

FOSSIL ANGELS

Regard the world of magic. A scattering of occult orders which, when not attempting to disprove each other's provenance, are either cryogenically suspended in their ritual rut, their game of Aiwaz Says, or else seem lost in some Dungeons & Dragons sprawl of channelled spam, off mapping some unfalsifiable and thus completely valueless new universe before they've demonstrated that they have so much as a black-lacquered fingernail's grip on the old one. Self-consciously weird transmissions from Tourette's-afflicted entities, from glossolalic Hammer horrors. Fritzed-out scrying bowls somehow receiving trailers from the Sci-Fi channel. Far too many secret chiefs, and, for that matter, far too many secret indians.

Beyond this, past the creaking gates of the illustrious societies, dilapidated fifty-year-old follies where they start out with the plans for a celestial palace but inevitably end up with the Bates Motel, outside this there extends the mob. The psyche pikeys. Incoherent roar of our hermetic home-crowd, the Akashic anoraks, the would-be wiccans and Temple uv Psychic Forty-Somethings queuing up with pre-teens for the latest franchised fairyland, realm of the irretrievably hobbituated. Pottersville.

Exactly how does this confirm an aeon of Horus, aeon of anything except more Skinner-box consumerism, gangster statecraft, mind-to-the-grindstone materialism? Is what seems almost universal knee-jerk acquiescence to conservative ideals truly a sign of rampant Theleme? Is Cthulhu coming back, like, anytime soon, or are the barbarous curses from the outer dark those of Illuminists trying to find their arses with a flashlight? Has contemporary western occultism accomplished anything that is measurable outside the séance parlour? Is magic of any definable use to the human race other than offering an opportunity for dressing up? Tantric tarts and vicars at Thelemic theme nights. Pentagrams In Their Eyes. "Tonight, Matthew, I will be the Logos of the Aeon." Has magic demonstrated a purpose, justified its existence in the way that art or science or agriculture justify their own? In short, does anyone have the first clue what we are doing, or precisely why we're doing it?

Certainly, magic has not always been so seemingly divorced from all immediate human function. Its Palaeolithic origins in shamanism surely represented, at that time, the only human means of mediation with a largely hostile universe upon which we as yet exerted very little understanding or control. Within such circumstances it is easy to conceive of magic as originally representing a one-stop reality, a worldview in which all the other strands of our existence...hunting, procreation, dealing with the elements or cave-wall painting...were subsumed. A science of everything, its relevance to ordinary mammalian concerns both obvious and undeniable.

This role, that of an all-inclusive “natural philosophy”, obtained throughout the rise of classical civilization and could still be seen, albeit in more furtive fashion, as late as the 16th century, when the occult and mundane sciences were not yet so distinguishable as they are today. It would be surprising, for example, if John Dee did not allow his knowledge of astrology to colour his invaluable contributions to the art of navigation, or vice-versa. Not until the Age of Reason gradually prevented our belief in and thus contact with the gods that had sustained our predecessors did our fledgling sense of rationality identify the supernatural as a mere vestigial organ in the human corpus, obsolete and possibly diseased, best excised quickly.

Science, grown out of magic, magic’s gifted, pushy offspring, its most practical and thus materially profitable application, very soon decided that the ritual and symbolic lumber of its alchemic parent-culture was redundant, an encumbrance and an embarrassment. Puffed up in its new white lab coat, ballpoints worn like medals at the breast, science came to be ashamed in case its mates (history, geography, P.E) caught it out shopping with its mum, with all her mumbling and chanting. Her third nipple. Best that she be nipped off to some secure facility, some Fraggles Rock for elderly and distressed paradigms.

The rift this caused within the human family of ideas seemed irrevocable, with two parts of what had once been one organism sundered by reductionism, one inclusive “science of everything” become two separate ways of seeing, each apparently in bitter, vicious opposition to the other. Science, in the process of this acrimonious divorce, might possibly be said to have lost contact with its ethical component, with the moral basis necessary to prevent it breeding monsters. Magic, on the other hand, lost all demonstrable utility and purpose, as with many parents once the kid’s grown up and gone. How do you fill the void? The answer, whether we are talking about magic or of mundane, moping mums and dads with empty nests, is, in all likelihood, “with ritual and nostalgia”.

The magical resurgence of the nineteenth century, with its retrospective and essentially romantic nature, would seem to have been blessed with both these factors in abundance. Whilst it's difficult to overstate the contributions made to magic as a field by, say, Eliphas Levi or the various magicians of the Golden Dawn, it's just as hard to argue that these contributions were not overwhelmingly synthetic, in that they aspired to craft a synthesis of previously existing lore, to formalise the variegated wisdoms of the ancients.

It does not belittle this considerable accomplishment if we observe that magic, during those decades, was lacking in the purposeful immediacy, the pioneering rush characterising, for example, Dee and Kelly's work. In their development of the Enochian system, late Renaissance magic would seem typified as urgently creative and experimental, forward-looking. In comparison, the nineteenth century occultists seem almost to have shifted magic into a revered past tense, made it a rope-railed museum exhibit, an archive, with themselves as sole curators.

All the robes and the regalia, with their whiff of the historical re-enactment crowd, a seraphic Sealed Knot Society, only with fractionally less silly-looking gear. The worryingly right-wing consensus values and the number of concussed and stumbling casualties, upon the other hand, would probably have been identical. The rites of the exalted magic orders and the homicidal beered-up maulings of the Cromwell tribute-bands are also similar in that both gain in poignancy by being juxtaposed against the grim, relentless forward trundle of industrial reality. Beautifully painted wands, obsessively authentic pikes, held up against the bleak advance of chimney-stacks. How much of this might be most accurately described as compensatory fantasies of the machine age? Role-playing games which only serve to underline the brutal fact that these activities no longer have contemporary human relevance. A wistful recreation of long-gone erotic moments by the impotent.

Another clear distinction between the magicians of the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries lies in their relation to the fiction of their day. The brethren of the early Golden Dawn would seem to be inspired more by the sheer romance of magic than by any other aspect, with S.L. McGregor Mathers lured into the craft by his desire to live out Bulwer-Lytton's fantasy *Zanoni*. Encouraged Moina to refer to him as "Zan", allegedly. Woodford and Westcott, on the other hand, anxious to be within an order that had even more paraphernalia than Rosicrucian Masonry, somehow acquire a contact in the fabled (literally) ranks of the *Geltische Dammerung*, which means something like "golden tea-time". They are handed their diplomas from Narnia, straight out the back of the wardrobe. Or there's Alex Crowley, tiresomely attempting to persuade his school-chums to refer to him as Shelley's *Alastor*, like some self-conscious Goth from Nottingham called Dave insisting that

his vampire name is Armand. Or, a short while later, there's all of the ancient witch-cults, all the blood-line covens springing up like children of the dragon's teeth wherever Gerald Gardner's writings were available. The occultists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries all seemed to want to be Aladdin's uncle in some never-ending pantomime. To live the dream.

