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The goat and the gazelle: witchcraft

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FULL moon, November 1984. In a witches' coven in northeast London, members have gathered from as far away as Bath, Leicester and Scotland to attend the meeting at the full moon. We drink tea until nine – in London, most rituals follow tea – and then change and go into the other room. The sitting room has been transformed. The furniture has been removed, and a twelve foot chalk circle drawn on the carpet. It will be brushed out in the morning. Four candlesticks stake out the corners of the room, casting shadows from the stag's antlers on the wall. The antlers sit next to a sheaf of wheat, subtle sexual symbolism. In spring and summer there are flowers everywhere. The altar in the centre of the circle is a chest which seems ancient. On top an equally ancient box holds incense in different drawers. On it, flowers and herbs surround a carved wooden Pan; a Minoan goddess figure sits on the altar itself amid a litter of ritual knives and tools.

The high priestess begins by drawing the magic circle in the air above the chalk, which she does with piety, saying 'let this be a boundary between the world of gods and that of men'. This imaginary circle is then treated as real throughout the evening. To leave the circle you slash it in the air and redraw it when you return. The chalk circle is always drawn with the ritual knife; the cakes, wine and the dancing always move in a clockwise direction. These rules are part of what makes it a witches' circle and they are scrupulously observed. On this evening a coven member wanted us to 'do' something for a friend's sick baby. Someone made a model of the baby and put it on the altar, at the Minoan goddess' feet. We held hands in a circle around the altar and then began to run, chanting a set phrase. When the circle was running at its peak the high priestess suddenly stopped. Everyone shut their eyes, raised their hands, and visualized the prearranged image: in this case it was Mary, the woman who wanted the spell, the 'link' between us and the unknown child. We could have 'worked' without the model baby, but it served as a 'focus' for the concentration. Witches of folklore made clay and waxen effigies over which they uttered imprecations – so we made effigies and kept a packet of plasticene in the altar for the purpose. By springtime, Mary reported, the child had recovered, and she thanked us for the help.

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Modern witchcraft was essentially created in the forties – at least in its current

form – by a civil servant, Gerald Gardner, who was probably inspired by Margaret Murray's historical account of witchcraft as an organized pre-Christian fertility religion branded devil-worship by the demonologists, and more generally by the rise of interest in anthropology and folklore.[1] Gardner had met Aleister Crowley, knew of the Golden Dawn, and may have been a Freemason. (Indeed his rituals show Crowleyian and Masonic influence.[2]) In the early fifties, Gardner published fictitious ethnographies of supposedly contemporaneous witches who practised the ancient, secret rites of their agrarian ancestors and worshipped the earth goddess and her consort in ceremonies beneath the full moon.[3] He claimed to have been initiated into one of these groups, hidden from watchful authorities since the 'burning times'.[4] In his eyes, witchcraft was an ancient magico-religious cult, secretly practised, peculiarly suited to the Celtic race. Witches had ancient knowledge and powers, handed down through the generations. And unlike the rest of an alienated society, they were happy and content. This paragraph gives the flavour of his romanticism:

> Instead of the great sabbats with perhaps a thousand or more attendents [the coven] became a small meeting in private houses, probably a dozen or so according to the size of the room. The numbers being few, they were no longer able to gain power, to rise to the hyperaesthetic state by means of hundreds of wild dancers shrieking wildly, and they had

[1] In *Witchcult in Western Europe* (1921), Murray argued – much influenced by Frazer – that an organized pre-Christian fertility cult lay behind the witchcraft persecutions. The religion centred on the cycle of the seasons and their crops, and deity was incarnate in a horned male god, who had a female form, Diana. Murray proposed that the male god had superseded the female deity, and that the Inquisition had twisted the symbolism into a cult of devil-worship. Murray described her researches as anthropological, and compared witches to shamans: just as shamans understand themselves to leave their bodies, so witches believed themselves to leave their bodies to 'fly' – when they participate in certain rituals. It was a commendable approach, because it interpreted the witchtrials as concerning genuine popular belief – not as the collective delusion historians often assumed.

Other influential books in the development of modern witchcraft were Leland (1899) *Gospel of Aradia*; Frazer (1890; the twelve volumes were slowly published, and the abridged volume appeared in 1922, when Frazer's influence was at its peak – Cohn (1975: 107) *The Golden Bough*; Evans-Wentz (1911) *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*; and later, Graves' (1968; first edition 1948) *The White Goddess*.

[2] There seems to be no hard evidence that Gardner actually was a Mason. However, there are some striking similarities in ritual structure between the two practices: an initiatory hierarchy of three 'degrees' (Masonry of course has many higher degrees in addition to the three basic ones); an initiation ceremony in which an initiate is presented blindfolded, with a garter around one leg, then presented to the different directional quarters, and presented with the 'weapons' or 'tools' of what is known as the 'Craft'.

[3] He claimed that he had only published then because of the repeal of the Witchcraft Laws in 1951, which proclaimed the practice of witchcraft illegal. They were replaced by the Fraudulent Mediums Act. See Farrar and Farrar (1984: 277).

[4] Gardner may well have been initiated into a practising group. He claimed that he had been initiated in 1939 by one Dorothy Clutterbuck. Some members of the group I joined had actually known him, and one at least – the most senior member – was persuaded that the group had existed, and that 'Old Dorothy' was not a fictitious character. Gardner talked about her, he said, as if she had been alive. Valiente, Gardner's close associate, was also persuaded of this woman's reality, and searched for the traces of her in county records. She produced evidence of a Dorothy Clutterbuck born and buried at a suitable time, in suitable places. See appendix in Farrar and Farrar (1984: 283–300). However, there is no reason to suppose that if such a group existed, it necessarily pre-dated the publication of Murray's book.

to use other secret methods to induce this state. This came easily to the descendents of the heath, but not to the people of non-Celtic race. Some knowledge and power had survived, as many of the families had intermarried, and in time their powers grew, and in out of the way places the cult survived. The fact that they were happy gave them a reason to struggle on. It is from these people that the surviving witch families probably descend. They know that their fathers and grandfathers belonged, and had spoken to them of meetings about the time of Waterloo, when it was an old cult, thought to exist from all time. Though the persecution had died down from want of fuel, they realized that their only chance to be left alone was to remain unknown and this is as true today as it was five hundred years ago.[5]

The invention of tradition is an intriguing topic: why is it that history should grant such authority, even in so rational an age? Witches speak of a secretive tradition, hidden for centuries from the Church's fierce eye, passed down in families until the present generation. There is no reason that such claims could not be true, but there is very little evidence to support them. The most sympathetic scholarship that speaks of an organized, pre-Christian witchcraft has very shaky foundations[6] – although there is more recently work that suggests that there were at least shared fantasies about membership in witch-related societies.[7] But those accused of witchcraft in early modern Europe were very likely innocent of any practice.[8]

[5] Gardner (1954: 46).

