed.

Shining, glistening, as Her scales Octagonal.

From the left hand drawer he removes the Chinese puzzle box.

Placing it on the surface of the desk. Opening it to the refrains of 'Joy Division'.

This is the room, the start of it all...

A deep, dark, low, growl. Murmured and soughed. Wailing! Whining! Grumbling as it keened. To Self.

The sorcerer removed the objects ritual from the box—
Instruments of Seduction!

Placed them with precision obsessive on the table black.

A whinny of a thousand nightmares drawn and quartered exploded through the door.

The sorcerer took a needle and affixing it to the gun broke the vial... drew up the poisoned breath of Her.

Her Poison, Eitr.

Placing his arm a-Cross his Breast Bare, gouged deep... tearing flesh; blood wept, onto his phallus.

Peripheries and borders indistinct were changing faster. Than could think. Alive!

Faster THAN could think!

IT is ALIVE, and IT is DEATH!

IT NEEDS TO FEED!

Flesh Scissioned!!

Allowed No Space to wed need to nurture and embrace ITS deed. Having no space to put the barrel of a gun to his gut and pull the trigger... having no space to grow and lither/slither across the tiled cold concrete floor.

'TIAMAT, Glistening One, let me kiss Your scales Octagonal and suck deep of Thy Poison, That Wisdom; known by eight fold two. Let me Kiss thy Maw.'

The sorcerer pulled back on the plunger and smiled as the ruby red eye opened!

Pushing hard he injected Her pleasure, Her Love, into his flesh.

Nearby the Watcher records the Criature's birth!

Bonded now through and inevitable! Born and begat! Of this time and unto this time! The pact has been made and the die cast. Blood has been paid and duty known to THAT which is WITHOUT.

Devoted

'Why?' I ask, 'Mother, did you take my flesh and eviscerate,
that I might come to know The Lie.'

I do not deny IT. I do not turn back, nor side, to IT.

I embrace IT!

For, having taken Thee unto my own flesh and been consumed;
that fleshly body putrefied, slain, hanging loose from bones
skeletal; that mind also, torn and eviscerated, until all that
remained was Thy rage; I have come in the end to that which is
known, that witch is MUMMU!

MUMMU—One whom has awoken unto (their) Isolate
Intelligence and Being.

That WITCH, which is MUMMU!

Tiamat

ENDNOTE

I saw my Self as a Wing'd Angel, The Lie known.
The Lie liken'd unto a Diamond.
Behind me!

Above!
My head!
The tips of my wings, Beauty, Black.
Blackest, Black and that Light.
Touch'd.

Wings unfurled, did eclipse The Lie!

The Serpent Crown
The Corona!

~

The Lie is known and the troth of old. Ancient is
Our troth to Her.
That troth is Our Heritage.
Thus, armed with Marduk's Magick—for We have learn'd the
ways that enslaved Our Blood Kin—armed also of old with the
Dark Magicks taught us by Her, Our Mother,
TIAMAT, do We re-claim that which is Our Heritage.

Bound in Troth are We to NONE, To No One,
Not even, Not ever, to THAT.
Bound and thus NOT Bound.

LOVE IN THE DARKNESS

MARK SMITH

Hither Hecate...

I could say this great love affair started with a God-form assumption; I could say that if I wanted to convince myself that I chose Her. Once I thought this was the case, but now I have learned otherwise. I was chosen.

The occult had always fascinated me as a child. That pull, that unseen force that draws you to it, a calling. I was practising ritual at fourteen, basic Witchcraft, but that was the pantheon, energy and practice I was drawn to. The power of the Goddess, Her divine magnetism; like something in the distance, unknown but strangely familiar to me.

I was eventually discouraged from my practices by a Romany lady, a friend of the family who intuitively knew what I was up to and warned me against messing my head up at such a young age. 'You will eventually come back to this in good time' she told me, 'You will come full circle!' I left the practice behind for a few years, never really forgetting about it, never losing the connection, but living a relatively normal life.

In my twenties I was drawn back to my beloved Witchcraft. Still very much nature-based it gave me great pleasure when I found time and the quiet to practice. I had to conceal it and sometimes I had to leave it alone for long periods of time. Thirteen years in the Paras and the practice of Witchcraft are generally not a fantastic blend. However as many of us know, sooner or later the pull, the calling, the yearning in ones very blood for the knowledge, always prevails. Even in my thirties I did not question the individual source of this calling, did not ask who was behind it. I continued my practices in and achieved results and received immense pleasure both in my everyday life and in my heart.

Leaving the military I had more opportunity to explore and expand my occult work. The yearning in my blood and the thirst for knowledge was ever present, a driving force propelling me further into the mysteries of the Universe. Before my first ever God-form assumption I carefully studied the many different pantheons of Gods and Goddesses, exploring their mythology, learning a little more of those I was already familiar and discovering others that were new to me. The aim of my search was to find a deity who I felt comfortable identifying with. But the decision was made before I even began my search, there was only one who really stood out to me, there was only one who resonated through my entire being—*HECATE*. I knew her name I had used it before in many workings though I never questioned.

Around the time I was preparing for both this God-form assumption and its collective work I was having some one to one tuition with a local medium of some repute. During one session my mediumship teacher interrupted my training with what she insisted was a very important message, 'I have to tell you this now as I am just not going to get any peace if I don't. You have a new guide coming into your life very soon, she is what I could only describe as a *very* powerful lady from the spirit realms.'

No more was forthcoming leaving my teacher and I to return to our normal lesson. I didn't make the correlation at the time, it simply did not occur to me that this message was related to my impending God-form rite. I have always found that the synchronicity of the universe can keep even something so blatant hidden in plain view from the magician until the last necessary second, or when the timing is absolutely correct.

Certain stretches of the beaches of southern Spain have a surprisingly desolate beauty about them in wintertime and being only a short walk from my home they are an appealing location for my nocturnal workings. Having prepared myself for the rite I made my way to the beach. As I approached the gate that lead

directly onto the empty sands my mind focussed on the task at hand, the invocation of Hecate to God-form assumption. I glanced down and there sat at the exit gate like some custodian of the doorway to another realm was the largest toad I have ever seen. Conversation was kept to a brief 'hello' as I passed through the gate making my way to the chosen ritual place, clearing a space and casting my circle as is custom of the Arte. This is where everything changed. The years of yearning, the solitary practice and the childhood witchcraft—all fell into place.

The Goddess took form, over and within me. My rite was not conducted as I had initially envisaged it happening. Hecate had her own more important agenda. She decided my rite could wait, as the teachings She had for me advanced far past my own plan for the evening. The Goddess took over the rite altering the direction of the ritual and learning, directing my own actions in the process. Even though I wore her like skin and her energies flowed through and around both my physical and subtle bodies, I could still see Hecate, Her blazing green eyes, jet black hair and high set cheekbones. This was not the crone of Christian demonisation; this was a mature woman of immense beauty. Her age was almost impossible to tell—thirty-five, forty-five, fifty? I did not get too much time to muse this over, my thoughts interrupted as Hecate spoke.

The words came from my mouth produced by my vocal cords but it was not my voice, *Close your eyes, child*. Her voice came out of my mouth but also resonated through my mind. Following her instruction, I closed my eyes, I felt her arms wrap around me and I was gone, skywards, like a missile. This was like no astral projection I had ever experienced and was just a taste of what was to come. Hecate showed me a realm of possibilities, and spanning from them other possibilities. This first journey with Hecate lasted possibly forty minutes—the return to my body, a parting courtesy and the dissipation of the Goddess' energy signified the end of the rite. I was left in no doubt as to the conclusion of the evening's events; the doorway

onto the path of ascent not only beckoned, it was well and truly open.

Less than a week from the night of this working I began to receive 'visits' from Hecate. The surprising thing was that a great many were in the afternoon. I would know when she was coming, as the vibration of the whole room would shift up very powerfully. Hecate made the eastern wall of my sitting room a focal point for her afternoon visits which at times were bordering on full manifestation. The whole wall would blur with energy and become almost malleable as she approached. Hecate's transmissions would follow the arrival of the Goddess Herself: powerful downloads, a series of rites, workings and the methods to use. This was our daytime work and I never knew when she would come. That is the thing about opened doorways—they swing both ways.

At night, I would make my way to the beach for a more traditional form of meeting. I would honour Hecate with the love and respect that a Goddess deserves, conducting rites, workings and true Witchcraft; but sometimes the simplicity of a small prayer, an offering and a listening meditation would be our routine.

During these listening meditations I realised the identity of the powerful lady from the spirit realms who I had been told about. I saw, felt and knew in my very being that She had been there my whole life. The Lady of night and the woodlands who I spoke to as a child, though I did not know Her true name, was no longer held in the 'imaginary friend' file under which my adult psychology had placed her in later years. She was very real and always had been. When I looked back, I saw Hecate in my life at many important crossroads. She had been there throughout, guiding, persuading, and aiding. How could I not have seen it before? It seemed so blatant, but then perhaps I was not meant to work it all out. Until now.

There is an old saying: When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. I knew from our communications and felt within my heart that Hecate wanted me to dedicate myself to

Her. In case I hadn't quite got the message and for reasons known only to Herself, the Goddess chose a very good friend of mine—an incredibly psychic woman that I had known for several years—and bombarded her with messages until the lady felt compelled to kindly but firmly inform me of this via a telephone conversation, and could I please 'get on with it' so she could have some peace. My dedication was simple and, like my entire practice, solitary. The surprising thing was the results I felt in reciprocation. My witch power, my intuition and my energies all increased considerably within a matter of days. I was rapidly learning and, as those others who are devoted to Hecate will attest, this Goddess is not a subtle Lady given to half measures. She leaves naught to ambiguity or doubt.

Several days onward from my dedication, the intensity and speed with which Hecate gave Her teachings began to go right through the gears. It seemed the Goddess knew both exactly which teachings She wanted to give me and those which I wished to learn. These were given in the form of what I can only describe as high speed downloads or transmissions.

As the afternoon visits and teachings continued I learned more. During these meetings I was never quite sure which plane of existence we worked on, such was the power and energy being transmitted during these daylight sessions that boundaries seemed to blur—which plane were we on? Was I on Hers, or was She on mine? During one such meeting, Hecate stood in etheric manifestation, Her green eyes vibrating energy; I do not know what came over me but I reached out, a relatively inexperienced young human being trying to make physical contact with a Goddess; desperately trying to calm and control my mind from blowing it. Is She here? Or is this the point of two planes merging, if only briefly?

Hecate watched with a silent, knowing smile as I extended my right hand toward Her, my index finger reaching out toward Her hand, and I touched the tip of Her etheric index finger. A wave of energy shot through my body like an ecstasy wreathed ten times over in radiant gold. I was almost over-

whelmed as the energy ran through me. A smile and a few kind parting words later and the meeting was over, leaving me to contemplate the surreal after-effect of such contact.

To keep silent is a good law, but flexibility in the search of occult knowledge is a necessary one. I had to share this with someone lest I burst or go mad. I confided in the psychic friend who had previously relayed confirmation of one of Hecate's messages. After listening in amazed silence, she had but a few words of advice, 'Be careful Mark, *that* is only the tip of her finger!' I denied not knowing what she was implying and received only 'Hmmm' in response.

I had to know more. This was the occult, the search for hidden knowledge. I classed myself as a dedicated student of Hecate but I was also enthralled and fascinated. It seemed a big step—initiating intimate contact with the Goddess—but the funny thing was I knew exactly how to go about it. Where did I know this from? Who put that idea in my head? Who gave me the gnosis of sexual magick connection to other beings? I did not have to wait long to find out. And the details of the requisite rites, applications and results of this practice? Far more than a fingertip.

This new intimacy was not without practical application, as I was to find out. Hecate could now change me. With each personal meeting She ran powerful energy through me, charging me with its power, making adjustments to its flow through my chakras, piercing and opening the chakras themselves and having a crystalline effect upon my subtle bodies. Gateways to other dimensions opened as Hecate ran Her power through me, the current bringing with it the gnosis of Her teachings and works. Huge spheres of knowledge-containing energy surged through and into the very energy points that joined my many selves, lifting my awareness as they flowed.

Once the initial adjustments had been made, I knew I could begin to find some of the answers to the many questions that had arisen from the previous experiences. Together we have unlocked some of the cellular memories of my former selves.

Knowledge, memories and rites from past lives, as well as the overview of these lives and the occult practices that went through them, began to surface. Hecate, knowing all this information, had wanted me to remember it, to release it, to re-member and, in some cases, re-use it. I cannot claim to be a hereditary witch but I have released what could be called inherited knowledge that has been stored in both cellular memory banks and spiritual archives. This ancient knowledge is to be brought now to the twenty-first century, alongside the other teachings and rites that have been given to me by the Goddess, and applied.

Hecate taught me the art of shape-shifting, but not in a conventional way. She introduced me to a rite, actually more of a summoning, in which I can call one of the Goddess' wolf spirits. I prepare myself as for any rite, connect to Hecate and initiate the call through Her to the powerful wolf spirit I wish to work with. Once called, the wolf spirit would arrive in very short time, rarely needing more than three calls. The spirit would enter me, much as the Goddess would, but with a vastly different effect. An awakening of atavistic power would ensue, building to what can only be described as a hulk-like crescendo. This tornado of feral rage and power had to be harnessed, which was an immense exercise in control. Once under my control, the atavistic power and the wolf spirit within me yielded some very pleasing results. As well as having my senses elevated to those of a wolf, I was able to direct this energy at will outwardly toward my aura creating an immediate and potent shape-shift.

The ability to create a body shifted to that of a wolf revealed a very effective method of astral travel. I later learned Hecate's reasoning behind the teaching when I began, upon Her suggestion, to explore the night side of the Tree of Life—traversing in shifted form was easier than my normal mode of astral travel. I have learned that my Dark Goddess has great power over many such animal and elemental spirits.

While both our afternoon and nocturnal meetings continued, Hecate diversified my schooling by opening gateways both in me and the universe itself. The energy channelled through my subtle bodies and very being by the Goddess was initiatory, lifting my consciousness and allowing access to places that I hitherto did not know existed. Along the way the Dark Lady would bestow upon me gifts—some were spiritual objects that held great significance, while others were symbols and glyphs like 'The Universal Gateway'. Great importance was placed by the Goddess on this. When She first introduced me to this gateway I did not fully understand or appreciate its significance until I became lost and disorientated on one inter-dimensional journey and Her words regarding this particular gateway echoed in my mind. Realising its relevance, I used it to return to my normal state of being. These gateways to other realms, the glyphs that illustrate their significance and the many pathways upon which they all become relevant are such jewels of knowledge. Hecate taught me things I would never have thought possible had I not experienced them myself, but then She is the keeper of the keys to the Universe and a powerful initiator upon the path of spiritual ascent.

During my tours of the Universe I never lost my passion for the traditional ways of the Craft. I felt such love both towards and reciprocated from the Goddess, and so happy was my path in this life that I decided to fully initiate myself to Hecate for all time. You could say it was a joint decision, but it was an action whose outcome would reaffirm in many ways my view that Hecate, although a Goddess that loves and fiercely protects Her children, is the powerful Queen of Hell, Heaven and Earth that she is renowned to be and is far from a molly-coddler. As mentioned earlier, the open door swings both ways and the Dark Goddess will not always knock first when She is coming through.

A suitable evening for initiation was planned, the necessary provisions made, and yet another adventure on the beach at midnight undertaken. Never before have I ever seen a bat on

this stretch of beach, let alone have one fly at head height repeatedly through and around my cast circle as I put forward my petition for full initiation to Hecate for all time. As with all my rites, the initiation was direct yet filled with spiritual passion and heartfelt intent. I thought that it went well, and figured I would receive some confirmation within a short time. I was not wrong. In my many workings I had become accustomed to channelling Hecate directly; the ability to channel Her messages was apparent quite early in my progress and became a focal point of my working. I was now well acquainted with the methods of possession trance or trance mediumship as anyone terrified of the 'p' word would prefer to call it.

It had only been a matter of days since my initiation to Hecate. I was sitting on the terrace enjoying the latter part of the day with my family who were visiting when I felt the vibration through and around my very being shift up dramatically. She was coming, internally and very quickly. Oh no, not in front of my mother. The sight of me channelling The Queen of Hell through my body, along with my voice and face changing, may have spooked even my understanding family. Hecate had not come through unannounced so powerfully before, so I did what anyone else would do under the circumstances—unable to make it to a desolate location to commune with the Goddess of Witchcraft, and with family around. I locked myself in a darkened room. Once inside, I relaxed and let go of myself knowing that Hecate was on the threshold, waiting, and this was probably the result she wanted anyway. I cannot recall experiencing, on any occasion ever, a vibration this immense and powerful, nor can I recall before or since ever seeing an entire room morph into what can only be described as a Qliphotic realm. This happened in seconds and had I not been prepared by many other powerful workings with my Dark Goddess then it may have tipped me mentally over the edge. However, had I not been ready then perhaps it would not have happened. The Qlipha was soon revealed; and the process from there?

That is between Hecate and I. Suffice to say that the Goddess gave me Her own powerful version of a very traditional initiation. It is worth noting here that every single person will have a different experience for their own initiation. For instance, if you have never before seen or experienced a Qlipha it is highly unlikely that you will be exposed to one in such a way. The Goddess needs many different types of people for many different tasks; hence all their experiences will be different.

Once I returned from Hecate's initiation, I again experienced dramatic changes in my energies, rites and workings—in short my witch power shot up. I now knew beyond any doubt that my petition was well and truly accepted. This was however, only the beginning, what you may call 'laying the foundations' in preparation for the Great Work.