John Dee, conversely, was perhaps more wilfully awake than any other person of his day. More focussed and more purposeful. He did not need to search for antecedents in the fictions and mythologies available to him, because John Dee was in no sense pretending, was not playing games. He inspired, rather than was inspired by, the great magic fictions of his times. Shakespeare's Prospero. Marlow's Faust. Ben Jonson's piss-taking *The Alchemist*. Dee's magic was a living and progressive force, entirely of its moment, rather than some stuffed and extinct specimen, no longer extant save in histories or fairytales. His was a fresh, rip-roaring chapter, written entirely in the present tense, of the ongoing magical adventure. By comparison, the occultists that followed some three centuries down the line were an elaborate appendix, or perhaps a bibliography, after the fact. A preservation league, lip-synching dead men's rituals. Cover versions. Sorcerous karaoke. Magic, having given up or had usurped its social function, having lost its *raison d'être*, its crowd-pulling star turn, found itself with just the empty theatre, the mysterious curtains. Dusty hampers of forgotten frocks, unfathomable props from cancelled dramas. Lacking a defined role, grown uncertain of its motivations, magic seems to have had no recourse save sticking doggedly to the established script, enshrining each last cough and gesture, the by-now hollow performance freeze-dried, shrink-wrapped; artfully repackaging itself for English Heritage.

How unfortunate, then, that it was this moment in the history of magic, with content and function lost beneath an over-detailed ritual veneer, all mouth and trousers, which the later orders chose to crystallize about. Without a readily apparent aim or mission, no marketable commodity, the nineteenth century occultist would seem instead to lavish an inordinate amount of his attention on the fancy wrapping paper. Possibly unable to conceive of any group not structured in the hierarchical manner of the lodges that they were accustomed to, Mathers and Westcott dutifully imported all the old Masonic heirlooms when it came to furnishing their fledgling order. All the outfits, grades and implements. The mindset of a secret and elite society. Crowley, of course, took all this heavy and expensive-looking luggage with him when he jumped ship to create his O.T.O, and all orders since then, even purportedly iconoclastic enterprises such as, say, the I.O.T, would seem to have eventually adopted the same High Victorian template. Trappings of sufficient drama, theories

intricate enough to draw attention from what the uncharitable might perceive as lack of any practical result, any effect upon the human situation.

The fourteenth (and perhaps final?) issue of the estimable Joel Biroco's KAOS magazine featured a reproduction of a painting, a surprisingly affecting and hauntingly beautiful work from the brush of Marjorie Cameron, scary redhead, Dennis Hopper and Dean Stockwell's housemate, putative Scarlet Woman, top Thelemic totty. Almost as intriguing as the work itself, however, is the title: Fossil Angel, with its contradictory conjurings of something marvellous, ineffable and transitory combined with that which is by definition dead, inert and petrified. Is there a metaphor available to us in this, both sobering and instructive? Could not all magical orders, with their doctrines and their dogmas, be interpreted as the unmoving calcified remains of something once intangible and full of grace, alive and mutable? As energies, as inspirations and ideas that danced from mind to mind, evolving as they went until at last the limestone drip of ritual and repetition froze them in their tracks, stopped them forever halfway through some reaching, uncompleted gesture? Trilobite illuminations. Fossil angels.

Something inchoate and ethereal once alighted briefly, skipping like a stone across the surface of our culture, leaving its faint, tenuous impression in the human clay, a footprint that we cast in concrete and apparently remain content to genuflect before for decades, centuries, millennia. Recite the soothing and familiar lullabies or incantations word for word, then carefully restage the old, beloved dramas, and perhaps something will happen, like it did before. Stick cotton-reels and tinfoil on that cardboard box, make it look vaguely like a radio and then maybe John Frumm, he come, bring helicopters back? The occult order, having made a fetish out of pageants that passed by or were rained off some half-a-century ago, sits like Miss Haversham and wonders if the beetles in the wedding cake in any way confirm Liber Al vel Legis.

Once again, none of this is intended to deny the contribution that the various orders and their works have made to magic as a field, but merely to observe that this admittedly considerable contribution is of, largely, a custodial nature in its preservation of past lore and ritual, or else that its elegant synthesis of disparate teachings is its principal (perhaps only) achievement. Beyond such accomplishments, however, the abiding legacy of nineteenth century occult culture would seem mostly antithetical to the continued health, proliferation and ongoing viability of magic, which, as a technology, has surely long outgrown its ornate late-Victorian vase and is in dire need of transplanting. All of the faux-Masonic furniture and scaffolding imported by Westcott and Mathers, basically for want of being able to imagine any other valid structure, is, by our own period, become a

limitation and impediment to magic's furtherance. Leftover hoodwinks, too-tight ceremonial sashes that constrain all growth, restrict all thought, limit the ways in which we conceive of or can conceive of magic. Mimicking the constructs of the past, thinking in terms that are today not necessarily applicable – perhaps they never really were – seems to have rendered modern occultism utterly incapable of visualizing any different method by which it might organise itself; unable to imagine any progress, any evolution, any future, which is probably a sure-fire means of guaranteeing that it doesn't have one.

If the Golden Dawn is often held up as a paragon, a radiant exemplar of the perfect and successful order, this is almost certainly because its ranks included many well-known writers of proven ability and worth whose membership loaned the society more credibility than it would ever, by return, afford to them. The luminous John Coulthart has suggested that the Golden Dawn might be most charitably regarded as a literary society, where slumming scribes searched for a magic that they might have found demonstrable and evident, already there alive and functioning in their own work, were they not blinded by the glare of all that ceremony, all of that fantastic kit. One author who quite clearly contributed more that was of real magical value to the world through his own fiction than through any operations at the lodge was Arthur Machen. While admitting to his great delight at all the mystery and marvel of the order's secret ceremonies, Machen felt compelled to add when writing of the Golden Dawn in his autobiography, *Things Near and Far*, that “as for anything vital in the secret order, for anything that mattered two straws to any reasonable being, there was nothing in it, and less than nothing...the society as a society was pure foolishness concerned with impotent and imbecile Abracadabras. It knew nothing whatever about anything and concealed the fact under an impressive ritual and a sonorous phraseology.” Astutely, Machen notes the seemingly inverse relationship between genuine content and baroque, elaborate form characterizing orders of this nature, a critique as relevant today as it was then, in 1923.

The territory of magic, largely abandoned as too hazardous since Dee and Kelly's period, was staked out and reclaimed (when that was safe to do) by nineteenth century occult enthusiasts, by middle-class suburbanites who turned the sere, neglected turf into a series of exquisitely appointed ornamental gardens. Decorative features, statues and pagodas of great intricacy, were contrived in imitation of some over-actively imagined priesthood past. Terminal gods among the neat beds of azaleas.

