



# THE DEVIL'S RAIMENTS

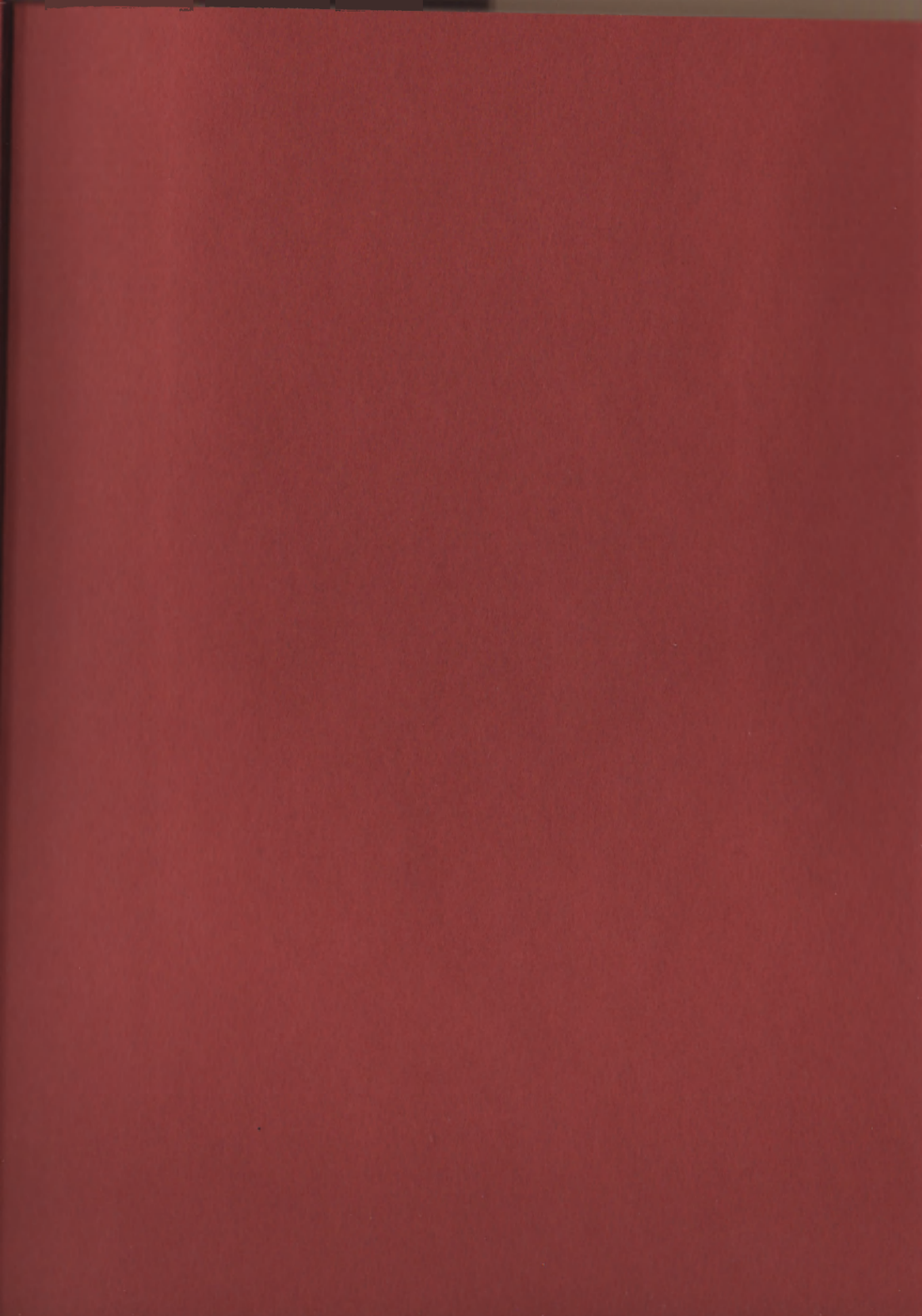
Martin Duffy



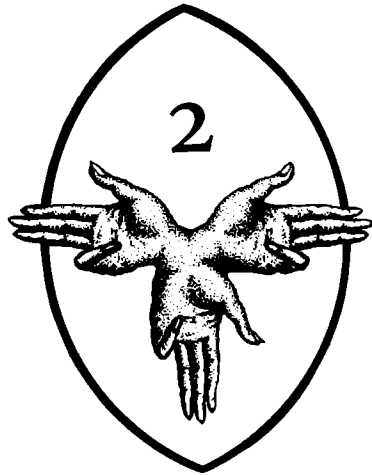
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*Clad in the black robe, or daubed in black unguent as a consecration of wisdom, we are one with the hidden and secret realm of Night, and when so enveloped become the fertile void wherein we may receive the inspiration of the Muse or Genius.*

**I**N occult literature, the Vestments of the Art Magical are poorly understood, principally because few save the body of initiates behold them. The robe, mask, hood, mantle, garter, and veil, constituting the arrayments of the witch, trace their pedigree to a number of magical sources, each constituting a mystery of form and function. These mystical underpinnings often possess a deeper Arcanum, being both emblematic of specified witch-power and serving a hidden ritual purpose. In *The Devil's Raiments*, Martin Duffy examines the relationship of the sorcerer to that which clothes him, with particular emphasis on the witch-cult. Also explored is the modern perception of the witch as the Naked Enchantress, as well as some of the older historical rationales for the portrayal of nudity in witchcraft.









# The Devil's Raiments

*Habiliments of the Witch's Craft*



Martin Duffy

Illustrations by Steve Damerell

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Monograph 2  
The Devil's Raiments

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# The Devil's Raiments

## *Habiliments of the Witch's Craft*

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## Introduction

*The body is the Vestment of Matter which gives  
Form unto Essence.*

Andrew Chumbley, *Qutub*

Within occult philosophy it has long been held that the physical body of man is but a visceral cloak of flesh, draped upon the bones that cage the Starry Radiance within. The naked flesh, as a veritable cloak of its own, is an infinite firmament veiling and sheltering this luminous essence, and when man dies his soul will cast this garment aside as he passes into the realm of his divine birthright, taking on a mantle of shining light. Thus is the original condition of man 'naked', in which state he enters and leaves this world.

However, just as the cloak of the magus is resplendent with the many signs and sigils of his royal art, so too does the flesh contain many secrets within its folds, lines, appendages and proportions thereof. These morphological features are as signs and symbols themselves, each figure upon the skin being like a constellation emblazoned upon the cloak of night, mediating and evoking the very mysteries themselves. Many are the secrets written upon the body of man, the enciphered pattern of the worlds contained therein, and it is to these that the wise look to discover man's secret nature, and in understanding man as the very image of god we discover also something of the nature of the Divine.

There exist numerous cosmogonies that tell of man's origin as a luminous incorporeal form, about which the physical frame was built. Within the conclaves of some mystery schools the 'first flesh' of the first man was understood as being of 'Light', and thus does the *Zohar* tell us that "when Adam dwelt in the garden of Eden, he was clothed in the celestial garment, which is the garment of heavenly light...light of that light which was used in the garden of

Eden". 'This Man of Light, who shone like the Sun, is the one made in 'God's image', and it is this outer garment of Light that some believe fell away on Adam and Eve's transgression, thereby revealing their 'nakedness'. Upon the loss of this radiance, and their expulsion from the paradisiacal Eden, man was given a "coat of skins", that is to say fleshly bodies and the faculties of sensation required to inhabit the physical world<sup>2</sup>, thus does the *Zohar* tell us that "the Soul and the Form when descending on Earth put on an earthly garment". Through works of wisdom man hopes to re-attain this gown of light.

When Adam and Eve lost their garments of light and glory, they sought to cover themselves with fig leaves. Some have construed this as a sense of shame over their nakedness, a mindset which manifests today in two polarised attitudes; at one end of the scale are the prudish notions of impiety and impropriety and at the other the exhibitionist and fetishist. Others interpret it as the shame they felt in their decision to transgress God's edict. However, there are others still who perceive it not as shame but fear, a fear of being 'unmasked', for to be stripped naked is to expose, and in recognising this they sought to clothe themselves and thereby re-cover the naked self; these being the twain powers of revelation and concealment.

Man can be 'veiled' with many different garments, which act not only to conceal but also to reveal and manifest. That is to say in adorning a garment we present a 'mask' to the outer world, each visible mask being emblematic of the different invisible powers and principles that they mediate; the image is not the reality but rather the objectification of the magical current thereby reified. In this sense clothing becomes a type of 'glamourie' wherein the witch's form becomes transmuted, appearing in the form of the desired, and thereby enshrouding the witch in the mystery therein enciphered. In this manner Man becomes aligned with the Fetish-Tree, the axis of the existent. Upon his boughs the vestments are hung according to his design, each garment becoming a fetish or

1. *Zohar* II. 229 B.

2. This coat of skin is the home of the sense-body; it is the intermediary through which the inner-self and outer worlds interact.'

repository of divers powers, thereby enabling the witch to manifest the dream.

Within the witch cult there exists a practice wherein the stang is adorned with a horned skull and then dressed by hanging linen rags upon a cross-beam, resulting in something akin to a scarecrow, and thereby becoming an *eidolon* or mommet of the horned witch god who stands guard at the north of the witch's circle<sup>3</sup>. Although the word 'mommet' is now often used by some magical practitioners to indicate a magical idol in general, its original use is as a dialect word for 'scarecrow', which is considered in some branches of traditional witchcraft to be a manifestation of the sacrificial god<sup>4</sup>. Just as some place the stang in the direction appropriate to time and tide, further decorating it with wreaths evoking the signs and wonders of the season, so too do some adorn the witch's stave with vestments and masks evoking the specific aspect of the witch god presiding over an Airt and its gate; in this manner does the wandering god traverse the horizon and boundary of the witch's circle with the turning of the year.

The dressing of the stang with regalia is based on the old belief that clothes come to evoke the man, recalling the occult Law of Contagion that gives rise to the manifold uses of garments as magical links. So it is that just as a cherished item of clothing from one's beloved immediately calls them to mind, so too do particular raiments help aid in the conjuration of certain powers. In a practical sense, just as symbols are read as if the reader were wearing them<sup>5</sup>, so too can enshrouding ourselves in the habiliments and regalia of the powers help us to concretise them. This is also affirmed by Manly Hall, who tells us that "the garments and ornamentations supposedly worn by the gods are keys, for in the Mysteries clothing was considered as synonymous with form"<sup>6</sup>.

There exist two approaches to the manner in which the various bodily adornments might be regarded, although in truth these lines of inquiry are conterminous rather than independent. The first is a ritualistic approach, wherein the clothes are worn because they

3. Jackson, *Call of the Horned Piper*, p. 26.

4. Gwynn, *Light from the Shadows*, p. 162.

5. Glass, *Witchcraft, the Sixth Sense* p. 143.

6. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, p. 231.

represent or mediate certain powers and mysteries, whereas the second considers the clothing as having become associated with the witch cult by virtue of the fact that it was the traditional dress of those peoples whose thoughts and actions informed the cult. However, even in the latter approach there is room for a ritualistic understanding, many things having accrued symbolic meaning and certain power through repeated use.

## The Bodily Habiliments

Wicca holds that the witch should 'be naked in their rites', a proclamation repeated within the pages of Leland's *Aradia*, "And as a sign that ye are truly free, ye shall be naked in your rites, both men and women also". Besides the mundane interpretation that such 'freedom' implies, there is an element of transgression and inversion of cultural norms within such a practice, accordingly, when correctly employed, such a rite of opposition leads to freedom from the societal shackles that one has been instilled with since birth. In the breaking of our cultural taboos, and more importantly in self-overcoming, we free the power therein contained, allowing it to be redirected to more useful arenas and opening the eyes to new vistas. However, we must be careful not to become seduced by the transgressional behaviour itself, for as Chumbley admonishes, "the opposition of the normative aesthetic is the means and not the end of the Path"<sup>7</sup>.

Aside from the unfettered freedom arising from the contravention of perceived ways of being, within orthodox Wicca ritual nudity is explained as being essential because clothes impede the emanation of magical force, which is considered to exude from the naked flesh<sup>8</sup>. Many modern adherents of the practice say that in being naked it allows them to experience an uninhibited flow of this power, although in reflecting upon the true nature and power of magic many have come to question the validity of this argument.

Despite the numerous medieval depictions of naked witches it is prudent to question how much of this was pure fantasy, for the

7. "The Secret Nature of Ritual", *Opuscula Magica* Vol. I (*Chaos International* No. 18, 1995).

8. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*.

unforgiving temperament of the British weather certainly throws grave doubt upon the likelihood of witches working naked rites in the open throughout the whole year. Some have suggested that it was because of these self-same climactic conditions that witches of old greased themselves up with warming fatty unguents, thereby fashioning an insulating layer. These unguents were said to have been bestowed by the Devil and were variously anointed upon the witch's body or vehicle of flight (such as besom, stang or spindle) as an agency to assist in the transportation of the witch to the sabbat. Although these 'flying ointments' were supposed by some to have resulted in a physical flight, within the records of some European witch trials and in such works as *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* this transvection is accorded as being visionary in nature, giving the sensation of flight rather than its actuality.<sup>9</sup>

Many recipes are given for such salves, often containing various venomous and mind-altering herbs to induce narcosis and 'vision'. Unfortunately, much of the modern research into flying ointments concentrates nearly wholly on determination of the various pharmacological effects of 'visionary' herbs upon the human phisium and the changes in consciousness thereby facilitated. However, such material reductionism is to completely misunderstand the true nature of 'vision' and omits any consideration of a plant's spirituous powers; in truth such short cuts pale in comparison when held up against the attainment of 'flight' by means of patient effort and devotion. Furthermore, by emphasising a purely entheogenic approach one fails to account for the large number of inert ingredients within the recorded flying ointment recipes. By rubbing the flesh of herbs into the flesh of man, we might access not only the physical properties of the worts but also the numinous vegetal powers therein contained. It will be noted that this practice has a certain similarity to the manner in which bestial powers are assumed by the wearing of their fleshly mantles. However, such shapechanging is also assisted by the use of fatty unguents containing animal fats, Henri Boguet relating that witches are able to turn themselves into

<sup>9</sup> *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin The Mage*, Aquarian Press, 1976 p.21.

wolves by virtue of ointments that would sometimes contain wolf fat (*Discours de Sorciers*).

One ubiquitous yet innocuous component of the salve is soot. It is evident this has no psychoactive property, rather its inclusion in the salve is to make the skin black. Skin staining as a type of bodily adornment is a practice with some antecedence. Pliny the Elder in Book 22 devotes his second chapter to the subject of adorning the body with plant dyes, noting in particular how the Gaulish women stain their body with vegetal pigments “when taking part in the performance of certain sacred rites” so that their skin is dark like that of an “Æthiopian”, which recalls the use of the witches’ sooty-black sabbatic unguent. He also refers to the practice of staining the face by ‘barbarous peoples’, a practice that is again not altogether alien to British shores (see the discussion of black face folk traditions below).