[6] While the attempt to examine the sixteenth and seventeenth century witchcraft persecutions as the product of popular belief was laudable, Murray took the apparent beliefs of the accused for their actual practice, and she drew her evidence from literary accounts of trials and from confessions exacted under torture. Certainly many confessions attest to the existence of sabbats, flying and the like, and there were those who believed that they were witches and confessed freely. However, there is little evidence to indicate the existence of an organized pagan fertility cult. Macfarlane, for example, found no evidence for an underground pagan religion in his thorough study of witchcraft prosecutions in Essex, nor did the language of the prosecutions include descriptions of the sabbat, the diabolic contract, and so forth (1970: 10). Thomas, drawing on a formidable knowledge of the period, concludes that 'in England there can be little doubt that there was never a "witch-cult" of the type envisaged by contemporary demonologists or their modern disciples' (1971: 516). The 'Murrayite thesis' is rarely taken seriously, in its full form, today.

[7] The relative ease with which people confessed to practice in itself indicates a widespread popular belief in witchcraft: whatever political purpose the persecution may have served, it depended upon common folk belief. In addition, there seems to have been popular medieval European belief in a Diana (Herodias, Holda) figure, who travelled through the night accompanied by souls of the dead and by female devotees. These 'ladies of the night' visited households with benevolent care; there were also beliefs of 'night-witches', cannibalistic women who devoured babies (Cohn, 1975: 206–19). Ginzburg presents evidence from late sixteenth-century Friuli of a belief in the 'benandanti', 'good walkers', who left their bodies at night and, armed with fennel stalks, set out to battle witches over the crops, the livestock, or other desired goods. This fantasy seems to have its roots in a pre-Christianity fertility religion. However, it is not clear that the benandanti ever met in the flesh, or that the fantasy was anything but that. 'On the basis of the available documents, the existence or non-existence of an organized set of witches in fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Europe seems to be indeterminate' (Ginzburg, 1983: xiv). Further evidence of a pre-Christian belief in witchcraft is given by Le Roy Ladurie (1987).

[8] Explanations of the 'witchcraft craze' of early modern Europe are rife. Accounts include: Trevor-Roper (1956), Cohn (1975), Thomas (1971), Macfarlane (1970), Henningsen (1980), Ginzburg (1983), Larner (1981, 1984), Estes (1983), Le Roy Ladurie (1987), Ben-Yehuda (1980). Accounts of the Salem trials include Boyer and Nissenbaum (1974) and Demos (1982). The corpus of this work is one of the best illustrations of the complex causality of any particular historical events, for the different accounts – admittedly handling different events in varied contexts – point to

Witches have ambivalent attitudes towards their history, as a later chapter details. They share, however, a common vision of their past, differing only on whether this past is myth or legend. Many of them say that the truth of the vision is unimportant: it is the vision itself, with its evocative pull, that matters. The basic account – given by someone who describes it as a myth – is this:

Witchcraft is a religion that dates back to paleolithic times, to the worship of the god of the hunt and the goddess of fertility. One can see remnants of it in cave paintings and in the figurines of goddesses that are many thousands of years old. This early religion was universal. The names changed from place to place but the basic deities were the same.

When Christianity came to Europe, its inroads were slow. Kings and nobles were converted first, but many folk continued to worship in both religions. Dwellers in rural areas, the 'Pagans' and 'Heathens', kept to the old ways. Churches were built on the sacred sites of the old religion. The names of the festivals were changed but the dates were kept. The old rites continued in folk festivals, and for many centuries Christian policy was one of slow cooptation.

During the times of persecution the Church took the god of the Old Religion and – as is the habit with conquerors – turned him into the Christian devil. The Old Religion was forced underground, its only records set forth, in distorted form, by its enemies. Small families kept the religion alive and in 1951, after the Witchcraft Laws in England were repealed, it began to surface again . . .[9]

It is indeed an evocative tale, with secrecy and martyrdom and hidden powers, and whether or not witches describe it as actual history they are moved by its affect.

Witchcraft is meant to be a revival, or re-emergence, of an ancient nature-religion, the most ancient of religions, in which the earth was worshipped as a woman under different names and guises throughout the inhabited world. She was Astarte, Inanna, Isis, Cerridwen – names that ring echoes in archaeological

the interdependency of psychological fantasy, small-scale social tension, and larger political and economic developments: the fear of a being who subverts the fertility of body and land, with unrestrained perverted sexuality, the cannibalistic, incestuous 'bad mother'; the child-rearing customs particular to a given society; the availability of criminal proceedings which made prosecutions available; the rise of a commercial ethic, a new individualism and the demise of the small face-to-face community; the collapse of a magic-like Catholicism for a stern, unforgiving Protestantism and the rise of a post-Galenic medicine, able to differentiate between the natural and non-natural cause for a disease; the political tensions within a given community; and then, Reformation and Counter-Reformation tensions, the rise and tenure of a notion of the 'godly state' in which Christianity held political significance. This blend of personally salient fantasy, cognitive shift, and political ideology probably precipitated the outbreak of witchcraft fear as Europe crossed the boundary from early modernism into secularized nation-states, heightening and creating social tension in its wake. But it is a phenomenon with many explanations and many causes, a typically messy transformation.

The accounts of African witchcraft are as numerous, but tend to be more homogeneous in their explanation, pointing primarily to witchcraft's role in relieving social tension – a social 'strain gauge', as one author puts it. Nevertheless, authors sometimes mention the psychodynamic elements of witchcraft fantasy, and point to some of the larger political elements of a rash of witchcraft accusations. The primary collections of essays, which include papers or book-excerpts from most of the scholars in the area, include: Marwick (1970), Douglas (1970), Middleton and Winter (1963), and Middleton (1967).

[9] Adler (1986: 45–6).

texts. She was the Great Goddess whose rites Frazer and Neumann – and Apuleius – recorded in rich detail. Witches are people who read their books and try to create, for themselves, the tone and feeling of an early humanity, worshipping a nature they understand as vital, powerful and mysterious. They visit the stone circles and pre-Christian sites, and become amateur scholars of the pagan traditions behind the Easter egg and the Yule log.