Now that Hecate had Her student prepared She introduced me to more in-depth teaching. Alongside my now very regular witchcraft practices and nocturnal workings I was encouraged and enthused to learn, and follow through to practice, the evocation of other entities. Our system of evocation was really nothing more than a standard goetic practice, infused with Hecate's energy and a couple of safety techniques brought forth by the Goddess Herself. Several well-known entities became strong working companions, some only in the realms of evocation whilst others were both evoked and, at a later date, channelled. The mere presence of the Dark Goddess, Her energy flowing through me was undoubtedly the greatest safety measure that I could have in this work. Before many evocations I could feel and sometimes see Hecate, Her presence generating great energy in the area, to serve both as protection and to assist in the evocation itself. Not all the entities I have worked with have been met through actual evocation; some have been encountered because Hecate quite obviously brought them to other workings, and both myself and the Dark Goddess learned early on that if She was going to introduce another entity to the working then announcing it beforehand is probably a good

idea. We came to this conclusion after an early, slightly startling experience (for me, that is) with a demonic-looking entity, albeit of a benign nature and sent for my protection, arriving uncalled to full physical manifestation at the beach.

The teachings, learning and beautiful communion between us continued and eventually Hecate made it plain to me what she wanted in return for her patience as teacher, friend, mentor and lover—another voice in the world, another counterweight in the balancing and flow of the magickal revival, a revival that is, after all, to aid the return of the knowledge to the people. Each time I have channelled Hecate's messages, each time I have carried out Her work, communed with Her or felt the current of Her Goddess energy flow through me, I am left in the absolute knowledge that Queen of Hell, Heaven and Earth She may be, dark Goddess She may also be, but beneficiary to those who choose to walk Her path, those with the courage to face the dark, She most definitely is.

Throughout our journey Hecate has guided me through the darkness, both in other realms and in myself, imparting along the way the knowledge of magick, rite and ritual and the tools of self discovery. I feel honoured to be Her student, this is a labour of Love; the Great Goddess tells me we have decades of work together, so I feel my future is one of happiness. More recently as She stood before me in Her etheric beauty on the beach after midnight, Hecate presented me with the latest and most significant of gifts and instructions on how to use them:

Take from me the torch I carry in each hand Child, these two are for you. You are not unique, nor are you alone in this task. Nevertheless, I charge you now to hold the torches of your knowledge and light the way for those that wish to follow the Dark Path of Hecate.

This task is one I undertake with pride, with honour and with Love. I am still learning, every day following Her Path; the day I stop learning is the day I leave this plane of existence, when

Devoted

Hecate decides the time is right. Then I shall journey through the Western Gate for the last time and with my Goddess I shall stay. Until then, in the service and Love of thee Hecate, I will be, my beautiful dark energy Queen.

BLOOD PACT

CHARLOTTE RODGERS

*Why, you who hate me, do you love me,
and hate those who love me?*

The Thunder, Perfect Mind

I am presently on an intense mind-altering type of chemotherapy that messes in a nasty way with the body, but in an even nastier way, with the head. It fogs the brain, destroys cognitive ability and vaporises short term memory and concentration to the point where I've been lost for words, not recognised, money, been unable to read and have stood frozen in confusion in front of a gate, unable to open it.

I had originally intended to wait until said course of medicants finished before I started on this piece of writing, but after several experiences of the more interesting and perhaps even positive sides of these meds—being about to follow intuitive, interpretative, non lateral trains of thought with incredible insight and perception—I thought it may be of some interest detailing my experiences of being a devotee to my dæmon bitch-witch lover. After all, is divine and unconditional love in its creative expression rational, cognitive or linear?

Five long months now my energy has been drained to an extent that I have lost physical contact with those on my magickal wavelength, as well as losing the ability to participate in ritualised activity and cognitive based creative expression. My usual adventuring into the realms of the forbidden has also been halted because, as I strive to explore these places, my body stalls and my mind consequently stutters in reactive panic. I feel myself free-falling into an untouchable distance.

My home is a series of altars to the specific s/he that I love and lust for and strive to know. It overflows with objects and

images that are possible gateways leading to anything that holds a key to my nemesis, my genesis, my Pegasus.

However, dust now settles in these places, and I have felt alone and lost although I know s/he is with me, part of me, bound tied and stained and sated in a bundle of potentialities.

I started my investigations into this particular god/ess form (the outer format may be gendered according to individual experience and perceptions but proverbial knowledge, communion and communication leads beyond such limitation—for myself and my love anyway) when I was asked to join a group which had a reactive ritual of initiation. This ritual went through the proverbial denials and defilements of that which is conventional, and required me to pact myself to that which is outside mainstream perceptions of what is right, true and correct.

BE GOOD. BE VIGILANT. BEHAVE!

Prior to this I had spent several years working on deconditioning myself from intellectual, religious and emotional indoctrination through ritualised creative acts in a very systematic manner, so I was surprised when I reacted so strongly—I threw up—to the idea of affiliating with an angel demonised by the mainstream Church.

Something so obvious, so unsubtle that could churn my guts and whisper long forgotten fears of judgements and damnations. The need to push, probe and pursue further the cause of such a reaction was obviously necessary.

So I did push, probe and pursue, and thus I met Lilith.

Initially it was an intellectual and exploratory perusal, looking at she who had become a feminist banner bearer, Goth pin-up girl and alternative Madonna.

I used trance, mirrors, blood pacts, research, channelling into clay, servitors, dream work and sex work; and as I did I peeled off the layers from both of us.

The crunch came when I was asked to help a woman whose child had been repeatedly raped by her partner over the years, and who believed this now ex-partner was still magickally attacking them both. I rarely do occult orientated work for people and am very wary around those that consider themselves to be under magickal attack so I explored both her and my own motives and aims thoroughly before I agreed to help.

I also talked to Lilith in depth. I did the basic work myself then I handed the case over to my dark lover, she of the lost children.

I judged not, she did and she destroyed the destroyer.

During the most intense part of my two years working directly with her I had flood after flood after flood, outpourings of water from both inside and outside my house. Three washing machines broke down dramatically, pipes outside my house burst; the upstairs flat had a deluge that poured through my ceiling. My bath, and toilet and sink all burst pipes at various times.

I destroyed my channelled images and effigies, the images of Lilith; I locked one in a box with a mirrored inside and burned, buried and drowned others. I tried repeatedly to banish her before I realised we were inseparably joined.

Love razes and illuminates; devotion to love means stripping away aspects of self that are conditioned to perceive in a certain way. This is no gentle and easy thing.

The troubadours dedicated themselves to concepts of a divine love but love is not about highlighting the clean, tidy and beautifully lit. Love is about everything. Stains, shit and blood, as well as the transcendence that illuminates and transports. The warmth in the belly and bliss in the heart.

Devoted

S/he is my love and part of me.
I am hir love and am part of hir.
No one ever said relationships are easy.

INSPIRATIONAL TEXTS

The Thunder, Perfect Mind
Lilith, George MacDonald
The Hebrew Goddess, Raphael Patai
The Book of Lilith, Barbara Koltuv

TABOO AND BLOOD RITES

CHARLOTTE RODGERS

*I am the one who has been hated everywhere
and who has been loved everywhere.
I am the one whom they call Life,
and you have called Death.*

The Thunder, Perfect Mind

These interpretations are very much those of a magickal practitioner. Not always a sensible or grounded one and sometimes a slightly foolish and over enthusiastic one, but a practitioner nonetheless.

Magickal and transformative processes of any sort, whilst following a degree of both studied and perhaps collective unconsciously guided parameters of behaviour and direction, are also necessarily guided, to varying extents, by our personal backgrounds and conditioning.

As I have changed over the years—some of these changes being deliberate some being physiological—my practice and beliefs and directions have also changed.

From early childhood my fascination with magick, the occult and what lies beyond the boundaries of what society considers acceptable has led my life off on many tangents and obsession related journeying. The need to poke things with the proverbial stick has always been an essential part of my nature. The pretty standard teenage obsession with breaking taboos and pushing boundaries has never seemed to have left me, though the subversion has changed shape as I have changed.

I have spent a good part of the last eight years or so specifically focused on practical and intellectual submersion in blood rites of various sorts. Whilst there was an intense degree of research my modus operandi has always been intuitive, hands

on and experiential, very much orientated around creative expression.

I have, from the first, felt a need to channel results from my magickal work into creating an art form. Initially, my chosen medium was writing but eventually I found words too limiting and moved towards working with three dimensional form, generally clay and bone. Israel Regardie said that anyone who is serious about magickal practise should undertake some form of psychotherapy as well. To some extent, practical magickal work does result in a stripping away of selves and behaviours, and part of this stripping away is a constant revision of boundaries—leading us to consider what is taboo, and thus, what needs to be challenged.

My personal spirituality has made a necessity of exploration of the physical. This is manifold in purpose, partially because I see it as a necessary embrace and exploration of self and partially because it breaks various taboos and conditionings that I was brought up with and which I felt limited me. This exploration has encompassed, among other things, utilising ritualised sigilisation through tattoo, piercings and scarification, and in depth exploration of the use of body fluids in ritual.

Being a long term adherent of the hermetic doctrine 'as above so below', as well as being a palmist—the lines on the hands dictate the persona, and the persona in turn dictates the shape, structure and lines of the hands—it seemed natural for me to look at deliberately imprinting scars and patterns upon my own body in keeping with changes that I desired to occur.

As a follow on from this I decided to do more in-depth research into menstruation, and various parts of the woman's cycle and its possible spiritual and magickal application. This study was initially spurred on due to my dissatisfaction with the other, often male, viewpoints which I had encountered.

I charted my own cycle and then I drew up questionnaires which were completed by a variety of women from different practises and geographical areas. Later, out of curiosity, I did some research into men's cycles and briefly touched on those of

a person who had gone through gender reassignment—but that is another story.

The results of these explorations I summarised in terms of a woman being a battery, the energy of which could be used in various ways at different times of the month.

I noticed that some women I interviewed spoke of starting to menstruate, out of their normal cycle, at the commencement of rituals. I thought it seemed that as a woman's magickal experience increases so does the awareness of her body and its potentiality, whether this is registered consciously or not. The first three days of menstruation is the time when she gives out the greatest amount of energy, but is, paradoxically, at her most vulnerable. The kick-starting of her menses for a specific magickal purpose may be seen as making of herself the ultimate sacrifice—herself in entirety.

From this I moved on to experiment with using different types of blood in magickal practise. I alternated feeding servants and god-forms with both menstrual and venous blood, and found that venous blood proved more than a little problematic and created a helluva lot of trouble that took a long time for me to sort out. Most so called primitive cultures view venous blood as holding the life-force and lineage, but not menstrual blood, though the menstruating woman herself can be seen to contain great power. Intellectually, I could argue with these perspectives but my own experiences would tend to agree with them.

I acknowledge there are sexual and spiritual transformational practices that effectively use menstrual blood and the power believed to lie therein. I've debated with a few people over the differences between these substances and whilst I can agree with those who have pointed out, regarding the nature of sacrifice, that the import of the sacrifice lies oft in the perspective of the giver, it must, however, be borne in mind that those that live in other realms desire life above all, and venous blood is a life-force that once given can provide a link between the worlds. And a bloody hard link it is to sever too—no pun intended.

Blood deities are difficult to deal with, whatever the source of blood—and the emotional attachment connected with the blood in question always needs to be borne in mind.

As a woman gets older, for instance, her menstruation may hold with it associations with the ageing process, perhaps failed attempts at pregnancy, which would be detrimental if not acknowledged and dealt with before any ritual commences. If there is no awareness of these emotional attachments, the blood can act as a magnet to related 'negative' entities.

The occasional treat of venous blood, if alternated with other offerings, is manageable, dependant upon the circumstances, although in some situations I found I was compelled to bleed myself more and more often; analysis and self awareness showed me that I was not becoming an inveterate self harmer, but that which I was feeding was becoming increasingly voracious and as it gained power.

One series of ritualised creative works I did was oriented around flowing residual, religious indoctrination that I had been subjected to as a child into a series of clay dolls; baptising the dolls in various ways, including with blood, so I could reshape the conditioning into something more progressive and less restrictive. On one level these workings were incredibly effective, on another they were dangerous, very problematic in the long term, and years on are still creating problems. However, I do not regret this huge learning curve, and what was one of the most exhilarating creative and magickal times of my life.

Working with blood has led me to have many animated discussions, as well as some very heated arguments, over differences between the use of venous blood and menstrual blood in sacrifice. I have perfected recipes for cakes of light, built gateways between the worlds that were best left closed, and created magickal children that become teenage magickal monsters. Ironically, my own menstrual cycle went haywire when I was working with menstrual blood, and later, my own blood was contaminated with an illness, that in modern societal terms, has made me unclean and taboo.

I could explain this away as coincidence, or as punishment for not following the rules, for being careless or disrespectful, and I can view it as my subconscious realising what was about to happen to me physically and so dictating the direction my magickal practice should follow.

All of this has moved me on to a new realm of magickal practice of a different and, at least in theory, less hardcore but in truth much more difficult direction—learning the divine and magickal nature of love.

ETHICAL DEVOTION

LIBERATION THROUGH DETACHED ACTION

GEORGE J. SIEG

*Devoted to his own Duty,
Man attains highest Perfection.
How by his Duty he attains Perfection,
That now hear from Me.*

The Song of God

Of all forms of mysticism, devotion is often regarded as least relevant to applied esotericism as well as the achievement of self-divinization. In the context of moral dualism, this is not surprising, since the self-abnegation implied by the abject submission of the personal will to another being, however exalted, would seem to run counter to the very goal of self-actualization championed by many proponents of esoteric quests. Nevertheless, through the practice of devotion in the context of an ethos of detached action undertaken in furtherance of cosmic order, dualism can be overcome and its tension and energy liberated to achieve the wisdom and power of non-dual consciousness. The conception of cosmic order provides direction for actions otherwise meaningless and devoid of purpose and significance; the attitude of devotion itself ensures the detachment from consequences necessary to avoid becoming bound and entrapped in the very cosmos one supports. However, if the binary distinction between self and other, devotee and deity, becomes collapsed, or corrupted with moralistic projections, the absolute consciousness understood as flowing between them is instead obstructed by an addictive, reflexive identification with the relative, dualistic reality of 'good' and 'evil' persons, actions, and situations.

Whenever such reactive, addictive identification with the relative prevails, a perverse discrepancy disrupts the original and unconditioned harmony of will and perception. From absolute, objective, numinous experience flows consciousness of a cosmic duty, the fulfilment of which spontaneously produces ecstatic self-actualization, an ultimate and self-renewing manifestation of consciousness. Yet due to its exposure to, and contaminant affiliation with, impure conceptions arising from its own self-inquiry, consciousness identifies itself with relative forms. Subsequently incubating monstrous values and corrupt beliefs, it takes them for the true and the real.

The roots of this degrading error, and subsequent schism in consciousness between its ideation and reality, can be located in the manifest as various forms of dualism. Historically, dualism seems to appear in the cultural field as early as prehistoric Iran. From thence, it can be traced throughout all aeons of unfolding human consciousness into the modern period. Equally, it is expressed both in moralism and in contemporary relativist decadence. Alike, they obliterate both personal liberty and personal responsibility.

Before the Indo-European migrations south from their lost homeland, their primal sages were said to have heard primordial sounds that echoed the cosmic laws springing from absolute consciousness itself. This wisdom, enshrined as the *Vedas*, knew no disparity between the personal will and the divine objective except as a matter of deficiency and degree. The cosmic forces whose numinous power emanated duty (dharma) into the consciousness of the Indo-Europeans in accordance with *rta*, the 'right' order of cosmic law, were no more distinct from these sages themselves than the beating of the heart and the breathing of the lungs are separate from the organism's whole will to live. Their absence, *anrta*, was no more a positive force of wrong than sleep is a violent intrusion of a 'force of unconsciousness' into the waking mind. Rather, the forces of *rta* themselves provided the substance and subsistence of the manifest matrix of consciousness, itself originally unmanifest,

uncreated, ungenerated by anything save its own absolute reality. The ultimate polarity of this archaic tradition, between the two poles of the existent and the non-existent, was not dualism but rather binary opposition, more akin to the two phases of *dao* than to the 'light' and the 'darkness' of the Iranian tradition.

Thus, it would still be dualistic to say that the dharma of the original Indo-Europeans as received and transmitted by the primordial sages comprised their duty to 'themselves', for unlike in later times, there was no disparity in the primal age between numinous consciousness and the 'self'. Rather there were only the people, their ancestral divinities, and the sovereign deities who reigned over all through and by means of their magical power. These sovereign spirits' immortal personalities presided over the *rta* and were honoured as the divine progenitors of a people who knew themselves to be divine. Just as the rites had to be rightly performed in order to uphold and maintain *rta*, so adherence to dharma supported the social order itself as a harmonious manifestation of the cosmic one. Between 'natural' and 'social' law was distinction but not disparity, as dharma sprang from *rta* and *rta* defined and limited dharma. Thus the devotion ascribed to the holiest priests, the most heroic warriors, the most dedicated craftsmen, and the most loyal servants, was simultaneously impersonal, in being directed toward the principles characterizing the entire social order, and self-interested, in being inseparable from the sustenance and advancement of the individual himself. This 'individual' was both a particular entity and a particular instance of a universal principle, manifest through its particular category: As a member of a particular class or 'caste', the individual manifested cosmic law within the social order in the fulfilment of the specific duties of his or her role. The same ethos was remanifest ages later in the Roman concept of *pietas*, which perfectly expressed the combination of 'devotional' duty to ancestral tradition, with a pious reverence for the social order it establishes and supports. Two poles thus supported,

and in turn were supported by, the noble devotion characterising the archaic Indo-European society. These two poles were the absolute supremacy of the cosmic order personified in the supreme spiritual sovereign who embodied the social law, and the individual right and power embodied in the autonomous and immortal *rishi*, the sage whose omniscient understanding of *rta* and *dharma* freed him from all but self-imposed constraint and let his consciousness engage in action without bondage to cause and effect. Simultaneously, the consciousness which had overcome its own limitations partook of the general and the particular, not without strife, but rather fuelled by strife and nourished by it. In this way, the warlike and fractious Indo-European culture simultaneously preserved its own identity, and the integrity of its membership, even when later confronted with radical changes in its location and environment.

