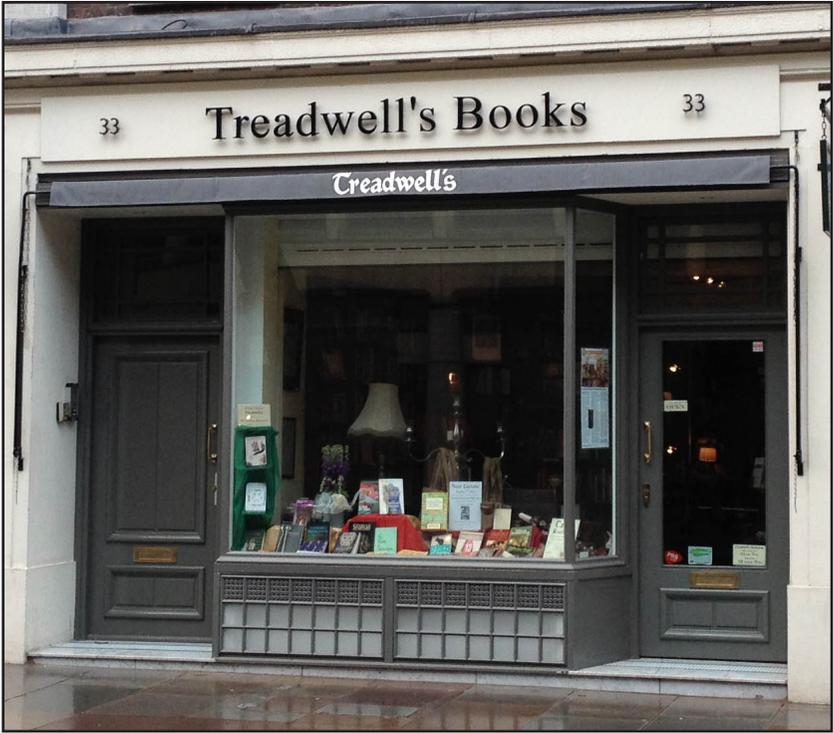


Celebrating **Treadwell's**



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Welcome to Treadwell's

All bookshops have some magic about them. They are like libraries in that respect. Gather enough books together and a critical mass occurs. There's a movement from ideas in ink stasis to sentience. Tomes begin to whisper to each other when no-one is browsing the shelves. Stories are swapped between pages. Long dead authors gossip in the stacks. Gates are opened.

This bookshop sorcery can happen in the most unexpected places—it's even rumoured to have happened in a railway branch of W.H. Smiths once—yet it occurs with most regularity in independent establishments curated with passion. It occurs most often when books are treated not just as commodities, but as possibilities in learning, empowerment and wonder. In those places, you can feel the magic crackle like a static charge across your psychic skin.

Whatever first brings you across the threshold of Treadwell's—latent curiosity, a decade-long knowledge quest, the bullying of London rain—you instantly know you've entered a place where bookshop sorcery happens as a default setting. To browse is to be enchanted. To ask the staff is to receive sage advice. You cannot help but make glorious discoveries. You know instinctively this is a place where wonder lives, a site of portals and potential.

So of course you come back. That's when you learn the deeper magic of Treadwell's—it's role in an incredible, vibrant community. It isn't just an esoteric bookshop, a must-go specialist destination for the witch, it is an engine of connectivity, a nexus for folk on a thousand different occulted paths. For more than two decades, Christina Oakley Harrington has turned Treadwell's into a safe space for everybody who wants to learn, who wants to connect across the bruised margins of the arcane. It is one

of London's cultural centres. A hub of idea exchange and a salon that inspires discussion beyond the usual lines of academia, practitioners and obsessive readers.

Christina has imbued Treadwell's with kindness, joy and an infectious caring for knowledge. These values are so strong, you can even feel them in its online presence—a truly rare thing. People trust it to provide an opportunity to obtain whichever peculiar and particular tomes might be required for their personal navigation. People trust it as a place to find tuition and inspiration. Treadwell's has also become an essential venue for collective conversation that the esoteric community needs. It's a home for many of us. That is why this book was created.

People love Treadwell's and wanted to give something back. Every piece in this book exists because Treadwell's has a huge place in the hearts of the authors. It is a place where they discovered new wonders, made firm friends, were enriched by lectures or the discussions after a lecture. It exists as an act of gratitude to Christina and all the family of Treadwell's for opportunities given, support that sustained people when they were first starting out and sustains still. It is also a recognition of Treadwell's role as vital magical infrastructure not only in London, but much further afield.

David Southwell

I would stop at Café Paradiso then, latte in hand, roll a cigarette and admire the week's themed window—Kate always did such a beautiful job with those.

The practice of opening up Treadwell's is itself a magical ritual—the opening of a portal. Unlock the door, pull down the awning, drag the £1 bookshelf outside, tidy up the shelves, light the incense, turn on the music, make a cup of tea, light the candle, open the door, and sell the hell out of those rare books. I haven't practiced the Treadwell's opening ritual for over ten years now, but the gestures remain etched in my body and my heart. The memory of it returns effortlessly—a practice of love and mystery, woven into a mutual aid network for smart oddballs.

I will love it always.

Livia Filotico



The Dark Flood

It is the appointed time. I tap on the glass like Kathy wanting to come in from the cold. A cloaked figure both familiar and mysterious opens the door and asks if I wish to proceed. I nod and croak “Yes.” I am given admittance.

The door is closed behind us, and I am led though the dark inside and down the narrow staircase, where a seat awaits me in a room lit only by flickering candlelight. Soft music plays in the background, lulling me into a momentary state of relaxation until the figure returns and asks me again if I would like to proceed. Again, I nod and say yes.

The figure bids me to remove the trappings of the outside world and be seated, and I am left alone again, wondering what will happen and wondering if I am mad to do this. I decide I must trust the process; for even the worst that could happen cannot be worse than where I have been living. I wrap myself in a cloak that has been left for me on the chair and start to gaze into the flickering candle flame. Time passes. An hour. Maybe two. I have no way of telling.

The figure returns again and reads me the words of the journey I must go on. This is the six of swords, the journey across water, a rite of passage.

*Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
And the long journey towards oblivion.
Build then the ship of death, for you must take
The longest journey, to oblivion.¹*

I welcome it, whole-heartedly. If this is what it takes to leave this scarred and battered self behind, I welcome it with open arms. May the dark lord Osiris come for me now; I am ready.

¹ The words of the Poem shown in italics are taken from “The Ship of Death” by DH Lawrence, published in Last Poems (1932).

*And die the death, the long and painful death
That lies between the old self and the new.
Already our bodies are fallen, bruised, badly bruised,
Already our souls are oozing through the exit of the
cruel bruise.
Already the dark and endless ocean of the end
Is washing through the breachers of our wounds,
Already the flood is upon us.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At last, the boat scrapes upon the shore, and I can feel the sand and gravel beneath the hull bringing the boat to a complete standstill. I cautiously listen for sounds around me. A rush of anxiety washes through me, but I feel for the sides of the boat and get to my feet, hesitatingly, and set by step feel my way out of the boat. The gravel and cold

water feel harsh against the soles of my feet, and my skin begins to feel painful momentarily, but as I make my way further up the beach, the gravel gives way to sand and gradually I cease to feel where my feet were, it is as if my body has left me.

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

It is the end, it is oblivion.

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

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

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

The voices far away dissolve into what sounds like laughter, and despite my unusual predicament I find

myself smiling. Then a rush of cold air signals to me that a door has opened, and someone steps in close to me. He is Hermes, the messenger of the gods, and he reassures me with a flourish of chivalry. He has come swift-footed to guide me the rest of the way. Finally, he whispers, "Your name?" The question hangs in the air for a split second before I speak, uncertain, testing, but I know now it is right.

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, I speak the words that will be imprinted upon my unconscious mind for all eternity. A token has been taken lest I should weaken; my life is now given to my gods, willingly and with a full sense of what that might mean. It is no longer mine to squander. It is no longer

mine to be surrendered in a pool of tablets and alcohol, even if I wanted it to be. By their bidding I must live it to its fullness.

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

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

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

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

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

Rebecca Beatie

The Bookshop that Dreamed

My official journey with Treadwell's Books began in the lush, golden swell of summer 2014. But in truth, it felt less like a beginning than a returning, a rekindling of an ancient thread, long woven through the weft of my soul's very fabric. Though my formal tenure came to an end a few years later, Treadwell's never truly released me. It lingered, a constant sigil carved into the soft bark of my days.

Through vibrant seminars and workshops I was privileged to host, I kept that tether taut until the final flickers of 2019, a twilight hour poised delicately on the cusp of a world soon to be irrevocably changed by the slow-burning storm of a global pandemic. A hush before the howl.

Treadwell's—not just a shop, but a sanctum—and its indomitable founder, Christina Oakley-Harrington, cast a profound influence upon my path. With a steady hand and radiant insight, Christina coaxed me from the shadows of private fascination into the bright uncertainty of public speech. It was her unwavering faith and the singular atmosphere she conjured that allowed me to speak, for the first time, with conviction—on magick, on Thelema, on the sacred and the strange. That crucible of experience forged more than confidence; it awakened authorship, shaped the contours of who I was becoming.

What ultimately pushed me across that threshold (from practitioner to teacher, from speaker to writer) was the act of preparing those very seminars. Each one was a demanding exercise in distillation: forcing me to sit down with two decades of study, practice, and gnosis, and arrange it into something clear, meaningful, and accessible not just to the initiated, but to the curious passer-by. It was one thing to lecture within the cloistered walls of a magical order, surrounded by those who had already walked through the

gate. But this? This required a new tongue. A new architecture of thought.

And it worked. In the clarity demanded by those workshops, I found the seed of something larger—something that would eventually bloom into online classes, and later, published works. I began first with small digital offerings, uncertain but intrigued, and watched as the audience grew. Ten courses, hundreds of students, and three books later, I can now trace the contours of that evolution back to those nights at Treadwell's. It was there that the raw material was first tempered by the fire of necessity. It was there that the quiet call to teach was sharpened into a resonant voice.

And yet, my bond with Treadwell's did not begin at the counter or in the back office. It reaches further, deep into memory—back to 2003, when I still lived in Rome and made pilgrimages to London like a moth chasing lamplight. Those days were electric, dizzying, alive with nocturnal chaos. I flew Ryanair for pennies, driven by the pulse of youth and hunger for sensation. I danced into oblivion at Slimelight, spilled secrets under red lights at the Purple Turtle, and gave myself to the sumptuous excesses of Torture Garden. London wasn't a city then; it was a fever dream.

And amid all that heady abandon, I always found my way to Treadwell's, then nestled in Covent Garden, a quiet shrine hidden within the delirium. I would step through its doorway and feel the world hush. The scent of old pages, the thrill of obscure titles, the hushed reverence of other seekers—it all conspired to offer a different kind of ecstasy. My visits became ritual, sacred pauses in weekends otherwise drenched in neon and sleep deprivation. In hindsight, those pilgrimages feel mythic—quests not just for books, but for meaning.

When I eventually stepped into my role as a member of the Treadwell's team, Christina greeted me with warmth

and candour. She smiled, and warned me. With a glint in her eye, she said that joining the Treadwell's family meant accepting its wonder and its wear: the glamour and the grind.

“Running an occult bookstore,” she confided, “is an act of devotion. It’s hard, and it never stops being hard.”

Her words rang true quickly. My days filled with ceaseless movement and quiet miracles. I catalogued arcane titles with monastic precision, often unearthing strange, glimmering relics of thought buried deep in the stacks. I wrangled unruly spreadsheets with a scholar's diligence, each figure a whisper demanding accuracy. Evenings were devoted to the orchestration of events: choosing which authors to summon, arranging chairs like constellations, ensuring the alchemy of ambience. It was demanding—*relentlessly so*—but beneath the fatigue pulsed a sense of purpose too rich to name.

The deeper I immersed myself, the more I saw: Treadwell's was not a shop, but a sanctuary, a living entity made sacred by intention. It existed at a crossroads between the mundane and the magical, offering something rare: a place where meaning was honoured. The lessons came not just from books, but from people, the ever-turning parade of visitors. Newcomers with trembling questions. Occult veterans with quiet gravitas. Lost souls drawn in by something they could not name. Each conversation offered a mirror, a mystery, or a lesson.

Some souls, of course, never truly leave. There was one—kind, sharp-witted, with laughter that warmed the coldest days—whose absence still echoes softly between the shelves. They passed before their time, leaving behind a silence that hums with presence rather than emptiness. I often think of them as one of the invisible guides of the shop now, part of the fabric, a spirit folded gently into the

woodgrain and the whispered hush of pages turning. Time moves forward, always, but in places like Treadwell's, it also spirals, looping back, catching glints of those we've lost and holding them close. Their essence lingers, not as memory alone, but as a quiet influence, an unseen hand lighting the path for those who walk it now.

And then, of course, there were the strange ones, the wild cards in the tarot of daily life behind the counter. Treadwell's, with its curious magnetism, drew not just seekers and scholars but the beautifully unhinged.

I still remember my second day on the shop floor when a man wandered in—eerily calm, yet unmistakably off-kilter. He meandered through the aisles before abruptly erupting into shouts, brandishing what appeared, at a glance, to be a katana. The police were called. Tension thickened. It turned out to be an umbrella. A humble umbrella. Still, it was quite the baptism of fire.

Another time, a man arrived on a deathly quiet Sunday and proceeded to speak to me—*at me*—for four uninterrupted hours. According to him, I was a chosen one, a vital node in some “unseen network” visible only to him. Apparently, I had been summoned to help save the world, though the specific mechanics were murky.

And then there was the impeccably dressed woman—late thirties, perhaps early forties—who would buy the most obscure and expensive titles without blinking. One quiet afternoon, she asked if she could nap on the shop's little couch. I let her. She slept deeply. When it was time to close, I gently woke her, only for her to ask, in all seriousness, if she could stay the night.

These moments—absurd, surreal, sometimes unsettling—were part of the pulse of the place. Magick isn't always solemn. Sometimes it's strange. Sometimes, it's

funny. And sometimes, it just carries an umbrella shaped like a sword.

There are stories, of course, that have already passed into legend, told in hushed tones by those who were there, and embellished by those who only wish they had been. Tales like the time I conjured the goetic King Paimon into full, physical manifestation in the basement. But it's better not to say too much. Legends, after all, draw their power from the spaces between the words. They must remain elusive to remain alive.

In the quiet moments—before the doors opened, or after they shut with a sigh—I swear the shop would breathe. The air would shift, and the shadows would settle as if listening. The tall, dust-flecked windows let in a low amber light, painting the wooden shelves with a kind of secular holiness. Every tome held secrets. Every corner echoed with invisible threads of story. And the air—oh, the air—held that sacred scent: old paper, polished wood, and something older still. Something almost like memory.

In those rare silences, I felt the heartbeat of Treadwell's. It wasn't still; it thrummed. Not merely a collection of texts, but a dreaming beast, fed on curiosity and longing. The whispers tucked between those spines weren't idle—they were ancestral. Each visitor brought their longing, and the store held it tenderly, like a votive flame.

Yes, the role was exacting. It demanded body, mind, and spirit. But the rewards—*oh, the rewards*—were worth every drop of sweat. There was no thrill quite like watching someone find their path, that moment when their eyes lit with recognition, as if some long-lost part of them had stirred awake. In hosting workshops and seminars, I didn't just teach; I witnessed awakenings. Every gathering was a rite. Ideas kindled like sparks catching dry tinder. The room would shimmer with shared revelation, with electric camaraderie. I watched curiosity bloom into purpose.

Christina's words, spoken at the threshold of my journey, became something more than a warning—they were an initiation. The romantic fog of "working in a bookshop" lifted, revealing the sacred labour beneath. Treadwell's demanded integrity, presence, and fierce love. In return, it offered transformation. Through its doors I became more than I was: a scholar, a speaker, an author. A seeker who had learned to stand in his seeking.

Still, like all sacred rites, there came a moment when it was time to move on. The circle had closed. The lessons had taken root. I felt the call to expand, to shape new paths of expression beyond the bounds of even that beloved place. And so, I left, not in sorrow, but in reverence, for the fertile unknown ahead.

Then, the world cracked open.

The pandemic, vast and indifferent, swept through our lives like a storm of glass and ash. Treadwell's, like so many other sanctuaries, was forced to adapt at speed. The in-person events that had once defined the store's rhythm, its lifeblood, sputtered and fell silent. Where once you could step through the door on any given evening and find a crowd of vivid personalities gathered for a lecture or a reading, now the energy had shifted to the digital ether. The online shop expanded. Virtual classes became the norm. A new model rose, efficient and global, but never quite the same.

I rarely make it to the shop these days. And when I do, the faces are unfamiliar. The room feels quieter. The echoes fainter. But such is the price of passage through history. The pandemic has left its scars on all of us, and even the places we loved most have not escaped unmarked.

And yet... the soul of Treadwell's endures. It always will. Because it was never just a place—it was, and remains, a

beacon. A crossroads. A living altar built from curiosity, longing, and the fierce, defiant magick of the human spirit.

As I look back, the memories of fatigue soften, blur. What remains is light. What remains is gratitude. Treadwell's wasn't just another chapter in my life but an alchemical crucible. It took my raw, radiant yearning and refined it into something lasting. Something worthy.

For that, I offer my eternal thanks.

To Christina.

To the shelves.

To the ghosts between the pages.

And most of all, to that beloved, living temple on the streets of London: ***Treadwell's Books***, where magick was never just studied, but *lived*.

Marco Visconti

Germinal Becomings: Treadwell's and the Unfurling of Chaos

In 2005 I gave the following paper at Treadwell's. I was an academic but not yet 'out' as an occultist in academia. So the research I was performing which involuted continental philosophy (particularly the works of Deleuze, Guattari and Irigaray) with chaos magick and apocryphal esoterica was not publishable in any established journals. Treadwell's not only allowed me to present this work but cultivated a community where the kinds of hybrid philosophy meets occulture ideas were prolific rather than perverse (or perhaps both). The ideas in the following paper appears in a very different form in my 2020 *The Ahuman Manifesto* (Bloomsbury) showing that because of places such as Treadwell's occultism and esoterica belonged with feminism and philosophy and queer theory as much as theology and anthropology. I have since presented many works and had book launches at Treadwell's in the areas of philosophy, film, queer theory and chaos magick but always with the open acknowledgement that my attitude to philosophy was occult, that, after Foucault and Blanchot, I was not interested in metaphysical revelation, but in the knowledge unable to be revealed, that which trembles in secret, that which impels imagination, creativity, ethics and queerness.

This could be considered my juvenilia, both in terms of occult publishing and to an extent philosophical publication, appearing at Treadwell's as an experiment in ideas.

The appendix, 'on the word', is here unauthored. I am unsure whose research or work it is. It may be Steve Ash, my dear friend from the EEOD. But it may be someone else's. I include it here with apologies to whomever wrote it that I have no record, but it doesn't seem my writing style

so I am assuming if not Ash, it was perhaps an email from one of the many mansplainers that evening who wished to claim the vulva as their own. It has enough semantic interest that I add it for interest. But the vulva still belongs to *cunnis chaosium*. Some things never change...