Above all, witches try to 'connect' with the world around them. Witchcraft, they say, is about the tactile, intuitive understanding of the turn of the seasons, the song of the birds; it is the awareness of all things as holy, and that, as is said, there is no part of us that is not of the gods.[10] One witch suggests a simple exercise to begin to glimpse the nature of the practice:

> Perhaps the best way to begin to understand the power behind the simple word *witch* is to enter the circle . . . Do it, perhaps, on a full moon, in a park or in the clearing of a wood. You don't need any of the tools you will read about in books on the Craft. You need no special clothes, or lack of them. Perhaps you might make up a chant, a string of names of gods and goddesses who were loved or familiar to you from childhood myths, a simple string of names for earth and moon and stars, easily repeatable like a mantra.
>
> And perhaps, as you say those familiar names and feel the earth and the air, the moon appears a bit closer, and perhaps the wind rustling the leaves suddenly seems in rhythm with your own breathing. Or perhaps the chant seems louder and all the other sounds far away. Or perhaps the woods seem strangely noisy. Or unspeakably still. And perhaps the clear line that separates you from bird and tree and small lizards seems to melt. Whatever else, your relationship to the world of living nature changes. The Witch is the change of definitions and relationships.[11]

The Goddess, the personification of nature, is witchcraft's central concept. Each witch has an individual understanding of the Goddess, which changes considerably over time. However, simply to orient the reader I will summarize the accounts which I have heard and have read in the literature. The Goddess is multi-faceted, ever-changing – nature and nature's transformations. She is Artemis, virgin huntress, the crescent moon and the morning's freshness; Selene, Aphrodite and Demeter, in the full bloom of the earth's fertility; Hecate and axe-bearing Cerridwen, the crone who destroys, the dying forests which make room for new growth. The constant theme of the Goddess is cyclicity and transformation: the spinning Fates, the weaving spider, Aphrodite who each year arises virgin from the sea, Isis who swells and floods and diminishes as the Nile. Every face of the Goddess is a different goddess, and yet also the same, in a different aspect, and there are different goddesses for different years and seasons of one's life.

The Goddess is very different from the Judaeo-Christian god. She is in the world, of the world, the very being of the world. 'People often ask me whether I *believe* in the Goddess. I reply, "Do you believe in rocks?" '[12] Yet she is also an

[10] This is a phrase taken from Crowley's Gnostic Mass (1929: 345–61). It sometimes appears in witchcraft rituals or in writings about the practice.

[11] Adler (1986: 43–4).

[12] Starhawk (1979: 77).

entity, a metaphor for nature to whom one can talk. 'I relate to the Goddess, every day, in one way or another. I have a little chitchat with Mommy.'[13] Witches have talked to me about the 'duality' of their religious understanding, that on the one hand the Goddess merely personifies the natural world in myth and imagery, and that on the other hand the Goddess is there as someone to guide you, punish you, reward you, someone who becomes the central figure in your private universe. I suspect that for practitioners there is a natural slippage from metaphor to extant being, that it is difficult – particularly in a Judaeo-Christian society – genuinely to treat a deity-figure as only a metaphor, regardless of how the religion is rationalized.[14] The figure becomes a deity, who cares for you.

Gardner began initiating people into groups called 'covens' which were run by women called 'high priestesses'. Covens bred other covens; people wandered into the bookstore, bought his books and then others, and created their own covens. By now there are many types of witchcraft: Gardnerian, Alexandrian, feminist, 'traditional' and so forth, named for their founders or their political ideals. Feminist covens usually only initiate women and they usually think of themselves as involved with a particularly female type of spirituality. Groups stemming from Gardner are called 'Gardnerian'. Alexandrian witchcraft derives from Alex Sanders' more ceremonial version of Gardnerian witchcraft. Sanders was a charismatic man who deliberately attracted the attention of the gutterpress and became a public figure in the late sixties. Some of those who read the sensationalistic exposés and watched the television interviews were drawn to witchcraft, and Sanders initiated hundreds of applicants, sometimes on the evening they applied. Traditional witches supposedly carry on the age-old traditions of their families: whether by chance or otherwise, I met none who could substantiate their claim to an inherited ritual practice.

Covens vary widely in their style and custom, but there is a common core of practice. They meet on (or near) days dictated by the sky: the solstices and equinoxes and the 'quarter days' between them, most of them fire-festivals in the Frazerian past: Beltane (1 May), Lammas (1 August), Halloween (31 October), Candlemas (2 February). These are the days to perform seasonal rituals, in which witches celebrate the passage of the longest days and the summer's harvest. Covens also meet on the full moons – most witches are quite aware of the moon's phases – on which they perform spells, rituals with a specific intention, to cure Jane's cold or to get Richard a job. Seasonal ritual meetings are called 'sabbats', the full moon meetings, 'esbats'.[15] Membership usually ranges between three and thirteen members, and members think of themselves – or ideally think of themselves – as 'family'. In my experience, it

[13] Witch, Z. Budapest, quoted in Adler (1986: 105).

[14] Gombrich's (1971) study of Sinhalese Buddhism draws a related conclusion, that devotees tend to treat the Buddha-figure as a god, not – as doctrine would have it – an enlightened man.

[15] The terms are probably drawn from Margaret Murray, although 'esbat' appears in a sixteenth-century French manuscript (Le Roy Ladurie, 1987: 7). 'Sabbat' is a standard demonologist's term.

usually took about a year of casual acquaintance before someone would be initiated.[16] The process took so long because people felt it important that a group should be socially very comfortable with each other, and – crucially – that one could trust all members of the group. As a result, covens tended to be somewhat socially homogeneous.[17] In the more 'traditional' covens, there are three 'degrees'. First degree initiates are novices, and in their initiation they were anointed 'witch' and shown the witches' weapons.[18] Second degree initiates usually take their new status after a year. The initiation gives them the authority to start their own coven. It consists in 'meeting' death – the initiate acts the part of death if he is male; if she is female, she meets death and accepts him. The intended lesson of the ritual is that the willingness to lose the self gives one control over it, and over the transformations of life and death. Third degree initiation is not taken for years. It is essentially a rite of mystical sexuality, though it is sometimes 'symbolic' rather than 'actual'. It is always performed in privacy, with only the two initiates present.[19] Behind the initiation lies the idea that one becomes the Goddess or God in one of their most powerful manifestations, the two dynamic elements of the duality that creates the world.