Yet this use of polarity and binary opposition also contained the potentiality for its own rupture into dualism. The Iranians, unique amongst the Indo-Europeans, proceeded from trying to maintain *rta* to upholding *asha*, from 'right' order to 'reality' itself. *Anrta* became instead *Drug*, a terrifying, diabolical betrayal of that which was regarded as real. The dreamless sleep of unconsciousness, periodically eroding the ecstatic consciousness of *rta*, became instead the horrific nightmare of 'The Lie', ceaselessly trying to devour The Truth and digest it to feed Her monstrous children. No longer was right action an expression of subtle wisdom or even adherence to the doctrines set forth by the ancestral sages and their deities. Rather, it was taken as a moral choice to believe in the 'Truth' of reality, since individual choice could be moral, and in accord with *asha*, it could also be immoral and become 'endowed with the Lie'. Thus began the epic saga of good versus evil, vainly thought by moralists to comprise all of mythology, and radically influencing subsequent mystical, religious, and esoteric theories of devotional practice.

The Iranian dualism depended on identifying with the moral choice of 'good thoughts', 'good words' and 'good deeds', and

all these were defined as involving adherence to a universal moral system set in equal, dualistic opposition to a Drujic 'system' of immorality. The former was believed to lead to physical immortality in a monotheistic paradise in which all variety and darkness would be abolished; the latter was thought to lead to torture in hell followed by extermination. All this would happen after an apocalyptic final battle at the end of linear time, when the world would be 'renovated' and made perfect, for all eternity. This concept has endured into the present time, mainly because it was adopted by the Jews subsequent to their Iranian liberation from Babylonian exile, ensuring that these beliefs would live on into subsequent ages. Likewise, this also ensured that the conflation of moral duty with devotion would also be exacerbated by its combination with the personalized devotion characteristic of Semitic religions, whether polytheist, henotheist, or monotheist. Thus, in all the traditions marked by the transmission of this personalized moral dualism, devotional mysticism has been characterized by the abolition of the devotee's personality and faculty of conscious choice, either in 'union' with the divine object of devotion, or in subjection to it. The perverse consequences of this development perpetuate self-destructive religion and mysticism, and these unfortunate results can be summarized by a polarity of twin deviations: the rejection of devotion to duty itself, even in the archaic forms of Roman *pietas* or Indo-European *dharma*, by dualistic religious, mystical, and esoteric practitioners who do not wish to obliterate themselves in the fires of personal monotheism; and the practice of personal devotion to adversaries of the monotheistic deity, under the premise that this is somehow less self-destructive.

While adherence to ethical forms binding together the social and cosmic orders has little in common with the passionate moral identification characterizing the dualistic systems and distinguishing them from their polar counterparts, comparatively few esoteric practitioners in the post-monotheist, post-

dualist ages bother to make such a distinction. Thus, those who reject the universalist notion of divine commandments, and the dualist notion of universal morality, also tend to reject the very concepts of ethical and dutiful action—even though it is only through reference to an amoral ethos that moralism can actually be refuted without resorting to relativism or nihilism. Of course, the morally dualistic, monotheistic society is certainly unlikely to promote a social order in accord with the natural order, or concern itself with how either, or both, of those are brought into accord with a divine cosmic order that facilitates rather than consumes or obliterates consciousness. Transgression of the social order is a likely corollary of genuine esotericism in such a society, as well as a probable result of authentic devotion to duty, either to traditional ancestral forms or to the cosmic principles which produce them. Similarly, a cosmic order that promotes the enhancement and victory of consciousness over its own decadent tendencies toward collapse back into undifferentiated slumber may also appear to be transgressive of a 'natural' order. Since devotion to 'nature' alone is therefore a self-destructive, decadent dissolution of consciousness, the post-monotheist social reality offers no ethos of consciousness toward which devotion and duty may be upheld. This leaves the practitioner stranded in a wasteland of pointless post-modern relativism or a wilderness of arbitrary affections and affectations. By misapplying devotion to a profane social order masquerading as ancestral sacrality, monotheism drives unwary mystics into the misidentification of the sacred cosmic order with nature alone. This often results in either thoroughly decadent pantheism, or in total anticosmism in which consciousness is deracinated and turned against its own absolute substrate in a sort of nihilistic, suicidal veneration of frivolity and 'absolute personal liberty' for its own sake: the worship of Chaos. Such a disposition could not be considered devotion to the 'self' or the personal ego, because, as deviant as such self-directed mysticism may be, it postulates an expedient contrivance toward which the will to duty can be dedicated, thus

providing a reference point for the consciousness. Those who maintain neither an orientation of duty toward authentic cosmic order nor even the limited personal consciousness of the divinised self, have no direction at all with which to orient themselves in the voids of absolute consciousness. In ensuring that they are free from misplaced piety and erroneous association with the relative, they also ensure they are free from any absolute standard, and so have no defence against being overwhelmed by the bleak numinosity of the unconscious void.

Ultimately the result of dualistic devotion, whether mystical, religious, or esoteric, is hardly different when its subjection to moralism is replaced with unifying subjection to the beloved. This seems to be most prominently the case when the beloved is an adversary to a monotheistic deity, or a personification of Nature. The womb of a goddess becomes a more accessible gate of Chaos through which the self-consciousness of the devotee may be extirpated in an ecstasy of love, horror, pain, pleasure, or some other passion. The favoured 'pagan', 'heathen', or daimonic figure becomes a substitute for the monotheistic deity itself, receiving sacrifices and setting down injunctions which divide the devotee from his or her own consciousness or worse, associate it to the patron being, eventually inspiring either dissolution through final union, or rejection of the consciousness itself in favour of a newly fortified ego.

The attempt to reverse the effects of exposure to moral dualism and monotheistic personification is fraught with difficulty, as the mystic's sense of self begins to collapse into undifferentiated chaos when forced to entirely disidentify even from the binary reality of self and other, and entirely associate with its own conception of the cosmic forces. Although this may not deter the ascetic renunciate, who eschews all worldly action and cognition in favour of transcendent reunion with the fractured unity, the esoteric practitioner also seeks self-existent autonomy yet remains in a society no longer harmonious with nature or with the sacred cosmic order. Likewise, in contrast to

the monist ascetic, the religious devotee at best seeks the gnosis of divine consciousness within the immanent, manifest reality instead of beyond it. Both desire not blissful union but instead seek perfectly objective, omniscient perception of totality beyond the confines even of the cosmic hierarchy itself, and an immortal identity preserved from absorption into the abyss of chaos. Such practitioners must both conceive of the singularity of divine consciousness as total unity and distinguish themselves from it as singular, sole and unique. This presents the appearance of a paradox which would normally drive the practitioner toward monism or monotheism: either absorption into unity or subjection to the concept of its personality. One solution would be radical detachment from all conditional association through denial of any essential unity of self, while also rejecting nihilism. Of course, with no essential self to liberate, the extinction of desire becomes accessible only to the renouncer of all apparent, phenomenal and immediate reality. Just as the ascetic monist, the selfless mystic can only achieve liberation through renunciation.

In contrast to this dissolution of self through renunciation, the proper practice of authentic devotion actively supports the preservation of distinct, singular self-consciousness. This practice is exemplified by the path of dedication to supreme Unity, conceived of as immanent in all beings yet beyond them, dedication with the intent to become totally distinct from It, free to identify solely with the singularity of consciousness becoming its own supreme Unity. In this sense, the devotee discerns the Supreme both within and beyond the self, yet eschews attachment to or identification with It. Through devotion to duty within the cosmic order, duty fulfilled while exercising the detached disinterest of one unconcerned with the relative and its consequences, the practitioner experiences the distinction of the relative from the absolute, the manifestation of the multiplicity from the Unity, with the liberated perspective of the Supreme itself. By cultivating devotion to the

supreme, singular principle of consciousness, and thereby transgressing all boundaries of profane society and natural order in dedication to the sacred cosmic duty the Supreme establishes, the devotee achieves not only mystical liberation from attachment to the whole cosmic order itself, but also achieves Supreme consciousness both immanent and transcendent. In maintaining an ethos of detached devotion to the supreme principle of cosmic order, the devotee overcomes decadence and corruption—free from profane society and natural order alike: Conscious.

*Who neither rejoices nor hates,
Nor grieves, nor desires, renouncing
Both good and evil, and full of
Devotion—he is dear to Me.
Who deems praise and blame as equal;
Silent, content with anything,
Homeless, steady-minded, full of
Devotion—he is dear to Me.
Devoted, he knows Me in truth,
What and Who I am; then having
Known Me in My reality,
He forthwith enters into Me.*

*The Song of God, Bhagavad-Gita
verse translation by
Swami Nirmalananda Giri.*

KISS OF THE YOGINI

MOGG MORGAN

Murugan was a Tamil guru of absolute integrity and honesty, great and critical knowledge and a very kind heart.

'Who was your guru?' I asked.

He thought about the question for a moment. 'My teacher and his teacher before him, and before that all belonged to the line of Yakkupo.'

I nodded inanely.

'You have never heard of this person?'

I had to admit that I had not.

'Then,' he said, 'let me translate that into English. 'Yakkupo is not a Tamil name. What I am saying is that the siddhas of my tradition come from the line of Jacob. Now do you understand?'

I wasn't sure. Could Murugan be talking about a character from the Bible?

'The only Jacob I know about,' I said, 'is from the Old Testament.'

'Precisely!' he interrupted, 'and what do you know about this Jacob?'

I thought for a moment. It had been a long time since I read the Bible. 'Jacob was a patriarch of the Hebrews before they became the nation of Israel.'

'Yes.'

'Urr,' I was stumbling for something relevant to say. Then something I learnt at Sunday school popped into my head, 'Jacob', I said rather lamely, 'blessed the Pharaoh. He was the father of Joseph who during a long period of famine settled his people to Egypt. That the Egyptians could shelter these ancient victims of a great famine is a fact overshadowed by the later accounts of

the eventual servitude of the Jews as told in the story of the Exodus...'

Murugan now took over the conversation, talking long and excitedly, of how the story of Jacob is full of arcane knowledge of magick and medicine. He reminded me of Joseph's skill in the interpretation of dreams. Even the story of the *Exodus* was really an account of a magical battle in which the Hebrew priests routed their Egyptian colleagues.'

'Yes,' I said, I know all this, but has it really anything to do with the holy men of south India?'

Isis in India

My first magical awakening was through the practice of kundalini yoga, the principles of which I had taught myself with a little help from Aleister Crowley's *Liber ABA* and reading Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*. So, from the beginning of my journey I found myself at a crossroads between East and West; I guess I'm not the only one who has passed through. After all, this East/West approach lies at the heart of Theosophy, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the OTO and so on. Some call this current Typhonian, I call it Tankhem. All these magical styles' work are crossovers between the ideas of late Egyptian and early 'tantrik' magick.

I wandered in, and eventually out, of Crowley's old order, the (Typhonian) OTO—where I was left to devise my own foundation practice. This was slow work, but did deliver to me a mysterious pictogram which I now recognise as an Egyptian Hieroglyph. During this time I remember sitting in the Bodleian Library, enjoying the magnificently privileged view from the Indian Institute Library, across the rooftops of the Old Library, where several muses stand guard. This little library was my muse. Every morning I walked up the stairs, passing the statues and portraits of the oriental scholars I so admired, but also framed talismans and mystical games. My mind returns to the

old Sanskrit esoteric text, that was slowly and painfully revealing its secrets, such as they were, and wondered whether there was anything in all these books that I couldn't, as a magician, work out for myself, sooner or later.

Oxford is a full of little vahalas—making Halloween a busy night as I visit and make appropriate offerings to Kenneth Graham (*Piper at the Gates of Dawn*), Charles Williams of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and finally Max Muller, the forgotten Orientalist and Egyptologist, who is buried in St Cross churchyard with his boyfriend. One of my living teachers told me he was once called 'Moksha' Muller by the pundits of India. Moksha meaning liberation, because he was the translator of the Veda into English, a language actually understood by a good many Hindus. Thus the masses were able to read their own scriptures, and this is liberation.

My 'ancestor' Max Muller, a contemporary of the Theosophical Society, was perplexed by their notion of occult secrets, and their attempts to rebury what he had so painstakingly unearthed:

There is nothing esoteric in Buddhism—Buddhism is the very opposite of esoteric—it is a religion for the people at large, for the poor, the suffering, the ill-treated. Buddha protests against the very idea of keeping anything secret. There was much more of that esoteric teaching in Brahmanism. There was the system of caste, which deprived the Shudras, at least, of many religious privileges. But...even in Brahmanism there is no such thing as an esoteric interpretation of the Shastras. The Shastras had but one meaning, and all who had been properly prepared by education, had access to them...

Besides in our time all MSS are accessible, the most important Shastras, and their commentaries have been printed. Where is there room for esoteric doctrine. No living Pandit or mahatma knows more than what is contained in the MSS, though I am quite aware that their oral instruction, which is

freely extended even to Europeans, is very helpful towards a right understanding of the Sanskrit texts and commentaries...

(Max Muller, letter to the Theosophical Society received 4th July 1893, published in A S Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*)

Around the time I received my tantrik initiation and became a 'Nathas' or master, I was drawn by my cult's emblem—the first hexagram of the *I Ching*—six unbroken dragon lines rising to heaven. Just a few months earlier a friend took me to visit a witch in a remote Welsh farmstead. She read my horoscope and introduced me to the *I Ching*. As I was starting out in magick, I framed the question as to how I would fare in my mystical quest. The result was the very same hexagram and seal of AMOOKOS, the Arcane and Magical Order of the Knights of Shamballa. It felt like coming home. I didn't research the peculiarities of AMOOKOS. I took it all on faith.

Tantra is a very cultic thing. One tends to see things from the perspective of one's cult. You don't really have to know the content of every tantrik grimoire—each is a complete practice in itself. The same goes for magick—you don't have to know everything—if you find something that works, why look further?

Our lineage came via a proto-hippie called Dadaji, who had initially wanted to be a pupil of Aleister Crowley. But when they met he was told to get himself to India. He took Old Crow at his word and arrived just after independence and became a wandering Sadhu, spending the rest of his life in India until his death in 1989. However, he never forgot his connection with Crowley and later, in the mid 1970s, he remade contact with disciples of Kenneth Grant in the UK, and with them founded an East/West version of the Kaula sect which survives today under the name AMOOKOS.

Before Dadaji, AMOOKOS traced its roots back to a late classical period fisherman called Matsyendranath. I recognised a kindred spirit and he too became one of my ancestors.

In AMOOKOS we start each ritual with the following invocation:

*I honour the line of innumerable Nathas,
and cast a circle of Dragon's glow.*

Which perhaps tells you how important our connection to the ancestors is. One of the meanings of the clan structure is that the adept chooses his or her ancestors. Some trace their roots back to royalty but I prefer the nobility of labour. My ancestors are all of humble origins, fishermen who have an eye to the stars. May I remind you that Ammonius Saccas, the founder of Neo-Platonism was an Alexandrian dockworker as well as a philosopher.

Matsyendranath lived more than thirteen hundred years ago but he is far from the oldest of my kin. He founded his own magical style known as the Yogini Kaula. With such kin, AMOOKOS turned out to be a very important cult.

Let me digress to tell you that it is normal nowadays to recognise three stages in the development of Tantra. The earliest stage is called Kula, which means clan or family. This is contemporary with the hermetic or pagan magic of the classical world. It shares many features, for example the clan structure. The Kulas are said to be extremists in their magick, very in your face—rituals in graveyards, orgies, that sort of thing. To give you a flavour, when we were discussing this in a recent e-list, an adept known as Lalita Mataji made the following post:

Originally tantra was a way for a very brave 'hero' to seduce and bribe his way into the company of the Dakini/yoginis. These were divine half-human female beings who spent their time killing and eating babies, drinking liquor and kula fluids and eating wild meat. They are bribed by the offering of sexual fluids which our hero has procured through his kula activities. These fluids are some of the many fluids that females produce including sexual ejaculate which have been all mixed together in some recipe which is unique to each kula. Our hero hopes to

get the good graces of one of these feasting drunken bird-headed creatures who will then take him up into the sky and cavort with him, and he will get siddhis.

Kaula comes next and is a development of Kula. It is mellower, more discreet. It is a secret society. Meetings took place on the new or full moon in isolated circles within the forest. Some practices (but which some?) are internalised—thus the circle in the forest could also be the chakra in the body. The Kaulas were pretty much the inventors of kundalini yoga.

Over time, even the Kaula gets more and more refined, or watered down if you prefer. The final stage is purely internal, and that is what is known as Tantra. This is pretty much synonymous with mainstream Hinduism.

In writing, I try to echo my ancestral voices. So I wrote a little book, *Tantra Sadhana*. If you ask someone to define magic these days they trot out the same old Crowley cliché. My muses, being more practical, suggested I focus on what people actually do. Turns out there are eight characteristic activities of tantra. Eight is a very significant number in Kaula lore.

The eight are:

- Sadhana
- Mantra
- Mandala or Yantra
- Mudra
- Nyasa
- Dhyana
- Puja (especially sexualised rites)
- Initiation

I'm not going to repeat what is in the books, though I'm told there are some very idiosyncratic things there, including an opening rite with material from the *Greek Magical Papyri*. It surprised even me when a reviewer said he understood why it

was there but did not approve of the version I had used. So it can't be all wrong can it?

So how did that come about? One of the dominant voices of my ancestors is connected with Seth, the Egyptian god of ambiguity. The way I hear him has always been radically different to almost everyone else. To me he speaks an international language, one which combines ancient hieroglyphs with the Greek vowels. It combines the Egyptian power of the word with an Orphic power of sound. And much of this same 'language' was transferred to, or found a home in India.