Becomings-Cunt: Flesh, Fold and Infinity

This article suggests female genitalia as a model through which a project of becoming may be launched. If the penis is the morphological signifier that encounters phallic discourse as dominant, then the cunt is the morphological site of desire conceived differently, as multi-folded, disobedient, slippery, non-reified. It is clitoris, vagina, labia majora and minora, urethra, perineum. Its materiality is inextricable from a relationship to sexual discourse: it is the failed penis, the dark continent, plethora and absence, the use of which without or beyond the introduction of a phallus remains ambiguous and infinite, It is the wound, too much, not enough, too visceral, not present. Freud's castration, Lacan's specular lack and Irigaray's elucidation of the larger philosophical trajectories in dominant culture that make the way we understand genitalia a symptom rather than the cause of the blind spot. The cunt is an organ, but it is not adamantly organised visually, metaphorically, physiologically, taxonomically or ontologically in the same way as other organs. The cunt is therefore an organ already on its way to belonging with a BwO. Our cunt and viscera are our flesh known primarily through signification external to sense and which formulates what we believe the limits and thresholds of these organs are, which define the function, form and hence future of their embodiment within us. What can be unfolded and refolded within the embodied self when and if we become as much viscera as skin, as much entrails as brain? The cunt as internal/external, as part of that which stratifies (male or female) and that which confounds the body means it is also a threshold that, when unfolded, creates new configurations. Female genitalia should not

be understood as metaphor or as a reflection applied to a becoming, but becoming cunt does involve a shifting and folding of territories of knowledge and desire. My project is borne of a desire to renegotiate Deleuze and Guattari's much critiqued call to becoming-woman. For a variety of (albeit problematic) reasons, while being critical of, I am sympathetic toward their privileging of woman in becomings, and particularly the ways in which becomings and feminism involute. Where woman has man, the cunt doesn't really have an isomorphic dominant opposite, so it is difficult to fetishise. Cunt is a derogatory term, so it can, like queer, be reclaimed. As both noun and insult it describes woman and something disobedient to majoritarian paradigms. Thus becoming-cunt is a becoming-minoritarian. Cunts are gendered genitals, making them a privileged site for organising and reorganising desire and sexed subjectivity. Cunts are materially formed of multiple folds of flesh, which makes them interesting to read through Deleuze's work on Leibniz, the fold and the larval subject. The body becomingcunt is involuted and undone, create a larval sexuality—immature and transformed at every synthesis, which acts not toward a thing but toward its metamorphosis, toward perceiving itself which cannot be perceived, toward the imperceptibility within repetition where all elements within syntheses are dissipated, disoriented and reoriented with each turn, each folding and each alteration in the aspects of involution. Pleasure is folding with the planes of flesh. Beyond metaphors of flesh and fold becomingcunt signifies every part of the flesh, every nerve every tissue mass, every artery, every organ, the unfolded skin as libidinally provocative. In the event of thinking the unthought cunt, skin may be peeled, entrails fondled, parts removed or moved around, corporeal minugia explored and every plane of the body reorganized into a new configuration with new function and meaning. 'The self does not undergo a modification, the self is a modification.' (Deleuze, 1994: 79)

A cunt is a series of connexions as much as a thing, between the various elements of female genitalia, which resonates it with Lyotard's work on the great ephemeral skin, cunt as moebian band. The many folds of the cunt create connections, multiplying Irigaray's model of the more-than-and-less-than-one two lips. Being as a body is a formalisation of flesh into smaller forms which have function and signification: head as seat of logic, face as signifying plane of subjectivity, race, age, genitals as signifier of gender and possible sexuality and sexual configurations in relation with other subjects. The cunt is informal both as a non-reified biological form and as a mode of expression. Becoming investigates and exploits the relations between forces of subjugation and seeks tactics to reorient strata of desire—how does a cunt desire differently to a phallus or a vagina or clitoris within phallic paradigms? Becoming-cunt is, put simply, entering into an alliance with the fold, flesh and force of the indeterminacy of this desiring disorganising organ. It is difficult to conceptualise 'a' cunt in the same way as one can conceive of 'a' penis. One can however have cuntly male genitalia. The use of the word 'cunt' as opposed to 'vulva' comes as a response to 'cunt' being the limits of semiotic profanity in Western culture, where the actual signifier of non-specific female genitalia is exchanged for the signifier of a repulsive or offensive or, more resonant with its affinity with women, disorderly or disobedient subject, particularly male (essentially men most often call other men 'cunts' when they fail to fulfil an expectation). Hence the offence of cunt is redeemed from its expropriation from female anatomy to majoritarian insult. The disobedience of the cunt is intimately related to the transgression of paradigms of the singular, the onomastic, the visual and the functional which the cunt performs.

While the penis signifies beyond its reproductive function, the vagina literally and actually represents a blind-spot, empty space or aperture despite the vaginal walls being in permanent occlusion. It needs to be filled. The rest of the vulva is either ignored or quickened toward the

clitoris, seen as a truncated penis. A cunt is only a wound metaphor if that which is wounded is valued in its integrated form—Guattari points out integrated institutes of capitalism from the family to schools to signifying systems massacre the body. That the male position is an isomorphic position, against which everything else falls away, means that we are not talking about men and women, but the phallic and the cunt. Incompleteness is something which one explores rather than to which one is subjected. Becomingcunt addresses the need for indeterminate re-fleshed-refreshed desiring projects, of which phallogentric sexuality is only one.

Form and Force-Fold

Form

The form of cunt is indefinite. It is two sets of lips, clitoris, vagina, anus, g-spot and apocryphal elements. In act it is both spreading out and convergence of labia; it is the unity of the clitoris and its concealment of the urethra, where a single organ is palimpsest. The vaginal 'aperture' is a volitional hole, both penetrable and ingurgitant. The general perinea, the indiscernibility between what constitutes the cunt (not the thigh, not the belly) and what constitutes the surrounds (not cunt) and the internal aspect of the cunt, which reflects the infinite potential found in the exploration of all internality (seen in such activities as speculum sex, fisting, and douche and enema play among other things) offer an organ far removed materially and conceptually from the hypostasis of the phallus. If this describes an 'actual' cunt, how can we think the becoming-cunt of all desiring subjects? A cunt is already a pack animal, a demonic schema between various connected elements. We may know what to do with a vagina, but what do we do with a cunt?—'the demon functions as a borderline of an animal pack, into which the human being passes or in which his or her becoming takes place by contagion.' (ATP 247) The cunt's borderline sexual organ undifferentiated

pleasure fold requires the affected connected to enter into alliance, to be infected by the cunt's paradigms of possibility of sexual acts and pleasures. The whole desiring body must be more than one and folded to enter into alliance with the cunt. Otherwise the cunt is reduced to the little penis clitoris and the absent-penis sheath.

Demonic interlude:

Becoming implies:

An initial relation of alliance with a demon...There is an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt or always on the fringe of recognised institutions, groups all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words, anomic. If becoming-animal takes the form of a Temptation, and of monsters aroused in the imagination by the demon, it is because it is accompanied, at its origin as in its undertaking, by a rupture within the central institutions that have established themselves or seek to become established. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 247)

The cunt is a tempting form. Its tempting aspect is traditionally one of the reasons for its danger and the imminent downfall of the (usually majoritarian) tempted. The cunt is also a monster, all the more monstrous for simultaneously being so tempting, evoking the fascination of ambivalence. For all the ways the cunt transgresses and traverses dominant phallic paradigms it is both prohibited and revolt-ing (in both senses of the word). The cunt, as opposed to the obedient vagina, will not be defined by production (family), chastity (Church) or an acceptance of subjugation (state). And it is, above all, an assemblage of folds, organs, elements, textures, tastes and involutions with its disciples. It is, materially and conceptually, a rupture and rupturing.

The cunt is a demon—convoked by the sorcerer fascinated with the possible but unknowable futures the cunt offers, tempted by the cunt's seduction against the warnings of family, church, State. But like a demon the cunt must also be evoked. It will not come unless it is desired and it cannot materialise unless in the psyche of the sorcerer. The idea of the cunt is the temptation, but its evocation is the demon with which the unholy alliance is formed and the becoming-cunt facilitated. Many demons in a variety of literature and lore are, either cunts or cunt-like. This section will briefly sketch a few examples, but most demonic forms follow the basic tenets of the cunt as somehow gender ambiguous, as assemblage or fold, as both tempting and dangerous. Against the singularity of the phallus and the majoritarian subject, 'My name is Legion: for we are many' said Satan (Mark 5:9) and so is the cunt and the affinities we form with it.

Leviathan is one example of a demonic form becoming-cunt. Leviathan, like cunt, translates from Hebrew as 'that which gathers itself together in folds.' (Davidson, 173) Evoking Leviathan welcomes becoming-cunt as a folding with that which folds, offering infinite aspects. Leviathan, even when gathered, (i.e. unified) is a folding, thus she transgresses even the concept of unity by presenting as a unified folding, or gathering of dimensional aspects. Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, published in 1651, was a remarkable philosophical treatise on the breakaway from philosophy and political logic from the church. Utilising Leviathan as a metaphor for rupture and transgression of majoritarian power continued the presentation of entering into an affinity with Leviathan as a becoming-cunt. Biblically Leviathan is a threshold water/land monster, a Dragon similar to the crocodile (in the grimoire *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon* two demons, Sallos and Agares, arrive, when evoked, riding crocodiles) who inhabits the two worlds of land and sea: 'Leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; ... the dragon that is in the sea' (Isaiah 27:1) Isaiah's is an interesting

description of an ambivalent penis. A serpent is a clear penile metaphor, but although penile Leviathan does not necessarily behave like a phallus—crooked, serpentine (the phallus is rigid, straight and not reticulated or defined by its capacity to move). Yet Leviathan is still a piercing serpent, resonantly phallic. Job 41:1 offers Leviathan as something internal with parts that extrude ‘Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down?’. Psalms see Leviathan as suffering because of her own multiplicity, fit for food to a bacchic people: ‘Thou brakest the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.’ (Psalms 74:14) Leviathan has more than one head. His seats of logos becomes food, reflecting the proximity of seduction, cannibalism, food, ideology as nourishment, flesh, desire and the creation of thought. Leviathan is contagion through consumption, and his wild disciples become through consumption. The biblical apocrypha is where we meet Leviathan as a female ‘...a female monster named Leviathan, to dwell in the abysses of the ocean, over the fountains of the water...And I besought the other angel that he should show me the might of those monsters [Leviathan and Behemoth]...And he said to me: “Thou, son of man, herein thou dost seek to know what is hidden.’ (Enoch LX: 7-19) Leviathan folds flesh with land with water. She folds as clandestine and to unfold her secrets is to refold one’s place with God. The first part of Enoch is essentially about knowledge, creativity and thought and their relationship with desire as the ultimate punishable sin, concerning the Watchers, angels who fall because they mate with and teach knowledge to the women of earth. Inherently the rethinking of the relationship between flesh, thought and desire becomes demonic and ruptures dominant ‘Law’. The Watchers as angels are pure spirit. They fold spirit with the flesh of women, folding the imparting of knowledge with desire. The Watchers enflesh the threshold between man and God, or, to be precise, women and angels. This fold of woman and angel is an early example of invocation as a becoming. The unnatural participation

between angel and woman is emphasised through angels being apparently sexless. How does one copulate with a woman if one is not, technically, a man? Thus, although the union did result in offspring, there is something less tangibly sinful in the union, sinful precisely because of its intangibility of forms, functions, desires and results. God does not seem to punish the Watchers for their carnal transgression, but for the imparting of knowledge, in a similar way to Eve being punished as a result, not of committing sin, but receiving knowledge. (That she was seduced by a serpent resonates with the forms taken by Leviathan, Tiamat, Kutulu and other cunt-like deities.) The Watchers are punished by being relegated to the very cunt-like 'chasm of the abyss of the valley' (Enoch, LV1: 3)

Leviathan is the Hebrew name for the Babylonian goddess Tiamat. Kramer suggests '[Sumerian] Kur [is] the monstrous creature which at least in a certain sense corresponds to the Babylonian goddess Tiamat, the Hebrew Leviathan and perhaps the Greek Typhon.' (13) The horrific dragon serpent ruler of the Ancient Ones (defeated by the Elder Gods, the benevolent gods more closely associated with creation and humanity) is closely associated with Lovecraft's Cthulhu (called Kutulu in the grimoire *The Necronomicon*). 'It is this Tiamat or Leviathan that is identified closely with Cthulhu or Kutulu in the pages of the *Necronomicon*, although both names are mentioned independently of each other, indicating that somehow Kutulu is the male counterpart of Tiamat.' (Simon, *Necronomicon* xxi) Worshipers of Tiamat are associated with Kutulu, chaos, shape-shifting and unnatural alliances with beasts:

[Know that the worshippers of Tiamat] are to be known by their seeming human appearance which has the mark of the beast upon them, as they change easily into the shapes of animals and haunt the Nights of Men...and their books are the Books of Chaos and the flames, and are the Books of the Shadows and the Shells...and they are the raisers of the legions of maskim, the Liers-in-Wait. And they do

not know what it is they do, but they do it at the demands of the serpent, at whose name even Ereshkigal gives fright and the dread Kutulu strains at his bonds ('Book of Calling' Necronomicon: 97)

Feminine images of shells and shadows, of unpredictable potentiality, legion and chaos resonate around Tiamat, folded in the earth and the ocean. As an interesting parallel, the Magan Text and the Uralia Text of the Necronomicon warn against opening the gate of the abominations (over which Tiamat lords) because the abyss, the threshold between heaven and hell, earth and surface and life and death, Tiamat as cunt-gate-threshold, will open and 'all that abyss break forth upon the earth and the dead rise to eat the living for it is writ: And I will cause the dead to rise and eat the living' ('The Uralia Text' Necronomicon) This parallel emphasises the breakdown of the most primary human bifurcation—life and death—when the divided is convoked not as polar but fold or threshold.

Although described as 'he', Kutulu is a very cuntly he. Kutulu is the many tentacled squid-like creature that, like Leviathan/Tiamat, lies dead but dreaming in the depth of the ocean, where 'the water which is beneath the earth is feminine' (Enoch, LIV.7-LV.2: 8) Because his tentacles proliferate and emit from the aperture of his mouth these tentacles could not be described as phallic. They primarily defy the unity of the phallus, and the phallus as penetrating, rather than originating, from the folds of flesh which constitute a corporeal aperture. We are also never told in Lovecraft or The Necronomicon what these tentacles do (like the disciples of Tiamat 'and they do not know what it is they do'). Their function, unlike the function of the phallus, is not laid down in advance, or indeed, at all. Cthulhu is an example of a masculine subject becoming-cunt. Humwawa, The Necronomicon's Lord of Abominations, has a face which is a mass of entrails. The face is the primary plane through which subjectivity is 'read'—gender, colour, race, sanity, even class and

sexuality. The gendered male white face represents the socially concealed phallus expressed in a visible and hence legible way. It is the zenith of the upright, frontal human, correlating the phallus with the head as seat of logic. The face is the head of the human form as itself entirely phallic. Humwawa draws the cunt and the viscera to the most sacred plateau of the intelligible signified flesh; hence the becoming-cunt-face is its own form of becoming-cunt. The sigil or seal for Humwawa looks a lot like a vulva, while his brother Pazuzu (the demon who possesses Regan in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, 1973) is described as having rotting genitalia. Both abominations are male, yet both are explicitly described around their lack of phallogentric genitalia and unity in general.

Lovecraft expresses horror in his Cthulhu mythos tales beyond these elaborate inert monsters to the act of perception and the formation of worlds as non-Euclidean: Those angles! Those angles! 'Lovecraft's hero encounters strange animals, but he finally reaches the ultimate regions of a Continuum inhabited by unnameable waves and unfindable particles.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 248) Lovecraft describes worlds becoming-cunt, folding this dimension to reassemble all perception.

The very sun of heaven seemed distorted when viewed through the polarising miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion, and twisted menace and suspense lurked leeringly in those crazy elusive angles of carven rock where a second glance showed concavity after the first showed convexity (The Call of Cthulhu, 1994: 94.)

The self is inherently part of the folds and foldings in with these worlds until all perception is enveloped within a plane of Lovecraftian monsters and hybrids, from which the folded self cannot escape and often itself becomes infected with the contagion of the monstrous other plane. 'Then the other shapes began to appear, filling me with nameless horror the moment I awoke. But during the dreams they

did not horrify me at all—I was one with them.’ (Lovecraft, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* 1994: 461) The terror of the altered familiar is also the wonder at the infinite possibilities of the already available not exchanged or repositioned but folded into a multi-dimensional band across which becoming cuts a trajectory forming unique consistency.

If cunt is infinite and indefinite, how can we refer to it as being of a form? Deleuze and Guattari state of form as a turning point in thought;

a form in itself that does not refer to any external point of view... so many *inseparable variations* on which it confers an equipotentiality without confusion...under its first aspect of absolute form, appears as the faculty of concepts, that is to say, as the faculty of their creation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 210-211)

The cunt here does not appear prior to the act of thinking and its appearance is concept-aspect, which is also the act of creating it as a perception-thought-force. The cunt is infinite determinates and its dimensions become reformation of the single plane through perception as creation. Unlike the phallus, which has already been folded into a particular configuration to the extent that to create it as a concept is subsumed by its immediate presence to its own transcendent form. Attempts to know female form necessitates the death of majoritarian subjectivity, which is why theorists refer to the fatal results of the ancients' attempt to find female pleasure; Medusa's gaze (Cixous), the Sirens' call (Foucault) and the gaze of Orpheus (Blanchot). Deleuze and Guattari like demons. The cunt is non-visual full-frontal. It *requires* exploration to see (but not know) it. The speculum suggests the phantasy of knowledge through visualisation, but the speculum, ignoring the vulva, examines empty space and thus affirms the infinity of the cunt as internal (visceral) and external (dural). Because the cunt is internal, external, relatively smooth mons veneris full frontal, occluded and splayed labia, and various

other possible configurations depending on positioning, to see it through one perception or orientation is impossible. The body must actually be reformed or refolded to catch a glimpse of all the cunt's various aspects.

Force

'For there is no portion of matter which is not actually subdivided into others; so the parts of any body are actually infinite...much less can we arrive at the end of our analysis if we seek the mover of each body which is moved, an again the mover of this; for we shall always arrive at smaller bodies without end' (Leibniz: 98)

Can we say we have a memory of cunt in the same way as we refer to the meaning of the phallus as a historical artefact? 'Man constitutes himself as a gigantic memory, through the position of the central point, its frequency (insofar as it is necessarily reproduced by each dominant point) and resonance (insofar as all of the points tie in with it.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 293)

Forms fold and refold, recreating their own forms by their capacity to influence themselves. At the same time they influence external elements and external elements influence them. In the act of creating the cunt toward its various becoming potentials, the cunt's dimensions fold and refold. 'A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern...correlative to elastic compressive force. Unfolding is thus not the contrary of folding but follows the fold up to the following fold.' (Deleuze, Leibniz 6) For each form there are those forms which impress upon it to offer its form as the act of creation and reaction through those forms which buttress it; mouth, genital, skin, object, breath, heat, vibration, cold, absence, pressure, vacuum. Lyotard's möebian band: 'open up the so-called body and spread out all its surfaces...the labia majora, so also the labia minora...and this is not all, far from it, connected onto these lips a second mouth is necessary, a third mouth, a

great number of other mouths, vulvas.' (Lyotard 1) As in D&G's becomings, Lyotard includes the sonorous and the coloured. In becoming-cunt the act of conceptualising a cunt, which has no transcendent form, creates another dimension to the act of becoming; a constellation of conceiving as creating, while becoming. In order to become, form must be reoriented from analogy to transformation through contagion. However because the cunt form is itself unstable, demonic becoming is launched.

Fold

The folding of 2 matters refers to the involution of two forms and their impact within and upon each others memory, future and present form and force. The fold is not the result but the act of force of forms. Becoming-cunt is how we are cunt and cunt is us, how we reform cunt and as cunt, and how cunt reforms us and as us. While each form becomes the other, their specificity and for feminism their memory is essential to their becoming. The forms do not homogenise but retain specificity and yet assemble. 'If two distinct things can be really inseparable, two inseparable things can be really distinct.' (Deleuze: 12) Woman already has a cunt both distinct and indistinct from her form. The fold of cunt, thought and self creates a simultaneity of differential elements and integration. According to Leibniz, unlike inanimate forms which are components of assembled parts, organic elements cannot have their choices inferred in advance, thus an organic is required in becoming, through relations with organic or inorganic elements, as yet undeveloped, larval. '[there is] no universal reason or law of nature is assignable from which any creature, no matter how perfect and well informed about this mind, can infer with certainty what the mind will choose' (Leibniz: 102) One's own incapacity for inference is included. And the cunt neither follows a predictable narrative of temporal 'choice' (what it will do) nor spatial choice (what it will be).