Witchcraft is a secretive otherworld, and more than other magical practices it is rich in symbolic, special items. Initiates have dark-handled knives they call 'athames', which are the principal tools and symbols of their powers: they have special cups and platters and incense burners, sometimes even special whips to 'purify' each other before the rite begins. There is always an altar, usually strewn with herbs and incense, with a statue of the Goddess, and there are always candles at the four directions, for in all magical practice the four directions (east, south, west, north) represent the four ancient elements (air, fire, water, earth) which in turn represent different sorts of 'energies' (thought; will power; emotion; material stability).[20] Then, another symbol of the secrecy and violation of convention, most covens work in the nude. This is ostensibly a sign of freedom, but probably stems from the evocative association of witchcraft and sexuality, and a utopian vision of a paradisial past. There are no orgies, little

[16] I was fortunate: there was a feeling in the group I joined that my time in the country might be limited, and certainly that my stay in London was relatively brief (fifteen months). In consequence I was initiated only six months after my initial contact with the members.

[17] This may be an exaggeration. Social ease with the applicant was clearly pertinent to the coven's decision to initiate someone, and personality style seemed more crucial than socio-economic standing. I knew an applicant turned down by one coven, despite the fact that he was of a similar age and background as most of the members, and despite the fact that their coven needed more men to have an even balance of the sexes – which is thought desirable. This was probably because he seemed too independent to the high priestess; there was at least some personality conflict between them.

[18] As already mentioned, this portion of the ritual resembles the first-degree initiation in Freemasonry.

[19] The role and nature of this 'third degree' initiation has been, not surprisingly, a source of some controversy within witchcraft, and different participants have differing views about whether it should be 'actual' or 'symbolic' or held at all.

[20] Air, earth, water and fire were recognized constitutive elements in the ancient world and their role and nature was a matter of considerable debate. The attribution of directional definition and human capacity may be a later accretion.

eroticism, and in fact little behaviour that would be different if clothes were being worn. That witches dance around in the nude probably is part of the attractive fantasy that draws outsiders into the practice, but the fantasy is a piece with the paganism and not the source of salacious sexuality. Or at least, that seemed to be the case with the five covens I met.

I was initiated into the oldest of these witches' groups, a coven which has remained intact for more than forty years. It was once Gardner's own coven, the coven in which he participated, and three of the current members were initiated under his care. It pleases the anthropologist's heart that there are traces of ancestor worship: the pentacle, the magical platter which holds the communion 'mooncakes', was Gardner's own, and we used his goddess statue in the circle.

The coven had thirteen members while I was there. Four of them (three men and one woman) had been initiated over twenty-five years ago and were in their fifties: an ex-Cambridge computer consultant, who flew around the world lecturing to computer professionals; a computer software analyst, high priest for the last twenty years; a teacher; an ex-Oxford university lecturer. The high priestess was initiated twenty years ago and was a professional psychologist. Another woman, in her forties, had been initiated some ten years previously. She joined the group when her own coven disbanded; another man in his fifties also came from that coven. He was an electronic engineer in the music industry. By the time I had been in the group several months, Helga and Eliot's coven had disbanded (this was the coven associated with the Glittering Sword) and Helga at any rate preferred to think of herself as a Nordic Volva rather than as a Celtic witch. So she abandoned witchcraft altogether, though she became deeply engaged in the other magical practice, and Eliot and another member of his coven, the young Austrian who was also in the Glittering Sword, joined the group. The rest of the younger generation included a woman in her thirties who was a professional artist but spent most of her time then raising a young child. Another member was a middle-level manager of a large business. He was in his late thirties and was my 'psychic twin': we were both initiated into the group on the same night. Another man, thirtyish, managed a large housing estate. The computer consultant and the teacher had been married twenty-five years, the high priest and high priestess had lived together for twenty. Four other members had partners who did not belong to the group, but two of them belonged to other magical groups. Three members of the group were married to or closely related to university lecturers – but this was an unusually intellectual group.

This coven, then, had a wide age range and was primarily composed of middle-class intellectuals, many of whose lovers were not members of the group. This was not particularly standard: another coven with whom this group had contact had nine members, all of whom were within ten years of age, and it included three married couples and three single individuals. A Cambridge coven had a similarly great age span, and as wide a range of professions. But one in Clapham was entirely upper working class, and its members were within about fifteen years of age. For the meetings, the group relied upon a standard

ritual text. Gardner (with the help of Doreen Valiente, now an elder stateswoman in what is called the 'Craft') had created a handbook of ritual practice called the 'Book of Shadows', which had supposedly been copied by each initiate through the ages. ('Beltane special objects: jug of wine, earthenware chalice, wreaths of ivy . . . High priestess in east, high priest at altar with jug of wine and earthenware chalice . . .') The group performed these rites as written, year in and year out: they were fully aware that Gardner had written them (with help) but felt that as the original coven, they had a responsibility to tradition. In fact, some of them had been re-written by the high priest, because Gardner's versions were so simple: he felt, however, that he should treat them as Gardner's, and never mentioned the authorship.

The seasonal rituals were remarkable because in them, the priestess is meant to incarnate the Goddess. This is done through a ritual commonly known as 'drawing down the moon'. The high priestess' ritual partner is called the 'high priest', and he stands opposite her in the circle and invokes her as the Goddess; and as Goddess, she delivers what is known as the 'Charge', the closest parallel to a liturgy within the Craft. Gardner's Book of Shadows has been published and annotated by two witches, and it includes this text.

The high priest: Listen to the words of the great Mother; she who of old was called among men Artemis, Astarte, Athene, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Dana, Arianhod, Isis, Bride, and by many other names.

The high priestess: Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month, and better it be when the moon is full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me, who am Queen of all witches. There shall ye assemble, ye who are fain to learn all sorcery, yet who have not won its deepest secrets; to these will I teach things that are yet unknown. And ye shall be free from slavery; and as a sign that ye be really free, ye shall be naked in your rites; and ye shall dance, sing, feast make music and love, all in my praise. For mine is the ecstacy of the spirit, and mine is also joy on earth; for my law is love unto all beings. Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever towards it; let naught stop you or turn you aside. For mine is the secret door which opens up the Land of Youth, and mine is the cup of the wine of life, and the Cauldron of Cerridwen, which is the Holy Grail of immortality. I am the gracious Goddess, who gives the gift of joy unto the heart of man. Upon earth, I give the knowledge of the spirit eternal; and beyond death, I give peace, and freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before. Nor do I demand sacrifice; for behold, I am the mother of all living, and my love is poured out upon the earth.