In popular folklore, Picts are thought to have stained their skin blue by the use of woad, yet modern experimentation has shown such to be highly unlikely as woad has little to no skin staining ability. However, the Lindow Man was found to have had copper and iron pigmentation upon his body, both of which are capable of producing a bluish body paint, or more controversially tattoo ink<sup>10</sup>. The issue of tatoed Picts is slightly contentious because despite the proclamation in Isidore’s etymologies, there is limited evidence to support this idea and naturalistic images of them on monumental stones show no obvious tattoos. Either way, it is clear the Picts (‘painted people’), as they have been known since AD 297, did adorn their body with images or ‘pictures’ that were somehow stained upon their skin. Similarly do sorcerers sometimes decorate their naked flesh with signs and sigils apposite to their work, using magical inks composed of fitting herbs and minerals to draw upon the bodily canvas. By this means powers may be accessed and spirits summoned into parts of the body or specific limbs, such making reference to the body as a vehicle that might be driven by spirit and god alike. Other times the body might be stained a

10. Even here there is some dispute, some experts believing the copper/iron pigmentation to be a result of an interaction between the skin and the peat in which the corpse was interred.



particular colour so as to evoke the powers of that particular magical ray; Chumbley in particular relates a sorcerous practice of making the body green so as to become as one with the green wanderer, such amounting to a rite of transgression.<sup>11</sup>

Related to the making of images upon the skin is the witch mark, which is sometimes made at initiation as a tattoo upon a part of the witch's phisium, often taking the form of a coloured spot or some sort of cultic totem-beast. Within some covens the witch is marked upon their hand with three dots in the formation of a triangle, evoking the numerical powers of the triad and the potency of the sigilic trivium. Occasionally the triangle has a point at the centre, this being the shining star at the centre of the triangle of evocation, a point of light delivered through the vehicle of the three mothers or Fates. Within the Richel-Eldermans collection housed at the Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle, this mark is illustrated as being made upon the tip of the middle finger, with the tip coloured red, although other illustrations in this collection show the finger bearing the sigil of the sun. Being a point within a circle, this solar sigil has certain similitude to the point in the triangle and might be interpreted as the deliverance of Light from the dark void of the circle. In other instances the witch mark is a simple dot upon a particular finger that is in some way meaningful to the cult, usually having an association with the 'language of the hands'.

Returning to the subject of skin dyes and the sabbatic unguent, some assert that the soot merely enables the witch to blend in with the darkness of night, and thereby go about her business sight unseen. In this we are reminded of the old familiar stereotype of the nocturnal witch coven clad in black robes chanting as they make their way about the magic circle. This has some grounding in reality as, in stark contrast to their Wiccan counterparts, traditional and hereditary covens have often been known as 'robed covens' in deference to the fact that many of them work enveloped in robes and cloaks. Such was certainly true of the Chanctonbury coven, the coven headed by Charles Cardell, Robert Cochrane's 'Clan of Tubal Cain' and the Cultus Sabbati. Cloaks are still commonly

11. "The Secret Nature of Ritual".

worn by witches, and although many now speak of them only in terms of keeping warm, 'setting the atmosphere' and enabling one to 'slip through the night unseen', we may discern a much deeper philosophy at work here. Whether by making the flesh black or donning a black robe, the witch becoming encloaked in Night's dark mantle becomes *as one* with her.

Reference to this latter philosophy is made by Cochrane, who asserted that "*the cloak represents the concealment of the Mysteries and Night, the Hider of Light...also Humility, Poverty and Charity, which equals magic power*".<sup>12</sup> Herein is direct allusion to the goddess Nox, the exceptionally powerful primordial goddess of night who stands at or near the beginning of creation. She is sometimes depicted as riding a chariot drawn by two black horses, and other times by nocturnal animals such as owls and bats, with her star-bedecked black robe and veil following in her wake.

Nox was considered as the daughter of Chaos, yet unlike the modern understanding of the term, the Ancient Greek conception of Chaos did not refer to disorder but rather to the original state of negative existence from which the first gods were delivered. It is the 'nothingness' of Hesiod's *Theogony*, from which all things came; the Orphic's 'womb of darkness' from which emerged the Cosmic Egg containing the Universe; the Chaos from which Eurynome ('the goddess of everything') came in Pelasgian myth. As such Chaos is the pre-existent state, a belief held also by the old alchemists, and thus the womb from which all is delivered and the tomb to which all returns, the seething cauldron overseen by the Witch Queen. Orphic philosophers considered this Primal Chaos to be the true foundation of reality, the Light being fleeting and the Darkness abiding; it is the original state of unity preceding the differentiation which led to the emanation of the existent. In fact, it is an almost universal theme that Chaos preceded the existence of all things, and that it is from this original pre-manifest state that Order is spun by a creator who is oft-considered separate from Chaos.

We also find this belief extant within the realms of traditional witchcraft. In *Qutub*, Andrew Chumbley relates how, "there is a

12. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 142.

myth known to Few, a myth silent dreaming within all Creation”, a myth that “before the Manifest came to exist there was a Place of Darkness – the Negative Existence”. Chumbley rightfully asserts that “naught be truthfully be said of this Place, for it is Otherness Entire”. In Greek thought this Chaos or Negative Existence was the antithesis of the Kosmos, the latter being the ‘ordered universe’ (literally ‘orderly arrangement’). Negative existence by its definition cannot be defined, for as soon as its defined it ceases to become ‘negatively existent’; even to understand it would be to limit the Limitless and make the Infinite finite, thus making such an understanding impossible. It is for this reason that some label it the Incomprehensible Godhead, this being the Nameless and Unknowable Godhead that Cochrane believed stood beyond the Gods. Within the vast and dark void of Chaos are what Chumbley called “Those-who-exist-not, [and who are] called by their descendents The Elder Gods”<sup>13</sup>. These Elder Gods are what the traditional witch Daniel Schulke defines as “the Gods before the Gods of Men”, not to be identified with ancient polytheistic gods, i.e. the mortal gods of man, rather they are “*voidful sentiences...pervasive before the coalescence of the present world: nameless, faceless, devoid of human or earthly attribute, and beyond mundane comprehension*”<sup>14</sup>. It is these Elder Gods who are deemed most worthy of our honour and worship, for unlike the mortal gods of man’s passing faiths they are not icons forged by the hands of man.

There are some mythologies wherein Chaos and her daughter, the Black-Winged Night, are conflated, giving rise to a dark goddess of Night, Chaos, Death, Sleep and Dreams (Sleep and Death being two of Nyx’s children). As the mother of all that is mysterious and inexplicable, she naturally came to be associated with sorcery, witchcraft and the magical arts. Within some branches of traditional witchcraft the oneiric realm is understood as being beyond the mortal condition (the realm of life and death) and outside of time. This realm of infinite possibility is the pre-existent ‘dreamtime’, the archetypal depths within which all things are regenerated.

13. *Qutub*, p. 59.

14. “An Interview with Daniel A. Schulke”, *The Cauldron* No. 129.

Intriguingly, in the images of Nyx riding her night-time chariot she is often depicted as wearing a crown of poppies, the crimson bloom associated with Lilith as Lady of the Night and Witch Goddess. Besides being a bringer of dreams, poppies also frequently appear in formulas of the witch's Flying Ointment as a means of facilitating trance and enabling the witch to wing her way to the revelries of the night-time Sabbat.

Both Night and her mother Chaos were considered to be goddesses of Fate, but it was Night who was known as Mother of the Fates, Homer calling her "*the subduer of gods*", which is somewhat reminiscent of Cochrane's assertion that all the gods are subject to Fate's rule. However, in some Greek texts the *Moirai* weren't the children of Night, but of Chaos or Ananke (Necessity), the latter being a spindle-holding personification of Fate. It is of particular interest that the Fates are all 'fatherless', and although the Greeks later held Zeus as the father of the *Moirai*, this wasn't widely accepted.

The residence of Night was said to be within a place of darkness or within a cave beyond the ocean at the very edge of the Cosmos. One Orphic poem relates her as occupying a cave or adytum wherein she gives oracles, the whole of the universe moving to the rhythm of her chanting. Other accounts give her abode as a cavern deep within Hades or the Underworld. Yet in considering these various domiciles it is notable that all of them are at the very fringes of the ordered world (the Kosmos). It is no surprise then that like the Cavern beyond the Ocean's edge, the dwelling of the Witch Queen is held by some to be within a Hollow Mound across the River of Time that separates the worlds. Likewise are the Fates sometimes depicted as residing in a dark and mysterious cave where they tend and watch over a large black cauldron.

Within some branches of traditional witchcraft the relationship between the Lady of Night and Fate Queen goes a lot deeper than a shared abode in a cave. This is particularly evident in the traditions that gloss the Witch Goddess as Naamah, the weaving sister-wife of Tubal-Cain; herein do we find our Blacksmith God and Weaving Goddess. Naamah is sometimes known as "Lilith the Younger", which is unsurprising when we consider that Lilith

was originally a Sumerian goddess whose name cognates with Night, and within the older and younger Lilith do we find the bright and dark aspects of the moon (sometimes glossed as Diana and Hecate). The incestuous union of Naamah and Tubal-Cain, which some say birthed Asmodeus<sup>15</sup>, also recalls the union of Diana with Lucifer.

A common depiction of the pale-faced Witch Queen is as a lonely old spinster<sup>16</sup> sitting at a spinning wheel; “*the weaver or spinner who controlled the fate and destiny of the Gods and the human race*”<sup>17</sup>. This is of little surprise considering that the Witch Goddess is known by some as the ‘Three Mothers’, being in some ways a composite of the three Wyrd Sisters or Norns of Anglo-Saxon mythology, who spin, measure and cut the threads of fate. Here we return to the subject of cloaks and robes, for weaving, besides being symbolic of the manner in which linear threads of order are spun from the tangles of chaos, is a practical art that enables the witch to bring things into being, to fashion the very trappings that enclothe the magical force. This brings up the whole arena of cord magic, knot magic, knitting magic, the cat’s cradle, weaving spells and so forth, but of particular relevance to this article is the art of weaving magical garments, that is to say garments as *woven fate*<sup>18</sup>. These arts were considered under the auspices of Holda (identified by some with Nicneven, Dame Habonde, Herodias, Diana and the night goddess Lilith), who rides out through winter’s night sky with her hordes of witches in tow, these being the spirits of her followers who have left their bodies to travel to the sabbat held within Holda’s sacred mountain peak.

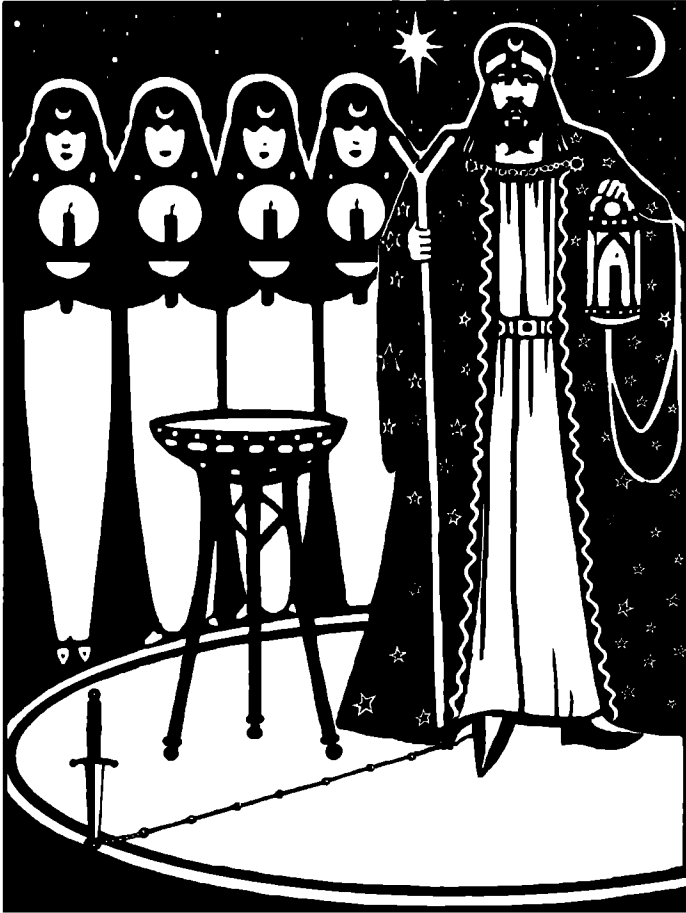
Clad in the black robe, or daubed in the black unguent as a consecration of wisdom, we are as one with the hidden and secret realm of Night, and when so enveloped we become the fertile void wherein we may receive the inspiration of the Muse or Genius, for

15. *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin The Mage*.

16. Originally a term for a spinner and later for an unmarried woman.

17. *The Roebuck in the Thicket* by Evan John Jones et al, Capall Bann, 2001.

18. Intriguingly, some images of the Virgin Mary show her as a spinner, “the Mother becomes the spinning goddess of destiny; the Child becomes the fabric of her body” (*The Rose-Garden Game* by Eithne Wilkins, Victor Gollancz, 1969 p. 95). It is the mother who weaves the garment that en-clothes the divine principle, the flesh becoming identified with the array of fabric; the very tissue of creation.



“in the darkness of the Chasm, Night still is and is still creating, bringing forth”<sup>19</sup>. It is to enter the silence from within which the Word is spoken, the night-time realm of all potential, and when we realise the witch as a mediator between the worlds we realise why the witch seeks to en flesh the Dream and thereby make it manifest; such is to deliver the vision of night’s phantasies into the waking world of the existent. Our world is but the manifested dream within the embrace of the Night sky, the realm of Chaos, and it is in the dark dreamtime that Chaos seeps into our River-bound world, her influence being as stars falling upon the earth from midnight’s celestial vaults.

19. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 157.

The fabric of the cloak may accordingly be considered as a boundary between that which is within and without. Aleister Crowley proffers a similar attitude when he says that “the robe is that which conceals, and which protects the magician from the elements; it is the silence and the secrecy with which he works, the hiding of himself in the occult life of Magick and meditation”<sup>20</sup>. When we enter the otherness of the Night-time realm we lose any sense of the external self as realised in the waking world, it is a moment of solitude. As such, when cocooned in the darkness of the cloak we are enacting a type of hermitage; we are withdrawing the self from life and going into the dark sanctuary of the Hermit’s Cave.

Yet within the Hermit’s Cave is not only shelter, but also darkness. In isolation and the dark of night the impossible seems possible, and the most terrifying of our fears will often surface to confront us, but it is in the overcoming of such fear that the beginning of wisdom is found. Modern society seems particularly frightened of Night and her children Death and Sleep, which manifests in an unhealthy obsession with artificially illuminating every corner of our settlements so as to keep darkness and its inhabitants at bay. Yet the witch realises that with such fears man evokes his own demons, and instead actively seeks out the darkness beyond the borders of civilisation, that place where Night’s influence may be felt most strongly.

In many ways the Hermitage is akin to the archetypal witch’s cottage sited upon the outskirts of the village and therefore the boundary of ‘civilised’ society; it is the place where the influence of Chaos begins to seep into the realm of Order. The importance of this seclusion within night’s veil is deftly summed up by Chumbley, for “*one who dares surrender unto the sky-spacious abyss of the Isolate shall find his self more in his self-losing, for the vast profundities of the soul shall be surrendered unto him*”; in isolation we discover “*unique autonomy of the self, independent of external factors*”, we find the source of our own power<sup>21</sup>. Such are the teachings embodied by the figure of the robed Hermit within the Tarot.