Becoming-cunt is splaying of self, becoming-indeterminate, palimpsest, the open and pure intensity of being a visceral, viscous and shuddering series of pleasure planes beyond and in excess of the phallus. It may include aspects of becoming-clitorised, variously penetrated and penetrating, onanistic and orgiastic, confusing dominance and submission and most importantly, becoming-more-than-one. Not knowing what will become of oneself as thought-materiality. Becoming-cunt is receptive and ravenous, desire as infinite and inevitable. 'A multiplicity is defined not by its elements, nor by a centre of unification or comprehension. It is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension without changing its nature...a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 249) The multiplicity of becoming-cunt as an assemblage reassembles the tensors and thresholds upon which it expresses force and by which force is expressed upon its various planes and dimensions. The self, the cunt and the world become threshold. Currently in my work through becoming-cunt I have explored becoming-splanchnic, becoming-demonic and becoming-cinesexual, the ecstasy of involution with the image as material force.

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Appendix: The Word

(I have no idea if this is my work or that of someone responding, if so it is likely to have been the occultist Steve Ash)

One reader has asked about the word cunt, wondering if it had something to do with “cunning” as in “a cunning woman was a negative thing”. It has nothing to do with cunning (which is related to the verbs ken and can) and everything to do with what it means today: “female genitalia”. It first shows up in a list of London street names of about 1230. That street name was, interestingly, Gropecuntelane, one of a warren of streets and alleyways all given over to the lowest forms of prostitution and bawdry. It lay between Aldermanbury and Coleman Street (where the Swiss Bank stands today) and it belonged to one “William de Edmonton”. Curiously, medieval Paris had a street name with an identical meaning - Rue Grattecon. Oxford and York apparently also had similar versions of that street name.

Cunt is believed to derive from a Germanic root *kuntōn “female genitalia”, which also gave rise to Old Norse kunta (ancestor of Norwegian and Swedish dialectal kunta and Danish dialectal kunte), Old Frisian, Middle Low German and Middle Dutch kunte, and the English doublet quaint. And, by the way, the word wasn’t always considered derogatory, even though it is today. Be careful about assuming that a word’s modern connotations must have governed its formation. By the way, no connection has been made between the Germanic words and Latin cunnus. The proto-Germanic root of cunt is ku- “hollow place”, while the Indo-European root of Latin cunnus is (s)keu- “to cover, to conceal”, the etymological meaning of cunnus being “sheath”.

cunt

“female intercrural foramen,” or, as some 18c. writers refer to it, “the monosyllable,” M.E. *cunte* “female genitalia,” akin to O.N. *kunta*, from P.Gmc. **kuntōn*, of uncertain origin. Some suggest a link with L. *cuneus* “wedge,” others to PIE base **geu-* “hollow place,” still others to PIE **gwen-*, root of *queen* and Gk. *gyne* “woman.” The form is similar to L. *cunnius* “female pudenda,” which is likewise of disputed origin, perhaps lit. “gash, slit,” from PIE **sker-* “to cut,” or lit. “sheath,” from PIE **kut-no-*, from base **(s)keu-* “to conceal, hide.” First known reference in Eng. is said to be c.1230 Oxford or London street name *Gropecuntlane*, presumably a haunt of prostitutes. Avoided in public speech since 15c.; considered obscene since 17c. Du. cognate *de kont* means “a bottom, an arse.” Du. also has attractive poetic slang ways of expressing this part, such as *liefdesgrot*, lit. “cave of love,” and *vleesroos* “rose of flesh.” Alternate form *cunny* is attested from c.1720 but is certainly much earlier and forced a change in the pronunciation of *coney* (q.v.), but it was good for a pun while *coney* was still the common word for “rabbit”: “A pox upon your Christian cockatrices! They cry, like poulterers’ wives, ‘No money, no coney.’” [Massinger, 1622]

“Of all the four-letter words, CUNT is easily the most offensive” (Ruth Wajnryb, 2004). Our taboo surrounding the word ensures that it is rarely discussed, though, when it is, the superlatives come thick and fast: ‘cunt’ is “a word so hateful it can scarcely be uttered” (Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, 2000). Accordingly, Andrew Goldman calls ‘cunt’ “the mother of all nasty words” and “the most controversial word of all” (1999). For Tom Aldridge, it is “unarguably the most obscene [and] most forbidden word in English”, “the ultimate obscenity”, and “the nastiest four-letter word” (2001). John Doran describes it as “The most offensive word in the world”, “the worst word that anyone has ever been able to think of”, and “[the] most terrible of terrible words” (2002).

The most succinct description is provided by Pentti Olli, who defines 'cunt' as "the bottom half of a woman or a very despicable person" (1999). According to Francis Grose's scurrilous definition in his *Classical Dictionary Of The Vulgar Tongue*, it is "a nasty name for a nasty thing" (1796). In fact, the word has nine recognised definitions: it can mean 'vagina', 'a contemptuous person', 'a sexually available woman', 'a foolish person', 'sexual intercourse', 'an infuriating object', 'a difficult task',

The Witches at Treadwell's

I first heard about Treadwell's from an assortment of druids down the pub one Sunday afternoon. I had a dream where I was instructed to collect some dirt from the top of Primrose Hill on the summer solstice. As one of the highest points of elevation in London with views over the city skyline, Primrose Hill had been associated with druid worship since the Welsh poet Edward Williams AKA Iolo Morganwg had sought to revive the pre-Roman religious practice in 1792. A notorious forger of manuscripts in support of his claims of the survival of druidic practices, Morganwg's assertion of an ancient connection between Primrose Hill and the druids might need to be taken with a pinch of salt, but his contemporary William Blake also made reference to the site and may have even participated in one of Morganwg's solstice ceremonies on the hill.

My own introduction to London's thriving occult scene in the late 90s had itself first begun with a visit to one of these druid revival ceremonies up on Primrose Hill, which I had gone along to on a whim after randomly reading about it somewhere, and from there found out about further word-of-mouth London occult events such as Talking Stick, which took place upstairs at Victorian gin palace the Princess Louise in Bloomsbury, and the South East London Folklore Society, which took place in a haunted house in Greenwich. I had met a lot of magicians and made some good friends at these events, but I had since distanced myself from all of that and rarely went along to any of these things anymore. I had never really gone in for the neopagan reconstruction end of occultism—my interests always more geared towards workable magic than bucolic revival—so these sorts of pseudo-druid solstice rituals weren't really my regular cup of tea. However, if I'm being told to get specific dirts from specific places at specific times in dreams - that's enough for me.

I had no idea if I would actually find any druid action happening at the top of the hill, as it had been years since the last time I attended this, but I spotted someone in white robes and followed them to a clearing where a circle of other robed figures were forming. All normal London things for me at this point though, so I took a place in the circle and was handed a photocopied bit of paper to recite some words from at the appropriate moments. After the solar incantations had concluded, I paid for a handful of dirt from the centre of the clearing where the ritual had taken place and followed the white robes, beards and real ale crowd to the nearest pub for “the pint after”—always an important closing component of London magic. It was here that I heard my first mention of the “Witches at Treadwell’s.” Apparently it was a new occult book shop that had just opened in Covent Garden, and it had a downstairs space where they put on talks and events on various related subjects.

The Witches at Treadwell’s. Whatever, I thought, I wasn’t really involved in all of that anymore so I didn’t pay it too much mind. I kept hearing about this shop all through that summer though here and there. Some of my friends had been doing occasional talks at the shop but I hadn’t made it along to any of them. The crossroads in South London where I used to communicate with spirits was being dug up for road works. I couldn’t get to it without climbing through the barriers that had been put up, and various wires and cables and electrical works were being installed under the road. It felt like a direct physical metaphor for what was also going on in my practice at the time. The roads being dug up and new components installed, but also a feeling of disarray and upheaval, and a forced period of inactivity when I was unable to get to my regular local spot for magic.

It had been an uncommonly hot summer for London, and by August I was still in a weird place with my occult practice, crossroads still dug up, still avoiding London

occult things generally. However, despite this, after a few pints I had accidentally promised the late Steve Wilson—known for the chaos magic text *Chaos Ritual* and as the compère of the long-running Talking Stick event—that I would do a talk at his new occult pub moot that he had started after the dissolution of Talking Stick. I thought about making my excuses and just not doing it, but I didn't want to let people down, so put together something on the landscape-based spirit work that my practice consisted of at the time, and its intersection with London psychogeography. I would just grit my teeth and get through it.

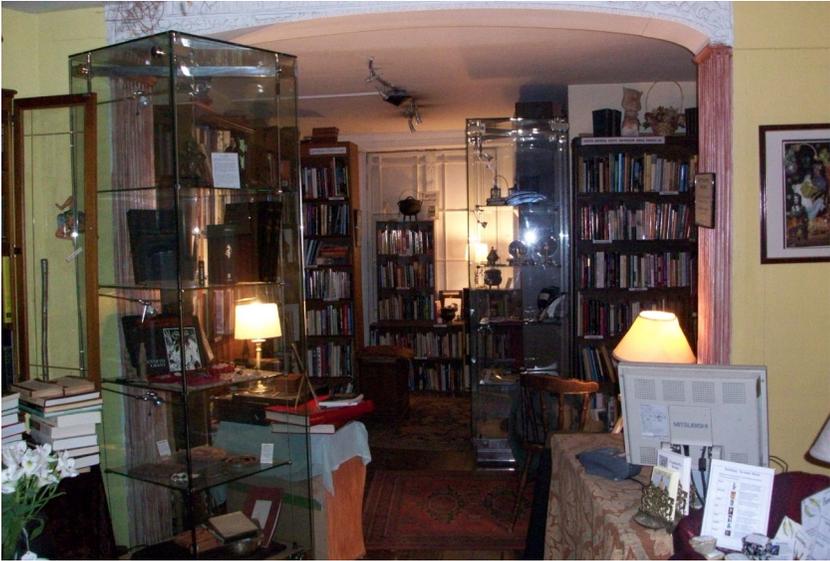
Christina, proprietor of Treadwell's, had been invited along to this event by some of our mutual friends, and also brought with her Allison Brice, who was then working as co-manager and tarot reader at the shop. Some years later I would propose to Allison at the seven-road crossroads at Seven Dials steps away from Treadwell's' original location in Covent Garden, and we would get married and leave England for a new life in the United States, but this was the first time we met. The Witches at Treadwell's. A handful of dirt from Primrose Hill collected at a certain time following directions from a dream, unfolding into chance meetings and coincidences, all lining up in certain ways to shape my future pathways of magic. Eventually relocating me across an ocean for initiations and immersive learning in living traditions that I never could have encountered in anything like the same way back home.

Soon enough—Christina invited me to perform a re-worked version of the same talk for an audience in the basement at Treadwell's. And then another, and then some more. Just when you think you are out, they pull you back in. My whole social circle of occultist types were also regularly doing talks at Treadwell's, so there was always something interesting to go to every couple of weeks, and the wine soirées afterwards were always a great opportunity to get to know other like-minded people with similar interests. For a time, it really did feel like attending these

time-incursion Edwardian salons on a host of esoteric subjects in this historic building located next door to the site where Thomas de Quincey had written *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. The crossroads at Tavistock Street, unfixed in time, a whirlpool nexus drawing in witches and wizards from far and wide with some strange gravity or magnetism.

Treadwell's changed and redefined the landscape of the London occult scene at exactly the right moment. The old pub moot format was struggling after Talking Stick came to an end, and had splintered into several competing pub events, but all of them on a smaller scale from what had been, and tending more towards cliquishness among the various factions and traditions that comprised that world. Speaking at those events was more like doing stand-up, with your audience typically several pints down by the time you went on stage and frequently heckling from the sidelines. Treadwell's introduced more academic rigour to the choice of subject matter, as well as an emphasis on real experiential magic. It was ran by magicians for magicians, and you couldn't get away with spouting a load of spurious nonsense here. If Treadwell's was hosting it, you knew you were going to be getting the real deal, but it also remained unanchored to any particular magical tradition or belief system, and never felt exclusionary.

Allison had the front door key to Treadwell's during the period that she worked at the shop, so I ended up doing a lot of magic in the basement space below as well as at the storied historic crossroads just outside the building. Having grown up in New Orleans she kept an altar space for Erzulie Freda at the top of the stairwell for a time. I put on a Fet Guede event in the basement one year and encouraged attendees to make offerings to their ancestors and remembered dead. At another event, I set up a mobile sound-system and played records from my collection of Vodou, Umbanda and Obeah tunes on vinyl, temporarily turning the normally subdued basement into a lively dance



floor for one night only. In a very real way, Treadwell's in its original location became my community hub and occasional impromptu temple space for years during this time.

Sometimes if we were out somewhere late in the west end, Allison and I would stay overnight in the basement below the shop instead of having to deal with the night bus back to South London. On one such occasion, we heard noises coming from upstairs around 4am that sounded exactly like someone was trying to break into the shop. I wasn't having that, so I got up and went to investigate, arming myself with the nearest weaponisable blunt instrument that I could find on my way up the stairs. This being Treadwell's, however, the nearest blunt instrument to hand was a giant 12" rose quartz crystal penis, which I cautiously advanced with up the stairs not knowing what I was going to find. Anticipating the tabloid headlines. Would-be burglar bludgeoned in occult shop with giant crystal cock. Geordie wizard suspected. There was nothing though. No burglars, not even a good haunting or a spirit conjured to visible appearance. We later found out that Michael Palin of Monty Python fame had an office next

door and the frequent 4am disturbance that sounded like someone breaking into the shop was merely his cleaner accessing the adjacent building, which perhaps serves as a counterpoint to the absurd Pythonesque crystal penis bludgeoning scenario.

Treadwell's would eventually relocate from its Covent Garden space where I had so many fond memories, did so much exciting magic, and drank with so many friends, many of whom are no longer with us, clawed away by the unwavering hands of time. I went to a few events at the new Treadwell's in Bloomsbury, once more situated within layer upon layer of occult history in the shadow of the British Museum. It was still Treadwell's. The building and location might be different, the precise ecology of spirits weaving their way around the new premises might have some different vectors, but it was still recognisably the same magical space and the same expression of Christina's magic. A steady welcoming flame drawing in the people who need it, to light their way or warm themselves in the cold night for a time, to find their magic and find their people.

Soon enough it was my own turn to leave the city and its magic, which I got to know so well during my almost two decades as an adopted Londoner. Making our exit through its revolving door so that others could take our place on its stage and weave their own stories around its venerable haunted buildings and crossroads pulsating with the memory of known and forgotten dead. Yet still, across an ocean, thousands of miles away, living in a strange land and in even stranger times, I still have the two brass keys from the front door of the original Treadwell's in Covent Garden. Tied together with red ribbon to make the shape of a cross, and set at the foot of a statue of St Anthony representing Papa Legba set near the door. A make-shift talisman of the living crossroads of Treadwell's, and its witches, and how their magic shaped my life.

Stephen Grasso



Many years ago, I was working at Senate House Library and, for professional development reasons, studying part-time for a Librarianship MA (possibly the driest and least thrilling Masters subject known to humankind). To assuage the tedium, I would often visit the ‘old’ Treadwell’s in Covent Garden, to buy books and attend lectures.

One day while chatting with Christina I explained the subject of my Masters dissertation: esoteric or ‘occult’ libraries (the Harry Price Collection of Magical Literature at Senate House, the Warburg Institute’s Yorke Collection, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, et al). She suggested I give a talk based on this topic, as it could well be of interest to Treadwell’s’ regulars.

At the time, public speaking of any kind was not something I’d done before or sought out, and being a shy and retiring type, certainly wouldn’t have put myself forward. I can still recall my feelings of eldritch fear and dread as I walked towards the shop on the appointed evening of my first ever lecture. Would the audience laugh derisively, yawn, or launch rotten vegetables at me? As it turned out, the talk was well-attended and well-received, and—as always after a Treadwell’s lecture, I conversed with a number of charming, well-informed and erudite people. Encouraged by this event, I went on to present further talks and began submitting one or two short pieces for publication, which



in turn led to more substantial published articles and a couple of books.

I wouldn't have considered doing any of this, had it not been for Christina's infectious enthusiasm, encouragement and positivity, for which I shall be always grateful.

In summary, may the gods bless Christina for having created an oasis of esoteric literature where browsing is encouraged, a magical space where one may encounter like-minded and lovely people. London's wonder and mystery are fast disappearing, as it becomes an increasingly homogeneous theme park and money-launderers' paradise, but by helping to re-enchant the city, places like Treadwell's are vital and delightful.

A salud!

Christopher Josiffe

Whether soaking up occult material history by sitting besides Pamela Coleman Smith's own fireplace, poring over antique editions of Agrippa's *Occult Philosophy* in the office, or co-enthusiasing about the value of planetary magic with Christina I have always felt not only welcomed but supported and inspired by the erudite Treadwell's community.

I am not only grateful for the opportunities Treadwell's has afforded me to share historical research and classes on practical sorcery, but have always thoroughly enjoyed presenting talks on necromancy, cunning-craft, and early modern magic, as well as catching up with friends and enjoying wine and fascinating discussions with folks afterwards.

The audiences and colleagues this wonderful bookshop and magical training-ground coheres and knits together are amongst some of the most educated and brilliant crowds I have ever had the pleasure to talk over slides at! Breakout discussions prompted and fostered by these congregations have ranged from cuneiform studies to traditional witchcraft, and of course the history and practice of both high ceremonial and down-to-earth folk magics alike.

It is my ardent hope that Treadwell's and her hardworking team continues to go from strength to strength in all their work connecting up authors and readers, scholars and practitioners, and providing resources, advice, and encouragement to everyone from seasoned magicians and witches to those just starting out on their crooked paths.

Truly a jewel in the crown of magical old London town, here's to celebrating Treadwell's' past, present, and future!

Alexander Cummins

Diary of an Occult bookseller

During the years I worked at Treadwell's I never kept a diary. Or at least I never kept a consistent record, though I have many notebooks full of scribbled lecture and workshop notes, scraps of ritual, the occasional pressed plant matter, and assorted other bits. In the alternate dimensional where I did keep one, I imagine (overgrandly) it would fall somewhere between Strindberg and Blythell. As such, I've had a word with other-dimension Kate, who's agreed to tear some pages out of her diligently kept tome and send them across to this one. Perhaps a few bits were lost in the transfer, or happened a bit differently in this dimension, but to the best I can recall, this is what it was like.

December 2009

I've just found the most wonderful place. A and I went out in London on the self-guided walking tour. We ended at bookshop—or is it a community centre—called Treadwell's. I'm not sure what happened when I went in, but I felt suddenly overwhelmed and dizzy. The nice lady at the till gave me some water and a gingerbread star that was hanging on the Yule tree in the centre of the shop. I immediately felt at home and found myself inexplicably straightening the bookshelves as I was browsing. I'm sure I'll be back.

February 2010, Covent Garden

It's raining, the shop has been empty most of the day. A young man walks into the shop, dressed in all black with a slightly awkward bearing. He has that look when he sees me that says he's surprised to see a girl working in a shop like this. He (predictably) makes his way over the chaos magic and Crowley books for a good long browse. I tried to catch his eye to ask if he needed any help, but he seemed to be actively avoiding talking to me.

Eventually he does come to the till though, asks 'Do you have the book of ... uh...' His face has changed to that slight panic one gets when they've just realised they are about to say a word that they've only read before. 'Do you have the book of Yog.. . Yog..'

'The book of Yog-Sothoth?' I ask, trying to sound helpful and disarming.

He nods

'Yes, we keep it downstairs'

His eyes go big and round. He's probably imagining it's chained up for safety, which in a way it is, but predominantly against shop lifters.

I get the book, he pays and goes out without attempting to speak again.

October 2010

Christina has been teaching a course on western occultism, so I've been staying in the shop late to read medieval grimoires. My head is full of circles, sigils, daemon summoning, and all the poor dead songbirds (seriously, what did medieval magicians have against small birds).