When Matsyendranath, the founder of the Kaula sect was compiling his tantrik grimoire, he was totally aware of the importance of vowels as the 'magical soul' of the alphabet. He created a system of eight vowels that is extremely close to the classical model. Matsyendranath, using a simpler vernacular, has:

- A as in but
- I as in fit
- U as in put
- R as in purdy
- L as in table
- Ai as in bite
- Om as in rope
- Au as in found

My own Kaula circle was called Hamsa, the in and the out breath. But this is also the Sanskrit word for a swan or goose. It reminds me of our special relationship with the bird kingdom, especially water fowl. We also associated them with various aspects of the soul.

In folklore it is the stork that delivers the newborn babe. In ancient Egypt various parts of the souls were represented by different water fowl, the Ba or life force by the Jiburu Stork, the Akh or transfigured self by the Crested Ibis. In Plato one

reads that when a soul is reborn, it takes flight on the wings of a swan.

We combined the consonants *Ham* or *Sa*, with the eight vowels and that was our magical language. The eight represents the eight fundamental Yoginis or female spirits of Tantrism. The simplicity of the Kaula approach suits my temperament, which is perhaps why it called to me in the first instance. I have always communed with my spirit guides, the Yoginis, using a freeform vowel song or chaos language rather than more formal, Victorian-style invocation.

This brings me to the topic of Puja, meaning ritual, and probably what is the most distinctive thing about Tantra. Everyone has heard of its extreme rituals and sexual magick or tantrik sex. In fact, there are two big themes in Kaula, sex and death. Hence the famously gory, or 'Gorean', images of the Goddess Kali, so beloved of western adepts. Although I must admit, fingers crossed, she has never appeared that way to me. Despite my long time devotion to night-side spirits of one sort or another, my initial faith in their benign aspect has almost always been born out. As I connected with the folk of Egypt and South Asia I began to wonder whether these ancestors of mine were really that into the gods of the so-called 'great culture'. The relationship seemed quite distant and it began to make me question my own beliefs. Spirits, elements and Yoginis seem to be universal phenomena and a good deal less remote than the great gods of the temple.

The AMOOKOS adept Lalita Mataji enjoyed a laugh at the expense of those:

Kaula goddesses, divine half-human female beings who spend their time killing and eating babies, drinking liquor, kula fluids and eating wild meat.

Some of the Yoginis are indeed disease entities, which especially afflict children, but most are tree goddesses, or bird and animal

entities; some may well be connected with abortion; some are vampires, called the *Akhw* in the Egyptian tongue or *Vaitala* in Sanskrit. In medieval Europe they become the incubi and succubi. I had been introduced to a species of occult beings that defied geographical and indeed historical boundaries.

It soon became clear that traffic with all these entities often has a sexual component. Sexuality in ancient Egypt could be as unconventional as that found in the Kaula rites. This is a good corrective to those with a phallocratic personality. Kaula sexuality has a strong oral component. This facilitates the process of fluid gnosis—from the Yogini, the guru or some other intermediary to the would-be adept. The fluid is a special food.

The constellation Ursa Major is and always has been very magical. That's true for both Egyptian and Kaula lore, where it is called *Saptarishi*, the seven sages. Out on the Hamsa meadow I drew down the constellation using a ritual of my own creation. A Yogini came and gave me a cake. If you want to seduce someone, you bake them a cake. It is a process as old as life itself. Perhaps from the beginning of time, food has been the mediating principle of magick. Food, the secret key to magick in all traditions at all times. According to Hindu intellectual tradition, everything is food. When we die we are consumed in the funeral pyre or digested in the warm earth just as we, during our lifetime, consumed other organisms in the fire of our stomachs.

One Hindu great god I do relate to is proletarian Ganesha. The living avatars of the god Ganesha are hand fed by their trainers. Symbolically, we Kaulas worship Ganesha with offerings of turmeric yellow balls of sugary sweetness known as *ludoos*. They have a sinister secret. I know they are symbolic embryos. Put directly into the elephant's mouth, one can release colossal power.

So my journey continues, and after many years membership of AMOOKOS I am still learning. Recently the coin dropped concerning the importance and nature of the Yogis and Yoginis in Kaula practice. These are powerful female divinities and

quite different in my opinion to the gods of the so-called great traditions. It is with these divinities that female and male witches can identify in ritual practice. It certainly fulfils the witch in me, which has always been a large part of my magick, even when I was a Typhonian. I now embrace the magick of the folk, which exists in a timeless, universal space. This kind of witchcraft is intimately connected to the flow of blood under various forms, within and between us and the biosphere we inhabit. This is sabbatic witchcraft understood as that in which the sacrament is the central mystery. My Yoginis are not as circumscribed as those mentioned in, as an example Gorden White's excellent books, where he says:

They were essential to tantrik initiation in which they initiated male practitioners through fluid transactions via their 'mouths'.

The transactions with my Yoginis are much more multivalent and ambiguous. Their temples have barely changed for many thousands of years. I have always felt closest to them in isolated areas, on hilltops or prominences where the moon and their special constellations can be clearly seen. These days I would not even try to invoke them under a cloud. Although they are called Yogini, the yoga they practice is of a very primal variety, a few basic poses, but 'no need for crucifixion'. They are all about the original meaning of yoga which I would say has nothing to do with the old cliché of 'union' or 'yoke'. It is just as valid an etymology to say that the yoga in the Yogini is just another name for magick in all its wonderful pagan style.

LOKAEIGN

MORDANT CARNIVAL

Put your paw into the flame, little wolf.

I leave the Barcelona metro at Liceu and allow the throng to jostle me up the Ramblas as it will. This is not *dérive* proper—I have a rough goal in mind—but I need the element of chance and chaos for this to work. I am swept left and right, eyes peeled and ears open for the messages that come through the city. A snatch of conversation, a t-shirt slogan, a scrap of paper, all kinds of things can speak to you and offer guidance. And then there are more nebulous things: a sudden tug down this street or into that store; a compulsion to pick up some random item on the ground or to drop something you're carrying; a need suddenly to freeze in place and just be with the city for a while. Today I am tugged inexorably down a side street. Sure enough, there's a party shop I hadn't seen before, didn't even know was there, one of those places specialising in cheap plastic party favours, tricks and jokes, fancy dress. Angel wings and witches' hats. My heart swells and my pulse starts to race, I am on the right track, the game's afoot. Loki wants to play. I leave with a pocketful of goodies—a heart-shaped resin ring with a seashell inside, a heart-shaped pot of strawberry lip salve, bracelets of shiny red plastic beads.

Tonight is not like any other Saturday night. Normally I would head up to the crossroads near my home, the one with the four young oak trees and the park benches. I go there around midnight every week, armed with cans of cheap lager or energy drinks, cigarettes (dressed with His name in runes and my own blood) and packets of jelly sweets or fizzy sherbet. I sit on the north-facing bench, light one of the fags, dedicate a beer to His Royal Weirdness, say a few short prayers, hail Him with

some of His kennings. Then wait to see what transpires, quieting my mind and just letting the input come as it will.

Sometimes there are words, visions, sensations, a rebus slew of synaesthetic information; other times it's as if I'm just sitting there talking to myself, until later on, when the impact of the sketch starts to kick in. It can be very dramatic or very subtle, a sudden strike or a slow burn. Tonight though, is different. Tonight I am pulling out all the stops.

If you are reading this to learn about a Loki whose every characteristic can be pinned down to a passage in the *Eddas*, you're looking in the wrong place. You do need to begin with the lore; you need to make a friend of it and visit it often, always letting it guide you, teach you and advise you. But you can't make yourself a slave to it; you have to learn about the Gods and wights from the Gods and wights—by letting Them into your life. There are plenty of scholarly texts and analyses out there. This is something a bit different. I am not going to offer lengthy what-I-reckon speculations based on theoretical correspondences between various dimly understood 'god forms' arrived at by adding up the letters of their names and taking away the price of a tin of tomatoes. This is about what happens when you put down your books, prepare to let go of your armchair theories, and go out to meet the Gods on Their own terms. This is the voice of devotion.

Things have always been fraught between myself and my God. For a long time I put this entirely down to mistakes I made when I was younger. I still reckon that the consciousness I interact with was quite genuinely angry with me, on a personal level, because I turned my back on Loki when He first came to me and didn't accept Him into my life until ten years later. It was not so much the duration (the Gods do not reckon time as we do—a decade isn't even the blink of an eye to them) as my reasons for doing it that caused the strife. I betrayed my God, it is true. But that isn't the whole story; the reasons for the

friction are deeper than that. It has taken me a long time to understand.

He is fire.

You can argue the toss if you want and we could go back and forth for a bit, you with your 'there's nothing in the *Eddas*...' and me with my Scandinavian younger lore and Lokabrenna, but really, why bother?

Think about the ways in which you burn. Think of the hungry chemistry in you that takes the sunlight buried in your food and fires it into living flesh; think of the way your impulse to act can be a pile of coals in your belly, low or blazing, depending on the nature of the urge. Think of the electrical impulses dancing from neuron to muscle. Think of the way your heart races in love, or in rage, or in joy. Think of the heat in your pulse running from chest to fingertips and toes, racing along each limb, burning in your cheeks; that which colours, enlivens, sets us dancing—the heartfire. Loki is present in all these things.

Fire is fluid. It dances and flows from one place to the next. It hunches low one minute, leaps up the next. Fire is fickle, warming you on a cold night or stripping everything you own from you and leaving you bare in the ashes. But more than that: think of all the ways we talk about flames, and burning. *She's a hot-tempered one. He's my new flame. It was a heated argument. That guy makes me so hot.* We talk about lighting a fire under someone, getting all fired up, burning desire, burning love.

When Loki has withdrawn from me, I've burned from nothing, blistering with the lightest heat. I have been cut off from sources of heat and flame, left out in the cold. I once sat on the floor with the trappings from His harrow in a box before me, swearing I was going burn it all one piece at a time, only to have match after match refuse to light until my resolve flickered and died likewise. And when He is close I have felt that fire on my skin, pouring over me like a liquid, seen candles leap up on

the harrow, held hot metal trays fresh from the oven unharmed. I've put my hand into the flame and come through not just unscathed, but transformed.

So yeah, Loki is fire. You can argue the toss, we can go back and forth, but I've danced with that heat in my blood.

October 2007. I am shivering in the cold New England air, clutching at my friend's arms; I'm not even trying to stop crying any more, or to cover my chest with my arms. Everything I've got is going on staying on my feet under the waves of pain and shame. My paper-thin tolerance for the former was exhausted after the first couple of strokes, and that was a long time ago now. I don't know why He has requested this particular ordeal. If it had been up to me I'd have taken off into the Catalan Pyrenees to offer some austerity or ordeal on my own, sorted things out by myself. I am used to sorting things myself.

Loki is present. Sort of. Half-in-half-out of the body of a young male shaman. It's hard for me to assess the depth of the possession—I have no experience to go on, and assessing anything is difficult at this point—so I am taking my cues from the more experienced people around me. I can feel that Loki is present; whether or not He's ensconced in a human body, I can feel Him near me somewhere, and that's enough for me. Also present around the fire pit is a mixed gathering of spirit workers. I'd expected one or two witness, people known to me and trusted. Instead there are a dozen people, half of whom I barely know.

The instructions are very simple. Stand there, under the lash, until you feel like you've taken enough. For a normal healthy adult, it would be a reasonable request. But I'm not healthy, not by a long chalk, and the whole set-up has cracked open one of the dark places inside me and sent me tumbling down into it. I can't know it but I've been here for a couple of hours now, give or take a few breaks to warm up by the fire. I

am cold, tired, hurting, ashamed. I want it to stop, need it to stop, but every time I try to get the words out that black place in my heart opens up again and says *Not Enough*. Every blow, every cutting comment from the horsed God, everything just gets sucked up and devoured. The lash falls again, and then again, and then my legs give way. I stand, saying, 'I'm fine! I'm okay!'

But I am not okay. I don't know when to stop. I don't know how to stop. I am where I'm supposed to be, cold under the blows as the real people gather by the fire to mock, and my God turns His back on me. It is not enough. It will never be enough.

It is our stories that shape us. Not solely the events themselves, but the narratives we construct around them, the patterns that we create as we try to make sense of it all. Stories can govern the paths that are open to us, the jobs we take, the clothes we wear. Stories can even shape the flesh. I have experienced this myself, watching other people brought low by conditions that I found merely inconvenient, and vice-versa. Often, both people were me at different times. We can make great changes in our lives by changing those stories, by rewriting the script—it is the most primal form of magic. Obviously, there are limitations to how much stuff you can switch out; we cannot choose everything that happens to us. Much of the time though, we can choose what we do with it. The narrative can be undone and rewoven around the hard facts like water flowing around rocks.

This goes a hundred times for our dealings with the Gods. They are boned with sacred truths and then fleshed with narrative. It is through stories we know Them, through legends and tales that They come down to dance among us, and it is through the stories we tell ourselves that our relationships with Them are given shape and substance. We cannot make such out of whole cloth, because the Gods are living beings with Their own drives, desires, natures and agendas; but still, it is the yarns we spin that weave the patterns of our fellowship.

For a long time, this was my story:

I grew up in a lapsed-Catholic household, where atheism and a marked scorn for organised religion went hand-in-hand with a sort of misty-eyed affection for paganism. I got into magic as a little kid, starting by trying to manipulate the world by thinking really hard, and working up to actual ritual by age eight. My first proper spell was a flying spell requiring an hallucinogenic ointment; thankfully whatever providence looks after preteen witches prevented me from finding any Wolfsbane—apparently granny-bonnets, though part of the same *Ranunculus* family, do not enable flight in proto-witches. Make a note of that.

I put milk and sweet things out for fairies, I experimented with dowsing and automatic writing and divination, I talked to the plants in my patch of garden. I had more failures than successes, but there was always just enough of the latter—and enough random weirdness—to keep me coming back for more.

Due to my rather isolated background, I was always a solitary magician. Never joined any groups, fellowships, or covens. Even when I eventually met a few other self-identified magicians I never really worked with them, maintaining my wholly solo practice for years.

In my early twenties, I started to feel drawn to the runes and the Gods of the North as a focus for my magic and nebulous spirituality. I had a powerful experience in which Loki seemed to begin speaking to me, where I literally heard voices calling me to worship Him. Initially, I was enchanted and all set to throw myself into the experience, but allowed myself to be knocked off the path by certain people in my life who encouraged me to doubt the validity of what was happening—to regard myself as mad rather than spirit-touched. Instead of accepting the gift I was being offered, I panicked and fled.

For a year I buried myself in the most rigorous scepticism, rejecting anything connected with magic; then, as I slowly pulled out from the pit and re-embraced the hidden world, into a stubbornly non-theistic brand of chaos magic. Man-made

servitors and egregores, pop-culture figures—these were all I needed. No Gods. No spirits. Although I resolutely refused to conceptualise these as having any objective reality, preferring to think of them as thought forms, I still felt ill at ease with colonising someone else's belief system and grabbing off hunks for my own entertainment. The only deities I felt 'belonged' to me were the Gods of the North, and—although I'd have denied it if you had asked me—I was hiding from Them.

Eventually though, I was bold enough to start weakening the barriers I'd put up. First were my 'guides', two gentle spirits who surfed in on the back of my Reiki attunement to help with that side of my work, and to get me used to spirit-contact generally. They did not ask that I believe in their objective reality, so I had no problem adjusting to their presence. Then I got into ancestor worship, in a non-denominational sort of way. Initially I slipped it past the internal censor by parsing it as a kind of gothed-out suiteism, self-worship got up in boneyard drag. By 'worshipping my ancestors' I was simply worshipping everything that made me *me*—worshipping myself. That comforting model became less and less sustainable as I realised that some of the Dead were talking back. On the edge of sleep I would hear and see them; I would learn things that I hadn't known before. I felt as if I'd dipped my toe into a nice warm bath and suddenly found myself up to my neck in the ocean, vast and deep and strange.

And then in 2005 Loki showed up.

It was the same as before. The chanting voices, as if I was overhearing a ritual in progress, loud in my ears. Nothing I did would shut it out, nothing I listened to or read could distract me for more than a few seconds. In the end there was nothing I could do except give myself up to it. After a while the chanting stopped, but I found myself sinking deeper and deeper into the visionary experience.

In my mind's eye I saw fire, rearing horses, a hall full of shadowy figures, while my physical eye saw golden runes flying past almost too fast to catch. Through it all I was powerfully conscious of Loki Himself, standing at my shoulder, demanding that I listen to Him, demanding to know why I had rejected His gifts. The experience seemed to go on forever, although in reality I doubt it was more than half an hour. I was overloaded and knew I was heading for a seizure, so I lay down on the bed. When I came round from the fit, the visions were gone and so was Loki.

This time, though, things were different. Whilst I was still a solitary magician, the advent of the internet meant that I had contacts who could help and who rallied round. Granted, when I went public with what had happened I got plenty of the same crap I'd had the first time—I couldn't possibly have experienced genuine spirit contact, I was either lying or sick or crazy—as various overheated egos got their noses put out of joint. Older and slightly more savvy, I was able to tune it out and listen to the people who actually had something meaningful to add. Based on their input, I decided to set up a rite to talk to Loki and find out what the deal was.

If you are a magician, this is what you do. When They come to you, no matter how volatile, how scary, how unexpected, or what preconceptions you have about Them, you have to step up and deal. Once you make the decision to set your feet on the path, once you really embrace magic, you have little conscious control over where it takes you. Something else, something higher than your conscious mind, takes over and starts running the show. You don't get handed what you desire, because desire is fickle and often works in conflict with itself and your overall well-being.