The high priest: Hear ye the words of the Star Goddess; she in the dust of whose feet are the hosts of heaven, and whose body encircles the universe.

The high priestess: I who am the beauty of the green earth, and the white Moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters, and the desire of the heart of man, call unto thy soul. Arise and come unto me. For I am the soul of nature, who gives life to the universe. From me all things proceed, and unto me all things must return; and before my face, beloved of Gods and men, let thine innermost divine self be enfolded in the rapture of the infinite. Let me worship be with the heart that rejoiceth; for behold all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within you. And thou who thinkest to seek for me, know that seeking and yearning shall avail

> thee not unless thou knowest the mystery; that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee. For behold, I have been with thee from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.[21]

The nature-imagery, the romantic poetry, the freedom – this is the style of language commonly heard within these ritual circles. The point of this speech is that every woman can be Goddess. Every man, too, can be god. In some Gardnerian rituals – like Halloween – the high priestess invokes the stag god in her priest, and he gives similar speeches.

When the coven I joined performed spells, no ritual form was prescribed because no spell was identical to any other. The idea behind the spell was that a coven could raise energy by calling on their members' own power, and that this energy could be concentrated within the magical circle, as a 'cone of power', and directed towards its source by collective imagination. The first step in a spell was always to chant or meditate in order to change the state of consciousness and so have access to one's own power, and then to focus the imagination on some real or imagined visual representation of the power's goal. The most common technique was to run in a circle, hands held, all eyes on the central altar candle, chanting what was supposedly an old Basque witches' chant:[22]

Eko, eko, azarak
Eko, eko, zamilak
Eko, eko, Cernunnos
Eko, eko, Aradia[23]

Then, the circle running at its peak, the group suddenly stopped, held its linked hands high, shut its eyes and concentrated on a pre-arranged image.

Sometimes we prefixed the evening with a longer chant, the 'Witches' Rune':

Darksome night and shining moon
East, then South, then West, then North;
Hearken to the Witches' Rune –
Here we come to call ye forth!
Earth and water, air and fire,
Wand and pentacle and sword,
Work ye unto our desire,
Hearken ye unto our word!
Cords and censer, scourge and knife,
Powers of the witch's blade –
Waken all ye unto life,
Come ye as the charm is made!
Queen of Heaven, Queen of Hell,
Horned hunter of the night –
Lend your power unto the spell,
And work our will by magic rite!

[21] Farrar and Farrar (1981: 42–3).

[22] Pennethorne Hughes corroborates this attribution, but it is not clear that other historians would substantiate the claim.

[23] Farrar and Farrar (1984: 17).

By all the power of land and sea,
By all the might of moon and sun –
As we do will, so mote it be;
Chant the spell, and be it done![24]

The tone of the poem captures much about witchcraft; the special 'weapons' with special powers, the earthly power and goddess power used within the spell, the dependence of the spell upon the witches' will.

Most of the coven meetings I attended in England – in all I saw the rituals of some six Gardnerian-inspired groups – were similar in style. However, there were also feminist covens, a type of witchcraft relatively rare in England but quite important in the States. Witchcraft appeals to feminists for a number of reasons. Witches are meant to worship a female deity rather than a male patriarch, and to worship her as she was worshipped by all people before the monotheistic religions held sway: as the moon, the earth, the sheaf of wheat. Members of feminist covens talk about witchcraft and its understanding of cyclic transformation, of birth, growth and decay, as a 'woman's spirituality', and the only spirituality in which women are proud to menstruate, to make love, and to give birth. These women (and sometimes also men[25]) are often also compelled by the desire to reclaim the word 'witch', which they see as the male's fearful rejection of a woman too beautiful, too sexual, or past the years of fertility. The witches of European witch-craze fantasies were either beautiful young temptresses or hags.

Feminist covens emphasize creativity and collectivity, values commonly found in that political perspective, and their rituals are often quite different from those in Gardnerian groups. Perhaps I could offer an example, although in this example the women did not explicitly describe themselves as 'witches' but as participating in 'women's mysteries'.

On Halloween 1983 I joined a group of some fifteen women on top of a barrow in Kent. One of the women had been delegated to draw up a rough outline of the ritual, and before we left for the barrow she held a meeting in which she announced that she had 'cobbled together something from Starhawk and Z Budapest [two feminist witchcraft manual authors]'. (Someone shouted, 'don't put yourself down'.) She explained the structure of the rite as it stood and then asked for suggestions. Someone had brought a pot of red ochre and patchouli oil which she wanted to use, and someone else suggested that we use it to purify each other. Then it was suggested that we 'do' the elements first, and people volunteered for each directional quarter. The person who had chosen earth asked if the hostess had any maize flour which she could use. We talked about the purpose of the rite. The meeting was like many other feminist organization meetings: long on equality, emotional honesty and earthiness, short on speed.

[24] Farrar (1971: 20).

[25] There was at least one group of this ilk that was mixed: they would probably argue for the importance of integrating the male divine principle into a goddess-centred religion, and so justify the men's presence in a context usually focused on 'women's mysteries'.

When we arrived on the barrow some hours later, we walked round in a circle. Four women invoked the elements, at the different directions, with their own spontaneously chosen words. It was an impressive midnight: leafless trees stark against a dark sky, some wind, an empty countryside with a bull in the nearby field. Then one woman took the pot of red ochre and drew a circle on the cheek of the woman to her left, saying, 'may this protect you on Halloween night', and the pot passed around the circle. Then the woman who had drafted the ritual read an invocation to Hecate more or less taken from Starhawk, copied out in a looseleaf binder with a pentacle laminated on the front:

This is the night when the veil that divides the worlds is thin. It is the New Year in the time of the year's death, when the harvest is gathered and the fields lie fallow. The gates of life and death are opened; the dead walk, and to the living is revealed the Mystery: that every ending is but a new beginning. We meet in time out of time, everywhere and nowhere, here and there, to greet the Death which is also Life, and the triple Goddess who is the cycle of rebirth.