Now I've been ill the last few days, and last night I thought I'd try remedy from the Turkish witch I lived with last year, which involves drinking a strong preparation linden, boiled until it turns blood red. I spent the night sweating, and somewhere between lucid dream and hallucination. I see myself in robes with a summoning circle, calling some great daemon which proceeds to escape my control. The energy in the house feels strange when I wake. Is it possible to summon something in your sleep?

November 2010

Very early start because some ceremonial magicians are hiring the room. The shops been struggling. I'm not sure if I'll have a job in a few months' time. AB came in recently and was telling me about a hoodoo shop that she used to walk by in the mornings, timing her walk to coincide when they were tipping their magical floor wash onto the street. I ask her about how the floor wash is made, and she explains in brief so I think I'll give it a try.

I've added to it herbs and oils of Jupiter of prosperity, of mercury for swiftness and commerce, and yarrow for protection. I sing a chant* while I wash the floors, that the shop will thrive to give a place of community to all that it means so much to. And another that it will financially hold those who work here so we can keep it going without struggling. And another chant to dispel any ill will or threat against us.

The first customer comments on how peaceful it feels here and how nice it smells. They buy a few books and go. Not a bad start to the morning.

March 2011

I was at the till, teaching someone to make a Rowan cross for protection. They asked how to identify a Rowan tree. In Covent Garden we would send people down the street a little way to the one that grows behind the market and I suddenly realized I didn't know where to send them. After work I went walking and just a little way down the Store Street is not one, but a little row of rowans. They are beautiful and feel at once powerful and peaceful. One is so tall I had to spend a bit of time making sure it wasn't an ash.

I think this will be a good home for us.

June 2011

A little old lady came into the shop today. She looked so sweet with a wicker basket covered over in white fur. Then she showed me what was in the basket.

There were a few fox skulls, one painted in some kind of ceremonial fashion which she assures me she found as road kill, but mostly what she called her 'aliens'—eerie little things cobbled together out of muskrat skulls. They look as if they might take off and fly around the shop if not watched carefully enough. She also went into some detail about how she kindly and lovingly raises and slaughters her own rabbits for food, and fur. I didn't tell her that I'm a vegetarian.

We bought them all.

October 2011

The downstairs room was being hired out this weekend for a Shamanism/Santeria workshop, with the facilitator coming in from Amsterdam for it. I just barely made it in before him, and only had time to run the Hoover over the carpet before he arrived. After the first session ended, he asked who had been using the space before him. He's not happy with it.

'Oh. The chaos magicians. Is it the toilet? I'm sorry. They keep flushing their spell remnants down, instead of giving them to the Thames like everyone else. . . It blocks the toilet.'

'It's not the toilet.'

'Have they left something?'

'In a way.'



He explains that when he got in the energy of the room was still ringing with the ritual from the night before. He spent some time clearing the space, but would have expected me to have done that, for the sake of psychic hygiene. I'm a little ashamed that I'm not really sure how I should do this, but he's kind and shows me how he clears a space.

I've since spent some time devising a clearing ritual using incense and the druid call to peace, which I try before I next work down there. It works.

June 2012

I'm on the shop floor with D when two Russian women and a quiet young man come into the shop. They are clearly witchy, and something seems odd about them. They ask me if I believe in love magic. I go for a green candle and start with my usual caution that it's best to only do spells to attract love into your life, rather than a specific person, as that would be a breach of their free will and not ethical. One of them takes the young man out of earshot and tells us conspiratorially that they have performed a love spell to bind the young man, who they use for his wealth. D and I are both aghast and I try and tell her this is not a good

thing to do, but she's clearly not going to listen. D goes downstairs.

I feel I should say something to him but I doubt he'll believe me, and they are making sure he doesn't have a chance to speak to me. They are in the shop for a while, and true to their word they pick out several expensive items which he pays for without a word. D has come back up at some point but keeps away from them. When they finally go, so informs me she's broken their spell and his free will return to him. Perhaps he will choose freely to love and support them. Then again...

September 2012

Sunday again. No customers, again. Apparently occultists don't get out of the house before 3 on a Sunday

CW was telling me recently about *Pneuma*, an ancient Greek word for breath of life/spirit, but also the act of giving breath in the form of voice to words and spells. I think the books may enjoy in. I've picking them off the shelves and reading the books to the books. I tried a few from the Greek magical papyri but there are too many curses in that—probably best to avoid giving those a voice in here. Moved on to a folk song in Scots, which was surprisingly understandable to me when read aloud—some things about a man that turns into a (seal) when he's away from land who's gotten a Norwegian girl pregnant.

July 2013

Pendulum dowsing is really annoying. I don't like the new crystal pendulums we got in, they feel impersonal and overly computerised, but SC taught me how to use one anyway. People ask how they work, so I demonstrate them how to hold it, and ask it a few yes or no questions to get a baseline (is the sky blue, is it raining outside, is one plus one three). Different ones give different motions for yes and



no—one makes circles for yes, vertical lines for no, another makes a vertical line for yes, horizontal for no—but when I revisit them they are annoyingly consistent. Maybe it's how they are weighted. While I'm still holding it I will get the person to ask me questions and the bloody things respond really well. I'm sure it's my subconscious moving my hand, but I really and trying not to.

A customer today was dead convinced I'm psychic. I tried to convince him otherwise and explained the subconscious movement thing. He was having none of it. Awkward.

March 2014

We've taken a book stall up to the Cambridge for a conference called *Visions of Enchantment: Occultism, Spirituality & Visual Culture*. This feels like a turning point. The study of western esotericism and the occult have been so overlooked (silenced? stigmatised?) by the world of academia, but I've met so many scholars at Treadwell's who want to change this. Livia and I took turns staffing the book stall and going to lectures. There's a buzz and I catch

snatched of conversation on art, philosophy, and spiritual development.

Christina seems at her best talking to academics, in the world where people can see western occultism as worth serious study rather than some fluffy fantasy. It's time for that old stigma to fade, and in the last few days it feels like it's happening.

May 2014

Book launch last night was fantastic. So many authors, occultists, magicians, pagans, witches, students and seekers. Where else can you see a man in a tweed jacket pleasantly conversing with a statuesque woman with shining black daemon horns? And even better—she's the academic. Christina and Livia are both brilliant with conversation at these things. I think I'm at my best and happiest making sure things run smoothly, books get sold, wine glasses are full, and spilled or broken ones go unnoticed. I did manage some interesting chats too though after it calmed down a bit, but mostly just happy to be a part of making this space for these people.

October 2014

I can't believe I'm leaving. I don't feel done here. I think find my way back.

Kate Templar

My time at Treadwell's, reading and teaching Tarot and Wiccan Workshops was among the most valuable in my life. In the 17 years I have worked at the shop and later, online, I was gifted with the delight of meeting the most interesting and diverse people in the Occult and Pagan world. From well known authors to curators of museums, artists and activists, practitioners and academics, musicians and magicians all in one magical bookshop in the heart of Bloomsbury, the literary centre of London.

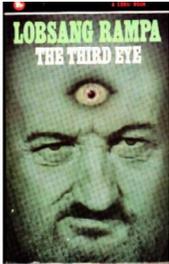
Like many, I had read about different religions, magical traditions and practices, ancient cultures and subcultures yet here, within a welcoming and open minded environment, we were able to exchange views, share practices, learn about different traditions first hand and join in during workshops and ask questions in person at lectures. One day, I might be reading for a Chancellor of a University and in the evening I could attend a lecture by a leading Alchemist. At the weekend I could join in a Workshop by leading experts in their fields, teaching their practice in small groups. My knowledge and practice grew apace and was a learning curve that I could never have imagined.

Treadwell's is a place like no other. For over twenty years now, such people have been passing through their doors, some staying for tea and chat, others dipping into lectures online, some learning through workshops but either way, we are all blessed with a place where those of us, often considered a little strange or out of the ordinary, can find like minded souls, engage with practitioners and experts we might only ever have read about and learn about our Craft in a place that feels like an esoteric home. I will be forever grateful for its place in my life.

Suzanne Corbie

The Fantastic World of Lobsang Rampa

In 1956 came the first British publication of a book called *The Third Eye*—described in glowing terms by the *Times Literary Supplement* as “becoming a near work of art” whilst *The Observer* called it “an extraordinary and exciting book.”



The Third Eye was the autobiography of one Tuesday Lobsang Rampa. He was the son of a leading member of the Dalai Lama’s government and lived in a well-to-do home in Lhasa. At the age of seven, astrologers predicted the boy’s future—that he would enter a monastery, train as a priest-surgeon, suffer great hardships, leave Tibet, and live amongst strange peoples. Tuesday thus joined a lamasery, and in due course proved to be an exemplary student and was selected to receive the most esoteric teachings. On the boy’s eighth birthday, priest-surgeons drilled a hole in his skull, in order to create a “third eye” which would allow him to see auras. After recovering from the operation, Tuesday was interviewed by the Dalai Lama, who had investigated the boy’s past lives, and reminded him of the role he would soon play in preserving the wisdom of Tibet.

At the age of twelve, Tuesday took the examination to qualify as a medical priest. This involved being sealed inside a stone cubicle, into which was passed written questions, which required written responses. The tests lasted for fourteen hours a day and lasted for six days. After passing the exams with flying colours, Tuesday accompanied his tutor, the great Lama Mingyar Dondup, on an expedition to collect medical plants and herbs. During this expedition, they visited a monastery where the monks build box kites that are large enough for a person to fly in.

Tuesday made several flights and also made suggestions for the improvement of their design. On another expedition, Tuesday and his teacher encountered the Yeti and found a garden of Eden-like paradise in a lost valley. At the age of sixteen, he is examined once again, and achieved the rank of Lama.

The book closes with Tuesday receiving the rank of Abbot—undergoing “the Ceremony of the Little Death”—and departing Tibet for China, on the instructions of the Dalai Lama.

Publishing The Third Eye

The manuscript of *The Third Eye* was first given to several publishers, such as Robert Hale & Collins—who rejected it out of hand. The Publishing Company E. P. Dutton, based in New York sent it to Hugh Richardson, a former officer-in-charge of the British Mission to Tibet, who had lived there for nine years. Richardson returned the manuscript with many corrections and offered the opinion that the book was a fake, using existing published works as a basis and “embellished by a fertile imagination”. Dutton rejected the book on Richardson’s recommendation.

The manuscript was then sent to Secker and Warburg. The story goes that the author met Frederick Warburg and impressed him by reading his palm and correctly divining his age and that he had been recently involved in a criminal case. Warburg obtained a copy of Richardson’s report on the manuscript and further, sent copies to a battery of authorities on Tibet, including the mountaineers Heinrich Harrer and Marco Pallis, and respected scholars such as David Snellgrove and Agehananda Bharati. All declared unequivocally that the book was fraudulent.

In the preface to the first edition of *The Third Eye*, the publishers acknowledged the reservations of the expert readers but noted that:

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

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

The Scholars Fight back

The popularity of *The Third Eye* drew an outraged response from the scholars who had given their testimony to the publishers. David Snellgrove described the book as “shameless”. Marco Pallis stated that it was “a wild fabrication and a libel on both Tibet and its religion. Heinrich Harrer’s review was so scathing that the book’s German publisher threatened him with a libel suit. Hugh Richardson published a critical review in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post* in November 1956, declaring that “anyone who has lived in Tibet will feel after reading a few pages of “*The Third Eye*” that its author, T. Lobsang Rama, is certainly not a Tibetan...”

In 1958, Marco Pallis, acting on behalf of a group of European scholars of Tibet, engaged the services of Clifford Burgess, a private detective, to discover the “true identity” of the author of *The Third Eye*. After a month of investigation, Burgess revealed that the author was one Cyril Henry

Hoskin, born in Plympton, Devonshire in 1910. His father was a plumber, and he was considered by those who knew him as “an odd child”. He later worked for a surgical goods manufacturing company and as a clerk for a London company who offered education via correspondence courses. Burgess reported that during this period, Hoskin became increasingly “peculiar”—calling himself Kuan-Suo, shaving the hair from his head, and taking his cat out on a lead for walks. He then appeared in Bayswater in 1954, calling himself Dr. Kuan-Suo. Burgess stated that until he moved to Dublin there was no evidence that Hoskin had ever left the UK.

Exposure and response

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

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

When *The Third Eye* was reprinted, it contained a statement from the author which began: “In the East it is commonly acknowledged that a stronger mind can take possession of another body...”. He went on to explain that, late in 1947, Cyril Hoskin began to experience an irresistible compulsion to adopt eastern ways of living. He changed his name to Carl Ku’an, left his job, and moved to a “remote location” where he experienced hallucinations and his own memories were gradually supplanted by those of an “eastern entity”. In 1949 he sustained a concussion falling out of a tree, and after this had no memory of his own early life but gained the full memory—from babyhood—of a Tibetan. He claimed that he had papers which proved his identity, but that he had sent them away again so that they would not be “sullied” by those who doubted him. In response to the opinions of the “experts” he responded that no two of them had been able to agree on any particular fault, and in any case, none of them had lived in Tibet as a lama—or entered a monastery at the age of seven “as I have done”. In closing, he states that there is a great deal of Theosophical literature on the subject of possession and that his publishers have a letter from a swami in India stating that possession is quite common in the East.

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

But that was not the end of the story. Undeterred by the critics, two other books quickly followed *The Third Eye*. *Doctor from Lhasa*, published in 1959, picks up the story of Lobsang Rampa in China, beginning in 1927. His many

adventures include being recruited into a special corps of medical airmen in the army of Chiang Kai-shek; flying an air ambulance during China's war with Japan; being caught by the Japanese (twice!), and tortured—although his training as a Lama allows him to resist this. He also enrolls in a medical college where he astounds his instructors by sketching a magnetic field, as seen through his third eye. He hopes, by combining his knowledge of Chinese and Occidental medicine, to reproduce a machine he once saw in the ruins of a prehistoric city in a hidden valley in the Chang Thang—a device for reading auras and predicting the onset of disease or mental problems.

The Rampa Story (1960) opens in Tibet, where the High Lamas have discovered, through astral exploration, a secret network of caves, which they are using to prevent their most sacred artefacts from falling into the hands of the communists. The Abbots, having known of the impending Chinese invasion through their clairvoyant powers, have been secretly preparing this for years. By now, Rampa himself is living in Canada. The Lamas contact him telepathically and give him the task of writing a book explaining how one person can take over the body of another—with the latter person's full consent. The book recounts that Rampa, after drifting across the Sea of Japan (which was where Doctor from Lhasa ended), found himself in Russia. He is drafted into the Russian army but later arrested by the security police and tortured in Lubianka prison. He is released and is deported to Poland, but on the way the truck he is travelling in crashes and Rampa is badly injured. Whilst in hospital, he travels to the "world of golden light" in his astral body, where he meets his former teacher, who has been murdered by the communists, and Sha-lu, a talking cat. The thirteenth Dalai Lama meets him also and urges him to return to earth and continue his work. The problem is that Rampa's body is in no fit state. The Dalai Lama tells Rampa that a body has been located for him in England, and that the present owner's aura has the same "harmonic" as Rampa's. He is warned however, that if he

returns to Earth, he will face disbelief, hatred and hardship, which is due to the force of evil which tries to prevent human evolution.

Further adventures take Rampa across Europe to America, and then to India, where with the help of an old Lama he makes an astral journey to the Akashic Records in order to investigate the past of lives of the man whose body he is to inhabit. He meets this man on the astral plane, and he agrees to allow Rampa to inhabit his body. A month later, Rampa visits the man astrally again, and instructing him to fall out of a tree, Rampa and three fellow Lama's sever the silver cord attaching the man to his body and attach Rampa's silver cord to the body. He does a variety of jobs in England, and eventually writes *The Third Eye*. After the completion of the book he has a heart attack and moves to Ireland—an island which was once part of Atlantis. His old teacher contacts him again once more and directs him to move to “the land of the Red Indians” where he has a final task to accomplish. The Rampa Story ends with the prediction of a Chinese nuclear attack launched from Lhasa.

Sixteen other books followed this initial trilogy, including *Living with the Lama*, which was written by (Mrs.) Fifi Greywhiskers, one of the Lama's cats. It has been estimated that overall sales of the Lobsang Rampa series have topped four million copies worldwide by the time of Rampa's death in 1981. The Lobsang Rampa books remain in print to this day and there are several websites and internet forums devoted to the discussion and circulation of his ideas.

Rampa as a ‘Mystifier’

The scholar Donald Lopez characterises Rampa as one of the great “mystifiers” of Tibet—in the sense that he “mystified Tibet, embellishing its various realities with his own mystical fancies” and that “he mystified his readers, playing on the credulity of the reading public”. Agehananda

Bharati, never one to mince words, writing in the Tibet Society Bulletin (vol.7, 1974) takes a similar stance:

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

Most of the critical scholarship on Lobsang Rampa deals with him largely in relation to western idealisations of Tibet, placing him alongside other “mystifiers” such as Madame Blavatsky . Lopez, for example, in his book, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, recounts how he gave *The Third Eye* to a group of his first year undergraduate students—telling them to read it, without giving any clues to its provenance. The students, Lopez says, were “unanimous” in their praise for the book, finding it “entirely credible and compelling.” Lopez poses the question of just why Lobsang Rampa’s books have been so popular—despite the opprobrium of scholars and frames his answer in a discussion of authority. Lobsang Rampa’s initial authority rested in him being accepted as a Lama by his readers. Lopez says that once Rampa was revealed to be Hoskin, his authority would have waned, were it not for the fact that, *Doctor from Lhasa* and *The Rampa Story* show how Hoskin has become Rampa. Lopez points out that by the time Rampa released *The Hermit* (1971) he simply states that his books are True and that “Some people who are bogged down in

materialism may prefer to think of it as fiction” to which Rampa adds: “believe or disbelieve according to your state of evolution.”

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

Rampa as a ‘Demystifier?’

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

specific texts. Only occasionally does he recommend other books to his readers.

Rampa also gives his views on a diverse range of esoteric subjects, much of which seems to be in response to letters he has received. He does not approve of fortune telling, absent healing or meditation in groups, which should be avoided, as it can lead to nervous illnesses due to contamination from other—untrained people's—thought-vibrations. In fact, he recommends that his readers avoid cults or esoteric groups of any kind. Astrology he asserts, is genuine, but most of the people who advertise themselves as astrologers are fakes. Similarly, spirit guides and mediums are the target of Rampa's scorn—he wryly comments in *Feeding the Flame* that “if everyone who claimed to have an Indian guide or a Tibetan guide was listed, there just wouldn't be enough Indians or enough Tibetans to go round” In *The Saffron Robe*, Rampa is told by one of his teachers “not to bother with yoga” and that it is “just a physical exercise, nothing more. Nothing spiritual.”

Rampa is also rather dismissive of scientists and “experts”. In a rare interview from 1958, he says:

“One should not place too much credence in 'experts' or 'Tibetan scholars' when it is seen how one 'expert' contradicts the other when they cannot agree on what is right and what is wrong...”

In *Chapters of Life* he states that scientists have little or no imagination, and that the investigation of subjects such as the world of anti-matter should be reserved for occultists, as

“...the competent occultist can leave the body and get out of the body, and out of the Earth as well, and once out of the Earth he can see what this other world is like—as I have done so very, very frequently.” He reveals that it is the anti-matter world which is responsible for phenomena

such as the Bermuda Triangle, or the mysterious loss of Flight 19.

Tradition/Modernity

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

When not recounting his autobiographical adventures in Tibet or elsewhere, or explaining various occult matters, Rampa comments freely on the state of the world and what has gone wrong with modern society. Hence we discover that young people of today are "dimmer" than their parents, and he directs particular scorn for those with "long hair ... and scruffy, tattered, rags of clothing." He blames the state of young people today on television, cinema, and both parents (particularly women) going out to work. He is irrevocably opposed to drugs such as LSD as they can damage the astral body irreparably. Also, Rampa makes it abundantly clear (in *I Believe*) that he has no time for so-called "Women's Libbers"—who are not really "women". He opines that the rot started in the First World War, when women went to work in factories. Women should stay at home and be wives and mothers—as Nature intended. He recounts that in the Akashic Records there is evidence of a long-vanished civilisation of people "who wore purple skins" which became dominated by women. Men were

treated as slaves, or virile studs for the sole purpose of making babies. This matriarchy was “unbalanced” and so ended. In *Three Lives*, the “Old Author” (Rampa) recounts a dream in which a young woman, killed in an accident, finds out that because she is a “Women’s Libber” she (like media people) is destined for the “hellish regions.” Hell, in this narrative, has special “stockades” reserved for publishers, agents, members of the press, old Etonians and Women’s Liberationists.