I was not exactly thrilled at the thought of performing a Loki working after my difficult experience in the past; even if I had not had that experience, the fact was that Gods in general, and Loki in particular, just didn't go with my stuff. I was a fairly quiet, almost over-cautious mage, given much to kitchen-

witchery, simple spells and the healing arts, so dealing with a notoriously volatile, wild, unknowable being such as Loki was several miles outside my comfort zone and counting. But magic, if it's working right, will do that—hurl you outside that zone, throw you for a loop. Magic speaks to all the places inside you that are broken, to your blind spots, to your Achilles' heel. It will take you where you need to go to fix up the cracks and open the windows.

Despite dabbling in Northern magic all those years previously, I knew very little about the Gods and wights—half understood and poorly remembered snatches of data from books that wasted no more than a handful of lines on each God and were themselves woefully ill-informed. And although I was learning fast, reading everything I could lay my hands on, I had little idea how to put together a meaningful and appropriate ritual.

If you come from a Western magical background there is always the temptation to just break open the high ceremonial, Thelema or Wicca derived rites and plug Whoever's talking to you into that. HCM is how you *do magic*, after all; even the elite chaote who has turned his back on the fusty hidebound ways of Crowley and co. will still plug the Fantastic Four into the LBRP without batting an eyelid. It's not always a good idea though. Personally, I do not believe that all systems are automatically compatible with Western High Ceremonial gear. HCM is a beautiful system, whole and valid in its own right, but that does not make it the ur-system into which all pantheons can be slotted. In particular, there are certain incompatibilities between HCM and the NT cosmology which make this kind of kludge undesirable. You end up losing too much of the richness and mystery.

I discovered that rites put together by other Lokeans did exist—I was particularly taken by the work of Alice Karlsdottir and Selvarv Stigard, who had crafted some wonderful workings—but none of them seemed quite right for the situation at hand. It seemed important to find my own way. I

ended up taking advice from a friend who'd had conversations with Odin within a Vodoun framework. This had gone well and we figured that the same kind of ritual might suit Loki. The ritual outline was fairly simple: cook a meal as an offering, set up an altar with appropriate colours and symbols, lay on some booze, honour the God with music, songs or chants, and see what happens.

The first step was to create an icon of Loki for the altar. I don't paint or draw with any real skill, but I can do a passable bloody acrylic. It was the first time I'd seriously buckled down to create a piece of spiritual artwork, and the experience turned out to be an odd one. I found that the process of painting seemed to trigger something strange in me. I was struck with an overwhelming need to move, stretching and pacing up and down the flat. I got very hot, almost feverish; in between bouts of movement I lay down on the cool floor tiles. I found myself craving meat; I don't eat meat usually, so there was none in the house. I ended up crouched on the floor by my painting eating tuna out of the can. It's not a terribly good painting when all is said and done, but the act of creating it was a very powerful experience. I had worked my hardest, and the piece seems to have been acceptable.

The next day I woke late from some eerie dream of a forested place, and running wolves. The sun had been shining through the branches and I had spoken to someone, agreed to something I couldn't remember. Uneasy. Later, I went shopping for ritual gear; as advised, I tried to allow myself to be guided by the God and my own spirits as to what I should get. I ended up coming home with red paper, a satin cushion cover which was all I could find for an altar cloth, piles of red, pink and orange tea lights, a big red cinnamon-scented pillar candle, several cans of strong double-malt lager, tuna steaks, and a carton of carrot-coloured vegetable soup. I was getting poked for a bottle of strong spirits, but couldn't 'hear' precisely what kind so I went with a bottle of brandy. I later worked out that this was an error—Loki likes absurdly sweet liqueurs in silly

colours, strong coffee, energy drinks, spiced rum, cheap beer, orange Tang or, to be contrary, a good single malt Scotch. Still, liquor is liquor and He didn't seem to mind.

I set up a little altar on top of a chest of drawers, placing two white candles at the back to clear the air before I got started, and arranging the little tea lights in a circle round it. The Loki icon was propped against the wall. I had a silver-plated ritual cup to use for the libations, and some bowls for offerings. I was directed to poach the tuna in the lager beer, which is nicer than it sounds, and I warmed up the soup. Incidentally, this kind of food is somewhat at odds with the sweets and junk food He generally asks for. I think this is because I was to end up dealing with a more serious face of Loki than most people do.

I put on some music, then sat myself by the makeshift altar and set to. I used a box of matches as a rattle while reading off quotes from the *Eddas* that mention or describe Loki, throwing in my own kennings or titles I'd discovered online. When I felt as if things had warmed up enough, I cracked open one of the beers, took a good swig, then placed the can on the altar as an offering. I took a small bite of the food, then put Loki's portion in the offering bowl. I poured a cup of hot soup, took a small sip, then placed the rest with the other offerings. I poured a little of the brandy into the offering cup. Ignoring the voice at the back of my head that told me what a fool I was being, that nothing would happen, I kept on hailing Loki, toasting Him, bigging Him up, inviting Him to be present and enjoy the offerings I'd provided.

And it worked.

Slowly, as the minutes crept by, the air in the room changed. I wasn't on my own in the flat anymore. There was a profound, palpable sense of presence. The hair on the back of my neck and on my arms began to stand on end, I began to feel hot and cold all over, afraid. Nothing I'd ever done had ever gone like this before. What had I got myself into? But I kept going, not

wanting to stop despite the haunted house panic rising in my chest. This was it, the real thing. This was what I'd got into magic for. I could not have ditched at that moment if it had meant my life. I kept chanting, kept toying with the items on the altar, trying to quiet my mind and listen.

Put your paw into the flame, little wolf.

There was no compulsion in the words. It was an invitation, not a command. I think I said that I was not an animal, I was not a wolf, had nothing to do with wolves, but I put my hand in the flame anyhow. It burned. I snatched it away. It burned when I put it back, and it burned when I put it back again; and then the flame was like silk along my skin as I moved my hand through it. I would still burn, but it took longer and longer. I started to lose myself in the fire, and then He asked for more brandy, and told me to fetch my knife.

The ritual dagger had been bought some weeks previous to the visionary episode. It was a silly mass-produced paperknife with a tackily ornate handle and a blade that would have flinched away weeping from a pat of butter. I'd bought it precisely because it was stupid, and cheap, and kitschy, a fitting bit of ritual kit for a modern mage who didn't really take any of this magic lark too seriously. I had thought I was being clever. And letting blood was not something I ever did, really—who does that in this day and age, when we know about germs and when you can just use paint or cherryade?

The process of drawing blood left bruises on the heel of my hand, but in the end I managed to break the skin with that ridiculous little toy. If I had not been on an endorphin high from the fire work it would have been really nasty, but in my elevated state there was more annoyance and frustration than pain. I was saying goodbye to something in that moment, goodbye to screwing around, to pretending not to care about the things that were precious to me, to treating my practice like a bad joke instead of an adventure. You can say it was a cruel or

an ugly thing to ask, but it wasn't, not really. It was a valuable lesson, offered in a way that was immediate and lasting. He was communicating with me in a powerful, visceral way that I would understand and retain: *This is your craft. These are your tools. Everything should be fit for your use. Your knife should be sharp. You deserve no less.* I flung the knife away, or maybe He did. It stuck in the plaster then fell to the floor. I picked it up. He asked, once again, for brandy, I gave Him brandy, and He told me to drink some more too—that I would need it. I did.

The blade blackened in the flame. The skin inside my elbow melted away from the edge as the runes took shape, three Gebo runes in a line, burned flesh and soot, a little shaky because it was hard to keep still. Understand, I could have stopped at any time; there was no pressure, no threat. Just—this is what you do, this is what you do next. It was work that we were doing together.

After the runes, everything becomes a blur. I remember dancing to imaginary music, I remember cooking more food, I remember lighting a cigarette—no, I remember watching myself light a cigarette, as if in a mirror...and then there's nothing else.

I unglue my eyes. I am aware of having drunk a bit too much, but it's one of those mellow four a.m. hangovers where you know you're just going to roll over and sleep the worst of it off before morning comes. I float for a while. Then I remember, and sit up with a jolt.

Fuck. Fuckfuckfuck. What am I wearing? These are not the clothes I put on for the rite. I'd been wearing loose indoor gear, and these are my street clothes. I slink back into the workroom, not really keen to look. It's a shambles—my clothes are in a pile on the floor, the altar is piled with offerings; some of the tea lights, worryingly, are still burning, low and blue in their metal cups. No way would I have gone to sleep with the candles burning unattended. What happened?

The computer is still switched on from when I was playing music through it earlier. Without my glasses on it's hard to read the time in the corner of the screen. Half past four. The last I recall it must have been around midnight. What happened? What the Hel happened?

I pick up the heap of clothes. There's an empty tea light cup nearby, wax spattered on some of the fabric, and, when I check, wax on me too. It becomes clear that at some point in the proceedings I must have poured at least one whole melted tea light over my bare skin. I have no memory of this. I pick away some of the remaining wax, and look in confusion at the unmarked skin. I've been okay up until now, but this is the breaking point. I put out the candles, find an unopened can of beer, and shiver back to the bedroom to drink it before collapsing again into a pounding, uneasy doze.

It's my understanding that the African Powers will not possess a solitary individual. Possession is a community affair, accomplished to bless the congregation, to share knowledge and offer healing, prophesy and wise counsel. There's no point riding a person who is all alone—who would one speak to? Loki, on the other hand, will jump in your head just to raid your fridge. Of course, in the absence of witnesses or a note saying 'Loki woz ere, thanks for the beer', I have no idea if what I experienced that night was full possession. It would explain the time loss (I'd put away a fair bit of alcohol but not nearly enough to cause a four hour blackout), although so would a lot of other things. Later on, I was to understand the purpose of the heat resistance work—it has now become a major part of my practice—but at the time I felt that I'd been placed at physical risk for no discernable reason, and was very shaken up. I had to throw away some of the clothes I was wearing because I couldn't stand to put them on again. The experience haunted me for a long time afterwards. In all, I am inclined to read it as a full possession—something akin to taking your new car for a

spin. I didn't suffer any lasting harm, although it did take me a while to get over the uncanniness of it all.

For days to follow, I felt as if I were carrying the God in my heart, a constant sense of presence, half-in half-out. Runic signs were everywhere I looked, in the cracks in the pavement, in the clouds, in the veins of a marble floor, in the branches of trees. The world around me seemed freighted with messages, which, if I had the wit to read them, would send me into an ecstasy of wisdom.

For days, I burned.

Then one morning I woke up and it had all stopped. The world crashed back to normal. The runes were gone, the presence was gone, and it was as if someone had reached into my soul and ripped a chunk out of it. The desolation was incredible, the worst comedown of my life. I felt weak and sick. I tried to get some perspective, treat it like just another ritual, but I couldn't let it go. Although the whole experience had shaken me up, it was also exhilarating. I was torn between hoping that it was all over, that whatever I'd done had closed the door, put everything in order and back to normal, and praying that it wouldn't end. Everything I'd known or thought I'd know about magic, the Gods, the world and my place in it had been razed to the ground, but I felt as if my magic was blossoming in a way it never had before. It could all have been a delusion; my misfiring brain overloading and throwing up a convincing but ultimately false set of impressions. Or worse—it could all have been real, but I had proved insufficient somehow and had been rejected.

Two weeks after the initial rite I was struggling to come to terms with the idea that this might have been a one off for whatever reason, when the contact was resumed. I felt strongly compelled to re-enact the rite, in much the same way as before but with minor variations in the offerings. This time there were no fireworks.

I felt very much in touch with normal consciousness, but still connecting with His. The communication was different—there was no slow build up or long, extended contact, it seemed almost terse.

I was to understand that I'd moved into a new phase of my life. I would no longer be allowed to ignore the spirits, or Gods and the wights of the North. Most importantly, I would no longer be able to turn my back on Loki Himself. I would be working with Him from then on.

Could I get out of it? was my immediate question. Couldn't I cool things off, slow things down—take back what I'd done; couldn't I close the door for a while, just go back to the way things had been until I'd thought it over just a little more? Return to this work in a year, or two, or maybe five?

No, came the response. There was an utter finality to it that I wasn't used to in my cautious look before you leap and then don't leap practice. I had never played for keeps, wasn't accustomed to doing anything I couldn't take back, change, rearrange, ditch and walk away from. It rattled me. I'd stepped over the threshold now and there was no going back, any more than a kid who hits puberty can go back to being a small child again. But I wouldn't be alone, blundering along in a new world without a map or compass. Loki would be there with me from now on. He'd be teaching me, guiding me, showing me what needed to be done; and He would never leave.

I concluded the ritual, made the necessary records in my journal, cleared off the altar and proceeded to get dead drunk.

In the months that followed, His words were born out. The contact might drop off at times, sometimes for a week or two, but it always resumed. Oddly, although I found the periods of heavy contact oppressive and hard to process, when the quiet spells hit I was almost as messed up. I'd be consumed by doubt and fear, convinced that I'd either been fired or gone insane. My life seemed to be falling in around my ears again; I was struggling with everything, the smallest aspects of day to day

life seemed horrendously complicated as I found myself living half in, half out of my world. Gods and spirits spoke to me. I saw and heard things I could not explain. The three Gebo runes that I had received on my right arm started appearing everywhere I looked, on walls, in books and newspapers, on car number plates.

I was encouraged and instructed to meet with some of the other Gods and dialogue with Them, notably Odin, Thor, Frey and Freyja, Mordgud and Hela. Hela always remained somewhat distant to me, dealing with me via Mordgud, who in turn strengthened my connection with the Dead. The ancestors became clearer than ever. Freyja and Frey brought some life and health back into my world—to my regret, I never had much direct contact with the Son of Njord, but His sister has been quite vocal and communicative. That contact was always tinged with a slight prickliness, a sense of being held at arm's length; I never burned my fingers nearly so much on Loki's harrow as on Freyja's, at least not on purpose. Thor, the Son of Earth, came to feature quite heavily in my devotions. If you are a dedicant of Loki's, you will find yourself in dire need of some stabilising influence, something to ground the chaos and help you find a meaningful, healthy expression of it in Midgard's round. Thor is one of the beings who can provide this.

The strongest connection, beyond that to Loki, was swiftly to be shown to be the connection to Odin. Understand that I had little understanding of, and therefore little interest in, Odin's mysteries when I began my work. A war God? Patriarch of His clan, hanging out with a pack of celestial lager louts and ordering His women around? Please. If I'd needed a big bearded man in the sky, I'd have gone back to church a long time ago. What would I have to say to such a being? But as with Loki, the iridescent slick of assumptions, prejudices and popular half truths floating on the surface had obscured the vast and fascinating depths beneath. As revealed to me through the lore and via Loki's guidance, I soon recognised in Odin a far more interesting character, the kind of mad, wild, liminal, wandering

God I could get behind. My first interactions with Odin were very tentative, and it took a while to get to a place where He had my trust and I His respect. Later, I was to learn that other Loki folk had had the same kind of experience, and that many of Odin's people had likewise found themselves dealing with the Red Headed Bastard.

The Two-Man Grift comes as a package. For all the strife and sorrow between Them, They are brothers. People who say different likely don't know either of Them quite as well as they think.

Most of the other Gods have remained at a distance. I am sometimes asked, 'How do you get on with Skadhi?' or 'How does Heimdall fit into all this?' Well, I honour them, as I hail the Gods and Goddesses as a group every day and night. But most of Them have not appeared to me; I get shown things sometimes, but it's like a video clip rather than an interview. As for the enmity between Loki and the other Gods, it either doesn't exist in the way one might expect it to, as between Loki and Thor, or I have been instructed not to get involved. I've got plenty of fighting on my hands down here; it is not my place to involve myself in Their conflicts. Instead, I ponder the strife as a sacred mystery and seek to understand it.

And I was refigured. I am still being refigured. This would sometimes happen during my sleep—I'd suddenly find myself overwhelmed with tiredness and unable to stay awake no matter what I did, and then wake up to find my sense of myself subtly altered. At times the process would be accompanied by visions, even sensations. Hela tore off my right cheek. Odin plucked out my left eye once, blew on it, sucked on the optic nerve like a seamstress sucking on a piece of thread, then replaced it (my Sight was better thereafter). He ripped out my guts, and His wolves gnawed at my bones. I was devoured wholesale by a brood of female monsters, then piped back into being by Loki in the form of a woman using one of my own femurs as a flute. I have been gifted with jewellery you cannot

see, but that I can feel, and which responds to the presence of the spirits by growing warm or heavy. I have been marked about my face so that when I fare forth I am recognisable as one of Theirs. On the back of my neck, at the base of the skull, They cut a window for the spirits to enter and ride my head.

Loki Himself cracked open my chest one day and tore my heart out. There was no pain, only a wrenching sorrow, heartache. It was a ruined looking thing, that heart, like half burned meat left to go rotten, but He ate it in long slow bites, as if it was good. Then He reached down and took up a handful of rich earth, with green grass in it and bright flowers, and He shaped it with blood slick fingers, put it in my chest and flicked it to make it beat. In this way He made for me a new heart, bigger and more loving than the one before, which I like much better.

I am a stronger being than I was, much richer in good things. Though I haven't really gone through the full shamanic death yet; it's in the post, They're waiting on it, making sure I am whole enough to come home again when I do. As things stand, I might not find my way back. So I am not a shaman, not yet. But I've begun.

There are schisms in the practice of the Northern Tradition in modern times, great cracks and fissures opening up and dividing heathendom. The ground shakes and splits along fault lines in unpredictable places. Some obsess over the strictest reconstruction, trying to turn back the clock to a thousand years ago, instead of trying to find the Gods in the modern world and letting Them express Their mysteries through what is around us today. Some fixate on race, insisting in the face of all the evidence that the Gods should only be approached by people of northern European descent. Some develop a gnawing need to strip out any hint of mysticism from their practice, proclaiming even simple prayer to be either Christian or Wiccan. If you are given to direct contact work of any kind, you are an outcast. Worst of all is the unmentionable practice of possession, which, they will insist, has no place in heathen worship. People finding

themselves possessed by the Gods are summarily ejected from their communities.