Someone lit a fire in a dustbin lid (the cauldron was too heavy to carry from London) and each of us then invited the women that we knew, living or dead, to be present. We then chanted, the chant also taken from Starhawk, in which we passed around incense and each person said, 'x lives, x passes, x dies' – x being anger, failure, blindness, and so forth. The chorus was: 'it is the cold of the night, it is the dark'. Then someone held up a pomegranate (this was found in both Starhawk and Z Budapest) and said, 'behold, I show you the fruit of life'. She stabbed it and said, 'which is death' and passed it around the circle, and each woman put a seed in the mouth of the woman to her left, saying, 'taste of the seeds of death'. Then that woman held up an apple – 'I show you the fruit of death and lo' – here she sliced it sideways, to show the five pointed star at its centre – 'it contains the five pointed star of life'. The apple was passed around the circle, each woman feeding her neighbour as before and saying, 'taste of the fruit of life'. Then we passed a chalice of wine and some bread, saying 'may you never be hungry', pulled out masks and sparklers, and danced around and over the fire. Many of these actions required unrehearsed, unpremeditated participation from all members present, unlike the Gardnerian coven, where those not doing the ritual simply watch until they are called to worship or to take communion (members often take turns in performing the rituals, though). There was also the sense that the group had written some of the ritual together, and that some of the ritual was spontaneous.

There are also 'solo' witches, individuals who call themselves witches even though they have never been initiated and have no formal tie to a coven. I met a number of these women (they were always women). One had an organization she called 'Spook Enterprises' and sold candles shaped like cats and like Isis. Another called herself a witch but had never been initiated, although she was well-established in the pagan world. Another, the speaker at the 1983 Quest conference, gave talks on 'village witchcraft': on inquiry, it appeared that she had been born in Kent, and was an ex-Girtonian.[26]

[26] Girton is the oldest women's college at Cambridge.

Mick, the woman of this sort whom I knew best, owned a Jacobean cottage where she lived alone on the edge of the Fens, the desolate drained farmland outside Cambridge. She managed a chicken farm. She told me that she discovered her powers at the age of ten, when she 'cursed' her math teacher and he promptly broke his leg in two places. It was clear that witchcraft was integral to her sense of self, and she took it seriously, albeit with theatre. She called her cottage 'Broomstick Cottage', kept ten cats and had a cast iron cauldron near the fire place. In the corner of the cottage she had a small statue of Pan on an altar, alongside a ritual knife stained with her own blood. Many of the villagers knew her and in Cambridge I heard of the 'Fen witch' from at least four different sources. Once, when I was sitting in her garden (her Elizabethan herb garden), two little boys cycled past. One shouted to the other, '*that's* where the witch lives!' Mick got 'collected' for her personality, she told me: people seem to think it exotic to have a witch to supper. And this may have been one of the reasons she cherished her claims. She was a very funny, sociable woman, always the centre of a party, but a bit lonely, I think, and a bit romantic: witchcraft served a different function for her than fervent Christianity might have done, but like all religions, the witchcraft reduced the loneliness, lent charm to the bleak landscape, and gave her a social role.

There is a certain feel to witchcraft, a humour and an enthusiasm, often missing in other groups. Witchcraft combines the ideal and the mundane. It blends spiritual intensity and romanticism with the lovable, paunchy flaws of the flesh. Fantasies of elfin unicorns side comfortably with bawdy Pans. The high priest of the coven I joined described this as 'the goat and the gazelle': 'all witches have a little of each'. Part of this is the practice itself. People can look slightly ridiculous standing around naked in someone's living room. One needs a sense of humour in order to tolerate the practice, as well as enough romanticism to take it seriously. And witches are perhaps the only magicians who incorporate humour into their practice. Their central invocation, the declamation of the priestess-turned-goddess, calls for 'mirth and reverence'. Laughter often rings within the circle, though rarely in the rites. One high priestess spontaneously explained to me that 'being alive is really rather funny. Wicca [another name for witchcraft] is the only religion that captures this'.

9

Introduction: the magician's changing intellectual habits

HOW can a magician take his ideas seriously? Part of the answer is that the very process of learning to be a magician elicits systematic changes in the way that the magician interprets events. Interpretation depends upon a complex set of assumptions, biases, conceptual frames, knowledge, heuristics and attributive tendencies – intellectual habits in paying attention, in organizing what one notices, and in remembering it. The exact nature of this interpretive process is not well-understood, though it is the subject of considerable debate. Indeed, it is the subject of several disciplines and theoretical schools within them. Anthropology, of course: but also philosophy, linguistics, cognitive psychology with its current concerns with attribution theory, episodic and semantic memory formation, evolutionary epistemology, script theory, the nature of conceptual categories, and the like – all these have stakes at the gambling table of experimental and theoretical work on interpretation. The anthropological challenge is to identify the characteristic features of the interpretive process, and the value of this material on modern magic is that it allows the observer to observe what changes occur as the magician enters magic and begins to interpret his practice as effective.

There seem to be three outstanding changes in intellectual habits. The magician learns what events count as evidence that the ritual has worked, and begins to find new patterns in sets of events, to see connections where previously he has only seen coincidence. Then, he acquires the knowledge shared by fellow practitioners – their common knowledge – which gives a depth and complexity to his practice, and allows him to discriminate between events in new ways, armed with these new categories and distinctions. Finally, he begins to use a battery of new assumptions – some of them explicitly formulated, others implicit in the conversation – which alter the types of remarks he takes for granted and does not question. The cumulative effect is as if the magician acquires new spectacles, with a different focus on the buzzing confusion of Jamesian reality, and slowly, gradually, steadily, begins to adjust to the new perspective on events.

For the most part, these different interpretations of the outsider and the practitioner do not arise from the peculiarities of magic, but from the process of becoming knowledgeable, good at something in particular. I would argue that the rift between magician and non-practitioner is carved out by the very process

of becoming a specialist in a particular kind of activity. Becoming a specialist often makes an activity seem sensible. The specialist learns a new way of paying attention to, making sense of and commenting upon her world. The important point is that the significant features of becoming a specialist can be identified. There are new ways to define evidence which offer grounds to the expert that the non-specialist cannot see, and ways to order events so that the specialist sees coherence where the non-specialist sees only chaos; there is a body of specialist knowledge which gives discrimination and depth to the specialist's interpretations; there is a semi-explicit philosophy which creates the assumptions which frame most conversation.