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

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

Sheelagh Rouse, in her book *Twenty-five Years with Lobsang Rampa* explains that in pursuit of his research in Auric photography in Ireland, Rampa held that the female aura was “brighter” than the male—stronger colours—and

it was necessary to find female models who were willing to pose nude.

Rampa on homosexuality

Rampa uses characters to flesh out—and give veracity to his opinions. In *The Thirteenth Candle*, for example, his views on male & female homosexuality are verified through the device of vignette “slices of life” from two sets of characters: Lotta Bull (“the epitome of the masculine woman”) and her lover, Rosie Hipp (“all feminine, fluff, and froth with hardly a thought in her vapid, blonde head”); also Dennis Dollywogga and Justin Towne—who writes a letter to letter to Rampa objecting to his remarks on the causation of homosexuality in his previous book *Feeding the Flame*, in which he states:

“Being born is a traumatic experience, it’s a most violent affair, and a very delicate mechanism can easily become deranged. For example, a baby is about to be born and throughout the pregnancy the mother has been rather careless about what she was eating and what she was doing, so the baby has not received what one might term a balanced chemical input. The baby may be short of a chemical and so development of certain glands may have been halted. Let us say the baby was going to come as a girl, but through lack of certain chemicals, the baby is actually born a boy, a boy with the inclinations of a girl. The parents might realize that they’ve got a sissified little wretch and put it down to over-indulgence or something, they may try to beat some sense into him one end or the other to make him more manly, but it doesn’t work; if the glands are wrong, never mind what sort of attachments are stuck on in front, the boy is still a girl in a boy’s body.

If a woman has a male psyche, then she will not be interested in men but will be interested in women, because her psyche, which is closer to the Overself than is the physical body, is relaying confusing messages to the Overself and the

Overself sends back a sort of command, Get busy, do your stuff.' The poor wretched male psyche is obviously repelled by the thought of 'doing his stuff' with a man, and so all the interest is centred on a female, so you get the spectacle of a female making love to a female and that's what we call a lesbian because of a certain island off Greece where that used to be 'the done thing'.

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

To which "Justin Towne" replies:

"Most homos are not the little pansies you see on the street, they are not the ones the psychiatrists and doctors write about because those are the emotionally disturbed ones. 'Being an adventurer I have worked in cities, farms, some radio work, etc., etc., and I know homos in all fields who are as normal as "blue-berry pie" so to speak. So, they can be very masculine, they can think and act like men and do NOT think and act like women or have any of the feminine characteristics which so many heterosexuals seem to think they do.

I wanted to stress TO the homo, what an important part he could play in this world, if he'd get off his behind and quit feeling sorry for himself. I don't believe in things like this "Gay Liberation" thing where like all youngsters today they think they have to make a big issue of it, but merely go along and do one's own job well, with the tools they have (Being their own talents etc.)."

Romancing Tibet—The Third Eye as travelogue

Cyril Hoskin/Lobsang Rampa was not the first case of an author becoming his literary personality. One might think of notables such as T.E. Lawrence or Richard Burton assuming the disguise of the native, or indeed Alexandra David-Neel disguising herself as a Tibetan in order to explore the forbidden kingdom. There is also “Grey Owl”—Archibald Bellaney—who was a best-selling author and public lecturer in the 1930s (now hailed as one of the founders of the conservation movement), exposed, after his death as an Englishman, rather than a Native American.

When Rampa’s narrative turns to his life in Tibet, he is clearly drawing on what we would now recognise as cultural primitivist assumptions about the exotic nature of Tibetan culture—stereotypes existing in European popular culture, drawn from the writings of Theosophists such as Madame Blavatsky and Alice Bailey, and James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*—although Rampa always claimed that he had never read any Theosophical works.

The Third Eye paints a rather idealistic picture of Tibet as an idyllic utopia, untouched but cautiously aware of the materialism and progress of the west. Tibetans do not have wheels for example, because wheels represent speed, and “so-called civilisation”. Similarly, in *Doctor from Lhasa*, Rampa recounts with amazement his first encounter with a “spring bed”; running tap water, people smoking, and later, an aeroplane, which he first believes is “one of the sky-gods”.

Donald Lopez’s comments regarding scholars taking an interest in Tibet due to their reading of Rampa’s books is interesting. In researching this lecture, and trawling internet search engines in search of how Rampa is treated on the worldwide web, I found several instances of Tibetan aid foundations and organisations where members stated that their interest in Tibet had been sparked by reading

the Rampa books. In addition, I found that several of the large Rampa “fan sites” also had information about current events in Tibet and carried links to sites such as Tibet Online and the UK-based Tibet Foundation.

The Third Eye was written after the Chinese invasion of Tibet, but before the 1959 Uprising and the subsequent diaspora of Tibetan religious leaders to India and the West. To some degree, one might argue that the popularity of Rampa's works, and the late-1950s controversy around it, heightened public interest in, and the desire to access, Tibetan Buddhism. It could also be argued that Lobsang Rampa also provided a window into events in occupied Tibet. Although Rampa does portray a romanticised picture of life in Tibet, he at least does not depoliticise the country's history—*The Third Eye* mentions both the 1904 Younghusband expedition and the Chinese military attempt to control Lhasa in 1910. *The Rampa Story* contains some retellings of astral visions of Chinese brutality against ordinary Tibetans and executions of monks, and recounts stories of nuns being raped and burned alive. However, I have been unable to find any reference to the Tibetan resistance movements or the 1959 Uprising in his books.

In *Feeding the Flame*, Rampa opens chapter three of the book with an account of what life in Lhasa is like under the “terror” of the Chinese. He describes the “genocide” being practised upon the Tibetan people by the Chinese. However, he also takes this opportunity to express his dissatisfaction with the Tibetan government-in-exile. He had hoped to “speak as a representative of Tibet before the United Nations” but he feels that “high-ranking” Tibetans, now “living in comfort in India” are afraid to support him, because of the way he has been portrayed by the press. In *As It Was* there is a long section dealing with “predictions” made about Rampa's life by the “Chief Astrologer” which at one point extols Rampa's own skill at predictions, which include:

“He had made the prediction that there would be no real Dalai Lama after the Thirteenth had gone to the state of transition; there would be another but he would have been selected as a matter of political expediency in an attempt to assuage the territorial ambitions of the Chinese.” The Chief Astrologer says (of Rampa): “It will be considered to the benefit of a people as a whole that he be disowned, that he be not supported by those who should support him, by those who could support him, and I say again that these are probabilities because it is quite possible for our own people to support him and give him an opportunity to speak before the nations of the world, so that first, Tibet may be saved...”

It appears that the apparent refusal of the Tibetan government in exile to recognise Rampa as a spokesman for Tibet rankled deeply. *In As It Was* he comments that “it is mainly the *lower orders* (my italics) of refugees who seem to be opposed to me.” He also claims to have a letter saying that the Dalai Lama is praying daily for his health.

His followers sometimes claim that the present Dalai Lama’s “public denial” of knowing Lobsang Rampa is a sham, because he is “playing the political field, prostituting (sic) his religion trying to appease too many people who wouldn’t support him if he did”.

The UFO connection

Lobsang Rampa also had an influence on the UFO scene. In 1966 there appeared *My Visit to Venus*—an “unauthorised” anthology of Rampa’s early writings from the mid-1950s published by Gray Barker, author of *They Knew Too Much about Flying Saucers* (1956) and now recognised as the person responsible for introducing the “men in black” component to UFO folklore. Rampa gave Barker “permission” to continue to publish the book, provided he made some minor alterations to the manuscript, and send 10% of his profits to the “Save a Cat League” of New York. The second edition of *Venus* also contained a foreword from

John Keel. In *Venus*, Rampa recounts how he and six fellow lamas encounter a race of giant, telepathic humanoids in a lost city, which they discover, half-frozen in a glacier. These humanoids, it transpires, have been overseeing the development of humanity, and they take Rampa and his fellows to Venus, where they experience so many wonders that Earth seems a tawdry, drab place, in comparison.

UFO-related themes continue in Rampa's books throughout the 1960s. There are, for example, "the Gardeners", a race of aliens who colonised earth billions of years ago, and who periodically come back to check on humanity's progress. The Gardeners 'seeded' Earth with the human race, and although they are largely benign, they do occasionally abduct people and experiment on them in order to "improve the race". Humanity regarded them as "gods from the sky." There are also a race of advanced beings who live inside the earth, but who sometimes explore the surface using advanced technology, and inter-dimensional entities which can only be perceived (by humans) as patterns of lights. Also, in *The Hermit*, as Rampa recounts what we would now recognise as a 'classic' abduction experience, complete with telepathic interchanges and bizarre experiments performed on him, there is a description of the now-familiar grey alien:

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

Rampa's books have undoubtedly influenced contemporary 'alternative science'—themes relating to lost

technologies, underground cities, “lost lands” such as Lemuria & Ultima Thule; and “time capsules” as well as ‘conspiracies’ to suppress or guard against secret wisdom becoming common knowledge are all featured in his books. Whilst some of these themes may not have originated with Rampa, he certainly helped popularise them, years before the publication of Von Daniken’s *Chariots of the Gods* and later works. Indeed, the work of contemporary “alternative science” authors such as Graham Hancock is seen by adherents of Lobsang Rampa as validation and proof of his ideas.

Some final thoughts

Lobsang Rampa is often written off as a fraud, whilst those who follow his teachings believe him to be the psychically-adept Lama of his books, the ‘truth’ of whose writings has been suppressed by various forces—such as the current Dalai Lama, various governments, the scientific establishment, or western “occult secret societies” who didn’t like the secrets Rampa was revealing. The impression I have of Rampa—from reading his books, and the testimonies of those who knew him—is that he genuinely believed that he was who he said he was—or rather, that he was “host” for the spirit of Lobsang Rampa. Sheelagh Rouse describes how that the body originally owned by Hoskin, was over time, completely replaced Rampa’s body—and explains that Rampa suffered from the tortures he had received at the hands of the Japanese. Her picture of Rampa is of a spiritual adept, disinterested in having followers and disciples and somewhat reclusive, due to the persecution of the press and critics, yet willing to help the people who wrote to him with their problems and questions.

Rampa’s works stand at the dawn of the 1960s, when Western fascination with Tibet, ‘Eastern mysticism’ and other forms of esoteric wisdom took on new heights of popularity. It is rather ironic that Rampa’s first book, *The*

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

"Occultism is no more mysterious or complicated than the multiplication tables or an excursion into history. It is just learning of different things, learning of things which are not of the physical. We should not go into raptures if we suddenly discovered how a nerve worked a muscle or how we could twitch a big toe, they would be just ordinary physical matters. So why should we go into raptures and think that the spirits are sitting all around us if we know how we can pass etheric energy from one person to another? Please note that we say here "etheric energy" which is good English instead of "prana" or any other Eastern terms; we prefer when writing a Course in a language to adhere to that language."

All the reader has to do is follow Rampa's guidance—and believe that the exercises he recommends will work—and he or she too, will be able to begin to access the abilities that Rampa displays in his books. Rampa's books also appeal to readers who are suspicious of authorities—'experts' (such as scientists, or occultists) often draw Rampa's disdain. He uses his cast of characters not only to illustrate his world-view (and demonise the targets of his ire, such as Women's Libbers and members of the Upper Class) but also to provide 'independent' assertions within the text that he is a sympathetic listener and can be helpful to those who feel at odds with their position in society. The

interchange in *The Thirteenth Candle* between Lotta Bull and Rosie Hipp establishes that Rampa's opinions about homosexuality have helped Rosie understand herself—prompting Lotta to ask “Is he ... ONE OF US—Homo?” Which of course, Rampa isn't, yet is deemed capable of offering useful advice.

Rampa's books also act to provide readers with a 'privileged access' to Tibet (and other countries). His is not the world of the ordinary Tibetan, but the special insight of a superhuman elite—he repeatedly uncovers an aspect of Tibetan wisdom which is inaccessible to ordinary people or so-called 'experts'; a Tibet that makes explicit the romantic imagination of an exotic, yet ultimately familiar locale. At times, Rampa's autobiographical adventures in different parts of the world take on epic proportions; he could be likened to James Bond in his ability to move around the world freely, fighting the various forces of evil (such as the Japanese and the Chinese) and deploying special abilities and technologies. Like Bond, Rampa's adventures are set against the backdrop of the Cold War; both visit exotic locations and uncover secret schemes and technologies. Both belong to an elite class which grants them privileged access to secrets and intrigues. But whilst Bond's touristic adventures are set within exotic locations such as the Caribbean and the Mediterranean, Rampa provides a tourist gaze into spiritual geographies—hidden Tibet, the Akashic Records, other worlds. Places which are inaccessible to ordinary travellers—perhaps all too conveniently so.

Given the scope and breadth of Rampa's adventures in various parts of the world, his eventual arrival in postwar Britain—into the body formerly occupied by Cyril Hoskin—is something of an anti-climax. The writing of *The Third Eye* seems to have been a 'last option' for the transmigrated Rampa, as his adventures in England are rather less exciting than fighting, flying aircraft and performing medical miracles; they are mostly concerned with his

attempts to secure employment and his problems with the Labour Exchange. Rampa the international adventurer is replaced by Rampa the reclusive author and teacher.

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

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This essay also appears in *Hine's Varieties: Chaos & Beyond*, Original Falcon Press, 2018. It began though, as a Treadwell's lecture in 2008.

Phil Hine

Treadwell's – My Magical Home

I walk into Treadwell's and I've come home. I'm home among books full of esoteric wisdom and knowledge. I know I can browse in peace, although I'm sure a tome or two will entice me to buy. But Treadwell's is far more than just a bookshop. I know I can come here to find like-minded people at talks and workshops. I can socialise at soirées attended by London's magical community. I'm at home in a centre of mystical learning in the heart of London, but I'm also at home in a place I feel welcomed, safe, and supported.

Treadwell's was there for me when I was returning to the path of witchcraft after a lapse of many years, and wanted to renew and update my expertise. I knew I could confidently ask the shop's founder and guiding spirit, Dr Christina Oakley-Harrington, for recommendations of books to help me on my way. Later, when I started posting on *A Bad Witch's Blog* about the day-to-day life of a London witch, everyone at Treadwell's encouraged me.

When I decided to write my first *Pagan Portals* book, on candle magic, I found plenty of research material on Treadwell's shelves. When it was published, Christina hosted the launch event, and also invited me to run classes on the topic. I'll admit I was nervous to go from being a student attending classes in the wonderful space below the main shop, to being a teacher. I needn't have worried. The charm of Treadwell's meant everything went well.

Christina also encouraged me to write more books, and bolstered my confidence when I needed it—because all authors sometimes feel stuck, and need to be told they can finish what they've started.

I feel so lucky to live in a city with a place like Treadwell's. To anyone who lives in London or visits and has an interest in the esoteric, I would say: make time to pop in to the



magical shop at 33 Store Street, Bloomsbury, a short walk from the British Museum. You will feel you've come home too.

Lucya Starza

Origins of Writing: Magic or Accountancy?

Introduction

It is striking to note that myths from many of the ancient world's cultures ascribe a divine or supernatural origin to the art of writing. Thus, Nisaba, the Sumerian goddess, was patroness of scribes and writing, as was the Babylonian Nabu. According to another Sumerian myth, *Inanna and Enki: the Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Erech* (translated by Kramer, 1972, pp.64-65), it is the god Enki who gave the arts of woodworking, metalworking and writing, (together with many other skills necessary for civilization) to the goddess Inanna, and thence to humankind. The Egyptian Thoth was said to be the inventor of writing, and the Egyptian word for 'writing' (*m.d.w-n.t.r*) may be translated as "the speech of the gods". According to the Norse tradition, Odin hung on the world tree Yggdrasil for nine days, and by this ordeal was granted the secret of the runes, which he then gave to humankind. The Irish deity Ogma is associated with the invention of writing, the Ogham alphabet being named after him. The mythical Chinese god-king Fu Xi is credited with the invention of writing, as is Brahma, who, in the Hindu tradition, is said to have given the secret of writing to humankind. Gelb (1952, p.252) noted: "Everywhere, in the East as well as in the West, the origin of writing is ascribed to a divinity."

This article will seek to demonstrate that, whilst the origins of the Sumerian writing system are closely connected to an emergent trade economy (and thence the need for a written method of accounting), there may have been alternative driving forces—namely, magico-religious imperatives—which led to the development of other ancient writing systems. Early Chinese ('oracle-bone') scripts, and

the 'Old European' script of the Balkan Vinča culture, will be examined.

To begin with, it would perhaps be as well to establish what is meant by 'writing'. Gelb (1952, p.11) differentiated between what he styled the "*semasiographic* stage of writing (expressing meanings and notions loosely connected with speech) and the *phonographic* stage (expressing speech)". He argued that general linguists, having defined writing as a method of recording spoken language by means of certain marks (whether they be on clay, stone, wood, paper etc), and seeing such a method as being a faithful representation of its spoken equivalent, were unable to appreciate the development of writing from its earliest stages. They failed to understand that such a definition could not be applied to writing at its very earliest stages, where the marks only loosely approximated the spoken language. Similarly, he criticized philologists, who (he claimed) believed that writing, even after the introduction of phonetization, was still used to record both *sounds and ideas*. In fact, Gelb claimed, once humankind had established a method of *exactly* recording spoken speech in a written form, writing then lost its independent character and became 'simply' a substitute for speech.

It follows from this that Gelb regarded certain ideographic systems (such as that of North American Indians) as not being 'proper' writing as such, if defined as a system which faithfully represents speech phonetically. He differentiated between what he calls 'primitive' writing systems and more sophisticated ones, by looking for a 'full phonetic system'. But the mere appearance of some sporadic phonetic elements (e.g. Yoruba cowrie shells) is not on its own evidence of a 'high level'. Neither is a system's sophistication and elaboration evidence on its own of its being 'true writing'. Gelb argued (1952, p.56) that whilst the Mayan and Aztec systems are on a 'higher level' than their North American counterparts, they were, nevertheless, not 'true writing', since they lacked the full phonetic element:

“The best proof that the Maya writing is not a phonetic system results from the plain fact that it is still undeciphered. This conclusion is inescapable if we remember the most important principle in the theory of decipherment: A phonetic writing can and ultimately must be deciphered if the underlying language is known.”

However, it should be noted that the Mayan languages are still spoken in the present day, and are therefore “known” languages. Furthermore, it is no longer the case (as it was in 1952) that the Mayan script remains undeciphered; the last 40 years have seen major breakthroughs, following, in particular, the academic conference *Mesa Redonda de Palenque*, held at the Mayan site of Palenque in 1973. It is now possible to read and understand the majority of Mayan writings. These successes were kick-started, ironically, by a work published in 1952, Yuri Knorozov’s *Ancient Writings of Central America*.

The general thesis of Knorozov’s paper was that early writing systems such as Egyptian hieroglyphs and Sumerian, hitherto believed to be predominantly logographic or even ideographic in nature, were in fact possessed of a significant phonetic component. The Mayan system is now known to be a logosyllabic one, that is, an individual glyph may represent either a word or a syllable. But it is the phonetic element which conforms to Gelb’s criteria of ‘true writing’.