20. Aleister Crowley, *Magick*, Guild Publishing, 1986 p. 108.

21. Chumbley, “Seven Shades of Solitude”, *The Cauldron* No. 98, 2002.

It is an ancient truth that all things contain the seed of their opposites, and thus it is that hidden deep within the limitless abyss of the Negative Existence is the Positive. This is echoed in the ancient British belief that stands in stark contrast to the modern conception of blackness as a stagnant state of finality, rather darkness was considered as a fertile seed-bed whose loam would give rise to Light. It was this belief that darkness begets light that led our ancestors to begin their day at twilight and their year with the dark period, winter preceding summer. In the same way alchemists considered *nigredo* (the 'black chaos') essential to the operation, because Nature can only restore itself after first dying away, this being symbolised by the black crow perched atop the caput mortuum at the start of the journey. As a nod to this, Crowley states that "*the shape of the Robe is a Tau*"<sup>22</sup>, and in donning this black cloak and voluntarily entering death-in-life we undergo a sacrifice from which the perfected man shall be resurrected, recalling the 'Seamless Robe' stripped from Christ as he hung upon the crucifix.

Within many creation myths we encounter Light delivered from Darkness, a Voice arising from the Silence, these signalling the inception of the Kosmos and thus the divinely ordered creation that comes under the auspices of the Demiurge. In terms of our current discussion, this can be seen as the parting of the Robe of Night, the Light pouring forth through this tear or aperture in the Veil being the first creation of Night. From this fallen spark the worlds unfolded, "*the appearance of the ten spheres out of Nothing is as a flash of lightning or a sparkling flame*" (Sepher Yetzirah). This is the self-same Light that illuminates Man, and it is telling when Crowley relates that "*the only light of the Magician is from the Lamp which hangs above his head (the robe being open allows this light to pass in through the top and out the bottom to 'illumine them that sit in the shadow of death')*"<sup>23</sup>. Within the outdoor rites of the witch this 'Lamp' takes on a very different form, such hinting at the alignment of the Crown of Man with the Point of the Heavens, which in turn speaks of the 'fallen' Light.

22. Crowley, *Magick*, p. 108.

23. *Ibid.*



We may thus determine that Darkness is the precursor of Light, which manifests in the fact that darkness is the one constant, being periodically and temporarily illuminated by passing sources of light. On a terrestrial level it is the underlying darkness cyclically lit by the solar orb, esoterically serving as an allegory of those brief moments of understanding and gnosis wherein we catch a glimpse of the reality underlying the mundane world. Cochrane alludes to this when he describes the Cloak as representing “*the concealment of the mystery, night the hider of light*”, this being further encoded in the cloak's construction, which he says “*should be black with a red lining*”.<sup>24</sup> It is also a truth that the Heart of man resides within the dark sinistral side of the body, the Light shining in the Darkness of Midnight. We may thus conclude that just as Life comes forth from Death and the Manifest from Chaos, so is it that Night births the Star, or as Nietzsche more poetically expresses it, “you need chaos in your soul to give birth to a dancing star”.<sup>25</sup>

There is an interesting line within Cochrane's letters that speaks of “the Cloak that covers the Stone”<sup>26</sup>, which makes mention of the cloak's power of concealing, a boundary between the hidden and revealed. This calls to mind the mythical ‘cloaks of invisibility’ that allow one to go about sight unseen (such as that made by Alberich the dwarf so as to grant invisibility to Sigurd), and in many ways relates to the cloak and sooty black ointment as a means of allowing the witch to move about in the night sight unseen.

One might consider this quote from Cochrane as being an allusion to the cloak of Night covering the earthly millstone, and thus a reference to Nox and Gaia, for although the veil of night is lifted by day to reveal Nature, none have ever unveiled Night itself. However, Evan John Jones explains the stone as being the ceremonial whetstone that “sharpens the knife that cuts the cord”,<sup>27</sup> which is suggestive of the mastery of Fire that is required to overcome Fate. As a means to sharpen metal tools the whetstone is an emblem of the Blacksmith gods such as Vulcan, Wayland, Tubalo, Tubal-Cain and other masters of the fire, yet by striking

14. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 142.

15. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue 3.

16. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 117.

17. *The Roebuck In The Thicket*, p. 132.

the stone with another we may also “draw a spark”, thereby bringing Light and Fire from its cold body. Manly Hall relates this as “the dark cold Father – stone – giving birth out of itself to the bright glowing Sun – fire”, going on to elucidate that just as Fire worship replaced that of phallic stone worship, so did the newly born flame (Sun/Son) supplant his Father<sup>28</sup>.

In this respect we might esoterically consider the Cloak veiling the Stone as symbolic of the Secret Light and Fire hidden deep within the deathly shroud of night’s darkness; the Heart of the Mysteries. This is mythically embodied in the figure of Mithras, the “deus sol invictus”, who is shrouded in the cloak of night, the stars and signs of the seven planets upon it. It is the enduring and mighty Sun of the Spirit hidden in Midnight’s Veil. Likewise is man’s heart and inner fire hidden within the confines of the black robe, such being represented by the cloak’s red lining, symbolic of the god, blood and fire. This touches upon a further mystery, which is that of the Stone as a symbol of Man’s body, made in the image of the creator; the Fire contained within and issuing forth from it. In this sense the Cloak covering the Stone becomes as though a ‘mask’, a revealed form presented to the outside world and mirroring the concealed reality of the Self. Like Binah, whose virtue is the Silence of night, the cloak becomes the “Outer Robe of Concealment that suggests matter and the shrouding herein of the Inner Robe of Glory of the life-principle”<sup>29</sup>.

If the cloak is a mask, then it follows that like the serpent we may shed our outer skin and fashion a new one. Such cloaks, real or envisioned, aid one in congress with the magical virtue of that thing, and in becoming as one with it the woven reality is presented to the outside world as a masque. Such an art may be extended to the realms of the glamour, whereby the cloak hides the real person and a false image is presented in its place, as is enshrined in that old saying “a wolf in sheep’s clothing”.

Related to the motif of clothing as ‘disguise’ is a practice with specific biblical prohibition, that of cross-dressing; “the woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a

28. *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, p. 305.

29. *The Mystical Qabalah* by Dion Fortune, 1957 p. 159.



*Fig 1:* Examples of inversion and reversion of the norms include mice chasing cats, hares chasing hounds, horses controlling carts, wheelbarrows pushing men, fish living in the sky, candles burning downwards and arms being where legs should be. From *The World Turned Upside Down*, 1647.

man put on a woman's garment, for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God"<sup>30</sup>, which is a rod that has been brought to bear upon many, including Joan of Arc. That said, Christian authorities sometimes made exemptions for episodic transvestism when done out of a necessity for survival (e.g. to flee from danger in disguise) or for reasons of sanctity, such as the holy transvestites, those cross-dressing female saints who took on the mantle of a man in order to attain holiness. On the subject of holy transvestism, the 4th Century Saint Jerome remarked that as "woman is for birth and children...when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man", although this tolerance didn't seem to extend to the infamous Pope Joan.

There are, however, many who believe that this biblical passage was actually directed at those Canaanites who practiced a form of

<sup>30</sup>. Deuteronomy 22:5.

cross-dressing within their religious rites. Such a practice is known throughout the ancient world, and we may cite the Priests of Cybele and the Phoenician priests of Baal and Astarte as examples of religious cross-dressing. On one level the priest-shaman is simply assuming the mantle of their patron deity in order that the god might 'ride' them, and where this deity happens to be of the opposite gender cross-dressing is necessitated. Other times the priest might assume the opposite gender role to the god(dess) so as to become their 'lover', which in some ways parallels the taking of a demon-lover. However, we might also read this as a unification of the Twin Powers within the One Divine Androgyne, this philosophy being deftly summed up in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas "when you make the male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male, and the female not be female...then shall you enter the Kingdom". Some posit that this philosophy of ritual transvestism underpins the role of the she-male in the old British folk customs, such as the Mollie accompanying the Kent Hooden Horse, the Judy accompanying the Mari Llwyd horse, the Old Lass of the Old Tup players from Sheffield, the Maid Marian in the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance, the she-males at the Horn Fair and the Bessie of the Plough Monday ceremonies to name but a few<sup>31</sup>.

It is of interest that many of the trickster gods display a confusing ambiguity in their gender, such as Hermes, Mercury, Loki and Dionysius. However, it is not just in their gender-characteristics where there is uncertainty, these beings that walk between the worlds often conflate those things that are opposite by simultaneously displaying two contrary behaviours at once, such as being sacred and profane, foolish and wise, prince and pauper etc. This overturning of restrictive hidebound tradition is exemplified in the many revels wherein social norms are inverted, and which are often held in honour of transgressional gods, such as the Hysteria held in honour of Aphrodite, the feasts of Dionysius, the 15th Century Festival of Fools and the Topsy Turvy where the poor dress as kings, men as women, women as men, bishops as monks etc. Such inversions were also utilised by witches as an outward sign of their magical calling, some choosing to wear their clothes back-to-front

31. Bord, Janet and Colin, *Earth Rites*, p. 218.

or inside out, wearing petticoats over dresses or wearing scarves about their waists instead of their necks, all of these evoking a sense of 'otherness'<sup>32</sup>. Besides preserving freedom by a refusal to be bound, confined or defined as one thing or another, it also exemplifies the one true path to Wisdom wherein duality is resolved, this being symbolised by the Fire of Enlightenment burning between the Twin Horns of the Fallen Star.

This use of clothes as a mask to conceal an identity or present a different one appears regularly in myth and even in biblical texts. Most common is the use of clothes to deceive, with kings dressing in the rags of the poor, men in the habiliments of women and so forth, but one instance that particularly stands out is a legend from rabbinical tradition concerning the death of Cain. The legend relates how the aged and blind Lamech was out hunting with his son Tubal-Cain, when he saw what he thought was a horned beast, and with his son's aid he shot it dead with an arrow. On discovering the creature was actually his ancestor Cain, who was horned and clad in animal skins, he clapped his hands together in sorrow, but as he did so he accidentally struck his son's head and killed the 'young shepherd' (*Second Book of Adam and Eve*, Chapter 14). The confusion of Cain with a beast comes as little surprise when we consider that some sources give the Mark of Cain as a pair of horns or antlers<sup>33</sup>.

This legend exemplifies the mask-like qualities of garments, and demonstrates a certain similarity with the shamanistic use of animal skins worn to assume bestial powers; wrapped within their hides we may become as if the very animal itself. One might posit a correlation between this shamanistic use of bestial mantles and the lycanthropist, who in donning the wolf-skin becomes a werewolf. There is an example of this in the *Volsunga* saga, wherein Sigmund, his nephew and son kill some men adorned with wolfskins. Having slain these men they choose to don the fleshly mantles themselves, cursing them to become werewolves. Commentating on this body of lore, Mircea Eliade suggests that

<sup>32</sup> Howard, Michael. *West Country Witches*, p 52.

<sup>33</sup> Howard, *The Book of Fallen Angels*, p 51.

“by putting on the wolfskin, the initiate assimilated the behaviour of a wolf: in other words he became a wild-beast warrior, irresistible and invulnerable”<sup>34</sup>.

This has further correspondence with the practice of witches going forth in the shape of animals and also with ‘guising’, wherein participants would dress in the garb of beasts, becoming an embodiment of that animal. It is noteworthy that ‘guising’ customs are particularly associated with the liminal period about Halloween and Midwinter. Within the folk traditions of Britain examples abound of men dressing in the likeness of beasts or wearing their skins, such being exemplified in the Christmas Bull or Broad of the Cotswolds and the ‘hoden’ or ‘hooden’ horse of Kent<sup>35</sup>. It is notable that in all of these the person wears an outfit wherein they ‘become’ the animal. Even in the instance of the ubiquitous Hobby Horse, the Old ‘Oss of ceremonial folk rite isn’t ridden like the children’s toy of the same name, rather the wearer is ‘ridden’ by the spirit of the animalistic theriomorph<sup>36</sup>. Schulke tells us that besides being a frequent iconographic feature of European witchcraft, the bestial human is a magical construct of ancient origin enabling “the magical assumption of the spirit-attributes of the animal guardian”<sup>37</sup>. Within the Antient Order of the Horsemen we encounter a particularly intriguing example of this practice, the initiate being encouraged to shake hands with Lucifer or ‘Auld Nick’, who is manifested in the rite by an initiate dressed in animal skins and stag horns, with a cloven hoof in his hands<sup>38</sup>.

34. Eliade, Mircea. *Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture*.

35. There are numerous theories as to the meaning of ‘Hooden’ or ‘Hoden’; some posit it to be a dialect confusion with ‘wooden’, others still believe it a corruption of Odin or Woden, with others still suggesting it to derive from the hood worn over the head (the word *hood* deriving from the Old Frisian word *hode*).

36. This evokes a wider body of lore relating to the Horse as the fleshly steed of matter ridden by spirit, the Master of the Horse being none other than Cain (see Andrew Chumbley, “Gnosis for the Flesh Eternal”, *Opuscula Magica* Vol 2. It also recalls the stang as horse (see my article ‘The Shod Stang’, *The Cauldron* Issue 131, 2009).

37. In text accompanying and describing the image entitled *Per Via Novum Carnis Dei Regnum Enuntiabitur* by Daniel Schulke.

38. *The Society of the Horseman’s Word* by Ben Fernee et al, The Society of Esoteric Endeavour, 2009.

There also exists a body of lore wherein the would-be shapechanger enshrouds himself within a cloak of feathers so as to become a bird. Although the esoteric import of birds differs here, but from the Dove of Judeo-Christian tradition to the migrating geese and 'seven whistlers' of British tradition, there exists a strong folk-belief that the spirits of the dead are borne away by, or re-appear as birds<sup>39</sup>. This is of particular interest when we consider that just as the ancient Egyptians believed the soul could leave the body in the form of a hawk, so too are there numerous examples of feather-laden cloaks being worn so as to become as if the bird itself, such as the falcon-feathered cloak utilised by the Norse goddess Freya<sup>40</sup>.

Combined with trance states, these feathery habiliments are of much use in enabling the spirit of the sorcerer to fly free from the body and soar into the realm of the winged angels and demons, although the latter, in stark contrast to the former, are often depicted with the wings of night-birds, moths and bats as opposed to those of day-flying birds and butterflies. Feather-adorned cloaks are also used to call upon specific avian powers and thereby aid in the working of certain rites, corvid plumage for example may be used in works of prophetic and oracular trance. Further to this is the use of such cloaks to assist in the manifestation of those spirits and god-forms having an avian aspect, such as the trickster raven and night-owl.

We have already seen how mantles of flesh and feather can be assumed, yet many other things besides can be worn, including the verdant leafy cloak that covers the tree. To put on such a robe is analogous to the staining green of the skin by way of sappy unguent, both working to evoke the vegetal powers, and in its apotheosis is to evoke the Witch God in his aspect of Lord of the Green, counterpart of the Master of the Beasts. It is of little surprise then that although more commonly depicted as being dressed in leaden black or fiery blood red, there exists also a number of folkloric references to the Devil wearing a 'cloak of green'<sup>41</sup>.

40. In the Old Norse poem *Hyndluljod* or *Lay of Hyndla*.

41. See for example "Why The Devil Wears Green" by W.D. Robertson Jr, *Modern Language Notes* Vol. 69, No. 7, Nov 1954, pp. 470-472, "The Devil In Green" by J.L. Baird, *Neuphilologische*.

Within the witch cult the Lord of the Green is sometimes manifested by the Verdelet, who wears a verdant emerald cloak. In this we find reference to an older custom wherein man becomes enshrouded in leaves and other plant matter, such being embodied by the various manifestations of the wandering Green Man, including the burry man of eastern Scotland and the Jack-in-the-Green central to the many May festivities (the Jack-in-the-Green festival at Hastings for example). The Jack-in-the-Green shares certain similarities to the Hobby Horse of folk tradition in that a human is within the structure peeping out, in this case a cone-shaped wickerwork frame covered from head to foot with leaves and other greenery, that is to say man becomes one with the mask he wears.