The problem is that gardeners sometimes quarrel. Boundary disputes. Tenant vendettas and evictions, moonlight flits. Once-enviable properties are boarded up, are often squatted by new problem families, new cabals. Hang on to the old nameplate, keep the same address but let the place go, and allow its grounds to fall into a state of disrepair. Slugs in the moly, bindweed spreading out amongst twenty-two-petal roses. By the nineteen-nineties, magic's landscape garden was a poorly maintained sprawl of tired, low-yield allotments with bad drainage, paintwork peeling on the cod-Egyptian summer houses, now become mere sheds where paranoid Home Counties vigilantes sat awake all night, nursing their shotguns and expecting teenage vandals. There's no produce that's worth mentioning. The flowers are without perfume and no longer manage to enchant. Y'know, it were all fancy lamens and Enochian chess round here once, and now look at it. The straggly hedgerows with their Goetic topiary as parched as tinder, dry rot in that Rosicrucian-look gazebo's listing timbers. What this place could do with is a good insurance fire.

No, seriously. Scorched earth. It has a lot to recommend it. Think how it would look when all the robes and banners caught. Might even take out that whole Mind, Body, and Spirit eyesore if the wind were in the right direction. Loss of life and livelihood would of course be inevitable, some collateral damage in the business sector, but it sure would be real pretty. Temple beams collapsing in a gout of sparks. "Forget me! Save the cipher manuscripts!" Amongst the countless Gnostic Masses, oaths and calls and banishings, whatever caused them to forget one lousy fire drill? Nobody's quite certain how they should evacuate the inner plane, don't even know how many might still be in there. Finally there emerge heart-wrenching tales of individual bravery. "H-He went back in to rescue the LAM drawing, and we couldn't stop him." Afterwards, a time for tears, for counselling. Bury the dead, appoint successors. Crack open the seal on Hymenaeus Gamma. Cast a rueful eye across our blackened acres. Take it one day at a time, sweet Jesus. Blow our noses, pull ourselves together. Somehow we'll get through.

What then? Scorched earth, of course, is rich in nitrates and provides a basis for slash-and-burn agriculture. In charred dirt, the green shoots of recovery. Life boils up indiscriminately, churning from black soil. We could give all of these once-stately lawns and terraces back to the wilderness. Why not? Think of it as astral environmentalism, the reclaiming of a psychic greenbelt from beneath the cracked Victorian occult paving-slabs, as an encouragement to increased metaphysical biodiversity. Considered as an organizing principle for magic work, the complex and self-generating fractal structure of a jungle would seem every bit as viable as all the spurious imposed chessboard order of a tiled lodge floor; would seem, in fact, considerably more natural and

vital. After all, the traffic of ideas that is the essence and lifeblood of magic is more usually transacted these days by bush telegraph of one kind or another, rather than as ritual secrets solemnly attained after long years of cramming, Hogwarts' CSEs. Hasn't this rainforest mode of interacting been, in fact, the default setting of practical western occultism for some time now? Why not come out and admit it, bulldoze all these lean-to clubhouses that are no longer any use nor ornament, embrace the logic of lianas? Dynamite the dams, ride out the flood, allow new life to flourish in the previously moribund endangered habitats.

In occult culture's terms, new life equates to new ideas. Fresh-hatched and wriggling, possibly poisonous conceptual pollywogs, these brightly-coloured pests must be coaxed into our new immaterial eco-system if it is to flourish and remain in health. Let us attract the small ideas that flutter, neon-bright but frail, and the much tougher, more resilient big ideas that eat them. If we're fortunate, the feeding frenzy might draw the attention of huge raptor paradigms that trample everything and shake the earth. Ferocious notions, from the most bacterially tiny to the staggeringly big and ugly, all locked into an unsupervised glorious and bloody struggle for survival, a spectacular Darwinian clusterfuck.

Lame doctrines find themselves unable to outrun the sleek and toothy killer argument. Mastodon dogmas, elderly and slipping down the food-chain, buckling and collapsing under their own weight to make a meal for carrion memorabilia salesmen, somewhere for that droning buzz of chat-room flies to lay their eggs. Memetic truffles grown up from a mulch of decomposing Aeons. Vivid revelations sprung like London Rocket from the wild, untended bombsite sprawl. Panic Arcadia, horny, murderous and teeming. Supernatural selection. The strongest, best-adapted theorems are allowed to thrive and propagate, the weak are sushi. Surely this is hardcore Theleme in action, as well as representing a productive and authentic old-skool Chaos that should warm the heart of any Thanateroid. From such vigorous application of the evolutionary process, it is difficult to see how magic as a field of knowledge could do otherwise than benefit.

For one thing, by accepting a less cultivated, less refined milieu where competition might be fierce and noisy, magic would be doing no more than exposing itself to the same conditions that pertain to its more socially-accepted kinfolk, science and art. Put forward a new theory to explain the universe's missing mass, submit some difficult conceptual installation for the Turner Prize and be in no doubt that your offering will be subjected to the most intensive scrutiny, much of it hostile and originating from some rival camp. Each particle of thought that played a role in the construction of your statement will be disassembled and examined. Only if no flaw is found will your work be

received into the cultural canon. In all likelihood, sooner or later your pet project, your pet theory will end up as scattered down and claret decorating the stained walls of these old, merciless public arenas. This is how it should be. Your ideas are possibly turned into road-kill but the field itself is strengthened and improved by this incessant testing. It progresses and mutates. If our objective truly is advancement of the magic worldview (rather than advancement of ourselves as its instructors), how could anyone object to such a process?

Unless, of course, advancement of this nature is not truly our objective, which returns us to our opening questions: what exactly are we doing and why are we doing it? No doubt some of us are engaged in the legitimate pursuit of understanding, but this begs the question as to why. Do we intend to use this information in some manner, or was it accumulated solely for its own sake, for our private satisfaction? Did we wish, perhaps, to be thought wise, or to enhance lacklustre personalities with hints of secret knowledge? Was it rank we sought, some standing that might be achieved more readily by a pursuit like occultism where there are, conveniently, no measurable standards that we might be judged by? Or did we align ourselves with Crowley's definition of the magic arts as bringing about change according to one's will, which is to say achieving some measure of power over reality?

This last would, at a guess, provide the motive that is currently most popular. The rise of Chaos magic in the 1980s centred on a raft of campaign promises, most notable amongst these the delivery of a results-based magic system that was practical and user-friendly. Austin Spare's unique and highly personal development of sigil magic, we were told, could be adapted to near-universal application, would provide a simple, sure-fire means by which the heart's desire of anyone could be both easily and instantly accomplished. Putting to one side the question "Is this true?" (and the attendant query "If it is, then why are all its advocates still holding down a day-job, in a world grown surely further from the heart's desire of anyone with every passing week?"), we should perhaps ask whether the pursuit of this pragmatic, causal attitude to occult work is actually a worthy use of magic.