Hooker (1990, p.6) restated the point that pictographs in themselves do not constitute writing as such: “Pictographs have no linguistic reference of any kind; they depict an event, or convey a message, by means of a series of drawings. Such a medium can hardly be called writing.” Nevertheless, he does appear to part company with Gelb, who drew a sharp distinction between what he termed ‘primitive’ and ‘complex’ systems. Hooker (ibid) wrote that “so-called ‘primitive’ societies using pictographs may be just as complex in their modes of thought as users of

other methods but it is a different order of complexity” and argued that pictograms were developed mainly amongst hunting or farming societies (e.g. North American Indians), whereas the ‘other methods’ tend to develop in urban societies with more advanced technologies (e.g. Sumer). Whether pictograms may be regarded as the precursors to writing proper, or whether logograms developed independently of pictograms is still a matter for debate. Hooker noted that the Egyptian (1st Dynasty; c. 3,100 BC) Narmer Palette features both. It is interesting to note that, in his research into the earliest writing of Mesopotamia (4th millennium BC: Uruk IV site), Falkenstein (1936) observed that purely pictographic signs were rarely employed; ideographic-abstract signs being far more common.

The earliest stages of the Sumerian system have been subjected to close scrutiny, and it is now generally accepted that—following Denise Schmandt-Besserat’s pioneering studies—the need for a means of accountancy was a determining factor in the origin of Mesopotamian written language.

Mesopotamian writing systems & Schmandt-Besserat

Schmandt-Besserat is strongly associated with the economic theory of writing origin, following her investigations into the clay tokens which are found in such profusion throughout the ancient Near East. Amiet (1966) had first proposed the idea that these tokens represented some form of recording system, but Schmandt-Besserat went on to develop and expand this theory. She described (1992, pp.7-8) finding these tokens, by chance, amongst:

“...Near Eastern archaeological clay collections dating from 8,000 to 6,000 BC stored in museums of the Near East, North Africa, Europe, and North America...[where] I...came across a category of artefacts that I did not expect—miniature cones, spheres, disks, tetrahedrons, cylinders, and other geometric shapes. The artefacts were made of clay...

some were in the shape of animals, vessels, tools and other commodities...I sensed that the tokens were part of a system because I repeatedly found small and large cones, thin and thick disks, small and large spheres, and even fractions of spheres, such as half and three-quarter spheres. But what were they for?"

She also examined a hollow clay 'tablet', dated to the second millennium BC, discovered at Nuzi, a site in northern Iraq, which bore a cuneiform inscription, reading:

- Counters representing small cattle: 21 ewes that lamb
- 6 female lambs
- 8 full-grown male sheep 4 male lambs
- 6 she-goats that kid 1 he-goat
- 3 female goats
- The seal of Ziqarru, the shepherd (Rudgley, 1998, p.50)

Upon further inspection, the object was not a tablet, but rather, a clay envelope that contained 49 clay counters. This sum corresponded to the total number of animals inventoried in the inscription on the outside. It then became clear to Schmandt-Besserat that this constituted some form of accounting system, and she connected the counters found inside the envelope with those tokens found in huge quantities all over the Middle East and Turkey. Over the next 15 years, she made this her main area of study, setting out a large body of supporting evidence for her theory that this system of accounting tokens was the precursor for both the earliest forms of writing (the Uruk archaic texts) and of a written numerical system.

She differentiated between two types of token, the first being those more simple forms, dating from c. 8,000 to 4,400-4,300 BC, which she termed *plain tokens*, nearly always composed of clay, between 1 and 5 centimetres wide, and forming geometric shapes such as spheres, cones, disks and so on. The second type, termed *complex tokens*, were of a later date, beginning to be created from 4,400 BC onwards.

The plain tokens were associated with commodities, so that the conical type of token represented a measure of grain, the *ban* (approximately a litre), and the sphere, a larger measure of grain, the *bariga* (approximately a bushel). Similarly, the cylinder represented a domestic animal, the tetrahedron, a unit of labour, and so on. The complex tokens she assigned to finished products as opposed to raw materials, so that incised cones, ovoids and rhomboid tokens represented bread, oil and beer respectively (Schmandt-Besserat, 1979).

Schmandt-Besserat saw these two types of device as leading to a duality in the subsequent writing system. Plain tokens were contained within a clay envelope, which was in turn impressed with tokens. This, she argued, evolved into a representation of the quantity of items being counted, i.e. numerals. Complex tokens were hung on string with an accompanying *bullā*, which was itself inscribed with a stylus (the incised nature of the complex tokens making them unsuitable to be impressed onto clay). The ensuing pictographs represented the *nature* or *quality* of the items being counted; these in turn, she argued, led to the development of phonetic signs. At some time around 3,500-3,100 BC, a further development occurred, whereby “the accountants realised that the notation on the outside of the envelope made the tokens and the envelope itself redundant” (Rudgley, 1998, p.54). In other words, a tablet, suitably impressed or inscribed, would serve the same purpose; there was no need for the tokens themselves.

It should be stated that there has been some criticism of Schmandt-Besserat's theories. Jasim & Oates (1986), whilst not disputing the validity of her interpretation, regarded it as being over-generalized, in the sense of its universal application across the entire Near East, when the evidence so far only points to her thesis being valid for certain localized sites such as Susa: "Certainly, there was no 'universal' system" (p.351). They also suggested that the tokens may have had different functions from those proposed by Schmandt-Besserat, noting that at Tepe Gawra, a child's grave contained a set of alabaster spheres, implying a gaming function, and that another tomb was found to contain only marble spheres, as grave goods, implying high status objects. They asserted that:

"...we cannot assume comparable function for all small geometric objects; certainly they are not all 'accounting tokens', though ceremonial or ritual symbols may have had an economic derivation." (p.352)

Whilst we may attempt to make a sharp distinction between an 'economic' and 'ritual' usage, Jasim & Oates made the sensible point that "the two functions are not necessarily as distinct as our terminology implies." (p.355)

Nevertheless, perhaps as a result of Schmandt-Besserat's undoubtedly exhaustive ancient Near East research, an economic origin is sometimes regarded as being the sole cause for the development of *any* written system *anywhere* in the world. As Powell (2009, p.63) observed:

"The undoubted economic character of the protocuneiform tablets has coloured general histories of writing, suggesting that all writing has appeared in response to economic behaviour."

In opposition to such a view, Powell pointed out that Mesoamerican writing systems were developed in order to glorify its rulers, as may also be said of early Egyptian

writing, and that the earliest Chinese writings were oracular in character.

Shang ‘oracle-bones’

The Chinese ‘oracle-bone’ inscriptions of the Shang dynasty (1,751–1,111 BC) constitute the earliest known writing system in East Asia, and form the basis of all later forms of Chinese writing. The so-called ‘oracle-bones’ were, in fact, either turtle shells, or the shoulder bones of oxen, and were employed in the forms of divination known as plastronomy, or scapulimancy, respectively.

These shells or bones would first be cleaned and prepared so as to create a flat surface. Indentations would then be bored into the surface at regular intervals. The shells or bones would then be subjected to intense heat by means of a heat source being inserted in one or more of the holes. This heat would induce stress fractures on the surface; the ensuing patterns would then be interpreted or ‘read’ by the diviner. It has been argued (e.g. Marshall, 2001) that there is a connection between the ‘oracle-bones’ and the 3,000-year-old Chinese *I Ching* or ‘Book of Changes’, used to this day by millions for the purposes of divination or for advice of a philosophical nature. Certainly, the similarity between those regular patterns produced on the ‘oracle-bones’ by the process described above, and the broken or unbroken lines which make up the hexagrams of the *I Ching*, is indeed a suggestive one.

This pyromancy was a relatively widespread form of divination, being attested throughout much of Asia and also in North America. The practice is perhaps very old, but the earliest evidence in China dates back to around 3,500 BC (at Fu-ho-kou-men in Liaoning), where the fractures were random. The Shang dynasty’s innovation was to produce more regular patterns by means of the drilled holes. The other singular factor is that amongst all the worldwide instances of such pyromantic divinatory practices, only the

Shang Chinese made a written record of their divinations, by carving signs into the oracle-bones themselves.

The divination process would begin with the shell or bone being anointed with blood, and inscribed with the diviner's name and the date, in a process known as the 'preface'. The subject of the divination would then be posed. Typically, enquiries would be concerned with the health of the king and members of his royal family; the outcomes of forthcoming military endeavours; the prognosis for that year's harvest, and so on. These enquiries were directed at ancestors as well as gods (Keightley, 1978).

Although the characters were mostly carved into the shell or bone, there are a few instances where the writing has been drawn onto the surface in red or black ink, using a brush. Keightley (1989, pp.182-184) observed that there is relatively no aesthetic component to the brush-writing:

"...the aesthetic influence of the brush appears to have been minimal; the brush-written script looks stiff and angular, resembling the carved script. That the Shang scribes could have written all their inscriptions with a brush but chose not to do so raises the interesting question of why they expended considerable time and labour to carve the characters into the bones. One cannot be sure of the answer, but two facts are suggestive. First, the diviners also carved out some of the cracks as well, rendering them deeper and more visible, and second, the diviners frequently filled the incised graphs and the cracks with red- or black-coloured pigments. These practices suggest that the carving itself served some aesthetic function - permitting the colouration of the writing—and that it may also have served some magical function in which the actual carving, by establishing a sympathy between the crack and the record, helped to "fix" or induce the desired event."

So the act of carving the signs itself was somehow part of the magico-ritual process.

As regards the nature of the script itself, Bagley (2004, p.198) stated quite unequivocally that it was to be regarded as ‘true writing’ and not just a set of simple pictograms:

“As to the script, specialists are agreed that it is full writing at the moment when we first encounter it; that is, a Shang scribe could probably have written pretty much anything he could say.”

Similarly, Bottéro (2004, p.258) stated that “the Chinese script is obviously an original system of signs created to record an ancestral form of the Chinese language”, and, whilst pointing out the fact of its origin being problematic, still regarded the Shang ‘oracle-bone’ script as being, if not the first, then one of the very earliest such:

“First, it is hard to find any social requirements for writing prior to the Shang dynasty...Second...the graphic style of the Shang script, with its rather pictographic shape, strongly suggests a writing close to its first steps or its beginning...” (ibid).

So, until such time as earlier examples of archaic Chinese writing are discovered, it would seem to be the case that the ‘oracle-bone’ script appeared fully-formed during the Shang period.

Keightley (1989, p.184) noted the “considerable continuity” between the Shang signs and those of later Chinese scripts:

“Literate Chinese of today, untutored in oracle-bone script, would probably find much of it incomprehensible at first glance...but after only a few moments of study they would begin to identify some of the early graph forms that preceded those of the modern script.”

A pattern of development may be observed when one compares the Shang characters with those of the later

Western Chou ('greater seal') script, the Eastern Chou ('lesser seal') script, and finally, the modern forms.

Keightley (1989, p.195) also suggested that "social or technological activity in the late Neolithic" may have led to the development of a writing system—the need for measurement and calculation for constructing pots, and compared this with Renfrew's argument (1972) of a similar imperative in the Mediterranean:

"Writing in the ancient Aegean seems to have arisen partly to assist in problems of mensuration and calculation. The archaeological evidence suggests that it was indeed the cultures of the Neolithic East that were primarily concerned with such problems. For componential pot construction implies attention to scale and measurement, particularly when three-footed vessels are involved, which must be made of equal size. The parts—legs, handles, spouts, lids—have to be measured so that they will fit the vessel body..." (Keightley, *ibid*)

The present writer finds this argument unconvincing. Would such a requirement as measurement—admittedly important - have been the driving force for the creation of an entire writing system, rather than just a numbering system? Rather, it would seem more logical to view the oracle-bone characters as being the precursors of later Chinese scripts, and to regard early literacy in China as having been driven by the imperative of magico-ritual demands, namely divination—and as Keightley himself observed, literacy was employed for divinatory purposes 500 years before it was put to any more 'practical' use.

'Old European'

Another writing system, whose origins may also lie not in economic but in religious practices, is the 'Old European' script espoused by the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, and by later writers. It must be emphasized that the

signs (found on pottery, and upon clay tablets) which are claimed to be ‘Old European’, are by no means universally accepted to be writing. Even if this sign system is accepted as being a written language, it is, as yet, an undeciphered one. But, as this article will hope to demonstrate, the work of Gimbutas, Winn and Haarmann builds a strong case.

The discovery, in 1961, of three inscribed clay tablets in a sacrificial pit at Tărtăria, near Cluj, Transylvania (now in Romania), ascribed to the Neolithic Vinča culture, was a perplexing one for prehistorians. Hitherto, the consensus had been that all technological and other innovations had arrived in Europe from the Near East, via diffusion (Childe, 1925, 1929). It was recognized that Neolithic cultures (e.g. the Vinča, Tisza, and Karanovo cultures) in the Balkans were the earliest in Europe to have employed techniques of metallurgy—using copper at c. 5,000 BC - but these techniques were thought to have been developed first in the Near East. Similarly, writing systems were regarded as having first arisen in Mesopotamia. So the discovery of the ‘Tărtăria tablets’ and their having being radiocarbon-dated to 5,500 BC, clearly conflicted with a Near East origin, given that Uruk IV proto-writing evolved in the later 4th millennium BC.

It should be pointed out that the early date ascribed to the Tărtăria tablets has been challenged, on stratigraphic grounds (Zanotti, 1983). But these inscriptions were by no means the only ones to have been discovered in the Balkans region. Clay tablets, bearing incised signs, found at two Bulgarian sites, Gradeshnitsa and Karanovo, were in both cases radiocarbon-dated to 4000 BC at the latest.

Regarding these incised signs, Renfrew (1999, p.193) observed:

“More than 200 examples have been described from the important settlement of the Vinča culture at Tordos in Romania. Some of them are very simple—just a few strokes

on the base of a pot, or a straightforward cross; others show more complicated motifs.”

Whilst the simpler forms might be thought to have been potter's marks, it was these “more complicated motifs” that aroused the interest of Gimbutas, described by Renfrew (1999, p.193) as “the leading American authority on the prehistory of eastern Europe...” She used the evidence of widespread incised signs found at these early Balkan Copper Age sites, together with accomplished sculptures, mainly depicting female figures - upon which signs were often inscribed - to posit a sophisticated matrifocal Old European Neolithic culture in existence between c. 7,500 and c. 3,500 BC.

Certainly the figurines are predominantly representative of the female form. Markotić (1984) stated that, of 558 figurine discoveries attributed to the Vinča culture, 541 depicted females. Whether these figurines represented goddesses or ordinary human females is uncertain, although Gimbutas (1991, p.308) insisted that these objects were religious in nature:

“Votive offerings—gifts to the divinity in accordance with a vow, a wish, or desire—inscribed on religious objects usually found in clusters or rows, are characteristic finds of the Neolithic and Copper Ages, particularly in east-central Europe.”

Whilst noting that: “the invention of a script some eight thousand years ago has seemed so unthinkable that to this day the possibility is ignored and its evidence given very little attention” (1991, p.308), Gimbutas went on to declare that:

“Although the Sumerians are generally thought to be the inventors of written language, a script in east-central Europe appeared some two thousand years earlier than any other that has yet been found. Unlike Sumerian script, the

writing of the Old Europeans was not devised for economic, legal or administrative purposes. It was developed, instead, from a long use of graphic symbolic signs found only within the context of an increasingly sophisticated worship of the Goddess. Inscriptions appear on religious items only, indicating that these signs were intended to be read as sacred hieroglyphs.” (ibid)

These claims may seem incredible to some, but it should be noted that Gimbutas, although the first to portray the many archaeological finds in the Balkan region as being representative of a coherent whole Old European civilization, is not alone in her claims. Winn undertook what is still the most comprehensive study of the Vinča signs for his 1973 dissertation (later published in 1981). It features an extensive sign catalogue, incorporating hundreds of examples from 50 sites identified as belonging to the Vinča culture. 210 basic sign types were identified (Winn, 1981, pp.60-65), which could be subdivided into 18 categories, and further classified as belonging to five core signs—(1) a straight, unbent, unbroken line; (2) two straight lines intersecting at the centre; (3) two lines intersecting at one end; (4) a dot or stipple; and (5) a curved line.

The signs - inscribed on pottery, figurines, spindle whorls, and other more unusual objects, sometimes unidentifiable - were sometimes found in isolation, or as part of a sign group. Arguing against an identification of isolated signs as mere potter’s marks, Winn (1981, p.13) noted:

“Isolated signs are found more frequently on pottery, but they may also occur on figurines, rarely on spindle whorls and occasionally on other subjects. Some of the basic sign types appear restricted to figurines and/or whorls. Therefore, these signs cannot be identified as mere pot marks.”

Winn (1981, p.14) also distinguished between mere decorative, aesthetic elements found on the objects, and the

signs proper: "A distinction has been made between decoration and signs on the basis of their integration into overall ornamentation or independence from decoration". He claimed that it was easy to tell which was which, although in some cases, a few decorative elements resembled signs (e.g. the 'M' sign, to which Popović and Gimbutas ascribed a religious meaning). He theorized that these had more than just an aesthetic value, with a symbolic meaning also, such that they may have formed the basis for the later origin of the signs proper (1981, p.12): "In a minority of cases the signs may be influenced by decorative prototypes, as there are certain decorative elements which may be related to the origin of signs." Interestingly, one decorative element identified by Winn, organized or deliberate scratch marks, was found in abundance at one site, Jela (in modern Croatia), at the very northwest limit of the Vinča culture's sphere of influence. He suggested that these scratch marks had been made as mimicry of the signs themselves, in imitation of an admired culture (one thinks of Romano-British coinage, where British chieftains sought to emulate Roman coins, reproducing the design whilst not understanding the script).

Winn (1981, p.76) also observed that the signs were inscribed on various parts of the objects: on the rim or upper body; on the lower side near the base; and on the base itself. In his catalogue, these various locations formed a further means of classification. It was noted that certain signs, or groups of signs, tended to be found on certain parts of the objects. For example, the Tordos signs were found to occur "in very high proportions on the base" whereas pictograms were found "principally on the body" of the objects:

Arguing against their identification as mere potter's marks, he wrote (p.79):

"It is difficult to understand why more complicated signs... should be placed on the base. The general view, of course, has been to dismiss them as proprietary marks, but in my

estimation this is an over-simplification. Certainly, some may be proprietor's marks, but this view does not provide an adequate explanation for the majority of recurring signs. These signs are noted at various sites and do not seem to be intuitively distinguishable for such a basic purpose as ownership, where owners could hardly be cognizant of identical signs elsewhere, unless the identity was entirely the result of chance or there were certain standardized signs, which then must have had an attached concept with which the owner was familiar when he utilized the sign as a pottery mark."

Instead, Winn maintained that the above observations denoted "purposeful distinctions in sign usage and, therefore, an intention to communicate something meaningful", concluding (p.235) that the signs form a "conventionalized and standardized" semiotic system, rather than individual signs being merely discrete magical symbols (p.267):

"The suggestion that the signs represent nothing more than magical marks is untenable, although some simple signs, particularly on pottery vessels, may have been inscribed as part of magical formulae. The evidence shows deliberate sign usage at various sites according to object and function; this usage over space and time illustrates its meaningfulness in the world view of the society."

Whilst the system could not be termed 'true' writing, on account of insufficient attestations of group sign repetition, Winn nevertheless argued against its being, fundamentally, a pictographic one—the majority of signs being abstract linear ones which occur alongside earlier pictographic signs, which in turn have been observed in isolation, at the earlier Tordos site. Thus the Vinča system may have developed from an earlier pictographic one, much like the development of Sumerian logograms and syllabograms.

Regarding the origin and source of the Vinča signs, this has been the source of much debate. Following the discovery of incised signs from the Tordos site in 1879 (during Zsofia Torma's excavations of this very large site, yielding some 10,000 objects, from 1875- 1891), and others found during the first Vinča excavation by M. Vasić in 1908, it was the general view that the script must have arrived in the Balkans by means of diffusion from elsewhere. Torma (1889) argued for an Assyro-Babylonian influence. The prevailing view at the turn of the nineteenth century was that early Troy and early Dynastic Egypt shared a common script. Vasić (1908) argued firstly for a Trojan influence, and then later suggested (1957) that there had been an Ionian colony at Vinča. And the enormously influential V. Gordon Childe (1927, p.83) claimed "an ethnic connexion between the first settlers at Vinča and the peoples of the Aegean", also noting (p.88) analogies between the cultures of predynastic Egypt, Troy, and Vinča.