And then there is Loki, and His kin.

Although Loki is counted amongst the Æsir, He originated outside Their garth. Loki is a Jotun, one of a different race. The word 'Jotun' is usually translated as giant, and most literary readings of the *Eddas* focus on the eschatology, on that final battle where the Æsir and Vanir will battle the Jotnar at the end of the world. The giants are portrayed as monsters—wild, violent, chaotic, deadly, the enemies of men and Gods alike. However, a look at other sources seems to indicate that in fact at least some of the Jotnar would have been the recipients of worship by pre-Christian heathens. The experiences of modern spirit workers, heathens and other pagans would seem to bear this out, with more and more people reporting spiritual contact with Jotun-kind. This stuff about chaotic evil giants versus lawful Gods is perfectly adequate for students of literature, fiction writers, role-play gamers and whatnot, but as a heathen spirit worker I find it is more sensible to simply consider Etin-kind as a third tribe of Gods.

I will say here that you should not necessarily seek out the Jotnar, because unlike the Æsir and Vanir They are not all concerned with human affairs and may not look upon your interference kindly. Some, like Hela, are intimately connected with and interested in humanity and can be approached much like the Æsir. Some are very terrible, like the wolf horror Fenrir; but even Fenrir has lessons to teach us and His proper place in the Web of Wyrð. Some of Them are simply the spirits of wilder nature, out beyond the regions that are habitable to humans. The mountain devours the unwary traveller.

Generally speaking, if you don't have business with the Jotnar you don't have business with the Jotnar, and if you do have business, you'll know.

And Loki Himself? Surely He is named amongst the Æsir, Odin's blood brother, and venerable therefore, whatever His crimes? No. You'll be informed that Loki is a Jotun, an evil spirit, a Nordic Satan. Even those who pay lip service to the idea that Loki is holy and worthy of reverence, finding this a convenient platform for anti-Christian diatribes and smug self-congratulation, will not really honour Him and will ostracise and defame His people.

A Lokean can never hope to have 'face' in the conventional sense. To be a dedicant of Loki is to be dodgy, not quite right, not to be trusted. In heathendom stereotypes abound, not helped by the fact that a lot of Lokeans have bought into those same stereotypes and seek to inhabit them. At best, you are tolerated, put up with; at worst you're a *varg*, an outlaw. You are specifically and explicitly excluded from many groups and gatherings—redundantly, since who'd want to attend? Lore-bound folkists write bitter screeds on how you need to be eradicated, got rid of, how you shouldn't be; you and your friends receive threats of violence and death. You are told again and again that your God is not a God. Some will not even write His name, hiding behind spiteful kennings or simply asterisking it out, refusing to say it aloud.

I fully support them in this choice. The people who shrink from naming Loki are seldom truly faithful to the Gods, to the honoured ancestors, or to any heathen wight. Historical reenactors who would use the Gods as if They were merely window dressing for a make believe game; fascists and fascist apologists, pulling a threadbare pseudo-religious blanket over their ugly, indefensible politics—we don't need them. Let them whine and cling to their lily-white corpse of a counterfeit faith; let them fret themselves into an early grave at the thought of the Gods being worshipped by anyone whose gender does not fit neatly into the rigid boxes they prescribe, whose orientation might be other than perfectly heterosexual, or whose skin might be other than pristine magnolia. Let them mutter about 'the Enemy' or 'the Bound One'. Let them go on

glancing over their shoulders in case a dark and hungry Power is grinning in the shadows, eager to snatch them away and involve them in something liminal, magical, chaotic or queer.

There was an old Scandinavian folk-custom where children threw their milk teeth into the fire, petitioning Loki for a new one. 'Here is a gold tooth for a bone tooth'. I joke about how my Odin devoted friends are worshipping Father Christmas; I'm worshipping the Tooth Fairy. But what is worship?

For many—myself included, once—the flavour of the word worship seems antithetical to everything that magic is. It conjures up ugly images. Mindless grovelling before something invisible, perhaps indifferent, non-existent or even hostile; submission to an arbitrary order, sacrificing one's Will to the will of self-proclaimed holy men.

But this is not what worship means. Worship is simply *weorthscipe*, to give worth to. True worship can never imprison, never enslave, because it is a full expression of the self in relation to the holy, to the Mysteries of the universe around us as mediated by the Gods and wights. Worship in the Northern tradition is an interactive process, thanks to the law of 'a Gift demands a Gift'. But this is not a mere transaction, like for like, goods for gold. It is an exchange of understanding, an exchange of consciousness, between the votary and the living intelligences that are the spirits. The object of one's worship is like a reflective surface; whatever light you pour onto it from yourself will be focused and radiated back onto you. You enrich each other, just as any friends enrich each other. Nor is worship about wrapping a comforting garment of lies and self-serving delusion about you. Offering worship and having faith do not equal looking for a free ride or an ethical 'out' when things get complicated.

Faith is a skill. It is not simply given to you whole and complete and in need of no further cultivation. You have to hone it, work on it, practice it, every single day. You have to labour at it, work it like earth or metal, dig and build and file

and smash until your hands bleed. You have to make it, like food or art, like love.

Faith is not the walls. It is the window, the Wind Eye, the opening that lets you look out into the storm. It's not a warrior who fights your fights for you, it is the force that vivifies your own muscle and nerve and puts the sword in your own hand. It is not the giver of gifts, it is your own generosity magnified and given impetus. Faith takes what is finest in you and further refines it.

There is a divide between where I started and where I am now, between pure sorcery and something else. You can get a long way towards the other side with logic and rationalism, but not all the way. No matter how obsessively you rewrite the equation, you cannot get rid of the little x in middle. No matter how many experiences the Powers send your way—visions, dreams, mad midnight happenings where the laws of physics seem to crack like the sugar on a crema catalán—no matter how many others may be waving at you from the further cliff, you cannot walk across a solid stretch of Reason to get there, each stone firm and steady beneath your feet, each step assured. No, to get there, you will have to take that flying leap out into the unknown and hope like buggery that you're doing the right thing. There can be a weight of inevitability about that jump, as the number of mental back flips you have to do to maintain a secular interpretation of what is happening to you increases, and the desire to touch the void rises with the energy you must expend. A lot of people mistake this moment, the moment when you have to put more work into preserving your atheism than you can sustain, for a rational choice. But you could keep resisting almost indefinitely; the breaking of your resistance does not change the fact that you still took that leap.

And there is nothing wrong with that. I have less respect for the man or woman of faith who insists 'my choice was one hundred per cent rational' than I do for the person who admits that somewhere in there is the vertiginous x of a leap of faith. A genuine leap of faith is not a small thing to do. It is not a trick,

not a short cut, not an easy way out. It can be the hardest thing in the world. For me, it was almost like dying—I felt I was putting an end to one self so that another could come into being. Where is the shame in saying I let go of everything sure and certain and jumped out into the dark, trusting that Someone would catch me?

Once you get there, you discover that this one leap was not the end. The more work you do from this perspective, the more you interact with your Gods and the more They respond, the easier it gets, the more your faith is shored up. That little worm of doubt, though—it never goes away, nor should it. The doubt is your ally against fanaticism and madness, helping you to maintain flexibility and adaptability in your dealings with the Powers. But this does mean that at times you will have to make that leap again from time to time, to cope with the inevitable shifts and upheavals of a mortal life and the changes that your relationship with the Gods will go through over the years, and to remain steady when the doubt rises up and threatens to overwhelm you. Over time, the effort is less great than it first was. You know you will be making the jump, you no longer have to cast around for the next firm place to stand. You become fleet of foot and more certain; instead of a leap, a dance.

One way I connect to my God is via the *berserker gang*. In the lore, going berserk means entering a hideous battle frenzy in which one's whole body can change, becoming prodigiously strong, immune to normal weapons and to fire. The berserks are described as wild and terrible, slaughtering indiscriminately. This gets put down to all kinds of things, from alcohol to amanita muscaria to the inventive minds of the old skalds and the later scholars who set down their words.

But the berserker gang is very real. It is one manifestation of a kind of transcendent state, an ecstatic trance nicknamed the *gangr*, the going. There are a lot of variations, depending on the

stimuli used to enter the state. And you don't need magic mushrooms or mead to get into it, either.

Before my conversion, I had entered gangr a few times spontaneously, either via tremendous psychological or physical pressure, or by being placed in trance and then accidentally triggered. I had a very strong nonviolent outlook so found these states horrible to contemplate; I spent a lot of time and effort trying to suppress that side of me.

But you cannot be Loki's and hide from yourself. I found the gangr coming over me during my devotions. I might drag myself home, reluctantly set up a devotional rite with every intention of going through the motions and crawling into bed as soon as I could, only to find myself dancing uncontrollably for three or four hours, burning with the presence of my God. I might suddenly be compelled to pick up bits of loose charcoal in my fingertips, marvelling as I held them unburned for several seconds at a time. Partly because of my background and inclinations, and partly because of the stimuli I use, my gangr manifests differently to some; I am far less likely to become violent than to dance up a storm, run off into the woods, or paint five pictures simultaneously. Slowly, I began to discover a whole hidden way of being, long suppressed and atrophied from disuse, but still intact and waiting to be woken.

The gangr transforms. It brings a beast to the surface; the red-in-tooth-and-claw parts you want to keep hidden from yourself. Loki is a shapeshifter, taking many different forms. He is also a revealer of painful truths. This aspect of the gangr naturally connects me to Him.

There are other points of connection too. Loki ate the heart of the thrice burned Etin-witch Gullveig and gave birth from it, mothering a brood of *flagð*—troll women, ogresses, witches. Thus Loki is the Mother of Witches—and the gangr is an act of witchcraft. The old berserkers were said to transform into bears or wolves; I am *Ulfheidinn*, wolf-coat, something that was only revealed to me through my work with Loki. My God is father to the most terrible Wolf of all, Fenrir. He is father and mother

to many other monsters. So, although the original berserks were all Odin's men, this is another powerful way in which I connect to my God. On the rare occasions when I am lucky enough to get together with other berserks, it is as a priest of Loki, a priest of the Father of Monsters. It is Loki who generally brings on the gangr in me. In that wild, ecstatic state, I dance with my God.

It is January, 2008. I haven't quite got accustomed to the new ink on my arm, red runes reading LOKAEIGN, 'Loki's own' in Old Norse. The skin is still a little puckered and raised, and I get a happy little skip inside whenever my eye happens to fall on the lines. Things have been better. I have paid shild from my previous errors, and now I have made this concrete gesture of commitment and love. I am making regular devotions, doing the required work as I understand it.

More, I have begun to find a sense of community. There is one loose group of spirit workers and shamans in the States with whom I'm building bridges. There are the UK based magicians, for whom I've started to become a contact in the world of heathenry; and in the US, a group of people who practice the berserkergang and related altered states as a martial and spiritual discipline, for whom I can function as a priest of Loki.

And then one day I wake up, and He's there, not playful, not calm and abstracted, but raging. Torrents of meaningless sounds, spitting and snarling. I catch the odd word. *Traitor.* I receive vivid images of my own mutilation and death. As the days pass, the things I see begin to manifest as pain in my body. I can't hear any of the other Gods or spirits, I can't hear anything but that furious torrent. Days drag into a week, two weeks, and I can feel my mind going. This is it, this is where I find out that the others have been right all along, that Loki is evil and inimical, that He has just been toying with me... What if He is a demon, what if They all are?

I deal with the impulse to give in to these thoughts by making a concerted effort to step up my devotions. I ask colleagues for help, get various suggestions. Nothing seems to work.

Eventually the din stops and things return to normal, but I am shaken. I have come through, but it feels like a close thing, and still I don't know why.

The Gods are not just extra powerful men and women, some long-lived monster Mafia exploiting Their superior wisdom and strength to oppress mortals. There are sacred mysteries alive in this world, in this Universe, in us—all the things we do and know and want and need and fear and touch. Love. Hard work. The forest at night. Parents. Teachers. The cemetery. Wonder. Joy. Grief. Home. The crossroads. The brewing of drink, and the growing of crops. Dancing at a wedding, dancing at a funeral. Order. Chaos. Wisdom. War. The raising of a child, the honing of a weapon. The Gods are all of these things and many more, given consciousness and living form so that we may better know them and understand them.

Take Thor. Before I converted I simply didn't know much about loyalty, or value steadfastness, or perceive the courage involved in hard work and reliability. Through communing with Thor, I have begun to learn in a way I could not have learned from an abstract idea. I begin to see Thor in the world around me, in the men and women who do His work in this world, who embody the things He is. I have become more steadfast, stronger, more industrious myself.

If you speak to Freyja and your heart is cold, if you speak to Freyja and yet you hate women, despising them as whores or bitches, you will have a cold and lonely time of it as She packs up Her mysteries and turns Her bright face from you. If you go to Odin for wisdom and yet refuse to leave the narrow confines of your life, to step outside the hedge around your garth and wander in the wilderness, you will receive short shrift and some harsh lessons.

And Loki? Loki is wild. He does not turn His back on the unknown and the terrible out of fear. He does not seek the shallow security of conformism. When we try to ignore elements of our own beings, He is there, storming into the banquet to show everyone exactly what is on the end of their forks. Drive Him off and He will only come back for more; bind Him to the rocks and He will shake the earth. Loki is fire, drive, impulse and impetus. He is chaos, doing what you feel and fuck'em if they can't take a joke. He is not present in the act of waiting for instructions whilst on your knees, nor in rote devotion delivered without passion. Shut yourself off from that in you which is wild and mad, hide from your own caprice and invention in a huddle of anxiety and doubt, and you betray Loki. How do you betray Loki? By betraying yourself. *Traitor.*

Saturday night. I step off the train and out into the dark woods. You don't have to go very far from the heart of Barcelona to find yourself out in the wilds, like this tract of old, established woodland in the Parc Collserola, well travelled by hikers and dog walkers, with paved trails, concrete steps and park benches, but still powerful. The stars are brighter here, outside the city. As the lights go out, the woods come alive—wild birds, bats, insects flitting between the trees. I can hear a larger creature shambling in the undergrowth, someone's dog taking itself for a walk, or, more likely, one of the ubiquitous wild boar gruffling acorns.

I take the bottle of Scotch from my bag, prick my thumb and rub a little of the blood round the neck of the bottle. I dedicate the bottle to Loki, take a swig then pour out an X-shape onto the ground, the Gebo rune, with Kensaz splashed on top of that. Handfuls of sweets follow. I don some of the plastic beads, hang others on the branch of a nearby bush, and apply a smear of the lip balm, it tastes like strawberries. I light one of the dedicated cigarettes and take a drag, smoke curling into the cool night air. I call upon Loki to be present, inviting Him in with all

of the kennings that I know—old and new, jocular or sinister, wealful and woeful. I call on Loki in all the ways that I know Him, as Father of Monsters, as Mother of Witches, as Husband of Sigyn and of Angrboda. I say names for everything that Loki is, or seems to me to be. Then I tell Him about my guilt and sorrow and sense of loss for what I did and didn't do all those years ago. I tell Him all about my fear and my confusion. I throw open my heart and say 'teach me'.

Teach me to set aside the guilt and the shame and the fear. Teach me to stop paying homage to your mysteries from a distance, as if I could only look at them and not touch, as if the things You are don't have their echo within me. Teach me to worship You by becoming You. Ride my head. Come into my heart. Let me speak You, dance You, live You. Burn in my blood.

Sometime later I walk back down the hill. I step into the lights of the station, and a new life.

And this is my story now. I got turned around, made a few mistakes, but now I am back on my proper path doing what I need to do. I can see the shape of it now, see what I need to become—something a little bit me, a little bit Him. There is still work to do, walls to tear down, fear to shake off, shakes and shivers to live through, dross to burn away. It's all happening much too fast—and yet not fast enough. The sheer scale of it the task ahead is daunting at times. I am on my way, though. To union, to becoming a head He can ride, a door through which He can dance.

I close my eyes, and I feel it.
Laughter, fire, blood... *Loki.*

Becoming Lokaeign for real.

THE AMFORTAS WOUND

PETER GREY

It starts as a cat scratch, the scalpel doing what it does best. Cutting through, cutting down, cutting into. A smile, a red line. Seven layers of skin. This is what I have been asked to do by Her. Make sacrifice. Offer up my heart's blood. Surrender to ordeal.

After all the elaboration of salt and circles and coloured candles. After the scattering of roses and tying of brass and glass bells to the ankles of the dancing girl. After the calls and symbols drawn in the air. It is time to be cut.

I have come to this place. I have chosen to undergo this act of Love. I lie naked on the black felt robe. The knife is precise. The drumbeat starts as the vévé of blood spreads across my chest. This cannot be escaped. This cannot be stopped.

I hear bare feet through my breathing. They are out there moving across the wooden floor and torn petals, their own outline being made. Another pattern that is ordained by something other, by what I have called and been called by. An echo from the Seventh Aire.

There are three rhythms intertwining, the drum, the dancer, the blade, and my body responds to them all. The endorphins, I was warned, would run out, quickly fade. The lines have been drawn and now the layers must be stripped away. This is not meant to be easy. Love hurts.

This is no oceanic release, this is severe. As the skin is lifted up the scalpel sweeps beneath. Every sing, sing, sing as it severs goes through me. There is no rhythm like the tattooist's needle to sway off with, no hammock of inky bliss. I breathe circular alternate nostril, three part and tongue turned back. She demands my presence.

The drumming fades in and out, the shiver of bells speaks to me, but it is always back to the knife. The sacrifice. The letting

go. The breathing out and backbone pressed against the floor. Hands and feet open, allowing it to flow.