If we're honest, most of causal sorcery as it is practiced probably is done so in the hope of realizing some desired change in our gross, material circumstances. In real terms, this probably involves requests for money (even Dee and Kelly weren't above tapping the angels for a fiver every now and then), requests for some form of emotional or sexual gratification, or perhaps on some occasions a request that those we feel have slighted or offended us be punished. In these instances, even in a less cynical scenario where the purpose of the magic is to, say, assist a friend in their

recovery from illness, might we not accomplish our objectives far more certainly and honestly by simply taking care of these things on a non-divine material plane?

If, for instance, it is money we require then why not emulate the true example set by Austin Spare (almost unique amongst magicians in that he apparently saw using magic to attract mere wealth as an anathema) regarding such concerns? If we want money, then why don't we magically get off of our fat arses, magically perform some work for once in our sedentary magic lives, and see if the requested coins don't magically turn up some time thereafter in our bank accounts? If it's the affections of some unrequited love-object that we are seeking, the solution is more simple still: slip roofies in her Babycham, then rape her. After all, the moral wretchedness of what you've done will be no worse, and at the very least you won't have dragged the transcendental into things by asking that the spirits hold her down for you. Or if there's someone whom you genuinely feel to be deserving of some awful retribution then put down that lesser clavicle of Solomon and get straight on the dog and bone to Frankie Razors or Big Stan. The hired goon represents the ethical decision of choice when compared with using fallen angels for one's dirty work (this is assuming that just going round to the guy's house oneself, or maybe even, you know, getting over it and moving on, are not viable options). Even the sick friend example cited earlier: just go and visit them. Support them with your time, your love, your money or your conversation. Christ, send them a card with a sad-looking cartoon bunny on the front. You'll both feel better for it. Purposive and causal magic would too often seem to be about achieving some quite ordinary end without doing the ordinary work associated with it. We might well do better to affirm, with Crowley, that our best and purest actions are those carried out "without lust of result".

Perhaps his other famous maxim, where he advocates that we seek "the aim of religion" utilising "the method of science", however well intentioned, might have led the magical community (such as it is) into these fundamental errors. After all, religion's aim, if we examine the word's Latin origins in religare (a root shared with other words like 'ligament' and 'ligature'), would seem to imply that it's best if everyone is "bound in one belief". This impulse to evangelism and conversion must, in any real-world application, reach a point where those bound by one ligament come up against those tied together by another. At this point, inevitably and historically, both factions will pursue their programmed urge to bind the other in their one and only true belief. So then we massacre the taigs, the prods, the goys, the yids, the kuffirs and the ragheads. And when this historically and inevitably doesn't work, we sit and think about things for a century or two, we leave a decent interval, and then we do it all again, same as before. The aim of religion, while clearly

benign, would seem to be off by a mile or two, thrown by the recoil. The target, the thing they were aiming for, stands there unscathed, and the only things hit are Omagh or Kabul, Hebron, Gaza, Manhattan, Baghdad, Kashmir, Deansgate, and so on, and so on, and so on, forever.

The notion of binding together that lies at the etymological root of religion is also, revealingly, found in the symbolic cluster of bound sticks, the fasces, that gives us the later term fascism. Fascism, based upon mystical concepts such as blood and ‘volk’, is more properly seen as religion than as a political stance, politics being based upon some form of reason, however misguided and brutal. The shared idea of being bound in one faith, one belief; that in unity (thus, unavoidably, in uniformity) there lies strength, would seem antithetical to magic, which, if anything, is surely personal, subjective and pertaining to the individual, to the responsibility for every sentient creature to reach its own understanding of and thus make its own peace with God, the universe and everything. So, if religion can be said to find a close political equivalent in fascism, might magic not be said to have more natural sympathy with anarchy, fascism’s opposite (deriving from an-archon or “no leader”)? Which of course returns us to the burned-down temples, dispossessed and homeless order heads, the scorched earth and the naturally anarchic wilderness approach to magic, as suggested earlier.

The other half of Crowley’s maxim, wherein he promotes the methodology of science would also seem to have its flaws, again, however well intentioned. Being based upon material results, science is perhaps the model that has led the magic arts into their causal cul-de-sac, described above. Further to this, if we accept the ways of science as a procedural ideal to which our magic workings might aspire, aren’t we in danger of also adopting a materialist and scientific mindset with regard to the quite different forces that preoccupy the occultist? A scientist who works with electricity, as an example, will quite justifiably regard the energy as value-neutral, mindless power that can as easily be used to run a hospital, or warm a lava-lamp, or fry a black guy with a mental age of nine in Texas. Magic on the other hand, from personal experience, does not seem to be neutral in its moral nature, nor does it seem mindless. On the contrary, it would seem, as a medium, to be aware and actively intelligent, alive rather than live in the third rail sense. Unlike electricity, there is the intimation of a complex personality with almost-human traits, such as, for instance, an apparent sense of humour. Just as well, perhaps, when one considers the parade of prancing ninnies that the field has entertained and tolerated down the centuries. Magic, in short, does not seem to be there merely to power up sigils that are astral versions of the labour saving gadget or appliance. Unlike electricity, it might be thought to have its own agenda.

Quite apart from all this, there are other sound, compelling reasons why it limits us to think of magic as a science. Firstly and most glaringly, it isn't. Magic, after it relinquished any and all practical or worldly application following the twilight of the alchemists, can no more be considered as a true science than can, say, psychoanalysis. However much Freud might have wished it otherwise, however he deplored Jung dragging his purported scientific method down into the black and squirming mud of occultism, magic and psychoanalysis cannot, by definition, ever be allowed a place amongst the sciences. Both deal almost entirely with phenomena of consciousness, phenomena that cannot be repeated in laboratory conditions and which thus exist outside the reach of science, concerned only with things that may be measured and observed, proven empirically. Since consciousness itself cannot be shown to provably exist in scientific terms, then our assertions that said consciousness is plagued either by penis envy or by demons of the Qlippoth must remain forever past the boundary limits of what may be ascertained by rational scrutiny. Frankly, it must be said that magic, when considered as a science, rates somewhere just above that of selecting numbers for the lottery by using loved ones' birthdays.

This would seem to be the crux: magic, if it is a science, clearly isn't a particularly well-developed one. Where, for example, are the magical equivalents of Einstein's General or even Special theories of Relativity, let alone that of Bohr's Copenhagen Interpretation? Come to that, where are our analogues for laws of gravity, thermodynamics and the rest? Eratosthenes once measured the circumference of the Earth using geometry and shadows. When did we last manage anything as useful or as neat as that? Has there been anything even resembling a general theory since the Emerald Tablet? Once again, perhaps magic's preoccupation with cause and effect has played a part in this. Our axioms seem mostly on the level of "if we do A then B will happen". If we say these words or call these names then certain visions will appear to us. As to how they do so, well, who cares? As long as we get a result, the thinking seems to run, why does it matter how this outcome was obtained? If we bang these two flints together for a while they'll make a spark and set all that dry grass on fire. And have you ever noticed how if you make sure to sacrifice a pig during eclipses, then the sun always returns? Magic is, at best, Palaeolithic science. It really had best put aside that Nobel Prize acceptance speech until it's shaved its forehead.