Most of the learning involved in becoming a specialist is not self-consciously verbalized; it is an unacknowledged accretion of knowledge and assumptions, ways of seeing and ways of making sense. People are often innocent of the changes in their own style of perceiving events, interpreting their actions, and organizing their memories. Many of these changes creep in slowly as the neophyte becomes a skilled hand at practice. The new ways of noticing, encoding, remembering, perceiving, not only alter the way events are observed, but also affect which ideas and theories seem plausible. To the long-term practitioner, magical theory seems more or less coherent, ordered, and rational. The magician argues about premises, debates the wisdom of certain actions, evaluates the evidence for his claims with care. He feels and behaves as if he acts according to a falsifiable system of whose validity he is slowly becoming persuaded. He may feel as if he has a keen, discriminating eye to judge his rituals and their effects.[1]

The striking observation is that in the course of practising magic the magic comes to seem eminently reasonable to the magicians, and that rather than realizing that their intellectual habits have changed they feel that they have discovered that the ideas behind magic are objectively true. To the non-practitioner, the magician's claims are woolly and ambiguous, undermined through the very attempt to protect them from disconfirmation. The practitioner seems to believe steadfastly in a theory for which everything could

[1] A constantly reiterated theme of cognitive psychology over the last fifty years (but particularly in the last two decades) has been that the mental activities such as perceiving, remembering, understanding, knowing, are active, constructive processes. The mind is not a blank passive slate. It structures its world. Bartlett (1932) is an apical ancestor of this approach: recent exemplars include Schank and Abelson, Neisser, Lakoff, Kahneman and Tversky, Johnson-Laird, Fodor, Rumelhart, and much of the work on visual perception, mental imagery and categorization (see Gardner, 1987 for a summary). As Neisser says, 'seeing, hearing and remembering are all acts of *construction*, which may make more or less use of stimulus formation depending upon the circumstances' (1967: 3). The investigatory problem is how someone perceives an event, and frames a problem. This chapter provides a skeletal account of three types of constructive features (macro-level features) which alter as outsiders become magicians. Another common theme (e.g. D'Andrade, 1981; Lave, 1986) is that the ease with which one reasons about certain events, or in certain ways, depends upon familiarity, not upon some transcendent ability to reason – an important observation, because the inability of preliterate Africans to perform well on experimenter's task of syllogistic reasoning has been taken by some to indicate their cognitive inferiority. Part of reasoning depends upon being taught to reason with familiar content, in familiar contexts. Magical training makes the unfamiliar context seem natural and persuasive.

be taken as proof and which nothing could disconfirm, a theory riddled with dubious remarks and meaningless statements. But as magicians become involved with the practice, their intellectual habits change, and what they think of as the theory of magic begins to seem both testable and true.

Why do they stay with it? What motivates magicians to continue the learning process that gradually shifts these ingrained habits of thinking about their world? The real lesson of these intellectual changes is that magicians find them illuminating, and the fact that they are illuminating makes the practice and its theory seem effective. By illuminating, I mean that the magician is able to give a rich distinction-filled description of the events which surround his rituals, and that this rich description is both exciting and intellectually challenging because it gives complex structure to life's disordered whole. This description may give a sense of discovery and confirmation, which may give the sense that the theory has been 'tested'. But practitioners do not in fact go to great lengths to treat their rituals like experiments, to tabulate the results and judge the hypotheses. To describe some theory as falsifiable – the fiercest test for a science – there must be a clear-cut set of hypotheses which are tested against empirical events and rejected should the test repeatedly fail.[2] In magic, that elaborate set of hypotheses is rarely present, let alone subjected to scientific test. There is a more or less coherent body of ideas, which will be described below, but different magicians develop it differently, talk about it in different ways, and pay more or less attention to it. Sometimes they play with the ideas, elaborating them or arguing about them, but more commonly they ignore the subject of magical theory unless it is deliberately introduced. But as they learn more about magic and as their sense of satisfaction increases, the very features which make it illuminating prevent them from seeing its weaknesses.

Before exploring this interpretive shift, however, I should explain more clearly the body of ideas which magicians find persuasive, the position, as it were, to which they shift.

THE IDEAS BEHIND MAGICAL PRACTICE

Modern magic rests upon the idea that thought can affect matter without the intervention of the thinker's acts. The first step in the reasoning is to argue that the two, thought and matter, are essentially one. Knight, the Greystone adept, writes scathingly of Descartes' 'arbitrary assumptions', and states that:

> The most glaring assumption upon which all modern science is based (except perhaps in certain areas of advanced atomic physics) is that there is an absolute dichotomy between mind and matter, between subjective and objective, between the observer and the phenomenon observed. It is, in fact, no more than a useful fiction.[3]

[2] Falsification is more complex than this is made to sound. The necessary feature of any falsification, however, is the conception of a hypothesis that could be overturned by experiment. Magicians often feel as if they are 'testing' a hypothesis, but an examination of the way in which they argue illustrates that they do not really treat their magic in a manner that at all resembles this. The question of falsification is discussed later in the section.

[3] Knight (1981b II: 20).

This may be an inaccurate characterization of modern science; Knight, however, means something more subversive than the neurophysiological base of mental activity. In his view, the distinction between 'inner' and 'outer', imagination and physical reality, is mere illusion. 'We have to grasp the fact that the underlying reality of things is not matter – or any equivalent base external from ourselves – but is an immaterial relationship.'[4] When one imagines, that imaginative act – in itself, as a mental image, regardless of its behavioural compulsion – can affect what we think of as an unrelated 'material' reality.

Magicians use this conception of dynamic interconnectedness to describe the physical world as the sort of thing that imagination and desire can affect. The magician's world is an interdependent whole, a web of which no strand is autonomous. Mind and body, galaxy and atom, sensation and stimulus, are intimately bound. 'Witchcraft strongly imbues the view that all things are interdependent and interrelated.'[5] Individual objects are not fixed but fluctuating, constantly responding to their surroundings, bundles of relationships, rather than settled points. To treat objects as isolated and unique is a Western distortion in magicians' eyes. The distortion may be useful for scientific analysis, but it fails to understand the object's essence. One manual speaks of:

> the world view that sees things not as fixed objects, but as swirls of energy. The physical world is formed by that energy as stalagtites [sic] are formed by dripping water. If we cause a change in the energy patterns, they in turn will cause a change in the physical world – just as, if we change the course of an underground river, new series of stalagtites will be formed in new veins of rock.[6]

The idea of magic emerges naturally from a philosophy of a world in interacting flux. If all the universe co-exists in delicate balance, minor variations should produce substantial change. Like a lever, a small magical spell can shift the world.