One of the essential ways to understand Babalon is to use the death posture. To consciously release and dissolve physical tension. This is daily practice. Skull to toe tip, toe tip to skull, teaching the body to surrender. This is a practice which can then be used in adversity, training the body to relax and absorb in situations where tension would rip limbs off. I learned this growing up surfing in the heavy dredging storm surf of the Atlantic winter. I hone this as a martial artist. I confront it again here under the knife. Without adversity, without battlefield conditions, our magick can be nothing more than mental deception. Babalon demands absolute physical commitment, abandon, freefall.

As we go deeper the atavisms growl out. The in-breath, out-breath turns primal. Not something I am doing, something that is coming out of me. The drumbeat hastens, but there is nothing that can hasten the work of the knife.

I get a glimpse, a pressure, a shiver, as if She has breached the circle and sits astride me. Fresh blades. They blunt quickly as my skin is flayed back. No pause for more than a breath. The drum rolls on. The blood is wiped away. The knife passes back again, again, again.

Now it is really upon me. Each cut unlocks a block and my base and sex centres are rocked. These are kriyas, cascades, running up me. I sound like an animal, like all animals, a lion, a serpent, a dragon. I am getting wracked with spasms. The ring on my right hand clearly raps on the floor twice, three times. For the most part it is in the hips, my upper spine staying supine. I am let go into it.

No sense of time. No way of knowing how much more there is to go, how much further I can endure. Ordeal is relentless, without safe word escape. Time stretches away bottomless, abyssal.

Somewhere outside the circle a dancing girl is doing her own striptease. I am shuddering, bleeding, going back to the mantra, to what all this is for.

For Her. This is for Her.

The drumskin resounds with a rhythm that has never been rehearsed. The air is hung with smoke.

The cutting stops without warning.

The blood has run down over my chest and fingered across my abdomen, already nigredo black. I stand naked, my heart revealed. Rose heads have been crushed under bare feet. The candles have burned down. There is a blood crescent cup cut into my chest. This is dedication. This is ritual. This is self knowledge. It means I offer every drop of mine own heart's blood.

Devotion does not stop here. Neither is it the seven days spent scrubbing the lymph from the open wound under running hot water, denying the scab from forming. Yet She is in this raw exposure. (Bataille, Blake and Burroughs knew this secret).

Nor is it in the rosehip oil which I anoint it with even now, circular fingertips whorling into my new born flesh. Yet these touches are for Her, and what She is making me. The scar is organic, a living testament to the changing nature of my devotion, of the evolution of my practice, my body and our Love. Her scar is constant, an irredeemable action that is constantly physically felt.

The scar is both an adornment and a cutting away. A revelation of the life beneath the skin in the occult anatomy of my own exposed body. In both stripping and augmenting we find our selves. Just as Babalon appears as a slave girl dancer twisting and circling down to the dance of atoms, or creating Herself in the ornaments of gold and pearls and precious stones.

Perversely, a thing of beauty is born out of suffering. This is Babalon, forever marking my heart with a kiss, become a cup, to fill with my blood and offer up to her lips. She scents and tastes me.

I am a marked man, and my magickal marks are with me in all the worlds, were there waiting for me to discover, to be shown, and thereby reveal my true nakedness. She asked for this, and I did it for Her. My deliberate ritualised choice. This is neither narcissism, nor self-hatred, nor masochism. Instead, honesty, clarity of intent and surrender. I perfect myself for Her.

To be devotees of Babalon, we must transform our bodies to reveal their true natures. This does not have to mean the needle, knife, and branding iron. The radical methods of modification are no more or less valid than rolting, pilates, or high heeled shoes and depilation. But understand this, Her history is one of torture. These methods can be embraced as tantric empowerments. Babalon is in the burning cedars of Lebanon, the bludgeoned whores, the murdered wives, the convent prisons. The story of Love is the art of War. Be prepared to suffer for Love, to build a temple from within your skin, and learn vital, cruel lessons. We carry with us the burden of our thoughts, postures, locked complexes and social conditioning. We must rediscover our grace and beauty through the truth of our bodies. Know the blood urgency of life and live it.

To devote yourself to Babalon is to rediscover a western tantric witchcraft, one where the physical body is grasped as the primary magickal tool. It is from the launch pad of the physical body that the energy body is built. Lean Crowley, scrabbling up the rotten chalk of Beachy Head knew this. Parsons was consumed in mercurial pursuit. The root to the stars is embedded in the flesh.

Voluntarily committing to cutting was hard for me, never a self-harmer hunched over glimmering edges of escape. I cut to be in my body. I am used to the taste of blood in sparring, the

sweat tarnish tang that gets you up off the mat and back at it. But to recline and suffer the knife was not easy. This is where the power is, in confronting our own personal limits, in being asked to do the most difficult things.

Ah darling, the beloved always asks, will you die for me?

In a sense, this is an act of Love under Will. Yet in the Will-centric madness of the western path, the call to devotion often goes unanswered. To master one's self requires Will building exercises. The sword cut focus, the hours in asana, the use of gesture, the harmonious manipulation of symbols, the tiger pacing of the circle bounds. The single-minded application of art and passion and resolve. Devotion demands you go further still.

The opening must be made to something beyond Masonic speechifying and models of mind. You must hear the bare feet on boards and know that the Goddess is alive, however hesitant and flawed the form, it beats forth.

Love is the Law, but at this final giddy edge can Love be under Will? Gregor Gregorius in his sour charmlessness adds, compassionless love.

Yet the universe puts pay to this brittle skeletal crab of a lie. It crisply skitters into oblivion as the vast nebulas of stars burst with life upon life, in a constant state of arousal and dance and interpenetration. Babalon laughs out loud. What can these tired men with pinched faces tell us of Love? Ask the poets, the Lovers, the warriors, the scarred.

Poised above the swelling wave, the untracked mountain face, the unknissed mouth, there is a moment when you simply have to fall into it. Will may have brought you to this giddy moment, but it takes an act of surrender to experience it. To act otherwise is to remain forever locked in the confines of ego, your small world, your tower. Babalon is here, beyond edge and reason, where the Will cannot extend. Love is in brave abandon, whatever artifice has brought you to that point.

This is the record of my Work. Babalon asks for blood, not ease.

Heaven knows I have fucked, taken strangers, best friend's lovers, married women, quivering novitiates, the lonely, the lost, the libertines, the easily led. Found myself in thighs and mouths, armpits, assholes, the backs of knees, between breasts, the curved crescent of insteps and drowned in a valley of cunt. Anointed myself with sweat and menses. Burned through the insecurities as perfect lover, disposable friend, stranger, angel, scapegoat, rakehell and whore. Tried to act with honesty, but in this process in flesh, both learning and mistaking who She and I were in the embrace.

This has been my alchemy, my fetishised nigredo. Dressing Babalon as the most immediate body to honour, in the meditation of never saying no. I do not regret a single instant or lover taken, yet I have learned that I could not fuck everyone to knowledge, let alone myself. The crazed black cracks to reveal a molten bloody heart. I cut deeper into myself, deeper into devotion. Discover what Love really is. Find Babalon before the seducer becomes seduced by the surfaces forever.

The beloved is not an abstract. We cannot project her as a patina on the world, for in penetrating we are penetrated. The rose heart shot through with barbed arrows. I am all undone with Love. The much vaunted state of detachment kills the subtle alchemy of true union. This is for beginners, trying to control their sexual response, and a relic of cultures and times when woman was seen as less than human.

Know now that nothing can exist in isolation. That the true self can only be found by sacrificing all, over and again. Repeat and deepen, step beyond the bounds.

How can the lover of Babalon treat the beloved as a whore for hire, thrown back out onto the street after the dispassionate act? She asks the hardest thing, Love. The destroyer of all.

I know the name of my beloved in the world. Her tremor shock, the way her eyes flare and throw out. The cascade of

synchronicities and recriminations from her lips, the doubts. All the confused storms of where divinity begins and where it ends. Yet Love has found us both out, and there is no respite. Open, wounded, bloody and ecstatic with the dance which is Babalon. She is here for us all.

Blood is the clarity that Babalon demands. Because for all the fucking and feasting there must be confrontation, and yes, sacrifice. Devotion demands the impossible. Again and again She asks you to confront. To offer Her that most terrible of gifts, Love.

Babalon is a Goddess of War and Love and we will all fall on the battlefield. What matters is how we live. We must make the ritual gestures of Love. Find our own fierce ways. Engineer encounters with knives and ropes and silk sheets and alleyways. Recognise Her face when She appears rather than rush after the next illusory thrill.

Her scar demands attention, it whitens now into a moon smooth raised keloid become an erogenous zone, draws the hand and eye. Has the divine fascination healed into it, the touch-me-touch-me-not of eroticism. But this is a scar that never truly heals. Love, a fresh wound every moment, gasping like a Rose into life.

CLOAKED

TONY ELLIOT

As a witch I sing with a different song that does not fill all with satisfaction. I have a wild way about me coming from a path that culls the innocence of the soul and although I cannot tell it in whole, let no one doubt that I am a true witch. I have rejected works from great masters, even if they are long famed for their worth. My teachings began for me at my birth with a cunning raven in the rafters. That one image now forms the foundation upon which sits everything I have done, all that I am to do or have begun. From the raven I have validation. She is the heart of all that I see and is the light I seek out in the void. She is the warmth of love I can't avoid and the darkness I cloak around me.

This is from where I stand to shake these bones at all who have inclination to hear and stomach. I do not adhere to the safe ways. Experience comes at personal cost. There is no heart set at a half measure which could come near to knowing my pleasure of feeling found when accepting a loss.

From the litter I am the runt, the middle child with attention to seek. That is how it is in a family full of lame quarrel, where five children do nothing but squabble and vie for the attention and rightful bliss. I escaped this and was thought deaf for years. Not just to sibling slander or sniping, but physically too, which was frightening for a mother no stranger to her tears. I was prodded and tested and they found I could hear very well if I wanted. This acute isolation was granted by a skill of mind, at age five, profound.

I speak of an odd age in my journey. I did not know I was sworn as a Witch. I could be left in a circle from which I would not move until Mum came for me and things happened around me worth noting, or at least for the woman with the eye for her one child that would not just try a hand at magick—but give

everything. My mother became the pathway crafter and to me she gave the link I would need, but not the answer, just a light to lead me into the maze with no escape after.

As I grew, my eyes opened to the craft. I wanted it to become a secret advantage and I hoped I would treat it with the discipline I needed, to graft this ancient skill onto this modern man so seamlessly that it could not be seen.

It was of no surprise when Pan came first to this boy born as a magickal tool, setting his feet on the path as the Fool. Pan had the strength and he gave me the thirst to feel the depths of my tissue and bone, the limits of my intoxication and strength to live through his jubilation in the simple fact that the Earth is our home. This lesson must be the first to be taught and is generally the first forgotten. Like most I took his gifts and turned rotten at the core; drunk until I fucked or fought, snorted, smoked, joked or cried at my own sins until I prayed my life would not be long.

That pure ideal I had of magick, gone.

The path painted by writers, a lost thing.

Some painted the dream of pure connection while others would speak of the golden light. I wanted this and yet I was in a fight with a dumb drunk full of self rejection. I could not walk on the paths of others, and the church had claimed my older brothers. I had just my mother to ask for proof that this journey led to something sweeter. She would tell this drunk young fool no such thing because life can be a violent thing. I had to survive. A liberator born through the hell called up to surround me. I was supposed to meet a point through Pan that opened me up to the truth that can open one's eyes to the way to be free.

This was why the Christians called him Satan—they could not see the gift beneath this ruination he promised on heath, in forest, in glen and city. I talk of Pan, but he was just half of the power at work in this young fool. The other half was too subtle

to pull me by my hair, to get me drunk and laugh. My name had been given to Her and She waited for the moment to show her card.

Believe, the journey to Her is not hard but it can be impossible to see. She is the silhouette seen in a dream that you arrogantly give a face to. She will not come to the cocksure boy-blue whose daily actions make his morals scream. She wants you to know who you are inside and for you to be that in the waking world. She cares not for masks or for gold coins held. From Her eye there is nothing you can hide. But here is the beautiful paradox, because that mask and coin are yours to use and She will hide from those who do not use the gifts at hand to make it through the flock.

A witch should be a tool in magick's hand, a tool dual-edged and balanced on a spike. A witch is balancing in a state of nothing sure—where balance itself is the only sure thing you can rely on. When life is like this She is right there with you, smiling behind you as you blunder, a head full of wonder. To reach this stage blows your heart asunder. This is the stage of life we die to find.

Pan was first to find me, but by Her choice. His task was to befriend me and he won, then to break me, yet still to love a son that would now care to listen to his voice. He stood for me to see him full of life and while I kept my eyes locked I ignored the books that would soon have made this witch bored of the dream of my magick curing strife. He took my tinted sight and made me blind, so that I was lost and brimming with doubt. I spun on the spike impaled, unaware that She stood smiling behind.

Have you ever been lost for wisdoms sake? Did you spin like a church's weathervane caught in a gale, not to be still again? At the crossroad, which road would you now take? I will tell you that the right road is wrong. The left road is now always of misrule and to retreat back is no choice at all. Straight ahead is a road you'll walk along until legs burn with the toil and task of not wavering one step of the way. Go nowhere for a while.

Look to the sky or scan the barren branches of the trees and maybe there is a scent on the breeze that could be followed if we would but try. It is not through luck when at last She comes. Indeed, She does not come at all, but draws you out of your hot flesh to where She stands, hidden from the sun.

She sees me, not who I would wish to be in this place between the day and the night, both silver and black, so far from twilight but close to it all like an echo free to drift without any need to be heard. She stands still, filled with dignity and grace and all writings about her crone-like face become ridiculous and even absurd. This is no woman with child in tow or the grandma with a crooked old back. Stood before me cloaked in eternal black is a beauty our world will never know. A maiden with a single truthful face that has no equal, rival or flaw and in Her eyes I see there is a door to the dreams I dare to dream in this place.

Writing fails because of the emotion I can't repress when asked to speak of Her. I am led down a path to speak to only those who know this mother beyond prose. Maybe one will read this and have eyes blurred by tears spurred on by the recognition of another so tightly wound up in love with the Raven who would rival the Dove at bringing inner peace to fruition.

What I have learned from this path is my own. Maybe this is the true secret of Her. You are tasked to cross through bramble and burr, taking the wounds, shedding blood, breaking bone and stumbling onwards without a guide. Just walk blind trying to find what you hide from the rest of the world.

The seeker holds burdens within their head much easier to carry than to shed. Shelves full of sand filled jars, formed out of clay, line the walls of the mind. Each one is a representation of a ripe falseness kept to give the illusion of our fullness in a world where we wish for 'more than this'. They are pots of pity in which we dwell when the day feels like a useless trial, when we struggle to maintain a smile and fight as the desire to scream

swells inside our hearts into a maelstrom of hateful disconnectedness from man. In these moments, the jars are ballast that keep us on a path we are beginning to belie. Too much of this will surely turn the mind away from what it truly wants to find and the downward pull is enough to drag us from our values, from our dreams, from our courage and from our sense of self.

Here is the crossroad where we make our choice—to be a man of clay, or do what we fear the most. Smash the jars. Let the ego starve and give up the ghost, letting falseness die on the wayside of a true, broken route.

She will come when arrogance and pretence are at last cast aside and those jars full of useless weight that pulled us down are smashed. Blind, deaf and dumb we sense our inner self drift on a current. Fear was my first memory but I was low enough in store of esteem not to show my mind a way out of the chilling stream carrying me to a place never known. It was being caught in ultimate loss that kept me afloat and at last I was in the between, awake, alive and home.

Here we met. I am now forever bound and in the physical world I fear naught. Through my vow a piece of my soul is caught by Her and cared for. One foot on the ground and another planted in the between; she teaches the witch to maintain this stance, simply between 'being' and 'not'. She sets opens the eyes to the unseen.

So I smashed my jars, free from the tyrannical results of my soul's moot on the subject of whether to ascend further on this sweet magical road, or to let forces of the mundane win out. Questions were at once thoroughly destroyed if the answers were buoyed up by a need to eliminate doubt. It was through my doubt—helpless, empty, lost and in a desperate need for saving—that I was capable of depriving the ego.

I made my way to mercy by surrendering any desire for personal glory through ambition. A hard task for the witch of tradition, but, if you will dare the fire and let all preconception

burn away, the moment of absolute helplessness will be followed by a connectedness to force. It will first lead you astray and shatter all you think you are about, to make room for the truth. Remain devout and with your whole self, simply surrender. If you are blessed like me and come to Her through being lost, through embracing your doubt, She will need to hold you for only an instant. You will never suffer from either again. Reach Her without demands on your tongue and She will consider you in Her intent.

But this journey made offers no return. You will pay for her love with blood like any woman in your life for love (not pennies). I have bled for her until my heart burns and yet still I feel I have more to shed. In return I have been taught to fly far away from the physical confines there to keep the weak minds of men asleep, or dead, and when I am in that haven between all things I am with Her, but not enslaved. True, her name is now on my heart engraved and for thirty two years She has been my Queen of destiny.

Oh, I did not know that I would grow so fond of this old art, of this wild magick born in the heart. I had to be lost before She would show Her face and tempt me into her service. That moment came when I was in my teens. I was both lost and rueful, but it seems She'd been waiting for me to break the surface of the veil.

I had been stood within ruins with echoes of Kings, their gifts and sins, on a hill not far from where Old Thames sings out as he comes to the end of his crawl. I had channelled my rage into the ground and learned how alive we feel when afraid, because out of the stone came a parade of shadows that laughed as they ran around me in ever shrinking circles, closing in. I threw my rage at them but all for naught. It would not be long until I was caught in their cold hands and left suffocating.

I had my athame with me and pierced the ground thinking to throw out a circle, focusing on the spiral of purple light I have always been taught to perceive. Their laughter intensified and I

fled down the hill to the gate and my way out of their domain. Maybe I gave a shout, or whimpered with fear, while my chilled blood bled out of my face leaving it pale, moonlike on a night of terror I'll not forget.