Where exactly, one might reasonably enquire, does all this leave us? Having recklessly discarded our time-honoured orders or traditions and torn up our statement of intent; having said that magic should not be Religion and can not be Science, have we taken this Year-Zero Khmer Rouge

approach too far, cut our own jugulars with Occam's razor? Now we've pulled down the landmarks and reduced our territory to an undifferentiated wilderness, was this the best time to suggest we also throw away our compass? Now, as night falls on the jungle, we've decided we are neither missionaries nor botanists, but what, then, are we? Prey? Brief squeals in pitch dark? If the aims and methods of science or religion are inevitably futile, ultimately mere dead ends, what other role for magic could conceivably exist? And please don't say it's anything too difficult, because for all the black robes and the spooky oaths, we tend to frighten easily.

If what we do cannot be properly considered as science or religion, would it be provocative to tender the suggestion that we think of magic as an art? Or even The Art, if you like? It's not as if the notion were entirely without precedent. It might even be seen as a return to our shamanic origins, when magic was expressed in masques and mimes and marks on walls, the pictograms that gave us written language so that language could in turn allow us consciousness. Music, performance, painting, song, dance, poetry and pantomime could all be easily imagined as having originated in the shaman's repertoire of mind-transforming magic tricks. Sculpture evolving out of fetish dolls, Willendorf Venus morphing into Henry Moore. Costume design and catwalk fashion, Erte and Yves St. Laurent, arising out of firelit stomps in furs and beads and antlers, throwing shapes designed to startle and arouse. Baroness Thatcher, in her baby-eating prime, suggested that society once more embrace "Victorian values", an idea that certainly would seem to have caught on within the magical fraternity. This clearly goes nowhere near far enough, however. Let us call instead for a return towards Cro-Magnon values: more creative and robust, with better hair.

Of course, we need not journey so far back into admittedly speculative antiquity for evidence of the uniquely close relationship enjoyed by art and magic. From the cave-wall paintings at Lascaux, on through Greek statuary and friezes to the Flemish masters, on to William Blake, to the Pre-Raphaelites, the Symbolists and the Surrealists, it is only with increasing rarity that we encounter artists of real stature, be they painter, writer or musician, who have not at some point had recourse to occult thinking, whether that be through the agency of their alleged involvement with some occult or Masonic order, as with Mozart, or through some personally cultivated vision, as with Elgar. Opera has its origins, apparently, in alchemy, originated by its early pioneers like Monteverdi as an art-form that included all the other arts within it (music, words, performance, costumes, painted sets) with the intent of passing on alchemical ideas in their most comprehensively artistic and thus most celestial form. Likewise, with the visual arts we need not invoke obvious examples of an occult influence such as Duchamp, Max Ernst or Dali, when there are more surprising names such as Picasso (with

his youth spent saturated in hashish and mysticism, with his later work preoccupied with then-occult ideas pertaining to the fourth dimension), or the measured squares and rectangles of Mondrian, created to express the notions woken in him by his study of Theosophy. In fact, the greater part of abstract painting can be traced to famed Blavatsky-booster Annie Besant, and the publication of her theory that the rarefied essential energies of Theosophy's rays and currents and vibrations could be represented by intuited and formless swirls of colour, an idea that many artists of a fashionably mystic inclination seized on eagerly.

Literature, meanwhile, is so intrinsically involved with magic's very substance that the two may be effectively considered as the same thing. Spells and spelling, Bardic incantations, grimoires, grammars, magic a "disease of language" as Aleister Crowley so insightfully described it. Odin, Thoth and Hermes, magic-gods and scribe-gods. Magic's terminology, its symbolism, conjuring and evocation, near-identical to that of poetry. In the beginning was the Word. With magic almost wholly a linguistic construct, it would seem unnecessary to recite a role-call of the occult's many literary practitioners. In writing, as in painting or in music, an intense and intimate connection to the world of magic is both evident and obvious, appears entirely natural. Certainly, the arts have always treated magic with more sympathy and more respect than science (which, historically, has always sought to prove that occultists are fraudulent or else deluded) and religion (which, historically, has always sought to prove that occultists are flammable). While it shares the social standing and widespread respect afforded to the church or the laboratory, art as a field does not seek to exclude, nor is it governed by a doctrine that's inimical to magic, such as might be said of its two fellow indicators of humanity's cultural progress. After all, while magic has, in relatively recent times, produced few mighty theologians of much note and even fewer scientists, it has produced a wealth of inspired and inspiring painters, poets and musicians. Maybe we should stick with what we know we're good at?

The advantages of treating magic as an art seem at first glance to be considerable. For one thing, there are no entrenched and vested interests capable of mounting an objection to magic's inclusion in the canon, even if they entertained objections in the first place, which is hardly likely. This is patently far from the case with either science or religion, which are by their very natures almost honour-bound to see that magic is reviled and ridiculed, marginalized and left to rust there on history's scrap-heap with the Flat Earth, water-memory and phlogiston. Art, as a category, represents a fertile and hospitable environment where magic's energy could be directed to its growth and progress as a field, rather than channelled into futile struggles for acceptance, or burned uselessly away by marking time to the repeated rituals of a previous century. Another benefit, of course, lies in

art's numinosity, its very lack of hard-edged definition and therefore its flexibility. The questions "what exactly are we doing and why are doing it", questions of 'method' and of 'aim', take on a different light when asked in terms of art. Art's only aim can be to lucidly express the human mind and heart and soul in all their countless variations, thus to further human culture's artful understanding of the universe and of itself, its growth towards the light. Art's method is whatever can be even distantly imagined. These parameters of purpose and procedure are sufficiently elastic, surely, to allow inclusion of magic's most radical or most conservative agendas? Vital and progressive occultism, beautifully expressed, that has no obligation to explain or justify itself. Each thought, each line, each image made exquisite for no other purpose than that they be offerings worthy of the gods, of art, of magic itself. The Art for The Art's sake.