However, the application of C-14 radiocarbon dating techniques in the 1950s, which gave a date of 4,240 BC to the earliest Vinča finds, meant that such 'diffusion' theories of origin were untenable, the earliest date for the foundation of Troy being at least 1,000 years later. Whilst the implications of these startling dates were still being assimilated, the discovery in 1961 of the three Tărtăria tablets added further controversy. The excavator,

N. Vlassa (1963) drew attention to the Tărtăria signs' similarity with those of the Uruk IV and Jemdet Nasr tablets (late fourth to third millennia BC), a view with which Falkenstein agreed (1965). Vlassa claimed the earliest level of the Tărtăria site to be no older than 2,700 BC, this making a Mesopotamian origin tenable. Other writers such as Popović (1965), Hood (1967) and Makkay (1969) concur. Popović, taking a similar view to Gelb, does not regard the Balkan civilization to be sufficiently advanced as to develop a system of writing, and thus claims a Sumerian origin. Hood also adheres to a Childe-like diffusionary theory,

arguing that the magico-religious attributes of the Vinča signs may have resulted from religious conversion via Near East influences. And Makkay (1969, p.14) compiled a list which compared Vinča signs with those of Mesopotamia, admitting that he is compelled to make such Near East connections for want of any possible European influences. Nevertheless, the Tărtăria signs aside (which this writer considers to be something of a red herring, on account of their debatable date (see Zanotti, 1983) and similarity with Jemdet Nasr/Uruk IV pictograms), there is clearly a problem for an *ex oriente lux* argument, given that C-14 dating ascribes a date of 4,240 BC to the earliest Vinča finds. Indeed, with radiocarbon calibration (the method by which a more accurate date may be found), an additional 500-800 years must be added, so that the dates are pushed back still further! Accordingly, we are faced with a well-established Balkan civilization flourishing in the 5th millennium BC, reaching its pinnacle around 4,000 BC, with its decline or destruction coming some time in the 4th millennium.

As noted above, Winn argued that the Vinča signs were derived from five core elements. Noting the prevalence of such signs as the zigzag or meander, the spiral, and the cross or X, he further noted (1981, p.237) that “such signs/motifs can be considered symbolic: fertility, good fortune or welfare, duty, water, etc...The association of such symbolic decoration with figurines is clear”. Gimbutas (1991, p.314) claimed a Palaeolithic provenance for certain core Vinča signs:

“Independent abstract signs, not pictographs, such as V, X, and Y, originated during the Upper Palaeolithic. A number of them, engraved on stone, bone, and antler, continued through the Mesolithic into early phases of the Neolithic. In Old Europe and Anatolia they consistently recur on ceramics in various arrangements: duplicated, triplicated, multiplied, inverted, opposed, and associated with meanders and parallel lines. Some signs are continuous from the Upper

Palaeolithic Gravettian and Magdalenian cultures into the Neolithic, Copper Age, and even early Bronze Age of Europe and Anatolia, a span of 15,000 years.”

She further attributed religious meanings to these signs; thus, the V sign was said (1991, p.315) to derive from the vulva or pubic triangle, “one of the earliest symbols known from prehistoric art...Its repetitiveness in homologous contexts speaks of its central role in the symbolism surrounding certain aspects of the Goddess.” One might, at this point, note this sign’s similarity to the Sumerian sign for ‘female’ (‘MUNUS’; Labat, 1948, no.554), although it should be noted that I am not arguing here for diffusion, an Old European influence on Sumerian; rather, that such elementary signs may have had an independent origin in different parts of the world at different periods.

Noting (p.315) that “multiple V’s or chevrons appear consistently on both articulate and schematic effigies of the Bird Goddess, and on objects associated with her veneration, such as ornithomorphic vases...”, Gimbutas observed (p.316) that:

“Examination of the repertory of symbols on figurines leads to several observations. Signs surrounding the image of the Bird Goddess, for example, (such as V’s and chevrons combined with X) identify her, while V’s associated or connected with meanders, zigzags, or parallel lines emphasize her intimacy with the aquatic life-giving sphere, suggesting her function as a giver of moisture and life waters...I believe that the Old European sign system developed into a script from extensive use of very ancient symbolism. It is possible that certain symbols could have had a phonetic sound much earlier than the 6th millennium B.C.”

One might note that the Sumerian sign for ‘water’, (‘A’; Labat, 1948, no. 579) in its very earliest forms (e.g. Jemdet Nasr or Uruk IV periods) resembles a zigzag. Rudgley argued that the zigzag’s association with water had a very

early origin (1991), citing Marshack's (1972, 1976) detailed examination of deliberate marks found on Upper Palaeolithic animal bones—in particular, the discovery of a zigzag on a fragment of bone found at a Mousterian site (Bacho Kiro, Bulgaria), suggesting a possible Neanderthal date.

Naturally, the idea that writing may ultimately have a Palaeolithic origin is very problematic, and has met with opposition by some in the academy. Forbes and Crowder (1979, p.359) wrote:

“The proposition that Ice Age reindeer hunters invented writing fifteen thousand years ago or more is utterly inadmissible and unthinkable. All the data that archaeologists have amassed during the last one hundred years reinforce the assumption that Sumerians and Egyptians invented true writing during the second half of the fourth millennium. The Palaeolithic-Mesolithic-Neolithic progression to civilization is almost as fundamental an article of contemporary scientific faith as heliocentrism. Writing is the diagnostic trait, the quintessential feature of civilization. Writing, says I. J. Gelb, ‘distinguishes civilized man from barbarian’. If Franco-Cantabrians [i.e. Ice Age European peoples] invented writing thousands of years before civilization arose in the Near East, then our most cherished beliefs about the nature of society and human development would be demolished.”

This is not to say that a Neolithic origin is any less controversial! Winn himself was unable to bring himself to describe the Vinča signs as true writing—hence, when his 1973 dissertation, *The Signs of the Vinča Culture* was published in 1981, it was titled *Pre- Writing in Southeastern Europe: The Sign System of the Vinča Culture* [my bold]. Winn was unable to determine the Vinča system to be a logographic one, due to the insufficient attestation of long strings of signs - whilst qualifying this with the cautious remark (1981, p.238) that “the system may be partially

logographic, i.e. some of the signs may represent words or concepts.” Neither was he able to describe it as a phonemic one, and therefore concluded that it was a system of pre-writing rather than writing proper.

In a linguistic study, Haarmann (1995) examined the Vinča sign system, in comparison with those of ancient Mediterranean civilizations such as that of Crete - Linear A & B - and the Cypro-Minoan script. He noted Winn's refusal to ascribe 'true writing' status to the Vinča signs, but pointed out Winn's adherence to an American definition of writing (Haarmann, 1995, pp.31-32): “[i]n American terminology, “true writing” or “full writing” is reserved to mean ‘phonetic writing of some sort’” He suggested that instead of ‘pre- writing’, the term ‘nuclear writing’ be used to describe early writing systems which, whilst essentially logographic, were not yet phonetic.

Haarmann (1995, p.28) believed that the Vinča signs comprised a ‘sacred script’, a genuine writing system, albeit one as yet undeciphered:

“The close relationship to objects which were used in burial rites or magico-religious rituals, that is, votive offerings and cult vessels, and the presence of inscribed objects with a potential usage such as offering gifts in the residential areas of the Chalcolithic settlements is indicative of a sacred function of the Old European script.”

Renfrew (1999, p.204) refused to ascribe to the Vinča signs the status of ‘true’ writing:

“To call these Balkan signs ‘writing’ is perhaps to imply that they had an independent significance of their own, communicable to another person without oral contact. This I doubt.”

Rather, he compared them to the signs on the rongorongo wooden tablets of Easter Island (sacred objects

surrounded by taboos), which, he argued, functioned as mnemonic aids for religious chants within an essentially oral tradition, citing Metraux (1957, p.206):

“The rongorongo of Easter Island bards used staves to augment the effects of their recitations. On these staves the engraved sacred symbols, like the notches on the staves of the Maori orators, may originally have been aids to memory; later the decorative or mystic aspect of the symbols gained over their pictographic significance...We may suppose that the signs were arbitrarily associated with chants, each symbol representing a significant word, a phrase, a sentence or even a verse.”

In a comparison with the Vinča script, Renfrew (1999, p.204) argued that the rongorongo tablets demonstrate how an elaborate sign system might arise in a “relatively small society, which, despite its hierarchy, had no permanent central bureaucracy, and no full- time specialists.”

However, he also suggested that, further comparing the rongorongo tablets with the Vinča script, we may infer the latter to have had mnemonic value only, rather than being anything so sophisticated as ‘true writing’ by which ideas might be communicated to any other party who was able to understand the script. And, citing those Vinča signs that are found inscribed on pottery, Renfrew compared them with potters’ marks from other cultures and periods, for example, those of Phylakopi in the Cyclades, c. 2,000 BC. These, he argued (1999, p.204), were merely a “private code, significant only to the potter who made [them]...carrying a meaning only at the moment they were made.” This seems an unfair comparison, when one recalls Winn’s extensive catalogue of the Vinča signs; from the thousands of occurrences found in museums in Europe and the US, he identified recurring attestations of 210 signs, which themselves could be analysed as belonging to one of five core sign groups. Further, these signs had been found at sites with a wide distribution throughout the Balkans region,

not one single local area. Clearly, the Vinča signs were not merely a “private code.”

By way of contrast, Renfrew (1999, p.204) noted that “the writing of the Near East, like that of Crete, grew up in another context, that of the emerging palace economy, with the need to record in- and out-payments and to indicate ownership.” In such an emerging trade economy, the need for written signs which form a codified system which may be readily understood by others, without the need for oral explication, is clear. The agricultural society of the Vinča culture had no such economic imperative, and as Renfrew pointed out (*ibid*), in terms of archaeological discoveries, “there is no evidence for a redistribution system like that of early Bronze Age Greece, where the seals and sealings

were functional objects of real economic significance.” Instead, the inscribed figurines and tablets of the Vinča culture:

“...testify to a very real absorption in religious affairs: and it is in this context that the signs on the tablets and plaques have to be understood. I suggest, indeed, that this “writing” emerged in a religious context, not an economic one.”

Thinking of the Vinča signs as mnemonic devices, aides-memoires for participants in religious ceremonies (as per the Easter Island rongorongo tablets), Renfrew compares them with Navaho sand paintings, which were designed according to strict conventions and laden with symbolism, were made specifically for use in a ceremony, after which they were destroyed. Had they, he suggested (p.204): “...been in a permanent medium they would have been—like the Balkan tablets—enduring repositories of symbolic information, indeed a form of writing.” So the Vinča signs may also be a ‘form of writing’, although:

“...while we can agree with the Bulgarian scholar Vladimir Georgiev that these Balkan signs had an independent

origin and held a real meaning for those who made them, to talk of writing, without careful qualification, may not be appropriate.”

Renfrew’s refusal to view the Vinča signs as comprising a script has been criticized (Haarmann, 1995, p.77), on the basis that “his opinion was based on scarce iconic material in the first place, and [that] he [had] inspected only a few specimens of Old European writing then known.” Winn’s investigation, involving the analysis of thousands of inscribed figurines and other objects, was far more rigorous. Perhaps Renfrew hesitated to talk of the Vinča signs as being ‘true writing’, because of the fantastical and unacceptably unorthodox implications of a writing system from Europe which pre-dated that of Mesopotamia by several thousand years.

The language spoken by these Neolithic Balkan peoples is totally unknown to us today. It was not an Indo-European language, since, according to Gimbutas’ hypothesis, Kurgan invaders from the Russian steppe first brought an early Indo-European language to

Europe, when they over-ran the Balkans and displaced the ‘Old European’ civilization and peoples. (For a geneticist’s findings which lend support for this theory, see Cavalli-Sforza, 1997). We are thus unable to map the Vinča signs (as written language) against a spoken counterpart. Therefore, Gelb’s distinction between a ‘semasiographic stage of writing (conveying meanings and concepts loosely connected with speech) and phonographic stage (expressing speech) is inapplicable—since we are unable to say whether the signs merely conveyed certain ideas and notions that were expressed by the spoken language, or whether they directly expressed speech (e.g. phonetically). It will be recalled that Gelb would only ascribe the status of ‘true writing’ to a phonetic system. It does seem unlikely that the Vinča signs are phonetic representations of a spoken language; there do not seem to be sufficiently

lengthy 'strings' of signs (as one observes in, for instance, Sumerian tablets), so are they more likely to have been pictographic or ideographic in character?

Again, one recalls Hooker's argument that a purely pictographic system is not 'true writing', since it depicts an event or message by purely visual means, rather than referring to any linguistic content; this also reminds us of Falkenstein's observations (1936) that the earliest Mesopotomian signs (at Uruk IV) were seldom pictographic in character. Whilst we cannot be certain, it would seem likely (for the reasons stated above) that the Vinča signs are pictographic or ideographic, rather than syllabographic. Nevertheless, Hooker refused to follow Gelb's lead in distinguishing between 'primitive' and 'complex' writing systems. He argues that pictograms were developed mainly amongst hunting or farming societies. So, in this sense we may claim a highly developed 'order of complexity' for the Vinča system, whilst not according it the status of writing. Hooker wrote (1990, p.6) that "so-called 'primitive' societies using pictographs may be just as complex in their modes of thought as users of other methods but it is a different order of complexity", arguing that pictographic systems tended to arise in hunting or farming societies rather than urban ones—like the Balkan 'Old European' civilization.

Conclusion

As noted above, there is disagreement as to whether the Vinča signs may be regarded as constituting 'true writing' or not. Winn ascribed to them the status of 'pre-writing', and Renfrew, by way of comparison with the rongorongo tablets, suggested that their function was a mnemonic one, an aide memoire for oral religious practice. Haarmann and Rudgley, however, insisted that the signs were a fully-fledged - if as yet undeciphered - writing system.

It should also be stated that Gimbutas has been criticized in some quarters. Such criticism tends to focus on

the speculative nature of her theories - based on an 'archaeo-mythological' approach—which posited the existence of a peaceful, artistic and matrifocal 'Old European' civilization. Partly because the script (if it is indeed a script) remains undeciphered, it could be asserted that her ideas concerning the wider 'Old European' culture lack foundational evidence to support them (although see Cavalli-Sforza, 1997). In addition, it has been argued that her theories were motivated by a desire to promote a feminist agenda (e.g. Hayden, 1986; Sommers, 1995), although for stout rebuttals of such criticism, see Christ, Goldenberg & Spretnak (all 1996).

However, whether or not one accepts the existence of the 'Old European' civilization as described by Gimbutas, the existence of a Vinča sign system is surely incontrovertible (following Winn's rigorous and scholarly analysis).

Notwithstanding the above controversies, Winn, Renfrew and Haarmann are all in agreement that the signs originated in a ritual-ceremonial-religious domain, rather than an economic one. The same may also be argued as to the development of early Chinese scripts, namely, that the motivation was magico-religious in essence (i.e. divination) rather than economic. For this reason, both Renfrew and Haarmann compared the Vinča script with that of the 'oracle-bones'. As noted above, the act of carving the 'oracle-bone' signs itself was a part of the magico-ritual process, so perhaps a tentative analogy might be drawn with the Vinča signs - particularly those carved on figurines which apparently depict goddesses.

However, until such time as a Rosetta stone equivalent is discovered, bearing the Vinča characters alongside those of another (known) script, the former will continue to remain the subject of speculation as to their nature and meaning. But, whether we accept the Vinča script as being 'true writing' or not, it is, I believe, reasonable to regard religion rather than economics as the driving force

behind the 'invention' of the signs. As Winn (1981, p.255) concluded:

"In the final analysis, the religious system remains the principle source of motivation for the use of signs. The thousands of [inscribed] excavated figurines impressively demonstrate the cardinal role of domestic ritual in Vinča society."

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Christopher Josiffe

The sacred little bookshop

Temples, churches, sacred sites... There is something beautiful about the creation of a space for that which we think of as holy. Perhaps a grand temple, built as a place of pilgrimage for those seeking a moment of divine connection, or a Church, with grand pillars reaching up to heaven filled with the tokens of saints, or a sacred site, a place of green stillness with a standing stone which has long watched the turning stars.

There is something profoundly human—and profoundly hopeful—in the creation of sacred space. It speaks to our need to believe that the mundane and the divine can touch. Across ages and continents, we have carved stone, raised timber, and cleared glades to set aside places for this communion. These temples, churches, and sacred sites are more than buildings; they are thresholds between the ordinary and the eternal, the known and the unknown.

Imagine a grand temple, its steps worn smooth by the feet of pilgrims who come seeking a moment of personal revelation. Within secrets hang in the air like curling incense smoke. Candles flicker and cast living shadows on intricate carvings that tell stories of gods and ancestors. Here, each element of construction is layered with intention. The structure itself becomes a conversation with the divine, architecture as poetry.

Or picture a cathedral, where towering pillars echo trees of an ancient forest, and stained glass windows bathe the tombstone-covered floors in kaleidoscopic reverence. Saints stand in quiet niches, holding their symbols like quiet reminders of piety. The acoustics are designed so that a choir might wrap us about with song and lift us up.

Then, turn to the wilder places—the sacred sites that pre-date memory. A lone standing stone in a clearing,

draped in moss, still as a sentinel. It does not preach, but it remembers. The air hums there, the silence is deep, and the land itself seems to breathe. These places are holy not because we built them, but because we noticed them—and then returned, generation after generation, seeking meaning in the hush between stars. We are drawn to the secrets that are told in no language we can ever be taught.

And how far, truly, is this from the quiet ritual of a small bookstore? I would say not far at all.

What unites all these places—stone or forest, built or found—is their offering of pause. In a world shaped by movement and noise, they say: stop, listen, look inward. They remind us that the sacred is not only beyond us, but also within us—and that sometimes, all it takes to remember that, is a place made with reverence.

Think of a bookseller, gently laying each title in its place at the start of day. The selection of a spine— by theme, by size, by the subtle aesthetic of colour and cover. A tiny act of reverence. And then, come the day's end, returning to that same book—perhaps now misaligned, a sign that it has drawn some wandering attention— and restoring it gently to its position among its companions. This, too, is sacred work: the slow, attentive tending of a space where seekers come not with candles, but with curiosity. Not to find the answer, but to ask better questions.

For many of us are seekers, not pilgrims to a single truth, but wanderers through a landscape of questions. Our sacred spaces are not the places where answers are enshrined and fixed, but where a single insight might lead us to ten more mysteries. The beauty is not in resolution, but in reverent pursuit, in asking, in wondering.

Whether stone or paper, sanctuary or shelf, these spaces remind us of what we most need to remember: that there is meaning in the pause, divinity in the details, and holiness

in the care we take with the things we love. A sacred space is not only where we find something—it is where we remember what we're looking for.

A little bookstore, tended by a priesthood, can become a sacred space, a place of pilgrimage. Come seeking a bookstore and that is all you will find, but come seeking a temple, a cathedral, a sacred place, and that you will also find.

Visit this little bookshop, a place made sacred through ritual and intent, and see what you might find.

William Hunter

My Treadwell's Journey

I first visited Treadwell's in January 2013 when I attended an Imbolc ritual as part of Suzanne Corbie's *Wheel of the Year* workshops. Although I'd always been interested in the occult and tarot, I'd only started exploring paganism in any depth for a few years. I was working on an urban fantasy novel, which featured Glastonbury, the magick of Aleister Crowley and modern day witchcraft. Through the British Science Fiction Association, I met author Liz Williams and her partner, Trevor Jones who run Witchcraft Limited, based in Glastonbury. Liz and Trevor undertook my magical education and I started attending the Occult Conferences, as well as checking out pagan groups and events closer to home.

Suzanne's Imbolc workshop was my first open ritual—my first real ritual of any kind—and it was a truly magical event. An introductory lecture followed by preparation for the ritual, almost 'Blue Peter' style culminating to the ritual itself. This in itself was a life-changing event. But there were more to follow.