Of further contemplation is the association some have proposed between guising in animal skins and the worship of the shape-changing Odin or Woden. One of Woden's many pseudonyms was "Grimr", meaning "shape-changer" or "masked man", and this referred to his ability to change both his skin and form in any manner he so fancied. It is in the consideration of Woden as a personification of the Witch God that we discover some insight into the 'Old Man', Magister or 'Devil' dressed in skins, horned head-dress and mask, thereby facilitating the manifestation of the Master of the Beasts within the circle's bounds<sup>42</sup>.

Within the figure of Woden wandering between the worlds, shrouded in hood and cloak, we find allusion to the figure of Cain, and as Crowley reminds us "*this 'going away into the wilderness'...we find in the lives of all men of the highest type of greatness*"<sup>43</sup>. This act of 'boundary crossing' reveals yet another role of the robe within the art magical, which is as a form of initiation and an assumption of the magical personality. This is not to be confused with some sort of excursion into the realm of make-believe, where one dresses-up and pretends to have magical abilities, but rather it speaks of the means by which the witch aligns themselves with the source of their power. In this sense the witch is transfigured in the manner of the Serpent; it is the successive shedding of the outer skin, the scales falling off, layer by layer, slowly refining the form until it

42. "Robert Cochrane's Letter to Robert Graves" by Grevel Lindop, *The Cauldron* No. 134, 2009.

43. *Magick*, p. 108.



mirrors the soul in such a way as to reflect the perfected form of the sorcerer.

Man is born into the world without clothes, cloaked only in the skin that binds the viscera and vital organs within. Within the Edenic myth this nakedness traditionally represents a state of pure and unfettered innocence, yet to others it represents the phase of ignorance prior to man's illumination by the Serpent. Intriguingly, the word used in Genesis 2:25 for naked is *arum*, in the sense of 'not clothed in the normal manner', and some posit that this refers to the fact they were clothed with garments of light. However, it is notable that this word also glosses as 'crafty', 'cunning' and 'wise' and is used in the self-same passage to describe the trickster nature of the serpent. Once man had tasted of the Fruit and gained Wisdom he became ashamed at his ignorant animal self and sought to cover his body, and in this we might consider the act of en-clothing to be one of the first and most profound rebellions man staged against the creator. So it is that the witch robe as a symbol of the Fall becomes emblematic of man's attempts to seize power over his own destiny, and also of the manner in which he seeks to fashion his own masques. It is of interest then that the Hebrew word for coat is *me'il*, which has connotations of *me'ila*, a trespass.

Upon their initiation by the Serpent, Adam and Eve sought to cover themselves, in particular the sexual organs, and in order to do so made an "apron of leaves". The covering of the genitals by a leafy green apron is particularly representative of Adam and Eve's discovery that they had the power to procreate and generate, but is also symbolic of the vegetal sacrifice of Cain and the verdant powers of the Lord of Life and Growth. However, the apron of leaves was later replaced with the god-given gift of a "coat of skins", a 'hide' to cover and conceal<sup>44</sup>, comparable to the hide-apron of the butcher and blacksmith, calling to mind the blood sacrifice, the murder of Abel and the crimson powers of the Master of Fire, Death and Sorcery. In these two aprons we encounter the twin aspects of the witch god, the powers of the verdant phallus giving way to those of the crimson skull.

44. It is worth noting that *hide* in the sense of 'animal skin' and 'to conceal' both originate in the same PIE root, *(s)keu*, meaning 'to hide or conceal'.

It is particularly significant that the apron covers and protects the generative organs, the home of the sleeping serpent-power identified by some with Fire, the one element given to man alone. We thus come to realise that the covering of the genitals has less to do with shame and more to do with the control and mastery of the red and green fires, epitomised in the blood and sap. Through sorcerous techniques these powers might be focussed so that the sexual desire might be transmuted and risen along the spinal axis to the head, this being the seat of wisdom. So it is that the leafy green apron may be used for those arts of the Tiller, whilst the red leathern apron may be used for those arts under the patronage of the Blacksmith, whether in his guise of Vulcan, Hephaestus, Weyland, Tubalo or Tubal-Cain.

The apron is of particular importance in Freemasonry, said to hark back to that worn during the construction of Solomon's temple. There are others still who claim it goes back to the aprons worn by the priests of Melchizedek, that priest-king who had neither mother nor father and neither beginning of days or end of life, he who stood alone<sup>45</sup>. Within the Masonic tradition the apron is square with the flap folded so as to form a triangle, recalling the four-fold nature of matter and the three-fold spirit that interpenetrates it. The downward pointing triangle is proximal with the sexual organs, which is significant when we consider that the downwards triangle is symbolic of the watery kteis and the upright triangle of the fiery phallus; herein the six-fold star is enciphered, denoting control and mastery of the twain forces and also signifying the union giving rise to the Magical Child.

There is a custom in traditional witchcraft that "the apron sometimes worn by the Magister as part of his regalia...symbolises nothing more than a butcher's apron"<sup>46</sup>. In accordance with this the apron was once tied about the waist for the sacrifice of a ram, this being a tithe to renew the seven year reign of the Magister, yet it is still worn by some in sacrificial rites, especially those of self-sacrifice. This is somewhat reminiscent of the Chod Rite, wherein tantric practitioners "dance festooned with bones, wearing a cap and apron tailored from tanned human skin, amidst corpses [within

46. Jones, Evan John. *Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed*, p. 145.

a cemetery]”<sup>47</sup>. During this rite the dancers experience the pains of death as their bodies are consumed by demons, a theme common to other sorcerous initiatory rites of death and resurrection.

It comes as little surprise then that the apron has an especial place within the initiation rites of certain guilds and cults. Within the initiatory rites of the Millers and Horsemen, for example, the aspirant's leather apron is filled with water from which the brethren are implored to drink for the health of the newly pronounced ‘brother’<sup>48</sup>. There are also some questions and answers during the catechism that deal with the meaning of the apron, these mostly relating to the supplicant being able to see the Devil sneaking up behind him, thereby preventing the ‘evil one’ from accomplishing his nefarious purposes. The Devil in his role of Opposer and Tester often features in such rites of induction, and sometimes he turns up in the folkloric record wearing an apron himself. The Stiperstones near Pontesbury, where the Devil or his human representative is said to have presided over the meetings of Shropshire witches, for example, were said to have been formed when the Devil's apron strings broke, and several large stones he was carrying within the apron fell out<sup>49</sup>. In Irish folklore the ‘Devil's Apron’ is nothing less than the humble nettle.

Initiation is of course closely bound with the processes of death and re-birth. We have seen that the original condition of man is ‘naked’, as enshrined in the Edenic myth, and at death we become naked once again, such being epitomised by the Crucifixion, for this is the state in which we enter and leave this world. Such alludes to spirit-flight, for stripped of the constraining mantle of flesh the spirit is liberated, allowing it to fly free in its divine unfallen state. Such is the basis of some exhaustive trance techniques, wherein the practitioner seeks to weaken the grip of the flesh on the spirit so that it might enter the Otherworld. Accordingly we might think of trance as being akin to death in life, the word trance originating in the word *transire*, literally meaning to cross over or die, making reference to the passage from life to death.

47. King, Francis. *Tantra for Westerners* p. 97.

48. Fernee, et al. *The Society of the Horseman's Word*.

49. Valiente, Doreen. *Where Witchcraft Lives*, p. 55.

Conterminous with life and death in terms of clothing are the swaddling clothing the newborn babe and the shroud of death veiling the deceased, these marking the beginning and ending of the journey. The kinship betwixt the swaddling and the shroud is one that speaks of the relationship between life and death, one feeding upon the other, with life being chased into death and death into life. It reminds us that the sorcerous mantle is one that is passed through a succession of generations, and to the wise provides a key means of accessing the powers of past incarnations through the flesh, these powers having been accrued through successive incarnations.

The shroud, like the garb of the departed, is sometimes worn as a mantle in the rites of the necromancer, who seeks to gain wisdom and petition for aid by acting as an intercessor between the quick and the dead. Cochrane believed that the linen tabard sometimes worn as a magical garment is in fact a remembrance of the shroud or veil<sup>50</sup>, which is of interest when we take into account Chumbley's observation that the Moroccan sect of the Dhu'lqarneni ('the two horned one') also wear a cerecloth or funerary garb in their rites to signify their belief in the transitory nature of the carnal form<sup>51</sup>. Taking into account the oft-observed influx of Arabic thought into Craft philosophy and practice, he further posits a connection between the word 'coven' and *kafan* (meaning 'winding cloth'), the name the Dhu'lqarneni give to their circles of convocation, evoking the symbolic wearing of the cerecloth to signify the interconnection between life and death<sup>52</sup>.

The journey from swaddling to shroud evokes the journey of man from birth to death, not just in a mortal sense but also the evolution of his spirit. In the beginning man is of course naked, a rationale that informs the many initiation rites requiring the aspirant to first come forth unclothed, thereby denoting their identification with the First Man who came upon the earth naked yet unashamed. Up until the Middle Ages even the baptismal rite demanded the aspirant to strip naked, the removal of the tunic

50. Glass, Justine. *Witchcraft, the Sixth Sense*, Neville Spearman, 1965 p. 143.

51. *Qutub*, p. 69.

52. 'Hekas', *The Cauldron* No. 74, 1994.

being in imitation of Christ, “who was stripped naked on the Cross, and by His nakedness put off from Himself the principalities and powers, and openly triumphed over them on the tree”<sup>53</sup>. Of further consideration is the legend of Ishtar, who on her descent surrendered one of her garments, and the powers therein enciphered, at each of the seven gates separating the created world from the Underworld. Underlying this is a philosophy wherein clothes become symbolic of the things man has accrued since birth, sometimes considered as ‘trappings’ that enchain man to the mortal realm. These earthly garments of mortality are laid aside like the shed skin of the serpent, symbolising the death of the old way of being so as to be born into a new existence, thereby taking on the New Flesh, a more perfect mantle, a new skin.

Within occultism and the mystery traditions the development of man on his journey between initiatory re-birth and death came to be represented in his outer garments, this being in deference to the fact that clothes were and still are worn as much for ornamentation as protection. The stages of development are often punctuated by a series of robes, changing in colour and style to symbolise the level of attainment. This philosophy is affirmed by Chumbley, who writes that the dyeing of the robe is a transformation that changes the nature of the raw material, the raw material being the woven threads that form the fabric<sup>54</sup>.

In some magical traditions the initiate on his journey through the Mysteries dresses in a succession of coloured robes, evoking the plumage of the peacock and the rungs of the rainbow ladder. This evolution of the outer mantle from visceral red to the supra-physical violet is sometimes aligned with a mastery of the various alchemical, elemental and planetary powers represented by each of the seven colours; the removal of each mantle being akin to the sloughing of the serpent’s skin — the scales fall off. The successive shedding of coloured outer garments reminds us that whilst the spirit of man is an immortal and permanent principle, the flesh is subject to the cycles of Life and Death, which becomes more glorious and refined through evolution. Thus does Manly Hall

53. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture 20 (*On The Mysteries II. Of Baptism*), c. 350 AD.

54. *Qutub*, p. 55.

proclaim that “the more developed were his super-substantial powers the more glorious was his apparel”<sup>55</sup>.

Just as outer ritual garments reflect stages of development, so too do many occultists believe changes in consciousness to be reflected in man’s body, this being the robe of his indwelling spirit. Manly Hall affirms this when he says that “man’s only lasting adornments are his virtues and worthy characteristics... he is clothed in his own accomplishments and adorned by his attainments”<sup>56</sup>. Unfortunately this has historically led to some making an assumption that bodily deformities reflect illness of the mind or spirit, but this is to mistake the profane flesh for the more subtle flesh, that is to say the transmutable flesh draped upon the skeleton of man and the vehicle of the spirit.

Just as the alchemist attempts to produce gold from black leaden matter, so too does the transfigured man gain the “shining mantle”. There is a telling phrase in the Gospel of Mark, where during the Transfiguration especial emphasis is given to the transformation of the lightbearer's clothes, “*his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them*”<sup>57</sup> and in Matthew “*his face did shine as the sun*”<sup>58</sup>. This marks the transformation of man into his perfected state, a birth into new life, and it is telling that angels are likewise described as being clothed in shining “raiments of light”. Enoch similarly informs us that “*the elect ones shall rise from the earth...they shall wear the garments of glory...the garments of life from the Lord of the Spirits*”<sup>59</sup>, and so does Enoch in his re-attainment of the original state become “*extracted from his earthly clothing, anointed with delightful oil and put in clothes of glory*”<sup>60</sup>. From Enoch we also learn that “the angel Azbuga will clothe the righteous and pious with garments of life and wrap them in the cloak of life that they may live in eternal life”<sup>61</sup>, hinting that the spirit of man has two garments, one for each of the worlds it inhabits; a material one

55. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, p. 231.

56. Ibid.

57. Mark 9:3

58. Matthew 17:2

59. 1 Enoch 62:15-16

60. 2 Enoch 22:8-10

61. 3 Enoch 18:22. Azbuga is one of the 8 great throne angels of judgement. Azbuga, whose name glosses as ‘strength’, also features in Hebrew folk magic, where his healing powers are evoked to deliver the supplicant from every evil, disease and affliction.

for the earthly world of matter and a numinous one for the realm of the gods. So it is that within many modern rites of baptism and initiation the aspirant wears a robe of white, symbolising the renewal of the original state and the shining raiment of light worn by man before his fall.

In *Metamorphoses* Apuleius relates how Lucius, in his desire to become initiated into the cult of Isis, undertook a journey into the darkness of the underworld. The moment of Lucius' initiation is marked by a change of garments, after which he was "decorated like the sun", this symbolising the Light being resurrected from the darkness of Night. Like the figure of Night, Apuleius describes Isis the Initiatrix as having "*a very black robe, fulgid with a dark splendour...glittering stars were dispersed through the embroidered border of the robe, and through the whole of its surface, and the full moon shining in the middle of the stars breathed forth flaming fires*". Manly Hall explains this vision as signifying "the sophic universal mercury and the operating substance of Nature", which having "no light of its own... receives its light, its fire, and its vitalising force from the sun", the Sun being born of Isis, who yet remained a virgin<sup>62</sup>. Such might be thought of as a union of the Sun and Moon, symbolised in the witch cult by the black robe and its fiery-red lining, and shows considerable similarity to the myth of Diana who, as darkness, gave birth to light and then desired to receive the created light back into herself, this desire being the dawn.

The theme of the shining robe as a mark of the re-attainment of the original paradisiacal state is found in the Gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl*, which is preserved in Manichaeism and is found in part in the Acts of Thomas. It tells of "the son of the king of kings" who seeks to retrieve a pearl from a serpent, and in so doing for a time dwells in the mundane world of matter, forgetting his divine heritage until he receives a revelatory message that causes his soul to yearn for a return to its natural state, such being a Gnostic teaching of the exile and redemption of the human soul. It is also known of as the *Hymn of the Robe of Glory*, for after remembering his divine heritage the prince charmed the testing Serpent, stole the Pearl and facing the garment "that seemed like a mirror...a bright embroidered robe", clothed himself therein and "ascended to the gate of salutation and homage". Within Mandaeen and Manichaeen

texts there also exists a belief that the development of the pearl within the oyster is akin to the temporary housing and development of the soul within the physical body. One might note that this thematic sequence of opposition and testing of the seeker as a means to determine worthiness of attainment is found in many myths, including that of the Grail Quest.