Paradoxically, even those occultists enamoured of a scientific view of magic would have cause for celebration at this shift in emphasis. As argued above, magic can never be a science as science is currently defined, which is to say as being wholly based upon repeatable results within the measurable and material world. However, by confining its pursuits entirely to the world of the material, science automatically disqualifies itself from speaking of the inner, immaterial world that is in fact the greater part of our human experience. Science is perhaps the most effective tool that human consciousness has yet developed with which to explore the outer universe, and yet this polished and sophisticated instrument of scrutiny is hindered by one glaring blind-spot in that it cannot examine consciousness itself. Since the late 1990s the most rapidly expanding field of scientific interest is apparently consciousness studies, with two major schools of thought-on-thought thus far emerging, each contending with the other. One maintains that consciousness is an illusion of biology, mere automatic and behaviourist cerebral processes that are dependent on the squirt of glands, the seep of enzymes. While this does not seem an adequate description of the many wonders to be found within the human mind, its advocates are almost certainly backing a winner, having realised that their blunt, materialistic theory is the only one that stands a chance of proving itself in the terms of blunt material science. In the other camp, described as more transpersonal in their approach, the current reigning theorem is that consciousness is some peculiar 'stuff' pervading the known universe, of which each sentient being is a tiny, temporary reservoir. This viewpoint, while it probably elicits greater sympathy from those of occult inclinations, is quite clearly doomed in terms of garnering eventual scientific credibility. Science cannot even properly discuss the personal, so the transpersonal has no chance. These are matters of the inner world, and science cannot go there. This is why it wisely leaves the exploration of mankind's interior to a sophisticated tool that is specifically developed for that usage, namely art.

If magic were regarded as an art it would have culturally valid access to the infrascapes, the endless immaterial territories that are ignored by and invisible to Science, that are to scientific reason inaccessible, and thus comprise magic's most natural terrain. Turning its efforts to creative exploration of humanity's interior space might also be of massive human use, might possibly restore to magic all the relevance and purpose, the demonstrable utility that it has lacked so woefully, and for so long. Seen as an art, the field could still produce the reams of speculative theory that it is so fond of (after all, philosophy and rhetoric may be as easily considered arts as sciences), just so long as it were written beautifully or interestingly. While, for example, *The Book of the Law* may be debatable in value when considered purely as prophetic text describing actual occurrences or states of mind to come, it cannot be denied that it's a shit-hot piece of writing, which deserves to be revered as such. The point is that if magic were to drop its unfulfilable pretensions as a science and come out of the closet as an art, it would ironically enough obtain the freedom to pursue its scientific aspirations, maybe even sneak up on some unified field theorem of the supernatural, all in terms acceptable to modern culture. Marcel Duchamp's magnum opus, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, is more likely to be thought of seriously as genuine alchemy than is the work of whichever poor bastard last suggested that there might be something to cold fusion. Art is clearly a more comfortable environment for magic thinking than is science, with a more relaxing decor, and much better-looking furniture.

Even those damaged souls so institutionalised by membership of magic orders that they can't imagine any kind of lifestyle that does not involve belonging to some secretive, elite cabal need not despair at finding themselves homeless and alone in our proposed new wilderness. Art has no orders, but it does have movements, schools and cliques with all the furtiveness, the snottyness and the elitism that anyone could wish for. Better yet, since differing schools of art are not so energetically competing with each other for the same ground as are magic orders (how can William Holman Hunt, for instance, be said to compete with Miro, or Vermeer?), this should obviate the need for differing schools of occult thought to feud, or snipe, or generally go on like a bunch of sorry Criswell-out-of-Plan 9-looking bitches.

Just as there is no need to entirely do without fraternities, then similarly there is no necessity for those who've grown attached to such things to discard their ritual trappings or, indeed, their rituals. The sole requirement is that they approach these matters with a greater creativity, and with a more discerning eye and ear for that which is profound; that which is beautiful, original or powerful. Make wands and seals and lamens fit to stand in exhibitions of outsider art (How hard can that be?)

Even mental patients qualify), make every ritual a piece of stunning and intense theatre. Whether one considers magic to be art or not, these things should surely scarcely need be said. Who are our private rituals and adornments meant to please, if not the gods? When did they ever give us the impression they'd be pleased by that which was not suitably exquisite or original? Gods, if they're anything at all, are known to be notoriously partial to creation, and may therefore be presumed to be appreciative of human creativity, the closest thing that we've developed to a god-game and our most sublime achievement. To be once more thought of as an art would allow magic to retain all that is best about the field it was, while at the same time offering the opportunity for it to flourish and progress into a future where it might accomplish so much more.

How would this mooted change of premise impact, then, upon our methodology? What shifts of emphasis might be entailed, and could such changes be to the advantage of both magic as a field and us as individuals? If we seriously mean to reinvent the occult as The Art, one basic alteration to our working methods that might yield considerable benefit would be if we resolved to crystallise whatever insights, truths or visions our magical sorties had afforded us into some artefact, something that everybody else could see as well, just for a change. The nature of the artefact, be it a film, a haiku, an expressive pencil-drawing or a lush theatrical extravaganza, is completely unimportant. All that matters is that it be art, and that it remain true to its inspiration. Were it adopted, at a stroke, a relatively minor tweak of process such as this might utterly transform the world of magic. Rather than be personally-motivated, crudely causal workings of both dubious intent and doubtful outcome, hand-job magic ended usually in scant gratification, our transactions with the hidden world would be made procreative, generating issue in the form of tangible results that everyone might judge the worth of for themselves. In purely evangelic terms, as propaganda for a more enlightened magic worldview, art must surely represent our most compelling 'evidence' of other states and planes of being. While the thoughts of Austin Spare are undeniably of interest when expressed in written form as theory, it is without doubt his talents as an artist that provide the sense of entities and other worlds actually witnessed and recorded, the immediate authenticity which has bestowed on Spare much of his reputation as a great magician. More importantly, work such as Spare's provides a window on the occult world, allowing those outside a clearer and perhaps more eloquent expression of what magic is about than any arcane tract, offering them a worthwhile reason to approach the occult in the first place.

In our wilderness scenario for magic, with the fierce and fair Darwinian competition between ideas that's implied, treating the occult as an art would also lend a means of dealing with (or carrying

out) any disputes that might arise. Art has a way of sorting out such squabbles for itself, inarguably, without resorting to lame processes like, for example, violent conflict resolution, litigation, or, much worse, girly democracy. With art, the strongest vision will prevail, even if it takes decades, centuries to do so, as with William Blake. There is no need to even take a vote upon which is the strongest vision: that would be the one just sitting quietly in its undisputed corner of our culture, nonchalantly picking its teeth with the sternums of its rivals. Mozart brings down Salieri, sleeps for two days after feasting, during which time the savannah can relax. Lunging out suddenly from tower-block shadows, J.G. Ballard takes out Kingsley Amis, while Jean Cocteau be all over D.W. Griffiths' scrawny Imperial Cyclops ass like a motherfucker. An artistic natural selection, bloody-minded but balanced, seems a far more even-handed way of settling affairs than arbitrary and unanswerable rulings handed down by heads of orders, such as Moina Mathers telling Violet Firth her aura lacked the proper symbols.

Also, if the vicious struggle for survival is enacted purely in the terms of whose idea is the most potent and most beautiful in its expression, then bystanders at the cockfight are more likely to end up spattered with gorgeous metaphors than with dripping, still-warm innards. Even our most pointless and incestuous feuds might thereby have a product that enriched the world in some small measure, rather than no outcome save that magic seem still more a bickering and inane children's playground than everyone thought it was already. Judged on its merits, such a jungle-logic attitude to magic, with its predatory aesthetics and ideas competing in a wilderness that's fertilised by their exquisite cultural droppings, would appear to offer the occult a win-win situation. How could anyone object, except for those whose ideas might be seen as plump, slow-moving, flightless and a handy source of protein; those well-qualified as primary prey who are perhaps beginning to suspect that this is all a tiger's argument for open-plan safari parks?