I continued to visit Glastonbury and joined a local moot. On a subsequent visit to Treadwell's I bought a statuette of the Venus of Willendorf and later attended the launch event for Gary Lachman's *Aleister Crowley: Magick, Rock and Roll, and the Wickedest Man in the World*. It was on this occasion I finally met Christina. By this time I was a regular frequenter of the Bloomsbury occult bookshops, but Treadwell's was now a firm favourite.

I finished the novel but sadly failed to secure a publisher. However, I'd been well and truly bitten by the research bug, and I wanted to build on what I'd learnt about the occult revival, the Golden Dawn, and yes, of course, Aleister Crowley. I was coming to the end of a long term consultancy contract and was considering taking a break to do

some sort of formal study. Encouraged by my husband, I started thinking about doing a Masters or PhD exploring how women used magic as a form of rebellion, building on Mary Greer's *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses*.

In April 2015, I attended a Treadwell's lecture given by Adele Gardner about Frieda, Lady Harris, the artist executant of Crowley's *Book of Thoth*. I was intrigued by this ostensibly conventional middle-class society wife and hostess who chose to involve herself with the 'wickedest man in the world'. She would make the perfect focal point for my potential thesis. Accordingly, I asked Christina to put me in touch with Adele who very kindly agreed to discuss my ideas. I was already talking to the History department at Royal Holloway College about a research MA, but Adele thought Ronald Hutton at Bristol might be interested and offered to contact him on my behalf. He was due to give a lecture at Treadwell's the following week, and said I should make myself known to him so we could discuss the matter further. So on 1 June 2015, I nervously approached Christina and asked her to introduce us. He said he would be very happy to supervise me, so after proposal submission and various administrative hiccups, I enrolled as a remote post grad at the University of Bristol, and again, this was a life-changing experience.

Although I had an extensive background in business analysis, I had little experience of academic research. I'd graduated from university in 1980, with a respectable second class honours degree in Classical Studies. Since that time, the only educational submission I'd written had been for a Certificate in Training Practice. I almost had to unlearn the analysis skills I had because instead of documenting what is, and proposing what could be changed, I needed to examine and reach original conclusions about historical events, taking into account existing texts and commentaries. I was totally out of my comfort zone and my initial literature review was a mess! When I told Christina

how much I was struggling, she got me to send her what I'd written and then gave me an hour's unofficial tutorial over the phone, and a list of recommended reading, inviting me to Treadwell's to look at specific journals and periodicals. As a result, I produced the literature review that underpinned the next four years. She also put me in touch with the late Victoria Musson, who had researched Frieda Harris extensively when she was considering writing a biography. And it was through Christina that I met Marco Visconti, who had a wealth of knowledge about Crowley and Thelema.

Christina continued to support me as my unofficial second supervisor and we met regularly to discuss my progress. At the first Trans-States Conference, held at Northampton University, she introduced me to various useful contacts. She involved me in group discussions with fellow researchers and Treadwell's staff. The conference was the turning point in my studies where I started to believe I could actually stay the course and finish my PhD.

Through Christina and Treadwell's I got to know such luminaries as Caroline Wise, Chris Giudice and Phil Hine and attended a wealth of wonderful talks. I also started presenting my own research, firstly for the Theosophical Society in Edinburgh, and subsequently for the Glastonbury Occult Conference and the inaugural Magickal Women Conference. A year later, I was among the presenters for the second Trans-States Conference, and in January 2020 I delivered my first Treadwell's lecture.

After all the support I'd received over the years, I was thrilled when I was able, in a small way, to return the favour. Frieda Harris's grandson Paul and his wife Gail had come over from Australia and I'd arranged to guide them through the Thoth Tarot paintings at the Warburg Institute. After the viewing, I took them to Treadwell's to meet Christina. I hadn't told her the Harrises were in



town, so it was a complete surprise. She was absolutely delighted: Gail purchased a Thoth deck, and Christina and Paul discussed her stocking his family biography, *Odd Boy Out*.

Treadwell's and Christina have been a fundamental part of my transition from business consultant to academic scholar and my life has changed completely as a result. After I was awarded my PhD, I was invited to submit my thesis for consideration by Oxford University Press for their Studies in Western Esotericism series. *The Lady and the Beast* was published in January 2025 and released in the UK on 22 April. It is only right that I should hold my book launch at Treadwell's, where the journey began.

Deja Whitehouse

Just occasionally, I wonder what other people think

One such moment occurred a few years ago at Treadwell's, in the basement, where I was teaching a day-long workshop on Baphomet—a spirit I primarily approach as Pete Carroll once described it as “...the psychic field generated by the totality of living beings on this planet,” which nicely captures the scale and ambiguity I associate with it.

Early in the day, having explained that our focus would be on Baphomet as the chimeric Great Spirit, I decided it was wise to address the whole “Baphomet as devil” thing head-on, so we could move into more interesting territory. To do this, I suggested to the group that we indulge in some light chanting—“Hail Satan!”—until we got bored or it became funny. (It didn't take long for laughter to ripple through the room.) As the final sniggering *Ave Satanis!* faded, I had a brief flicker of curiosity about what the fine patrons in the shop above might be making of the racket.

Having a space like Treadwell's—where I've been able to lead that workshop, among many other experiments in practical magic—continues to be a source of great delight. It's also an honour to be trusted by the team, especially Christina and Will, to deliver offerings—whether online or in person—that are powerful, engaging, and thoughtfully curated. But yes, at that moment, I did wonder if our shrieking in honour of the Dark Lord might have raised a few eyebrows among the book-browsing customers upstairs.

I've been blessed for many years to teach with Treadwell's, to be woven as one strand into the living occulture of that magical place. Over time, I've also come to know the space around the shop quite well. One in-person workshop I've

led several times explores occult psychogeography: methods for attuning to and investigating the spirit of place. Participants circumambulate the area around the shop, using a range of techniques to enter into a strange and vivid relationship with the landscape of that part of London. We shift our attention, playfully hunting for hidden messages in graffiti, eavesdropping on the cut-up conversations of passing tourists and locals, or closing our eyes and being led, slowly, through the city. We come into tactile contact with the surfaces of stone, metal, and glass.

This practice of changing how we move through urban space mirrors a kind of inward shift—an opening. It awakens us to new possibilities, revealing freshly drawn paths of desire within the imagination.

Inside the store, I've also offered bibliomancy sessions, inviting students to engage with Treadwell's itself as if it were a spirit entity. (Spoiler alert: if you're a panpsychist animist like me, everything is.) We attune to the spirit of the place, asking it to reveal a hidden insight through a randomly chosen text from its shelves.

To have a space like Treadwell's in my life—the people, the building, the spirit of it—is a tremendous blessing.

Long may it thrive.

Julian Vayne

The Bookshop I Still Carry With Me

I first started discovering my magical self as a teen in the early 1980s in South Florida, in a newly developed suburb of Fort Lauderdale where my family relocated to help care for my aging grandparents. This was a rough transition. As a young and awkward transplant from Michigan, where I regularly escaped into the woods as a child, Florida, being tropical and built on a layer of crushed shell, lacked many of the landscape features that I loved; deciduous trees, dirt and rocks. I felt alone, weird and rootless in my new home, I lacked space, freedom, and forests. I spent a lot of time building an imaginal and magical space in my head, wondering if witches were actually real because I thought I might be one. When we arrived in South Florida, my family camped out temporarily in a condominium in a senior living community owned by my grandparents as we waited for our new home to be built. I spent much of my time sitting in a dark closet building makeshift altars with random items purchased at my uncle's hardware store, trying to find, or create witchcraft.

Like many budding sorcerers, from the age of 11 onward I was in the school library over every lunch period, trying to find any proof whatsoever of living magic. I wanted spells, rituals, arcane symbols. About the nearest evidence of actual witchcraft I could find was the *Encyclopedia of American Religions* by scholar J. Gordon Melton, who had been compiling accounts of marginalized religions in the United States. I returned to his small entries on Wicca over and over again, because it was the only proof that I had that my people were out there, I just needed to discover them. In my first years of high school, I eventually found friendships with people who had the same craving for magic, but this was before the time of the 90s glut of witchcraft movies, and slightly before goth and we didn't

really have any models for what a coven or magical group looked like. The fact that we were in the newly built and rapidly expanding Florida suburbs increased our isolation. We had no cars for wider explorations. We rode our bikes to each other's houses and played with Ouija boards to a soundtrack of Led Zeppelin, Dio and Blue Oyster Cult. We invented our own magic, and we were serious about it, but we had no conception of any wider community and no books to guide us, a condition that is almost unthinkable for any budding young mage today.

I don't recall how I discovered New Age Books and Things, but I am pretty sure my first visit was when I was around 16 with my still best friend Gary, who was four years older and had a car. New Age Books and Things, which had a good run of 37 years, was not what you would call atmospheric. It was tucked into the corner of a plaza on Federal Highway, a central thoroughfare in Ft. Lauderdale, a city which itself generally lacks atmosphere, its crushing blandness only somewhat redeemed by its proximity to the Atlantic ocean. I remember full shelves of books against dull beige walls, some candles, tarot cards, maybe incense and a small section of jewellery in the front case near the cash register. It was generally quiet, mostly staffed by a single person, who was normally not interested in conversation. I am sure there were tarot readers, but they were certainly not out in the open. The shop was not small, it was quite spacious and I never recall it feeling crowded with things or people. It was in many ways modest and unembellished, not really calling attention to itself and I yet knew this was the motherlode! This place was evidence that witches were real, and maybe I could be one too.

While I was in high school, starting at about the age of 16, I worked to make my own money at a market research firm, conducting surveys on radio listening habits over the phone until generally quite late on most school nights. Gary and I would occasionally go over to the bookstore on the weekends, and I would sift through the shelves trying

to figure out what it was that I actually needed to read. There was no doubt I was flying by the seat of my pants. New Age Books and Things was not exactly a hanging out kind of book shop. Although browsing was encouraged, it wasn't a particularly welcoming spot with lots of cosy chairs for relaxing or exploration. It may be that the marginality of the subject matter in the mid 80s, just as the Satanic Panic was gaining steam, suggested an atmosphere of silence and discretion rather than conversation and inquiry. Yet it may also be the case that I was young and nervous and afraid to ask for guidance that may well have been forthcoming had I sought it.

I don't recall exactly what the first books I purchased there were. Without any particular input I made some random guesses that in hindsight were actually fairly intuitive. Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon*, Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance*, Israel Regardie's *The Golden Dawn*, and some small red book without an author that provided simple scripts of seasonal festivals were among my treasured purchases. I still have each of those books in my library. In looking back, I purchased books early on that would give me something on which I might build a foundation of practice and understand the history of a wider magical culture that I sought to be a member of. I never tried to find a local coven, my friends were coven enough, but this bookshop kept me from being rudderless. I will never stop being grateful for its presence and the important role it played in my own magical development.

But New Age Books and Things wasn't just about the books, it was also about the things! The candles, incense, and jewellery was evidence of practice, of people, of community. Even if I wasn't leaping into the wider witchy world just yet, I now had evidence that there were others out there doing magical things and that knowledge alone was important to me. There was still something that I was part of, I knew my people were out there, even if I didn't know them yet.

Experientially, Treadwell's is almost the polar opposite of New Age Books and Things. It is a truly magical place, atmospheric, beautiful, enchanted. I still feel the thrill every time I walk through the doors there, and I can only imagine what my 16 year old self would have thought knowing that it exists now. There's literally no place on earth like it. It is not just a bookstore, it is a haven, a meeting place, a place of discovery, of mystery and revelation, of learning and community. It is a stunningly visionary space, a magical conjuring by its legendary doyenne Christina Oakley Harrington, who is welcoming, wise and knowledgeable, with the ability to gently guide any seeker. She, too, is an institution in her own right. Anyone who has stumbled upon Treadwell's at any point in their spiritual journey must know how fortunate they are.

Yet I am still so exceptionally grateful for New Age Books and Things, even with its unremarkable interior and lack of apparent enchantment. Its presence alone gave me what I needed at a difficult and vulnerable time of my life, and given how long it kept its doors open, I am certain I am not the only one who is grateful, or for whom it holds a special place. It helped me to find magic, and I'm still carrying around its influence over 40 years later. In fact, I believe the first pentagram ever purchased for me as a gift from Gary was from that shop, and I still wear it around my neck to this day. With the rise of internet shopping and online magical communities, these sacred spaces where we can discover, learn, be inspired and gather are perhaps even more vital. They are necessary because of the people, because of the things, the material presence of witches and magicians past and present. No matter how long we have been seeking, we still need guidance and conversation. We need physical spaces in which to have unexpected encounters, to hold magical items, to buy candles, to meet new people.

I would imagine that many people, particularly folks in cities, have an occult bookshop that they hold dear to

their hearts, however luscious, cluttered, chaotic, or plain it may be. Yet so many seekers don't have access to an occult shop of any kind, so I also want to shout out to all of the unappreciated physical places in this world that help people on their magical journey, regardless of how mundane they may seem. To all the young suburban and rural witches and magicians around the world who find that spark in unexpected places: a hardware store, a local park, a bookstore in the mall, an arcade, a record store, a jewellery stall in a marketplace, or a gaming shop. So many people these days have their magical beginnings traversing through the black mirror of a phone or computer screen, just by asking a simple search question. That in itself is a joyous thing, but let's just not forget to find each other when we can, and keep our senses alive for all of the spaces where wonder is waiting.

Amy Hale

Prosperine's

In my role as a guide to Hookland, visitors to England often ask me to direct them places the county is based on. This is easy to achieve if they are travelling outside of the capital, more of an issue if they are confined to London. It isn't that my home city doesn't have a surfeit of territories ceded to Faery, it's just I am wary of sending tourists to them.

Mindful of visitor safety, yet still trying to be helpful I will suggest St Olave's and walking Tower Hill with both Bran and its 125 executed ghosts in mind. I will point them towards the crypt of Saint Bride's and stories of its lost holy well. I'll give A-Z coordinates so they can walk in the alleged footsteps of Gog and Magog, trace the psychic cicatrix of Blitz or failed rebellion. There will always be detailed instructions for navigation by ghost-soaked pubs. There will always be the strong advice to visit Treadwell's.

Treadwell's is in the DNA of Hookland. It is as an important factor in its creation of the county as 2010 conversations with Tim Dedopulos in a miserabalist London tower block, the books of Arthur Machen or that time in junior school when the local four-minute warning sirens misfired and we children got to see our teachers running into the street screaming.

It is significant in the shaping not because some of my beloved friends have worked at Treadwell's across the decades. Nor due to the fact many of the books I use for reference were bought there. Both things are true, but largely unrelated to its two great gifts to Hookland—inspiration from lectures held in its basement and a sense of it as a character that I wanted to tell stories about.

Writers by nature, are thieving magpies. We pick up gleaming ideas and facts others casually drop. We place

them in our already bulging mental pockets. There they tumble—sometimes for years—being polished by collision until they crack open to reveal something interesting, or just occasionally emerge alchemised into golden material for stories. I am happy to admit I've picked up treasures from downstairs in Treadwell's that have found their way into Hookland.

Muggy, enfolding and often giving a sense that it moonlights as a Mithraeum, downstairs at Treadwell's is one of my favourite places of learning. In it I've enjoyed revelations on Victorian erotica, dakini history and magic from the margins. It's there I've discovered obscure sorceries, queer perspectives on occulture and enough eccentric cults to fill a novel or two.

It is downstairs at Treadwell's where I heard a talk that focussed me on some of the specific things I wanted Hookland to be about long before I'd written my first word on the county. I'd gone to hear my friend Stephen Grasso talk and he was on fire. As a venue, Treadwell's often pulls the best out of its guest speakers, but Stephen that night delivered this poetic, rapturous rant about magic that made the sweltering basement feel like revival tent.

I came upstairs to gulp cool air, febrile with the possibilities his words inspired. We needed tales of the weird as experienced in our childhood working class communities. We needed tales of folk magic performed by dinner ladies, the girl on the supermarket checkout. We needed the language of the mysteries to be accessible, engaging and not divorced from our messy lived experience. That night as I left Treadwell's, I took an important step towards creating Hookland.

I have a number of odd thoughts about Treadwell's that I like to pass on to those asking for advice on visiting 'Hookland-ish places'. I mention the notion that it's one of London magical crossroads, visiting it a ritual act necessary

to better understand the city's mythscape. Mention that the books gossip to each other, share stories from their pages when the store is shuttered. Tell how all the inked incantations argue like boastful schoolboys about which is the strongest, most efficacious, most dread. I casually promise that it is haunted by one my favourite ghosts.

I know as writer of fiction, that last claim might be taken as urine extraction. My words so often come from the salt-line blur of remembered real and imagination, few will attribute to them any seriousness. Yet this my truth, the shade of my friend who was a noted feral magician, haunts Treadwell's. If not birdwatching on the Rainham Marshes or troubling folk sitting on the benches of a certain East London boneyard, he seems to spend a fair portion of his afterlife in a tangible fug of tobacco smoke outside the store.

When I visit he often pops inside with me to offer pithily insightful or withering reviews of books—"That one's written by a pretentious armchair occultist ... absolute hollow wankery ... now this one is the real deal ... lots of lived experience, lots of entrails ..." Occasionally as we come up the stairs after a talk, he might offer a grudging: "That was alright." Somehow this all seems entirely reasonable. Treadwell's is a place you find friends in life, there's no reason death should change this.

While I think of the store as hangout of friendly temporal shades and haven where books conduct their own sorcery, sometimes I think of it as a living character. Not only does it have a unique, instantly recognisable smell—a delicious mix of old and new paper, dragon's blood incense and something which might possibly be ancient leather jackets—in my head, it has a voice. This made it inevitable it would be appear in Hookland.

My first act in manifesting Hookland was to draw a map, placing stories I wanted to tell upon it. Some were vague descriptions: coffin cart ghost; entrance to St. Martin's

Land; river of the Empress Eel; wandering pub. Others were single names with whole unfolding folklores behind them: Bonehorse; Barrowcross; Harrowhound; Fethrower. One of those names was Prosperine's—Hookland's reimagining of Treadwell's.

In Hookland, nothing is made up, just remembered differently. I knew for storytelling reasons, the county would need a good esoteric bookshop, so of course it made sense to start with a deliberate misremembering of one I love. More than that, one which was to me already an entity, a numinous spirit. Fully formed on Weychester's Alderbeck Street, it became a portal where all the weird I'd encountered, all the lessons learned in Treadwell's could tumble out.

Downstairs at Prosperine's you can find Emily C. Banting giving a talk entitled Foundational Witch Graft. Upstairs in the rare book cabinet there's a lightly foxed copy of C.L. Nolan's *The Secret Land*, on the front table a pile of Dr. Michael Benn's latest work on folklore. Byron Geth is flicking through the zines, at the counter a customer is being guided away from Brian Danbury's ramblings and towards *An Ethnography of UFO Cults*.

The thought that the shop nodded to you as you entered persists as you head for your favourite shelf. The books jostle for your attention as you browse, whisper of the secrets they will share upon reading. You wonder if there's a word for the feeling of being simultaneously at home and on the threshold of wonder.

So next time you want to visit Hookland in London, pop into The Coal Hole to check whether Richard Harris's spectre is at his usual table, walk the Grand Union Canal to Kensal Green Cemetery and whatever else you do, make a pilgrimage to Treadwell's and say hello to it from me.

David Southwell



A place of work, a meeting-point, my favourite venue for book launches and lectures, a chance to meet friends new and old. Over the years, Treadwell's has been all of these things to me, and much more. I think of Treadwell's as a *bindu*, the central point of a tantric yantra, exploding forth to create a webwork of relationships, points of contact, memories, forging friendships, loosing chance encounters, lines of flight in new directions. Some of my closest and dearest friendships began at Treadwell's. There is a magic in making connections, in reaching out to others.

Also, looking back, I realize with a start that much of what I have written over the last decade or so, is entwined, one way or another, with Treadwell's. From blog posts inspired by conversations to lectures and entire books. Thank you, Treadwell's, and thank you Christina and your staff, for holding, and growing a unique space.

Phil Hine