Within the bible the robe is encoded as a symbol of initiation and the passing of power. In particular, the word used in Genesis (*k'tonet*) to describe the cloaks of skin gifted to Adam and Eve in Eden is the same as that used to describe the clothes given by Jacob to Joseph, and there exists a tradition that Joseph's cloak of many colours is in fact one and the same as that gifted to Adam, and then handed from Adam to Nimrod to Esau to Jacob to Joseph. This 'passing of the mantle' symbolises the passing on of power and authority, and is a tradition found in many arenas, another revealing biblical example being the passing of the mantle from Elijah to Elisha (Kings 2:13), wherein it is given the name *addereth* meaning 'prophet's garment', which originates from the root word for 'power'.

The passing on of a mantle of power, thereby en-clothing the chosen successor with the authority and power of the tradition, is in actuality an outer expression of an inner reality. This esoteric counterpart of the physical mantle may be observed as a sign of one's calling in those whom the Old Ones have chosen. Where the physical successor is unsuitable the mantle will often pass in body only, and may even pass from generation to generation in dormancy before it comes to fall on the shoulders of one suitable to awaken the power and authority within. Even when the mantle finds no place to fall, it shall await the passage of time in dormancy until the coming of a spirit willing and able to succeed. However, the notion that the cloak may come to hold some power of its own manifests not only in folklore, but also in the reverence accorded to ceremonial robes and the great honour considered to be bestowed upon one who wears or touches robes belonging to royalty or spiritual persons.

62. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*.



In some traditions the mantle of authority differs from that worn by others within the working group, with differing colours denoting positions of office and often harbouring secret significance. Manly Hall notes that even within the priestly robes of the ‘pagan faiths’ “a religious cipher language is concealed in the colours, forms and uses of sacred garments”<sup>63</sup>. Most people are familiar with this system within ceremonial schools of occultism, where colours might mark grades or align with the planetary powers being conjured, but such a practice also occurs in traditional witchcraft, one author remarking that in some traditions the male and female leaders as earthly representatives of the God and Goddess wear red and blue respectively<sup>64</sup>.

*Heyhow for Hallowe’en, when all the witches  
are to be seen, some in black and some in green,  
heyhow for Hallowe’en!*

English Folk Rhyme

In some covens a green robe is also utilised, Cochrane for example referring to those female witches he knew of called ‘Green Gowns’<sup>65</sup>, who wear the faerie colour representative of Nature, calling also to mind the Edenic ‘apron of leaves’. It is of note that in the colour spectrum green is halfway betwixt the blue of the heavenly skies and the red of hell’s flames, evoking the folkloric stance of faeries as being “too good for hell, but too bad for heaven”.<sup>66</sup> We have already mentioned the emerald cloak worn by the Verdelet as a representative of the Devil in ‘a coat of green’, but such a mantle may also be worn by a female representing the Queen of Elphame, calling to mind the green clad Dame Venus as a manifestation of Mother Nature and the ‘green gowns’ of folklore. Interestingly, malevolent faeries may be protected against by reversing one’s cloak, as the old rhyme goes “turn your cloaks, for fairy folks live in old oaks”, which in modern parlance is a ‘turncoat’, i.e. one who has switched allegiance.

63. Ibid., p. 427.

64. Gwyn, *Light from the Shadows*, p. 68.

65. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 28.

66. Kirk, the Rev. Robert, *The Secret Commonwealth*.

Protection is of course a chief virtue of the cloak, which shields the witch against more than just the elements, the sharing or extending of a robe to another becoming symbolic of protection and kinship. This is represented biblically by images of Mary offering shelter within her voluminous robe. Interestingly, the spathe and spadix of Lords and Ladies or Adam and Eve (*Arum maculatum*), besides being considered reminiscent of the male<sup>67</sup> and female sexual organs in union, is also thought of in folklore as emblematic of the Christ child being sheltered in the Virgin Mary's cloak, neither readings being antagonistic to the other. Within general occultism the cloak is sometimes considered to afford less mundane protection, protecting from psychic attack and possession by undesired beings. On this subject Franz Bardon writes that "just as a common garment protects a man's physical body from outside influences, rain, cold etc. so the magical garment of the magician shelters him from outside influences which may attack his body through its astral or mental matrix"<sup>68</sup>.

Similar to this are the uses of clothing in the old healing traditions of the cunning folk, wherein charms were often said over the cloak or belt of the afflicted<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, healings could also be effected by laying a piece of an enchanted person's clothing over the sick and the ill, by placing rags in drinking water<sup>70</sup> or by wrapping the client within certain cloths, a red one being said to cure smallpox. Similarly, a strip from a shroud tied about the head was said to alleviate a headache, whilst tied about a limb would decrease swelling<sup>71</sup>. In folk magic a cloth lain out to gather dew might be wrapped as a cure about the afflicted, although others purified the body of mundane illness and spiritual malaise by enfolding the seated person in a cloak and placing a censer of purifying herbs beneath their stool<sup>72</sup>. Curing by the laying of

67. One common name being *monk's* or *priest's pintle*, the pintle (penis) being enclawed within the monk's or priest's cowl.

68. Bardon, Franz. *The Practice of Magical Evocation*.

69. Froome, Joyce. *Wicked Enchantments*, p. 75.

70. One example from the Irish folk healing tradition concerns the taking of a strip from the clothing of a man called Cassidy to cure sick animals, this rag being infused in the drinking water. See Logan, P. *Irish County Cures*, Appletree Press, 1981.

71. Opie, Iona and and Moira Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, p. 101.

72. *Spiritual Cleansing* by Draja Mickaharic, p. 73.

certain cloths upon the physium is reminiscent of the biblical account of a woman being healed by merely touching the robe of Christ, and as she touched the robe he exclaimed “someone hath touched me, for I perceive that virtue has gone out of me”<sup>73</sup>, which is somewhat analogous to the manner in which virtue is stolen from a witch when scratched by a nail.

We may thus surmise that although the cloak and robe have popularly been considered as a throwback, or worse a form of theatrical escapism, there is far more at work here, and although the invigoration and fascination of the eyes is an important aspect of magic, the cloak is far more than a mere prop to “set the atmosphere”. It is shrouded within Night’s embrace that the witch goes about their work in secrecy and silence, veiling the inner workings from the gaze of the profane with a concealing yet revealing masque, ever seeking to uncover the stone that is hidden beneath.

## The Sacred Head and its Coverings

*I, Isis, am all that has been,  
that is or shall be;  
no mortal Man hath ever me unveiled.*

**I**n the history of the world, the head has universally been held in high regard, with innumerable rites, tabu and lore attached to it. Being the vessel of the brain and the home of the senses of sight, hearing, smell and taste, the head has long been considered as the seat or throne of the indwelling spirit, with the various bodily members being as servants, this giving rise to a cult of the head. Even in our modern language the word ‘head’ is used to denote a leader amongst men, further meaning ‘to be the origin of’ (as in ‘the head of a stream’) and ‘to move’ (as in ‘to head off’), thereby evoking the virtues of rulership, inception and movement, such being qualities indicative of the Primal Ancestor. Accordingly do we find severed heads and skulls, both in the form of imagery and macabre *reliquiae*, being used to represent the whole person, spirit

73. Luke 8:43-8.

or god. This is exemplified in some witch traditions by the image of the hooded skull as a fetish of the First Sorcerer.

Far from being imprisoned within its bony citadel, the spirit is considered capable of flying free from it. Indeed, the many apertures of the skull, each of which are ascribed to astrological rulership within occultism, are points at which spirit might ingress and egress. However, as these pertain to the face, we shall here restrict ourselves to that aperture at the crown of the head. At birth the bones of the skull do not meet, rather they are open like the mouth of a clay vessel, but as time passes they fuse, forming the sagittal suture, and thereby sealing all that's within. The Latin word 'sagitta' means 'arrow', evocative of the stellar blade or nail forged at the hands of Tubalo (counterpart of Tubal-Qayin) that pierces the centre of the skull-dome of the heavens, the gateway to the Great Beyond<sup>74</sup>. We might consider this piercing of man's crown by the Heavenly Nail as being akin to the falling to earth of Heaven's Fire, paralleling the descent of Spirit from the One Point into Man, thereby initiating spiritual illumination; the crown becomes the point of entry for the inspiring god or spirit.

It is also through this suture that the spirit of man leaves at death to enter the Otherworld, recalling the cracking of the skull during Indian cremations to release the indwelling spirit. Within the conclaves of witchcraft it is sometimes considered that the indwelling spirit of man may leave through this opening at the top of the skull, and in Indonesia it was held that the soul may be restored to the head by sorcerers through the self-same bony aperture, a practice familiar to some necromancers.

It isn't just our own soul, or gods and spirits, that may traffic through the aperture in the skull, malefic spirits are also capable of entering through the cranium, hence the well-known cross-cultural practice of trepanation to expel those evil spirits causing ill health. It is in light of the sacredness of the head that some cultures have sought to guard and protect these openings by covering it, especially those priests, shamans and magicians conducting rites of magic, wisdom and devotion. Indeed, even the word 'hood' itself

74. Jackson, Nigel and Michael Howard, *The Pillars of Tubal-Cain*, p. 247.

derives from the Old Frisian *hode*, meaning ‘guard’ and ‘protection’, emphasising its protective virtues.

Protection aside, the Greek Platonist Plutarch suggests that the covering of the head whilst worshipping the gods is a sign of humility and represents “the covering and concealment of the soul by the body”<sup>75</sup>. This is a belief that is also found within some lineages of traditional witchcraft, with the hood of the robe covering the head in deference and devotion to the spirits, as well as affording simple protection against the elements<sup>76</sup>. Intriguingly, Plutarch goes on to say that although the Romans “cover their head before the heavenly deities”, when sacrificing to Saturn they uncover the head for he is “a god whose realm is beneath the earth”. Praying with a covered scalp is a tradition also abided to in Islam and Judaism, whereas in Christianity man is exhorted to keep it exposed whilst praying so as not to ‘dishonour his head’<sup>77</sup>. The Christian tradition of uncovering the head in deference to god when praying in church has become concretised in the European superstition of men removing their hats when coming indoors, so as to avoid ‘bad luck’. However, women must pray and prophesise with the head covered<sup>78</sup>, which is in stark contrast to the many old pagan rites wherein women worshipped with their heads exposed and their hair down, such as in the Eleusinian mysteries, the Andanian mysteries and the worship of Dionysius. Interestingly, folklore declares that should a witch shake loose her hair whilst pronouncing a charm its power would be doubled<sup>79</sup>.

Related to the bare head is the tonsure, the hair ostensibly being shaven to remove impurity or evil influences from the head, hence the biblical instruction to shave the head of the leper for purification<sup>80</sup> and the old Arabic practice of shaving a child’s head before daubing it with sacrificial blood in order to purify them. The bald head of devotion and humility appears to be particularly associated with rites of initiation, such as those of Isis, and it is to make a sharp distinction between the Hebrew and pagan priesthoods that

75. *Moralia* (Book 4) by Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus (c. 46 CE-120 CE).

76. Schulke, *Viridarium Umbris*, pp 497-8.

77. 1 Corinthians 11:4-5

78. 1 Corinthians 11:4-5

79. Radford, Edwin and Christina Hole, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions*.

80. Leviticus 14:9

the former were specifically forbidden from shaving their heads<sup>81</sup>. Despite this prohibition, later Christians shaved their heads in the manner of slaves so as to declare themselves as subservient to Christ. It is interesting to note that although the common perception is of a circular tonsure, shaved in remembrance of the crown of thorns worn by Christ, there existed a variation that was shaved from ear to ear, which is the so-called "Celtic tonsure". This latter tonsure was worn by the Irish druids and adherents of Celtic Christianity, although those of the Roman tradition considered it unorthodox as it was akin to that worn by the heresiarch Simon Magus. As hair grows out of the head, wherein man's strength and spirit are held, the two have come to be considered as analogous to one another, such being exemplified in the story of Samson and Delilah (Samson glossing as 'man of the sun'). This belief gave rise to the practice of offering locks of hair, and thereby a part of one's own spirit and power, to the gods, whether as a libation or in the making of a binding oath to a patron god.

There does exist a certain 'cap' that covers the head of some newborns, this being the *Caput Galeatum* ('head helmet'), more commonly known as the caul or 'sillyhow', meaning 'blessed' or 'happy hood'. Being 'born in the caul' is to be born in the amniotic sac, i.e. within water, and thus in a case of like-curing-like did the caul come to be considered as a talisman against drowning. Yet for the child so born it was also a harbinger of great luck, a sign of having the Sight and a charm against sorcerers and fairies. Chumbley comments that like the blood-red naevus and other distinguishing birth traits, the caul is a especially associated with witchcraft as a 'Mark of Cain', "an anthropogenetic stigmata borne by the kindred of the Sabbat...signs that put the individual outside of the normative birth-state of the community", it is to mark them out as Other, exiled from the herd<sup>82</sup>.

As the virtue was held to remain with the caul, these highly prized talismans were impressed into paper so that they might be kept as an heirloom or sewn up in a bag to be worn about the neck, thereby keeping the child safe from drowning so long as he retained it. However, in light of the huge sums they could fetch on

81. See for example Leviticus 21:5 and Ezekiel 44:20.

82. Chumbley, *Opuscula Magica* Vol 2, p. 69.

the open market they were often sold to sailors, but sadly there were sometimes disastrous consequences for the child who sold or lost his caul, as was the case for a toddler who drowned in a shallow pond after his mother threw his away. Others still believed that a caul-bearer who was parted from his caul would become a restless wanderer<sup>83</sup>, and should they be buried without it their spirit would never rest and would return to search for it. This latter belief is perhaps linked to the Icelandic tradition that a part of the soul or a person's guardian spirit (*fylgia*) is contained within it<sup>84</sup>.

The notion of a caul bearer having a *fylgia* or co-walker bound to his caul is reminiscent of the belief that those destined to be one of the Benandanti were marked out at birth by being caul-born. They were believed to have the ability to leave their body at night in the shape of various spectral animals in order to battle evil witches and attend great feasts. Likewise is it believed in Slovenia and Hungary that children born with the caul possess shamanic powers, including those of shape-changing<sup>85</sup>. In many ways the shamanic virtue of the membranous cap recalls the hood of the robe, used to aid trance meditation and as a sign of solitary hermitage, the withdrawal into the solitude of night's darkness.

This concealing power of the hood is evoked in the figure of the shape-changing Woden, who wore a hood or large floppy hat to mask his face as he walked between the worlds, giving rise to his nickname *grimr* meaning 'masked man'. Intriguingly, Cochrane suggests that the "cloak and broad-brimmed hat worn by some English witches" are 'magical garments'<sup>86</sup>, both cloak and hat being combined as one in the witch's robe, the robe being "hooded so it covers the face"<sup>87</sup>. By covering the face with the hood, the veil of darkness descends upon man so that he might enter the secluded palace of Night and seek inspiration within its seething mass, the pre-existent seed-ground of all being. Then, in pulling back the hood, he is reborn into the light, bringing with him the 'dream' so that it might be manifested in the light of the revealed world.

83. Simpson, Jacqueline and Steve Roud. *A Dictionary of English Folklore*.

84. Hastings, James. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

85. Jackson, Nigel. *The Compleat Vampyre*, p. 116.

86. Glass, Justine. *Witchcraft: the Sixth Sense*.

87. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 142.