Upon consideration, these last-mentioned doubts and fears, while surely trivial within a context of magic's well-being as a field, are likely to be the most serious obstacles to any wide acceptance of a primal swampland ethic such as is proposed. However, if we accept that the sole alternatives to jungle are a circus or a zoo, the notion is perhaps more thinkable. And if our precious ideas should be clawed to pieces when they're scarcely out the nest, then while this is of course distressing, it's no more of an ordeal than that endured by any spotty schoolboy poet or Sunday painter who exposes their perhaps ungainly effort to another's scrutiny. Why should fear of ridicule or criticism, fear that the most lowly karaoke drunk is seemingly quite capable of overcoming, trouble occultists who've vowed to stand unflinching at the gates of Hell itself? In fact, shouldn't the

overcoming of such simple phobias be a prerequisite for anyone who wants to style his or her self as a magician? If we regarded magic as an art and art as magic, if like ancient shamans we perceived a gift for poetry as magic power, magically bestowed, wouldn't we finally have some comeback when the ordinary person in the street asked us, quite reasonably, to demonstrate some magic, then, if we think we're so thaumaturgical?

How empowering it would be for occultists to steadily accumulate, through sheer hard work, genuine magical abilities that can be provably displayed. Talents the ordinarily intelligent and rational person can quite readily accept as being truly magical in origin; readily engage with in a way that current occultism, with its often wilful and unnecessary obscurantism, cannot manage. Urgently expressed and heartfelt though most modern grimoires most assuredly may be, a skim through Borges' Fictions or a glimpse of Escher or a side or two of Captain Beefheart would be much more likely to persuade the ordinary reader to a magically receptive point of view. If consciousness itself, with its existence in the natural world being beyond the power of science to confirm, is therefore super-natural and occult, surely art is one of the most obvious and spectacular means by which that supernatural realm of mind and soul reveals itself, makes itself manifest upon a gross material plane.

Art's power is immediate and irrefutable, immense. It shifts the consciousness, noticeably, of both the artist and her audience. It can change men's lives and thence change history, society itself. It can inspire us unto wonders or else horrors. It can offer supple, young, expanding minds new spaces to inhabit or can offer comfort to the dying. It can make you fall in love, or cut some idol's reputation into ribbons at a glance and leave them maimed before their worshippers, dead to posterity. It conjures Goya devils and Rosetti angels into visible appearance. It is both the bane and most beloved tool of tyrants. It transforms the world which we inhabit, changes how we see the universe, or those about us, or ourselves. What has been claimed of sorcery that art has not already undeniably achieved? It's led a billion into light and slain a billion more. If the accretion of occult ability and power is our objective, we could have no more productive, potent means or medium than art whereby this is to be accomplished. Art may not make that whisk-broom come to life and multiply and strut round cleaning up your crib...but nor does magic, for that matter...yet simply dreaming up the image must have surely earned Walt Disney enough money so he could pay somebody to come by and take care of that stuff for him. And still have enough change to get his head put in this massive hieroglyphic-chiselled ice cube somewhere underneath the Magic Kingdom. There, surely to God, is all of the implacable Satanic influence that anybody, sane or otherwise, could ever ask for.

In reclaiming magic as The Art, amok and naked in a Rousseau wilderness devoid of lodges, it is probable that those made most uneasy by the proposition would be those who felt themselves unprivileged by such a move, those who suspected that they had no art to offer which might be sufficient to its task. Such trepidations, while they may be understandable, surely cannot sit well with the heroic, fearless image one imagines many occultists to have concocted for themselves; seem somehow craven. Is there truly nothing, neither craft nor art, which they can fashion to an implement of magic? Do they have no talent that may be employed creatively and magically, be it for mathematics, dancing, dreaming, drumming, stand-up comedy, striptease, graffiti, handling snakes, scientific demonstration, cutting perfectly good cows in half or sculpting scarily realistic busts of European monarchy from their own faeces? Or, like, anything? Even if such abilities are not at present plentiful or evident, cannot these timorous souls imagine that by application and some honest labour talents may be first acquired then honed down to a useful edge? Hard work should not be a completely foreign concept to the Magus. This is not even The Great Work that we're necessarily discussing here, it's just the Good-But-Not-Great Work. Much more achievable. If that still sounds too difficult and time-consuming, you could always make the acquisition of profound artistic talent and success your heart's desire and simply spadge over a sigil. Never fails, apparently. So what excuse could anybody have for not embracing art as magic, magic as The Art? If you are truly, for whatever reason, now and for all time incapable of any creativity, then are you sure that magic is the field to which you are most eminently suited? After all, the fast-food chains are always hiring. Ten years and you could be a branch manager.

By understanding art as magic, by conceiving pen or brush as wand, we thus return to the magician his or her original shamanic powers and social import, give back to the occult both a product and a purpose. Who knows? It might turn out that by implementing such a shift we have removed the need for all our personally-motivated causal charms and curses, our hedge-magic. If we were accomplished and prolific in our art, perhaps the gods might be prepared to send substantial weekly postal orders, all without us even asking. In the sex and romance stakes, as artists we'd all make out like Picasso. Women, men and animals would offer themselves naked at our feet, even in Woolworth's. As for the destruction of our enemies, we simply wouldn't bother to invite them to our launch-parties and openings, and they'd just die.

This re-imagining of magic as The Art could clearly benefit the occult world in general and the individual magician in particular, but let's not overlook the fact that it might also benefit the arts.

It must be said that modern mainstream culture, for the greater part and from most civilised perspectives, is a Tupperware container full of sick. The artists of the age (admittedly, with a few notable exceptions) seem intent upon reflecting the balloon-like hollowness and consequent obsession with mere surface that we find amongst our era's governments and leaders. Just a year or two ago, the old Tate Gallery's Blake retrospective drew from critics sharp comparisons with the Brit-artists currently inhabiting Blake's Soho stamping ground, observing that the modern crop of tunnel-visionaries pale when held up to Blake's Lambeth light. The studied and self-conscious 'craziness' of Tracey Emin is made tame beside his holy tyger madness, all accomplished within howling-range of Bedlam. Damien Hirst is shocking in a superficial manner, but not shocking to the point where he has loyalty oaths, vigilante lynch-mobs and sedition trials to deal with. Jake and Dinos Chapman's contributions to Apocalypse (the exhibition, not the situation with Iraq) are not in any sense a revelation. William Blake could pull a far superior apocalypse from The Red Dragon's sculpted crimson butt without a second thought. The modern art world deals now in high-concept items, much like the related (through Charles Saatchi) field of advertising. It appears to be bereft of vision, or indeed of the capacity for such, and offers little in the way of nourishment to its surrounding culture, which could use a decent and sustaining meal right about now. Couldn't a reaffirmation of the magical as art provide the inspiration, lend the vision and the substance that are all so manifestly lacking in the world of art today? Wouldn't such a soul-infusion allow art to live up to its purpose, to its mission, to insist that the interior and subjective human voice be heard in culture, heard in government, heard on the stained Grand Guignol stages of the world? Or should we just sit back and wait for praeter-human intellects from Sirius or Disney's walking whisk-brooms or the Aeon of Horus to arrive and sort this mess out for us?