One could forge a magical theory solely from that account of flux. But magicians also often speak of forces or energies which are not generally recognized by science. Some of these forces or energies are called 'psychic'. Most magicians – all I have encountered – accept the existence of parapsychological effects: communicating without speech or sight, moving objects without touch, sensing the future or the past. Magicians commonly accept that psychic ability, like the ability to play the violin, is distributed differently by nature, but they assert that all people can improve their skill with practice. The concept of magic implies that psychical effects can occur – they are but another example of an interwoven world – and magicians talk about working on the 'psychic plane' during rituals, of using 'psychic intuition', of trying to 'contract' someone else's mind. Psychic ability itself is not that highly valued: magicians are often disdainful of mediums, on the grounds that mediums are passive vessels while the magician actively directs and intervenes. And magicians often distinguish between the psychic ability and magical

[4] Knight (1981a I: 11). [5] Starhawk (1979: 11). [6] Starhawk (1979: 112).

efficacy, the difference being that between a radio receiver and the radio station producing its waves. Nevertheless, a parapsychological vocabulary helps magicians to speak of unusual, scientifically imperceptible forces. Magicians also talk of other forces, powers or currents, which pervade the universe and can be generated or directed by the knowledgeable. These are often described as if they were electro-magnetic currents, but the analogy is loose. The basic idea is that the forces are both part of the world, accessible by human effort, and yet somehow not like more familiar forces like gravity. A member of the coven I joined explained that:

> The spiritual 'currents' postulated in magic and witchcraft are 'immanent' because they are within our subconscious minds, but not bound by our body's space and time limitations. They are both part of us, yet universal, and thus link us in a telepathic way to equivalent levels of other people's sub-conscious.[7]

These forces are rather badly defined but they are thought to exist, and to be elicited and directed in magical rituals. It is as if magicians think of themselves as creating an electrical storm in rituals, and dispensing bolts of lightning to chosen targets.

So magicians tend to conceptualize reality as a dynamic flux shot through with subtle forces and unknown energies. What they call their magical 'technology' – the mechanism by which their magic works – involves an account of the 'correspondences' between reality's different bits. Different planets, gems, numbers, symbols, and so forth are grouped together as a set, and any given set is associated with particular ways of being, types of force or energy. Mars is associated with red, dragonsblood and aggressive anger. To draw another into love, you might wear a robe of rose and amber, burn benzoin incense, light seven candles while invoking Venus, and concentrate upon your desire. Contemporary magicians devote considerable time to mastering common correspondences and drawing up their own lists of the patterned associations. They read countless books and take courses and talk to others about the most suitable incense for Jupiter. 'Of this gathering of correspondences there can be no end, for the whole cosmos in all its planes corresponds in endless sequences.'[8]

However, today's magicians tend to have quite different opinions about the role that these associations play. Some think of them as real connections which the magician must use to manipulate the power; others interpret them as a symbolic language which the magician learns as a means to help him concentrate upon his goals. The magician may also argue only for the latter notion but act as if the former is correct. Most magicians would finally agree that the primary use of ritual and its paraphenalia of correspondences is as an aid to concentration. It is commonplace for the magician to say that the ritual is a 'prop'.

[7] This was Robert, who has written an extensive account of the proper understanding of magic.
[8] Fortune (1935: 65).

A spell is a symbolic act done in an altered state of consciousness, in order to cause a desired change. To cast a spell is to project energy through a symbol. But the symbols are too often mistaken for the spell. 'Burn a green candle to attract money', we are told. The candle itself, however, does nothing – it is merely a lens, an object of focus, a mnemonic device, the 'thing' that embodies our idea. Props may be useful, but it is the mind that works magic.[9]

Magicians tend to act as if the rules and symbols of ritual are terribly important, but they will often make remarks that emphasize the irrelevance of the 'props' and the importance of the concentration those props are meant to induce.

It is the mind that works magic. Modern magic holds that thought affects the world directly – even though it is patently obvious that most of the time it does not, without action. The magical idea is that mind affects matter in very special circumstances, namely when the magician frees himself from the shackles of everyday awareness and focuses his entire being on obtaining his goal. The ordinary analytic mind, it is said, cannot work magic. One must sink down into the lower realms of instinct and psychism, where primary desire mingles with vivid fantasy. Then one must represent the goal in the imagination, and focus on that image with total concentration and intense desire. Rituals help this to happen. They change the circumstances so that the appropriate concentration can occur.

Magic is ultimately the conception that mind alters matter when mind in all its complexities – conscious, unconscious, with emotion, desire and imagination – focuses completely upon a particular goal. One witch writes of 'the four cornerstones of magic from which the whole mysterious edifice of witchcraft arises . . . a virulent imagination, a will of fire, rock-hard faith, and a flair for secrecy'.[10] Know what you want, know that you can get it, and focus on it utterly (the secrecy is to protect oneself from being distracted by mockery). Like shamans, mystics and religious devotees throughout the world, magicians use various techniques to alter their sense of consciousness, to shake off their sense of the everyday and to stimulate their emotions. When strong emotions are directed to magical goals in an altered state of mind, magic is possible. Thought affects the world when it is intensely concentrated, fuelled by great desire. Magical practice is the attempt to train the mind and find the means through which such concentration can occur.

When I talk of the magician's 'claims', and of magical ideas, I mean first of all the general commitment to the efficacy of ritual, in this more than psychological sense (i.e., the ritual did more than psychologically boost the ritualist), and second that the commitment is usually coincident with some version of the account given here. To some extent I have inferred these ideas from scattered passages in magicians' own writings. Some magicians, however, explicitly try to order and explain these concepts as a theory in the books they write for newcomers. In one such book, entitled *Techniques of High Magic: A Manual of Self-Initiation*, the authors list 'four fundamental theoretical assumptions' of magic:

[9] Starhawk (1979: 110). [10] Huson (1970: 22).

1 That the universe of the physical scientist is only a part, and by no means the most important part, of total reality.
2 That human will power is a real force, capable of being trained and concentrated, and that the disciplined will is capable of changing its environment and producing supernormal effects.
3 That this will power must be directed by the imagination.
4 That the universe is not a mixture of chance factors and influences, but an ordered system of correspondences, and that the understanding of the pattern of correspondences enables the occultist to use them for his own purposes, good or ill.[11]

The tenets are an ordering of the ideas expressed above. Not all magicians would accept them as they are baldly stated, but they tend to be accepted in some form by most practitioners. The following pages discuss the intellectual attitudes or habits associated with the person who wants to treat them as valid.

[11] King and Skinner (1976: 9–10).