Aside from the transmutation of the body through the wearing of animal skins is that accomplished through the donning of a bestial headdress, and in some magico-religious philosophies the metamorphoses of the head is considered as synonymous with that of the whole body. Within the witch cult one common example is that of the Magister cloaked in a bestial mantle, paired with a horned head-dress. The earliest example of a horned headdress is from the early Mesolithic period, twenty-one of them having been discovered at Star Carr in North Yorkshire. These headdresses were fashioned of red deer skull-caps, complete with antlers, and had holes bored in the osseous caps so that leather thongs might be tied through them to secure the whole to the head. Images found depicting humans bearing horns or antlers upon their heads are too numerous to list, but are considered to be the precursors of certain ceremonial folk customs, such as the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance, the Horn Fair and the mask of the Dorset Ooser. Judging from the writings of Saint Cesarius of Arles (470-543) and Theodore of Canterbury (668-690) in his 'Penitential Book', we might assume a more magical philosophy underpinning these customs, for both refer with disdain at the devilish practice of dressing in skins and animal headdresses so as to assume a bestial appearance and cease to become as men.

Taken together, antlers and horns are commonly held to be symbolic of male virility and sexual potency, the horned Aries having rulership of the head. However, it is also worth taking into account the differences between them, which reveals certain variances between those images depicting the witch god with antlers and those where he appears as a goat or bull headed theriomorph. Whilst horns are permanent, antlers are not; rather they begin growing in spring in preparation for mating and are shed naturally in winter after the mating season, thereby evoking the seasonal round. It is in light of this that stags have come to represent the solar year, as emblemised in the image of the sun shining betwixt his antlers, which in mytho-poetic terms aligns the stag with the sacrificial king as 'roebuck in the thicket'. It also reveals the nature of the white stag as psychopomp; the solar chariot having the ability to traverse the worlds above and below, passing from life into death and back again. Herein we discover the twin powers of life





and death, for whilst the antlers represent the fleeting nature of light and life, symbolised by the risen sun temporarily illuminating the world, the horns represent the underlying and abiding darkness into which the world is plunged when the sun makes its inevitable return to the world below. Just as all life originates in and returns to the black loam of the horizon, so too does the revealed world emanate from and return to the dark hidden realm of Night.

The antlered headdress as representative of the roebuck in the thicket, or sacrificial king, speaks particularly of the role of the Magister in some traditions. Just as he is given his right to rule by decree of the goddess of the Land, evoking the gifting of the sword of rulership to Arthur from the body of the feminine stone, it is at her hands that he will die at the end of his reign, although in practice this now takes the form of a sacrifice made in his stead<sup>88</sup>. Within his letters, Cochrane intriguingly wrote “the hunter, old Tubal-Cain, and the Roebuck are one and the same Divine Presence in the shape of fate or wyrd”<sup>89</sup>. This in part harks back to the slaying of the antlered theriomorph and first murderer Cain by his own descendents, Tubal-Cain and Lamech, and thus in a twist of fate the hunter becomes the hunted, the young forever supplanting the old in the processes of evolution. The horned Dionysus fulfils a similar role, for whilst he has the appellation of Zagreus (‘the great hunter’), as a child he was hunted by the Titans, who tore him into seven pieces and consumed them. Fortunately Zeus saved his heart, and it was from this that he was later resurrected. This life-death-birth cycle formed the basis of Dionysius’ role in the mystery religions and clearly evokes the figure of the sacrificial king.

88. Jones, *Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed*, p. 145.

89. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 133.

Related to the antlered headdress is the horned helmet, such being known from depictions and finds throughout Bronze and Iron Age Europe. One particularly interesting example of an Iron Age ceremonial helmet (150-50 BC) was dredged from the Thames and had stylised conical horns fashioned of bronze. Despite the popular conception of Viking warriors going to battle in horned helmets, this headwear appear to have been mainly ceremonial in purpose. However, it remains true that Odin's chosen warriors, the Einherjar, were said to have worn horned helmets, and similarly are two spear-wielding warriors depicted wearing comparable headwear on one of the decorative plates of the Sutton Hoo helmet. It is this ceremonial use of horned headwear that has passed into the modern witch cult, such vestments being worn by the male leader of a coven or placed upon the stang as the representative of the horned master in the witch rites.

Whilst the wearing of horns and other animal headdresses are under the patronage of the witch god in his aspect of Lord of the Beasts, there is also tradition in dressing the scalp with the harvest of field and forest, such customs being ruled by the verdant Lord of the Green. The wearing of chaplets upon the head grew from the old custom of decorating the hair with flowers, such being particularly common during festivities. However, garlands of flowers were also worn upon the heads of kings, priests, supplicants and worshippers during religious and sacrificial rites to distinguish, magically differentiate and set them apart. Such a practice was especially common in the Greco-Roman period, as exemplified in the leaf chaplets worn during the Eleusinian mysteries and the laurel wreaths worn during the Andanian mysteries, but it is also a feature familiar to British tradition, as exemplified in the flowers bedecking the hair of the May Day revellers.

Oftentimes the leafy or floral garland was fashioned with herbal matter sacred to the god(s) to whom the bequest was being made or the patron overseeing the festival or rite. A classic example of this is the bay laurel wreath that adorned the head of Apollo, which being the embodiment of victory came to be worn by the victors at the Pythian games held in his honour. These wreaths of victory were known as *stephanos* and were woven of plants sacred to the

god(s) in whose honour the competition was held, the Isthmian games, for example, being under the patronage of Poseidon were fashioned of pine. Similarly, it was European folk custom to weave the last ear of corn into a wreath, which was worn by the person who cut it, marking them as an embodiment of the corn divinity<sup>90</sup>.

Wreaths were sometimes placed also upon the heads of idols and statues of sacred personages, such being a particularly common practice amongst the ancient Greeks and Romans<sup>91</sup>. Within the witch cult there exists a similar practice, whereby the stag as an embodiment of the witch god is sometimes dressed with a chaplet of plant matter sacred to that aspect of the god being summoned. Schulke for example tells us that in the Old Craft crowns of oak or holly, depending upon the aspect of the god evoked, were placed upon the skull of a stag set upon a pole<sup>92</sup>. This is evocative of the manner in which the axial maypole was sometimes topped with the crown, and similarly are various maces, sceptres, rods and magical staves so-dressed. We might relate this to the old symbol of the cross and the crown, wherein the powers of the philosophical cross are surmounted by those of the Crown of Heaven, whose import we shall soon discuss.

In other instances an herbal wreath might be placed upon a skull fetish, whether human or animal, or similar idol so as to evoke the powers. Similarly are the animals sacred to the gods sometimes crowned with wreaths, and we might see something of this in such folk rites as the crowning of the Penglaz, the coronation of the goat at Puck Fair and the plaiting of flowers in the manes of horses during the May festivals. Within Christian tradition an image of the Virgin Mary was sometimes paraded through towns during the month of May and ceremonially crowned with flowers, most often hawthorn, to mark her out as Queen of Heaven. This crowning of Mary's statue is still carried on in some Roman Catholic parishes, which resounds with the echoes of the May Queen's crowning with a garland of hawthorn<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>90</sup>. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

<sup>91</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup>. *Viridarium Umbris*.

<sup>93</sup>. For an interesting discussion of this subject see *The Rose-Garden Game* by Eithne Wilkins, pp 152-172.

The weaving of such a wreath serves to call upon the vegetal powers and potencies indwelling each of the worts, and in encircling the head this verdant crown serves to bind and focus such powers within the corpus of the person, idol or similar, much in the manner of the circle of ensorcelment. So it is that chaplets of certain herbs come to have especial association with certain rites, such as the aforementioned use of hawthorn in the May festivities, the evergreen garlands for the promotion of long-life, and the “wreath of death-dealing yew” worn to bind the hoary hair of the necromantic priest<sup>94</sup>. They are also of much use in the arts of magic, such as the talismanic ivy wreath, which when woven and placed upon the head “may be employed against any spiritual harassment, be it in waking or sleep”<sup>95</sup>, the leafy circlet forming a protective boundary line about the head.

Perhaps the most renowned vegetal chaplet is the famed ‘crown of thorns’ worn by Christ at his crucifixion, such being akin to the vegetal wreaths sometimes worn to mark out sacrificial victims in the Greco-Roman world<sup>96</sup>. Indeed, even sacrificial animals were sometimes so-dressed, Flaccus for example making reference to a black bull with “his brow rough with yew”<sup>97</sup>. This crown of thorns hearkens back to the fall of man, for when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree the ground was cursed so that thorns and thistles were brought forth upon it<sup>98</sup>, thorns being the defensive, punitive and warding part of a plant. Thorns accordingly came to be symbolic of transgression, punishment and suffering, and in wearing a crown of thorns Christ becomes identified with the sacrificial king, the scapegoat who bears away the sins and transgressions of man. This crown also comes to symbolise the trials and ordeals that the sorcerer must undergo in order to become liberated from the world of clay and be reborn into that of the spirit, in this sense the crown is also a symbol of victory over death.

94. *Oedipus* by Lucius Annaeus Seneca (circa 1st century AD).

95. *Viridarium Umbris*, p. 116.

96. Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game*, p. 149.

97. *Argonautica* by Gaius Valerius Flaccus (c. 70 AD). The referenced black bull is intended to be sacrificed for a necromantic operation. Some grimoires also call for sacrificial animals to be so dressed.

99. Genesis 3:17-18

The redemption of man is symbolised in Isaiah 55:13, wherein cypress sprouts where thorns once stood, the curse of the ground lifted, corresponding to the image of the rose blossoming from its thorny stem. More than this, the crown of thorns is evocative of the impenetrable thicket, with such tangled briars sometimes being raised as a protective and warding circle<sup>99</sup>. In British folklore the crown of thorns manifests as a wreath of holly and blackthorn, compounding the association blackthorn has in superstition with suffering and bad luck. Although scarlet, hollen berries were said to have once been white, but became reddened by the blood that fell from the Lightbearer as he hung upon the cross. These two herbs fashioned into a garland and placed on an apposite idol are of utmost use in the conjuration of the Dark Master and also in the raising of a protective hedge.

Sometimes the crown of thorns is shown as embracing the heart of the Lightbearer, which is oftentimes pierced with a spear, the heart being mystically aligned with the centre of the cross. This is known as the Sacred Heart of Jesus and shares some commonality also with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which instead of thorns is surrounded by a wreath of roses. Both of these images partake of the symbolism of the heart, which is a symbolism transcending time and place, and in some cases the heart might be replaced with a single rose. Indeed, within it we might see a veritable cipher of the witch's 'royal circle', with the heart and hearth of the crossroads being warded by thickets, which in turn gives rise to the golden ring.

In biblical tradition, upon the death of Christ the bloodied 'crown of thorns' becomes transfigured into a golden crown of glory<sup>100</sup>, such speaking of his transformation from a man of flesh and blood into a man of light and spirit. The moment of transformation is his sacrifice upon the cross, which might be syncretised with the many accounts of mythological bearers of light who have been slain upon a tree. Herein we specifically witness the transmuting of the rosy red blood into gold, the way of opposition and sacrifice giving rise to the golden treasures of the

99. *Viridarium Umbris* pp 117-120.

100. Revelation 14:14

spirit; the New Flesh arises in resurrection as a direct result of sacrificial death. This is sometimes symbolised in the Christian mythos by the image of the Cross and Crown, the trials and suffering yielding a heavenly reward.

The golden crown as a sign of the 'man of spirit' risen from the 'man of clay' is analogous to the corona of light surrounding the head of sacred personages in the iconography of divers faiths, whether god, angel, saint, divine king or hero. This eminence is related to the whole-body radiance or 'shining cloak of man' that originates from the transfigured man, and is often depicted surrounding Christ, Mary and some saints. This cranial emanation of light marks out those who are literally 'enlightened' and sometimes takes the form of a circular outpouring of light evocative of the solar rays, although othertimes it appears as dancing flames. This latter manifestation of spiritual enlightenment calls to mind the *Sepher Yetzirah* wherein it is said that the head is formed from and predominates in the primordial fire, symbolised by the Hebrew letter Shin, whose three points or teeth are suggestive of a flaming crown. It is also reminiscent of a line from the *Song of Amergin*, "I am the god who puts fire in the head"<sup>101</sup>, which Graves further associates with the image of the lightning-struck oak and the sooty faces of those revellers who dance betwixt the Midsummer fires<sup>102</sup>, their faces charred by the flames and blackened by wisdom, but we shall return to this when we consider the black-face tradition. In this respect it is interesting that in early Christian iconography Christ was generally only portrayed crowned with a corona of light in those images depicting him after his Baptism at the hands of St. John.

In Qabalism we might consider this as Kether, 'the crown', which corresponds with the highest level of consciousness, and has thus come to be associated with the head. However, as Dion Fortune reminds us, the Crown is not the head but rests above, upon and beyond it and thus "cannot be consciousness...but the raw material of existence"<sup>103</sup>. Accordingly we might render the

101. Lady Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men* (Part 1, Book 3).

102. *The White Goddess*, p. 290.

103. *The Mystical Qabalah*, p. 44.

shining golden disc as emblematic of the ‘Uncreated Light’ that “gives the power of comprehension of the First Principle, which hath no beginning”<sup>104</sup>. In some branches of traditional witchcraft the staff or stang is envisioned as a tree aligned with the cabbalistic middle pillar, and whilst its roots are in Malkuth and physical experience its top is in Kether and mystical experience<sup>105</sup>. It is in this sense that the crown of the tree (sometimes identified with mistletoe) becomes the crown of heaven as “the Great Arch, the Will to Power which drives the earthly substrate ever toward manifestation”<sup>106</sup>.

Amid the witch cult there exists a technique whereby the sleeping Serpent coiled in the base of the spine is awakened and drawn along the spinal axis until it reaches the summit of the skull, which might be imagined as an osseous Castle at whose centre we find the Graal-Cauldron. Such is to speak of the manner in which the sexual fire is aroused and transmuted into spiritual fire, literally ‘setting the head afire’. Besides aiding in the unfoldment of the secret faculties, which have their analogues in the physical senses, such a technique also connects man with god. In this manner man might receive wisdom, power and inspiration, which might be symbolically rendered as the descent of the Serpent of Light from the canopy of the Tree or as the philtre poured from the Cauldron into the vessel of the skull-cup. Yet the head is also aligned with the source from which the created world emanates. This is exemplified in the utterance of the Logos from the lips of the demiurge, the created world streaming outwards from the wellspring of the mouth, which shares certain similitude with the image of the leaves unfurling from the mouth of the Green Man.

As we have noted, it is through the suture at the apex of the skull that the spirit passes at death and during trance so as to ‘fly free’. In considering the foregoing discussion we come to understand that having passed through the subtle centres aligned upon the spinal axis, and having reached the Crown as ‘the One beyond the Seven’, the spirit transcends the material realm and enters the “Silence where-in the whole cipher of the mysteries is

104. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

105. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 142.

106. *Viridarium Umbris* p. 504.

immanent"<sup>107</sup>; it is in this Union that man becomes free of Fate's rule. Intriguingly, Chumbley relates that the Crown is sometimes represented by the circular form of Alif, which became two-horned to represent the Bull (Alif meaning 'ox'), thereby signifying the Horned One as Initiator<sup>108</sup>. This calls to mind also the use of the horned crown in the evocation of the theriomorphic Primal Master. It is he who stands as guardian and gate betwixt the witch and that which is beyond, hence his intimate association with the Crown as the One Light from which the seven rays shine and with the Point where created man gains comprehension of the Source as First Principle and Uncreated Light.