A productive union, a synthesis of art and magic propagated in a culture, an environment, a magic landscape lacking temple walls and heirloom furnishings that everyone tripped over anyway. Staged amidst the gemming ferns and purpled steam-heat of a re-established occult biosphere, this passionate conjunction of two human faculties would surely constitute a Chemic Wedding which, if we were lucky and things got completely out of hand at the Chemic Reception, might precipitate a Chemic Orgy, an indecent, riotous explosion of suppressed creative urges, astral couplings of ideas resulting in multiple births of chimerae and radiant monsters. Fierce conceptual centaurs with their legs of perfume and their heads of music. Mermaid notions, flickering silent movies that are architecture from the waist down. Genre sphinxes and style manticores. Unheard of and undreamed mutations, novel art-forms breeding and adapting fast enough to keep up with the world and its momentum, acting more like life-forms, more like fauna, more like flora to proliferate in our

projected magic wilderness. The possible release of fusion energy made suddenly available when these two heavy cultural elements, magic and art, are brought into dynamic close proximity might fairy-light our jungle, might even help to illuminate the mainstream social mulch that it, and we, are rooted in.

Nothing prevents us throwing off the callipers and the restraints, the training wheels that have retarded magic's forward progress for so long that moss obliterates its railway tracks and branch-line sidings both. Nothing can stop us, if we have the will, from redefining magic as an art, as something vital and progressive. Something which in its ability to deal with the interior human world has a demonstrable utility, can be of actual use to ordinary people, with their inner worlds increasingly encroached upon by a tyrannical, colonialist exterior that's intent on strip-mining them of any dreams or joy or self-determination. If we so resolved we could restore to magic a potential and a potency, a purpose it has barely caught a glimpse of in the last four hundred years. Were we prepared to take on the responsibility for this endeavour then the world might see again the grand and terrible magicians that, outside of bland and inoffensive children's books or big-screen and obscenely-budgeted extravagances, it has all but managed to forget. It might be argued that at this nerve-wracking juncture of our human situation, magical perspectives are not merely relevant but are an indispensable necessity if we are to survive with minds and personalities intact. By redefining the term magic we could once again confront the world's iniquities and murk in our preferred, time-honoured method: with a word.

Make the word magic mean something again, something worthy of the name, something which, as a definition of the magical, would have delighted you when you were six; when you were seventy. If we accomplish this, if we can reinvent our scary, wild and fabulous art for these scary, wild and fabulous new times that we are moving through, then we could offer the occult a future far more glorious and brimming with adventure than we ever thought or wished its fabled past had been. Humanity, locked in this penitentiary of a material world that we have been constructing for ourselves for centuries now, has perhaps never needed more the key, the cake-with-file-in, the last-minute pardon from the governor that magic represents. With its nonce-case religions and their jaw-droppingly demented fundamentalists, with its bedroom-farce royalties, and with its demagogues more casually shameless in their vile ambitions than they've been in living memory, society at present, whether in the east or west, would seem to lack a spiritual and moral centre, would indeed appear to lack even the flimsiest pretence at such a thing. The science which sustains society, increasingly, at its most far-flung quantum edges finds it must resort to terminology from the kabbala

or from Sufi literature to adequately state what it now knows about our cosmic origins. In all its many areas and compartments, all its scattered fields, the world would seem to be practically crying out for the numinous to come and rescue it from this berserk material culture that has all but eaten it entire and shat it through a colander. And where is magic, while all this is going on?

It's trying to force our boyfriend to come back to us. It's scraping cash together to fend off the black hole in our plastic, trying to give that prick that our ex-wife ran off with something terminal. It's making sure that Teen Witch slumber parties go successfully. It's putting wispy New Age people into contact with their wispy New Age angels, and they're all, like, "No way", and the angels are all, like, "Whatever". It's attending all of our repeated rituals with the enthusiasm of a patron come to see *The Mouse Trap* for the seven hundredth time. It spends its weekends trying to read our crappy sigils under their obscuring glaze of jiz, and in retaliation only puts us into contact with outpatient entities, community-care Elohim that rant like wino scientologists and never make a lick of sense. It's at the trademarks office, registering magic seals. It's handling an introductions agency that represents our only chance of ever meeting any strange Goth pussy. It's off getting us a better deal on that new Renault, helping to prolong the wretched life of our incontinent and blind pet spaniel Gandalf, networking like crazy to secure those Harry Potter Hogwart's Tarot rights. It's still attempting to sort out the traffic jam resulting from the Aeon of Horus having jack-knifed through the central reservation and into the southbound carriageway, hit head-on by the Aeon of Maat, which spilled its cargo of black feathers onto the hard shoulder. It's not sure the ketamine was such a good idea. It's sitting looking nervous on a thousand bookshelves between lifestyle interviews with necrophiles and fashion retrospectives on the Manson family. It's hanging out at neo-nazi jamborees near Dusseldorf. It's wondering if it should introduce a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy regarding the 11th Degree. It's advising Cherie Blair on acupuncture studs, the whole of Islington upon Feng Sui. It's pierced its cock in an attempt to shock its middle-class Home Counties parents, who've been dead for ten years, anyway. It wishes it were David Blaine. It wishes it were Buffy. Or, quite frankly, anyone.

We could, if we desired it, have things otherwise. Rather than magic that's in thrall to a fondly imagined golden past, or else to some luridly-fantasized Elder God theme-park affair of a future, we could try instead a magic adequate and relevant to its own extraordinary times. We could, were we to so decide, ensure that current occultism be remembered in the history of magic as a fanfare peak rather than as a fading sigh; as an embarrassed, dying mumble; not even a whimper. We could make this parched terrain a teeming paradise, a tropic where each thought might blossom into

art. Under the altar lies the studio, the beach. We could insist upon it, were we truly what we say we are. We could achieve it not by scrawling sigils but by crafting stories, paintings, symphonies. We could allow our art to spread its holy psychedelic scarab wings across society once more, perhaps in doing so allow some light or grace to fall upon that pained, benighted organism. We could be made afresh in our fresh undergrowth, stand reinvented at a true dawn of our Craft within a morning world, our paint still wet, just-hatched and gummy-eyed in Eden. Newborn in Creation.

Alan Moore

Northampton

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