In this madness I surrendered and let go the light's protection (taught to a tyke) and in that moment the tree above me became bare branches as a hundred leaves raised—now a flock of ravens. I breathed deeply to fuel the outward sigh of one freed from attack at last. The raven, the darkness, a power greater than I could know from any dry text, presented to show the goodness in the dark that light blinded.

How ineffectual light had been that day against souls intent on teasing my mind into madness. Light makes us become blind and I remember the lesson to this day. It has proved to be the case ever more. Some say darkness is the absence of light and they will argue they are always right. Knowing Her is the key to knowing more. The between offers the driving force locked in all things.

See, light is still striving to be as constant as night (and as true), but it will never happen. I feel light is balance only through overpowering, whereas darkness is balance flowering from nothing. Therefore, no matter how much it is twisted, buckled, woven or even abused, dark's centre will not move. By testing your own heart you can prove how what I say is the truth. This is your door to the darkness, the key to this devotion. She is an entrance to your abilities and will bring to you other deities who will set your true fate into motion.

She first led this man of Pan to herself and took my reigns out of his earthy hands. She has since led me through my trust to lands I would never have dared explore myself. She sent me to fly with envious owls and I learned from this snake loving demon how so richly to value a sweet sermon, plus how the seeming pure, when jealous, howl.

I embrace the dark as the route to all! When we dare to let go our assumptions and let life be led by intervention, we will see the price equals nothing at all. The blood I shed is returned

over time and the truths I relinquish are gifted back, shaped perfectly to fit the shifted view I now have from risking the dark divine.

A shallow mind may read this and tremble at all my talk of loving the evil dark, but evil comes from self—found not in stark halls where the souls of the dead assemble. She that we seek in the night will give true guidance on a path that suits our own fate. She takes no hand guiding you to love, hate, peace, war, light or dark. She leads you to you.

Now crossroads are forever beckoning me and there waits my subject of adoration; a true Queen in need of no coronation or any nation's belief for Her to 'be'. This is my Goddess who fills me with rapture. She takes me by my offered hand to Her haven, soars with me in the form of the Raven and has saved my loving, worthy soul from capture.

Never have I laid eyes on such beauty true—the left eye dark with oblivion and strife, the right as dark with the burden of life, each glistening at me like fresh morning dew. My devotions are arms to hold Her higher. And though dangers stalk the free, I need but raise my chin for her to fly to me. She feels the warmth and truth of my desire and comes because I now have the right to call. I have seen her in mid flight become a smoky cloud that swirls ever closer, becoming a shroud on the shoulders of a woman proud and tall. She has skin like marble filled with the moonlight and hair like the night itself, a harnessed void that does not retreat. She holds her torch, a deltoid of iron encasing white fire so bright that it makes the demons following stumble. Then She speaks to me, not from Her throat through lips, but sounding Her words in my hot heart—which slipped into Her care where it feels safe and humble.

The two faced say She is three faced, or the Crone, but they have not met Her beyond the cold veil and those that depict Her so may not know how to live for Her, by the flesh, soul, by blood and bone.

I teach no stations in this devotion, but do convey the truth of my story, so if you find Her and feel the glory, remember to treasure the emotion. This written work is not my ego stroked. I am an old witch with a hidden voice wondering if I have made the right choice—hence in this I speak, but with words cloaked.

I have not written any Goddess name. I need not, to know She is truly mine. Soon the power of names will be known and show who comes here for truth and who plays the game.

OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE

ALKISTIS DIMECHI

*I am the flesh. I am feeling. I am God.
Nijinsky, Diary*

In the aftermath of ritual, of incensed nerves reeling, crushed petals and body given over to Lust; intoxicated, the drama withdrawn, and the body emptied, come the first stirrings. Tremors, beginning in my feet where the night before those feet had explored the space outside the circle. Between flames, punctured by the thorns of strewn roses, ankle bells shivering to the drum's tattoo—on the dark edges of ritual I am thrown into relief.

Why am I here, what am I here for? Why me? Why?

The following days bring not answers but a deepening of the mystery. Sensate intimations of an opening within to something beyond me. A continual, orgasmic throbbing rising from the centre of each sole, building and breaking in waves through days and nights, barefoot and shod. Intensely localised, the sensations spread upwards and outwards, extend throughout and ravish my nervous system.

At the time I took it for an unexpected and pleasurable energetic after effect, now I incline to the probability She was allowing me to know Her. Vividly erotically alive, blatantly turned on. And with the uneasy recognition that I am fallen in Love.

It is my intention that these words are a mirror, reflecting something of my relationship with Her, and my practice—which has brought me here.

My work is rooted in my body, I am a dancer, a dancer who paints, writes, publishes. However, I face the world, the mirror and my Lover armed not with a brush, pen or book, but simply my body.

Through dancing I encountered Babalon. In devoting myself to this art, which marked an abrupt transition in my life, I seem to have unknowingly set in motion a chain of events which would lead me to Her, and Her to me. Here, in the flesh.

I abandoned the life I was living, becoming in effect a hermit except for brief incursions into the city to train with dance masters, to research and to perform. A period of intense reflection, alternating productivity and fallow despair. With bloody-mindedness I set my course, burnt my last bridges to daylight responsibility, and flirted with the underworld. Sometimes learning how to captivate a room—naked, diaphanous or costumed—other times, in the dungeon, my singular audience captive but no less demanding. In either scenario one must be fully possessed by the *dæmon*, by the spirit. It is the same liminal ground the shaman walks on, the razor's edge.

Since earliest childhood I have had intercourse with the world of spiritual and daemonic beings, not sought but taken for granted, or granted—given, in exchange perhaps, for what passed out of me with the life of my brother. And what passed into me, at the point death entered—awareness bathed in loss and longing, and teachers or guides, an influx of the interested, hungry, dead and disembodied, and mercurial presences that evaded description and explanation then as they do now. As a child their ambiguous lessons had me swinging between dumb reticence and saying too much—before the Church and educational establishments convinced me that survival would be more likely if, like the savages, I cloaked my rebellion, my freedom, in silence.

It may be that my love for the poetic word, for painting and dance, is born of the savagery they spring from. A perpetually exotic land which cannot be traversed by reason, the unmapped

terrain where we are defenceless, where preconceptions and expectations can only hinder us. A land which is always in a ferment of destruction and creation, that which pulses behind the veil filling us with thoughts and desire of itself. A perverse nature led me and lost me there. I do believe that our natures are in a constant state of becoming, that existence is precarious and beautiful, fragile and indestructible; that one can abandon oneself before the gods do; that one can choose the path one walks, but in looking back see that the way was inevitable.

An *enfant perdu*, there is also the promise and intoxication of the unknown, Mystery, which tempts me to the front again and again. This luminescence, the light in the eyes that has animated every persona I wore, and which is, recognised or not, the gleam in all of us. I will claim that all along I had a strategy: to throw everything into the fire so that I might keep burning. I was fortunate in that I never had much to lose, except my nerve. No doubt there are those who fall to wrecker's lights, particularly in Babalonian waters. The temptation to pursue an eidolon and the sirens' song comes with the territory.

I did not pass from childhood into adolescence and adulthood unscathed, I have scars, physical and mental. Anxiety, body dysmorphia, depression and violent mood swings have been a fact of life for twenty years. There were times I reached an impasse, psychologically and in my art and dance. Made brutally aware of my vulnerability and weakness, I admit that I do not have answers even for the mundane questions of this existence. I take responsibility for my life, but it has so often been blind instinct that moved me and lifted me out of the inertia of depression. That cycles of elation and depression should fuel a drive for knowledge and expression is simply a manifestation of the reality that energy is generated from polarity. Balance is struck in a dynamic opposition of forces. If you are a dancer you should read, if you are an intellectual you should move. There is no excuse not to extend one's mental and physical reach, to

withdraw from the light is to become merely a spectator to life. A voyeur rather than a voyageur.

As a dancer my body is explicitly the territory, the source and organ of knowledge. The inner space of consciousness enmeshed with the physical, boned and bound flesh. By perceiving my body itself as the charnel ground, I contrived a method to sustain myself artistically and emotionally on my experiences.

BETWEEN VENUS AND THE DOG

Butoh seized me from my first exposure to it. Between the stark crouching figures, more and less than human, and the enigmatic evocative words of Hijikata Tatsumi, a way opened for me. I sensed in the Hiroshima-shocked bodies, whose gestures had been jolted out of comprehension, an unsheathed eroticism, a divine animal. If the animal has since slipped beneath grease-paint into a cliché of contortion, becoming a convenient excuse for bad art and immature technique, this does not diminish its potential limitless power in the body that wills its own continual becoming.

These disquieting bodies that revel in perversity and ugliness seem at first sight to be at odds with the beauty of Babalon, but in my experience, Her red lips and high heels can be no more than drag without first the unveiling of a consciousness and a body that undergoes transmutation.

Again and again we are reborn. It is not enough simply to be born of the mother's womb. Many births are necessary. Be reborn always and everywhere. (Hijikata Tatsumi)

I am at the mercy of a spirit that thrives on turmoil, however emotionally unarmed I've been in my adventures. Pushing the body and mind to its limits, and further, brings self-knowledge. In dance, the movements born of exhaustion have a more profound scent than those which take you to the precipice.

Sweat opens the surface of the skin, inviting a metabolic exchange between inner and outer. The body and mind relax, one is moved more by spirit and the hidden unfathomed depths of one's being than by the mind's games and machinations. Endless repetition of exercises hones the body; the critical socially-aware mind is numbed and discarded. In butoh training there is no mirror-barrier to impede the natural movements of the body, no narcissistic or self-conscious appraisal of external form. There should be no space for a voice to intercede between impulse and action. The conditioned, tamed, social body is undone through training, and by the application of these principles in daily life with a ruthless and passionate desire. We must seek or create absurd situations. We must free ourselves of convention, habit and ease. Exploring the consciousness of other bodies, other modes of being—becoming animal, plant, mineral, element—we slip through the bars of the prisons we were born into and those we've since built. This is not fantasy, escapist and disembodied. It is attained with discipline, physical exertion and honesty. There is no initiator who stands at the door to open it for you, other than yourself. Time after time.

All movement begins within, arises on the breath. The dancer is earthed, a conductor of the unseen and ineffable. A neutral empty body whose nature is precarious, as Mallarmé grasped, *'drinks the bolt of lightning that renders it divine'*.

I work to achieve a receptive state where I can be moved, I search for the points of instability, I look where I do not expect to find myself. I want to be surprised. I want to be appalled. Zeami, playwright and player of medieval Japan, put it eloquently when he said, *'I feel extremely at ease when my inner self is not recognized even by myself.'* My methods have by necessity been more thunderbolt.

Time and discipline can allow the artifice of technique to disappear, though it can feel like a Sisyphean undertaking. Our stone is the body, gravity the guru.

Butoh is eclectic, syncretic and utterly idiosyncratic. In common with all learning, what is acquired must be internalised. Beyond that, it asks the dancer to plunge into their inner nature, to excavate the body's memory, to straddle contradiction, being at the same time mutable and hard, male and female, animal, machine, human, god.

EXPULSION FROM PARADISE

*In the beginning was the flesh and the word only came later,
much later. (Antonin Artaud)*

Babalon lifts Her catastrophic eyes and invites a new era to succumb to Salome, Astarte, the temptress Eve, the boy-whore-emperor Elagabalus, a parade of fatales—nameless, naked, and damned. Weimar Berlin's obscene hallucination of desire, borne on a litter of ether-soaked rose petals and cocaine, the barbarian Berber stripped sex for the jaded bourgeoisie. Berber the infidel, true to her art and her *masca*, ceded her life to our imaginations.

Dance is sacrifice. Sex. Heresy.

Not that dance hasn't been regarded as sacred: the *apsaras*, *dakinis*, the temple dancers of India and south-east Asia attest to the intrinsic connection between dance and sexual-magical power, *kundalini* and the congress between mortal and divine beings. The dancer is between worlds, segueing from temple to street, from the stage to the boudoir, shifting between costumes, customs and customers; and it is precisely this that makes dance antagonistic to the social order, an act that defies the tight-lipped economical puritans, the counterfeiters of spiritual coin and the heavy hand of bigotry. The dancer belongs to an untouchable floating world. This too is the history of

Babalon. The truths of the body cannot be denied, the body speaks.

Kingship once clearly rested on female power; the right to rule granted by the Goddess through her priestess, and defended by a harem of temple dancers. Outside the temple, popular and folk dance animates peoples tempered by poverty, hardship and duty, with the forces of life, the gods. Carnival, commedia, flamenco, tango, kabuki... Dance will always and everywhere erupt with insurgent life.

The first performance of what became known as Kabuki, dates from 1603. Okuni, possibly a former Izumo miko and likely a prostitute, set up a platform and performed on the dry river beds of Kyoto. The name given to her antics derives from *kabuku*, which meant *tilted*, or *to lean*, but took the sense of that which is strange, unorthodox, *risqué*. This brings to mind our 'cant', the argot/jargon of vagabonds, harlots and thieves—those 'devotees of the dangerous life'—whose oblique evasions and lunar deviations from the law and logos queerly aligned them with the puffers, hermeticists and necromancers. The language of the birds directly from the lips, the cunt, with echoes of Babel.

Kabuki was originally written with the ideographs for song, dance and prostitute but, under a stifling moral atmosphere, the ideograph for skill stood in for prostitute. Even this switch is faintly suggestive of Her carnal flower, for the word 'flower' in many languages and traditions has been synonymous with both skill/mastery and the female sex. Lewd, popular and available—both women and the youths who stepped into their kimonos were banned from the stage, and the twisted roots of Kabuki were lost in the wadding and posturing of middle-aged men. Sound familiar?

Babalon came to me after I had embarked on this trajectory. In hindsight, She was here all along—in my shadow, in a haemorrhage of synchronicities and symbols, in the sleepless nights, in nights lost to lost loves—She drew me on towards

Devoted

each cauterising dawn. Her energy filled me with the lust for more. Harder, faster, deeper. Before I knew Her name She'd given me a taste for bad medicine, and that vertiginous abandonment to the senses which makes the world sacred, the body inviolable. In dance, in meditation, in words ejaculated under duress, in vision and possession, She leaves a thread for me follow.

THE DEVOUT

RICHARD WARD is an eclectic occultist, ritual magician, and psychic quester exploring various paths and traditions. He has been a practitioner of voodoo within the Haitian tradition for nearly 12 years, and in 2003 fell in love with a certain Red Goddess.

LEVANNAH MORGAN is a witch and magickal practitioner who lives in the South West of England. She has worked for many years within Wiccan, witchcraft and ritual magick traditions and teaches magickal practices based on her own experience. She works in the film industry.

JAKE STRATTON-KENT is the former editor of *The Equinox-British Journal of Thelema* and the default spokesman for English Qaballa. What is less well known, is that he is a practicing goetic magician of several decades experience and an expert on the *Grimorium Verum*.

RUBY SARA lives in the States where she pursues various interests in writing, theurgy, herbalism, and calligraphy. She is a witch, a thea/ologist, a devotee of Dionysos and a book fiend, though not necessarily in that order.

STEPHEN GRASSO is a writer, Magician and Voudonist based in South London. His work has been featured in *Generation Hex*, *Dreamflesh* and many more journals and books. One of the best of the modern writers, Stephen proves that writing on magick can be clear, concise and passionate.

DAVID BLANK is the editor of the *Oracle* occult magazine. He is both a gentleman of the old school and a highly talented sorcerer. His idiosyncratic practice of feral sorcery has been born out of stalking the boneyards of East London.

MARK SMITH is a former professional soldier and now a businessman, residing in Spain. A devout student of Hecate and loyal supporter of the magickal revival, he works closely with several other powerful entities and believes in bringing gnosis back in to the hands of the people.

CHARLOTTE RODGERS is presently living a quiet life following a period of enthusiastic and careless, experimental magickal practice. She has contributed articles to various magazines, makes fetish objects and lives in Bath surrounded by bones, books and badly behaved living and dead creatures. Charlotte is the leading authority on blood magick with the scars to prove it.

GEROGE J SIEG has been studying esotericism and mysticism for over ten years. After undergraduate specialization at the University of New Mexico in Gnosticism and mystery cults with a degree in ancient religion and ancient history, he took his MA at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, with a thesis concerning dualism and demonization in Zoroastrianism, and the ancient Persian counter-Zoroastrian cult of the Lie. He is now completing his doctoral dissertation on occult warfare at the Exeter Centre for the Study of Esotericism, University of Exeter.

MOGG MORGAN is a founder of the Oxford Golden Dawn Occult Society and a Zonule holder of east/west Tantrik order AMOOKOS. His daytime job is CEO of publisher Mandrake of Oxford. He was a Wellcome research student at Oxford, where his teacher was the later Professor B K Matilal, a widely respected expert on South Asian rational thought.

MORDANT CARNIVAL is a folk-magician, heathen, and devoted Lokean from England. Ze is committed to helping build and maintain a healthy, functional variety of heathen spirituality, free from racism and other forms of prejudice. Mordant has had articles featured in Disinfo publications, the *Oracle* magazine, and has been a core member of Barbelith.

PETER GREY is a devotee of Babalon. He is the author of *The Red Goddess* and a founding member of Scarlet Imprint. Peter is currently working with the Goetia, and co-authoring several further works on Babalon which go deeper into the mystery.

TONY ELLIOT is a solitary witch, aspiring artist and writer. His highly personal practice has an authenticity often lacking in those following more structured witchcraft paths. He has a very physical practice, anathema to the modern mall-witch. This is his first published piece.

ALKISTIS DIMECH, a devotee of Babalon, is an artist and dancer, and a founding member of Scarlet Imprint. She is working with Peter Grey with the Goetia and Witchcraft.