*Crowned am I with the Stellar Fire entwined  
about the Horns of the Ancient One.*

Andrew Chumbley, *Azoëtia*<sup>109</sup>

The condition of the clay body suffused with Divine Light is not always represented in the imagery of solar rays shining from man's head, it may also be found symbolised by a crown of stars. This starry circle becomes as though a celestial wreath, evoking the stellar powers that whirl about the centre of the heavens, these being as gates upon the horizon of the shining ring. Most often the crown is depicted as seven stars above the head of a divine personage and is taken to indicate their immortality. It marks them out as one of the starry race, those whose hearts contain "a spark of that mysterious dark angelic fire that first breathed life into the clay of this world"<sup>110</sup>.

The theme of immortality is also encoded in the crown as a zodiacal circlet of twelve stars, thereby evoking the journey of the sun through the seasonal signs, and thus through the cycles of time overseen by Fate. By virtue of this journey from birth to death to subsequent resurrection, the solar orb comes to denote the everlasting light in the figure of the sacrificial lightbearer.

107. Chumbley, *Qutub*.

108. *Ibid*.

109. 'Proclamation of the Living Temple', p. 23.

110. Huson, Paul, *Mastering Witchcraft*.



Intriguingly, some have posited that one translation of *Caer Sidi*, the fortress that turns without motion between three elements, is ‘fortress of the zodiac’ (*sidydd* meaning ‘zodiac’ in modern Welsh), although others argue that the word was unlikely to have been in use when the poem was written.

A crown of twelve stars was worn by Mary when in her aspect of the Queen of Heaven, which evokes the mythic Arianrhod (meaning ‘silver wheel’) and identifies her with the seasonal whirling of the celestial vaults. Her heavenly abode (*Caer Arianrhod*) is identified with *Corona Borealis*, ‘the crown of the north wind’, and with *Caer Sidi*, the ever-revolving castle of the Otherworld, which has led some to suggest a connection with the Polestar as the still axis-point of the heavens that turns without motion. It was in her palace that Taliesin spent three periods<sup>111</sup>, Graves declaring this time in her spiral castle of death and rebirth to be as though in “royal purgatory awaiting resurrection”<sup>112</sup>. This is to identify Arianrhod as a manifestation of the Goddess as Creator and Destroyer, Taliesin becoming a manifestation of the Sun/Son God whom she both births and consumes.

*Corona Borealis* is also known as ‘Ariadne’s Crown’ in reference to that diadem gifted by Dionysius to his immortal bride Ariadne<sup>113</sup>, who mythically has much in common with Arianrhod. It is revealing then that the Cretan poet Epimenides (6th Century BC) wrote that Theseus only found his way through the dark and spiralling labyrinth by virtue of the light radiating from this golden crown, which was gifted to him by Ariadne.

The Queen of Heaven is especially associated with the moon, which when enhaloed by the corona or ringed by a circlet evokes a whole body of folkloric portents and omens. She is sometimes depicted wearing a crown of seven stars, and Cochrane tells us that these seven stars above the Head of the Moon are ‘the Goddesses’ and are to be seen in the Plough or Haywain<sup>114</sup>. In the folksong ‘Green Grow the Rushes O’ these seven sisters are evoked in the

111. From the riddle-poem *Hanes Taliesin*.

112. Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 94.

113. Plutarch writes that this wreath ‘of fiery gold and red Indian gems, set in the shape of roses’ was forged by the smith-god Hephaistos (Grave, *The Greek Myths*).

114. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 165.

“seven for the seven stars in the sky”, or as an alternate version has it “seven for the Queen of Heaven”.

In mythology the Queen of Heaven sometimes takes the form of a harlot or fallen woman, which is to say she descends from her exalted heavenly position to become immersed in the physical world. This ‘fall’ is reminiscent of that of Sophia, who was considered to have fallen from grace and helped to create the material world. Within Gnostic belief it is through her that the seven builders are brought forth, and just as the head rules the limbs, so too is the world shaped through the agency of their seven arms in accordance with the guiding principle of her Divine Wisdom.

Biblical tradition relates Sophia’s gift of Wisdom as a literal crowning of man’s head, the home of his spirit, “*She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown*”<sup>115</sup>. This recalls the manner in which not only wisdom and enlightenment are conferred to man, but also power and authority, such speaking of the radiant crown worn as a symbol of the divine right to rule. The story of kingship is tightly bound to the concept of sovereignty as a god-given gift, as epitomised by the role of the stone in choosing he to whom the sword of rulership is to be proffered, which is to identify the king as a *chosen* embodiment of the godhead. Accordingly, just as the right to rule might be symbolised by a heavenly golden crown descending to surmount the priest-king, so too is the crown of divine authority passed from one king to the next when the old king is slain or dies. Such a philosophy is of course not entirely alien to the manner in which the priesthood of certain witch cults gain their divine right to intercede between man and his gods, and how such a divine right passes to their successor. This divine right could also be taken away, a fallen crown sometimes being used to symbolise the collapse of those kingdoms that had fallen out of favour with their god(s). In biblical tradition god has the ability to remove the divine authority of both king and priest, for example, “Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be same: exalt him that is low and abase him that is high”<sup>116</sup>.

115. Proverbs 4:9.

116. Ezekiel 21:26.

Crowns differ from the more practical and utilitarian hat, generally being emblematic of achievement and pre-eminence, although they may also indicate divine nature, as exemplified in the crowns worn by the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Furthermore, as a symbol of divine authority, they have great tradition of being worn not only by kings but also by priests and magicians, these roles being brought together in the figure of the priest-king. In ceremonial magic the crown rising above the head symbolises “the Attainment of the Work” and may take in various symbols to represent particular aspects of the Magi’s Work, such as pentagrams, hexagrams, serpents and ram’s horns. Othertimes the circlet might be adorned with apposite gems, denoting the stars of the heavens circling the polar-axis and the stations upon the golden ring of Time. This crown of the magus may also include a crimson cap of maintenance to signify concealment, the blood of God and the flood of glory falling upon the magician from above<sup>117</sup>. However, despite these symbolic variations its basis is a plain circlet of gold representing the eternal circle of perfection, although we might equally consider it as kingly solar symbol denoting the wearer receiving their Light from upon high. Such a circlet is somewhat reminiscent of the *cornonoa radiata*, or ‘chaplet studded with sunbeams’<sup>118</sup>, worn by Roman emperors partaking in the cult of Sol Invictus, and also of the crown placed upon the head of the supplicant by the point of a sword in the Mithraic mysteries with the words “Mithras is my Crown”.

Of course, other metals besides gold are used to fashion the occultist’s crown. On the basis of being as if earthly reflections of the heavenly lights, the ‘fallen’ metallic ores have certain powers ascribed to them, and in fashioning circlets of these metals the self-same powers can be drawn upon by the wearer. Yet more than this, these crowns denote the divine authority of the magus and their rulership over the planetary powers, intelligences and spirits corresponding to that metal. In this sense they are related to the Magus-Band, which is a coloured band of parchment or fabric wound about the forehead and embroidered with various signs and symbols to express the nature of the sorcerer’s work and their

117. Crowley, *Magick* p. 106.

118. *Alexander the False Prophet* by Lucian of Samosata (c. 180 AD).

predilections, particularly glyphs of the god or spirit being worked with and those denoting the wearer's spiritual authority<sup>119</sup>.

In alchemy the crown represents the successful completion of the alchemical operation and the attainment of an individual magisterium. It also represents the purification and perfection of metals, wherein they are made royal. In some alchemical works this is portrayed in the image of planetary spirits receiving their crowns from the king, that is to say the heavenly regents delivering their power from the Sun, each being as refractions of the One Light. In *Margarita Pretiosa* for example, the planetary spirits are first shown bowing bare-headed before their king, but then after transmutation are depicted with crowns to denote their spiritual evolution<sup>120</sup>.

The image of the Seven Planetary Lights as rays or refractions of the One Light is evocative of the crown of peacock feathers. In Wolfram von Eschenbach's 'Parzival', the Fisher King Anfortas is described as wearing such a peacock-crown, which is an intriguing vision that brings together a variety of mythic themes. In essence it speaks of a successive line of priest-kings, whom have their origin in a primal archetypal ancestor, each being charged with the guardianship of a sacred vessel (Holy Grail). Yet more than this, in the mystical bond existing betwixt the health of the Fisher King, adorned with his crown of peacock feathers, and the health of the land we find an embodiment of the Peacock Angel as Lord of the World, all having mythically endured a 'fall from grace'. This correlation is all the more striking when one takes into account the legend of the Holy Grail being wrought from the *Lapis Exilis*, the emerald that fell from the crown of that other fallen angel of renown, Lucifer. When this radiant-green venereal stone fell from the starry heavens it brought light and life into the dark abyss, evoking the Fisher King's role in the greening of the kingdom through the agency of the Grail, and also calling to mind the figure of the Green Man himself.

119. Bardon, Franz. *The Practice of Magical Evocation*.

120. *The Pretiosa Margarita Novella* (New Pearl of Great Price) is a compendium of early alchemical texts printed at Venice by Aldus in 1546. It contains a series of 14 images showing the death of the king at the hands of his son by sword-point, his interment and subsequent resurrection.

Of course, in popular conception witches wear a pointed conical black hat<sup>121</sup>, which some modern Wiccans have suggested is symbolic of ‘a cone of power’ or power spiralling from the crown chakra, whilst others more pragmatically suggest it is simply an accident of sartorial fashion. Yet it is intriguing that there is a history of brimless pointed hats being associated with magic and the occult arts in general, as well as with the witches, wizards and dwarfs of European mythology, which is perhaps what led the Church to denounce pointed hats as being evocative of the Devil’s horns.

Some posit that the classic image of the wizard’s hat emblazoned with symbols of the whirling celestial bodies and its apex pointing to the heavenly axis is modelled on the floppy hat worn by Woden, much like other aspects of the archetypal wizard’s appearance, such as his robe, staff, long grey hair and beard. However, there is also a striking resemblance



Fig. 2: Witch with conical hat, undated English woodcut, circa 17th century.

here with the golden ceremonial hats discovered in Central Europe, which date back to 10 BCE. These were fashioned from a single piece of gold and inscribed with symbols believed to function as an astronomical calendrical device based upon the nineteen year metonic cycle.

However, pointed hats are not peculiar to occultism, rather they are common to the priestly castes of many faiths and cultures, especially those with a sacrificial bent or of a masculine and solar persuasion, such as the mitre of Christian tradition, which has led some to deduce them as having phallic significance<sup>122</sup>. Of the many

121. Some magical practitioners actively courted this stereotype by dressing in conical hats, cloaks emblazoned with magical sigils and so forth as an outward sign of their calling (Howard, Michael: *West Country Witches* p. 52).

122. In this respect it is worth noting the slang use of the word ‘helmet’ for the phallus after its similarity in shape to the male glans.

other manifestations of the pointed hat, perhaps most relevant to our discussion is the Phrygian or Mithraic Cap, which is commonly depicted on the heads of Greek and Roman gods in statuary, although there are curious carvings of 'welsh warriors' wearing these caps on the south door of Kilpeck church (England). Some posit this Mithraic Cap as "the origin of the priestly mitre of all faiths...worn by the priest in sacrifice", and was worn by men with the point forwards, but by women with the point back, the apex being known as the 'christa' and signifying the triumphal summit<sup>123</sup>. Jennings, in his work on the Rosicrucians, relates that the black *bonnet conique* is a successor of the high pointed caps worn by the Persian fire worshippers and the black caps worn by the Bohemians in the East, further linking it to the bonnet of the 'fire workers', 'fire raisers' and servants of Vulcan (Hephaestus was sometimes depicted wearing a conical pileus hat). He goes on to posit that this later evolved into the loose black Hussar Cap "of Tubal-Cain, the Smiths and Artful Workers in Nature"<sup>124</sup>.

Whilst the black pointed hat might be symbolic of the artful smith, when in its form of the *bonnet rouge* it calls to mind the archetypal female witch in her red bonnet, hence the common appellation of Old Mother Red-Cap for reputed witches. Wearing a red cap in the open was one way of publically declaring one's magical powers and occult interests, identifying the wearer as being apart from the rest of society<sup>125</sup>. The Phrygian Cap when of a sanguine hue was known as the 'cap of liberty', which gave rise to the common name for the similar looking 'liberty cap' mushroom. Intriguingly, 'mother red cap' is a common name for another vision-producing mushroom, that of the Fly Agaric, evoking the archetypal witch in her red bonnet. Red hats are also worn by various fair folk, such as the murderous powries or redcaps, which folklore attests are dyed red with the blood of their human victims, and the more benign gnome or *kabouter* of Dutch mythology.

In the above we have seen how the circular golden crown of the eternal spirit gives rise to a succession of coverings; the initial cap

123. Jennings, *Rosicrucians: Their Rites and Mysteries*.

124. *Ibid.*

125. Howard, *West Country Witches*, p52.

of flesh and hair coming to be covered in turn by various head-dresses, whether for reasons practical or purely symbolic. From the vegetal wreaths, flowery corollas and chaplets of thorns, which later gave way to the gem-adorned crowns of precious metals worn by king, priest and magician alike, to the pointed caps of witch, magician and fair folk, each of these head-coverings have the ability to deliver certain virtues to the wearer, whether to protect, bestow power or signify exaltation or deference. They have been worn by god, idol, angel, king, priest, witch and wizard, bride and nun alike, placed on the heads of sacrificial victims, on the dead and as offerings upon the grave itself, all of which demonstrates the tremendous import of the sacred head.

### **Veil and Mask: The Twin Embracements of the Face**

**A**lthough we touched upon some of the mysteries of the face when discussing the head, the face has an especial significance of its own. In essence it is the revealed form of a thing; the manifested expression of that which lies within and the part that is projected outwards to the world. Upon the face, its physiognomy and expressions are written many truths, and it is through the agency of this outer façade that we encounter the Arcanum. Similarly, it is via the medium of the perceptive senses here housed that we are able to observe and interact with the world about us.

As a round mirror reflecting that which is beneath, the countenance of the face is much akin to the image of the full moon receiving and reflecting the light of the solar body. That is to say that just as the head is crowned with a corona of stars, so too does the face become as if Dame Luna cupping or embracing the Sun, with the Fire becoming imprisoned in the body of form. Accordingly is the face of the enlightened one often given as shining like the sun (see earlier discussion on the white robes of ascension).

In essence all face coverings can be considered to have a dual function, these being to conceal that which is beneath in the manner of the veil and to reveal or project forth a new guise in the

manner of the mask. However, although there are subtle differences between them they both serve to cover the truth that resides beneath.

In the instance of the veil the virtue is purely to conceal, as in 'to draw a veil over' something, yet even this might be directed to various ends. In covering a thing in order to obscure it there is a hint of deception, such often working to hide the identity of that which lies beneath, yet there is also a protective aspect. Besides the preservation of modesty and the mundane protection from the elements that such face-coverings provide, there is also a more spiritual protection afforded. In Roman weddings, for example, the bridal veil, or *Flammeum*, was believed to protect the bride from nefarious spirits on her wedding day, the head being considered sacred yet vulnerable in ancient thought. Others posit that it relates to the need for sacred vows to be made under a veil, the act of veiling separating the sacred from the profane<sup>126</sup>. It is this latter philosophy of veils shielding the sacred from the eyes of the profane that is most germane to the current discussion.

Herein is found reference to the use of the veil to obscure the sacred adytum of the many faiths from the gaze of the non-initiated, thereby demarking the hallowed arena within which the image of the cultic god is safely and honourably housed. When covered by the veil this innermost sacred sanctuary becomes identified with the cranium, the temple of the one spirit, wherein the image of the godhead might be manifested so that it may come to speak its oracle, such enciphering a process by which gods and spirits might be invoked. There is an intriguing passage in Exodus that deals with this theme, wherein Moses comes down from Mount Sinai "unaware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord" and when the Israelites were unable to look upon his shining face he covered it with a veil<sup>127</sup>, yet it is notable that he removed it when speaking to God. Within this we find a certain esoteric significance, for whilst the Israelites are too ignorant to face the divine light, when meeting God Moses lifts the concealing veil so that they might metaphorically meet 'face-

126. *Rosicrucians: Their Rites and Mysteries*, p. 187.

127. See both Exodus 34:32-35 and 2 Corinthians 3:13 regarding the veil of Moses.



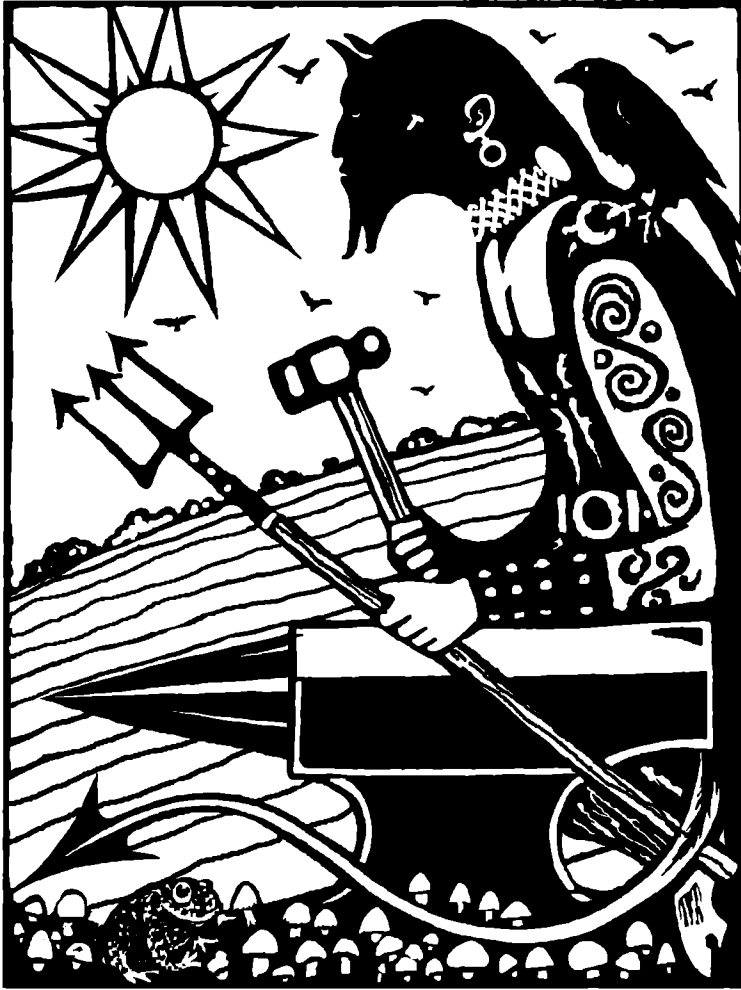
to-face', such having an import beyond that suggested by a mundane reading. Within this is a semblance also to that veil worn by the Virgin Isis, Manly Hall relating how she reveals her wisdom only to the tried and initiated few who have earned the right to enter her sacred presence, whence they might "tear from the veiled figure of Nature its shroud of obscurity and stand face to face with the Divine Reality"<sup>128</sup>. This piercing of the veil so as to enter the inner temple and gaze upon the face of the divine is somewhat reminiscent of the lifting of the protective bridal veil, further calling to mind the mystical marriage denoted by the veiling of those who dedicate themselves to the religious life<sup>129</sup>.

Although comparable to the many other myths and legends treating of transfigured man, those passages relating to the shining face of Moses are particularly significant in that they describe his face as shining with the reflected light of the divine. In similitude to the manner in which the moon is struck by the solar rays, the face of transfigured man is thus most often portrayed as being ablaze with effulgence, the golden light reflected out to the sub-lunar world as a silvery-white radiance. Whilst this accounts for the majority of depictions, in other instances the face becomes blackened in the divine presence, and a clue to the significance of this is contained in the Song of Solomon, wherein Sheba says "look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me". This correlation between the searing solar fire and the scorched black face is also referred to by Graves, who says that the faces of the Midsummer revellers became sootied as they leap betwixt the twin fires, the smoke giving rise to divine inspiration<sup>130</sup>.

Of especial significance here is the figure of the 'Coal Black Smith', whose face becomes blackened like all those who work with the fire of the forge. He is evocative of both the divine blacksmith and the Horned God as Opposer, that is to say the black-faced Devil who dances within the hellish flames of the forge. Herein we find reference to the purifying and transformative fire, which breaks things down so that essence or spirit is released from the encaging form, with the ashes that remain becoming symbolic of this process of death and sacrifice through which new life arises<sup>131</sup>.

130. Graves, *The White Goddess*.

131. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 141.



Accordingly did the Yezidis “collect the soot from their sacred fires as a token of the undying, yet transmutable, essence of the eternal fire”, with the daubing of soot so as to ‘blacken’ becoming “a consecration of Wisdom”. It is intriguing then that both the words ‘black’ and ‘charcoal’ have a common origin in the Arabic root FHM, meaning ‘to perceive’ and ‘to be wise’<sup>132</sup>. Chumbley posits that ritual ‘blackening’ as used in the modern witch cult may in fact have its root in the similar practices of the Maskarae of Persia and the Dhulqarneni of Morocco<sup>133</sup>.

132. Chumbley, *Qutub*.

133. *Ibid*.

Herein we discover how the black face becomes associated with the powers of death and the alchemical process of nigredo as exemplified by the black-faced Devil. Related to this is the intriguing figure of the red and black-faced Harlequin, thought to derive from the black-faced Hellequin of the French passion plays who roams the countryside at night on horseback, leading the *la maisnie Hellequin*, a horde of demons, as they gather up the souls of the damned and deliver them to Hell. Some posit that he is akin to the Old English *Herla Cyning* (King Herla), who is unsurprisingly identified with Woden in his more 'devilish' aspect as leader of the Wild Hunt, the ritual re-enactment of which sometimes involved ritually painting the body black, after the manner of the Germanic Harii.

It is this process of opposition, trial and death, symbolised by the casting of the body into the flames, that awakens the inner fire, enabling the sorcerer to go back to the seed-core at the centre of their being. In alchemical terms this process often takes place in the vessel as a simulacrum of the body, identified by some as the seething cauldron, and is subject to the flames tended by the black-faced one himself, his flame-charred countenance giving rise to his appellation of 'burnt one' (a la Set). So it is then that this initial saturnine phase is oft-represented by the Death's Head, a primal symbol of the Horned Lord of the Tomb, as well as by those devilish familiars the raven and lead-black toad. Besides the practice of blacking the face to become 'the Devil', as found in the initiatory rites of the Horseman's Word<sup>134</sup>, the black-face more arcanelly comes to represent those who have looked upon the Fire of the One Spirit face-to-face and thrown themselves upon it, like a moth unto the flame, and yet have emerged from their ashes in a new flesh, a veritable 'master' of the fire.

This phase of nigredo gives birth to the Peacock's Tail, the colours of its plumage evoking the transformative processes, and leads to the attainment of albedo or baptisma, the discovery of the hermaphroditic one light from which the seven rays proceed. It is the light of the morning star suddenly appearing from out of the depths of the night sky, this deliverance of Light from Dark

134. Fernee, et al, *The Society of the Horseman's Word*.

evoking the many mythologies of the Lightbearer's wintry nativity. It is telling then that the Devil is described as having a face both as black as the night and as shining as the morning sun, thereby evoking the two faces of the one power, after the manner of the two-faced Janus and the two-faced Devil. Once at this stage the sorcerer has no need of books or external guides for they have found the informing source of their power, but this must be fixated and made durable so that it is 'ever present' by the process of rubedo, such being akin to resurrection. Accordingly do the Sufis have the maxim *Da tariki, tariqat*, meaning, "In the darkness, The Path."

Such a mystery is sometimes worked by virtue of the veil in its form of 'blindfold', for in the same way that a gag is used to bind the mouth from speaking, so too does the blindfold come to close the mundane sense of sight, forcing one to look within. This is to draw upon the aspect of the mask that hinders or distorts certain faculties and facets of the True Face, whilst emphasising or revealing others. Besides the use of the blindfold and hood, the seer may sometimes cover his eyes with his hands, thereby entering the dark inner realm, wherein the moth takes flight as the inner eye so as to seek out the flame of the spirit, such 'vision' being free of the constraints of time and place. These practices are emblematised by the shadowy figure of the hooded and black-faced master, some aligning him with the figure of Saturn "who is both masculine and feminine, sex being indifferent to the 'Divine Absraction', and whose face is masked in Darkness"<sup>135</sup>.

Being symbolic of 'closed eyes', such veils and the states of consciousness arising from their use are evocative of sleep for they speed our return to the night-time realm, the black formless void as the 'cradle of possibilities' wherein all finds its point of inception and final resting place. Sleep is thus the dark realm of secret and hidden knowledge, of mystery and of magic; "all is possible in 'sleep' because 'dreams' are in sleep, 'god' is in sleep"<sup>136</sup>. Accordingly does the witch and occultist alike return and return again to this rich and dark seed-ground wherein inspiration, knowledge and wisdom may be sought and works of magic wrought.

135. Jennings, *Rosicrucians: Their Rites and Mysteries*, p. 259.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

Blindfolds and veils are sometimes used to denote 'blindness'. In a negative sense this implies ignorance of a thing, yet in esoteric matters a more exalted meaning is oft implied. Within the tarot, for example, the blindfold graces the figure of Justice, which is popularly conceived to be blind, like love, and not deceived or seduced by external appearance. Blindfolds are similarly used in initiation rites to evoke 'blindness', sometimes aping the figure of Christ bound and blindfolded, scourged and mocked, before his sacrificial death and later resurrection.

In mythology, blindness is often associated with seers, Odin for example sacrificed one eye to Mimir's Well so as to drink from its waters of wisdom and gain knowledge of the past, present and future, that is to say he sacrificed mundane sight for a supra-physical sight. This supra-physical sight is sometimes considered to be housed in the third eye as a blazing star that shines betwixt the golden right and silvery left eyes, thereby resolving the duality of the twain heavenly bodies in much the same manner as the burning brand between the horns of the sabbatic goat. This 'third-eye' is held by some to be analogous to the 'Mark of Cain' and is adorned in some faiths by a jewel, which not only harks back to Lucifer's emerald and the occultist's diadem, but also to the mirror upon the brow of Isis, such recalling the 'radiant brow' of Taliesin. This 'eye' is sometimes marked with particular signs and sigils related to specific works, and is oft-times consecrated with powders, ashes and washes, especially within baptismal and initiatory rites.

Although physically a receptive organ, the eyes have long been held to have an ability to project power, such being the basis of the belief in the evil eye and fascination. Agrippa describes fascination as a binding or ligation, the heart enflamed giving rise to a spiritual vapour that proceeds from the eyes as rays, he goes on to say that such rays may enter the eyes of the victim and there affect the spirit of the bewitched<sup>137</sup>. In order then to protect the eyes they were sometimes surrounded by kohl, such glamour having been taught to women, along with arts of deception through ornamenting the

137. *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Book 1, Part 3.

body, by the Watcher Azazel, whilst to men he taught the art of forging weapons and working the metals of the earth, and to both he taught the arcane secrets of the witches' craft<sup>138</sup>.

Besides the concealing veil and disguising blackface, which is now rarely witnessed outside of various British folk rites and dances (such as border morris), particularly those associated with the coming of winter and long nights, there exists another facial adornment that is still in much use, which is that of the mask. The word 'mask' derives from the word 'masque', meaning to cover the face so as to hide or guard it, such emphasising the veiling aspect of the adornment, which as we have seen speaks more of protecting the sacred from the profane than of mere deception. Herein we find reference to the use of grotesque and hideous masks as an amuletic and protective device to ward against evil. However, donning a mask is also to present to the world a new façade wrought by the hands in accordance with aesthetic desire, a type of glamour, and may thus be considered in a sense to selectively 'reveal' certain facets and virtues that may or may not be present in the wearer until the mask is actually worn. Besides being worn these masks are sometimes hung upon the boughs of the witch's stang or placed upon the votive shrine in order to access and mediate the powers beyond.

*Masks beyond Number concealing the Face of I.*  
Andrew Chumbley<sup>139</sup>

Within the esoteric mystery schools masks are often used to represent and reveal aspects of the one power, each reflecting a facet of the one diamond, thereby reminding us that Truth has many Faces. Each masque arises in the dark hidden dream world and momentarily reveals itself to the outside world, before eventually returning back to the void; accordingly do some say that the gods emanate from the Source as a procession of masques<sup>140</sup>. These manifested forms limit the limitless, and thereby give a face to the faceless and an image to the imageless, they become as idols

138. From the ancient Jewish work *The Book of Enoch*.

139. *Azoëtia* p. 23.

140. *Viridarium Umbris*, p. 2.

through which we might mediate with and manifest certain powers. However, rather than worship these images as though they were the very power, intelligence or godhead itself, the witch is exhorted to seek “the Unseen in the Seen, the Arcanum in the Outer Mask of the Symbol”, that is to say to pierce the veil or mask alike by means of keenly developed Sight.

Another etymology of the word ‘mask’ is that it derives from a pre-Indo-European language and is related to the Occitan *mascara*, meaning to blacken or darken (the face), with the old Occitan *masco* glossing as ‘witch’. This relationship between the blacking of the face, masks and witchcraft is also found in the ‘Maskarae’, a Persian sect of sorcerers who blackened their faces and bodies and then magically aped the forms of beasts, spirits and gods whilst dancing about in a circle. Chumbley, when commenting on the similarity existing between these rites and those of the Sabbatic Tradition, proposed that the *maskh*, as an Arabian magical technique of therio-anthropomorphic transformation, could be the origin of our words mask and masquerade<sup>141</sup>.

Although we have mostly spoken here of ‘blackening’ in context of ritual facial adornments, this being a localised form of ‘body-painting’ and a manifestation of make-up as mask, other colours besides black have been used to daub and decorate face and mask alike in many cultures the world over. One such example is the face whitened with flour, which being the ground down remains of corn is rather evocative of the relationship existing betwixt ash and wood, and it is notable that both white flour and black ash are used to trace the witch circle. It also calls to mind the mythos of the sacrificial king who dies at the hand of the pale-faced queen or ‘hag of the mill’, whom is described as ‘the woman white with flour’<sup>142</sup>. In this she has mythological ties with Alphito the ‘goddess of the barley flour’ (from *alphita* meaning ‘white flour’), whom some folklorists consider a manifestation of the “corn mother” and “white goddess”, and considering her avian shape-changing and murderous intent towards children is somewhat reminiscent of Lilith. Graves suggests that revellers once made their faces white

141. *Qutub*, p72.

142. Graves, *The White Goddess*.

in imitation of her emblem, the silvery white moon<sup>143</sup>, evoking the opposite yet complimentary virtues of the nourishing milk and the pallid complexion of the icy cold corpse. In making the face as waxen as the corpse the witch thus becomes aligned with her deathly powers, literally mimicking the ashen countenance of those who ride out with in her spectral throng.

Besides the black face of the smith and the white countenance of the pale-faced queen, pigments and dyes from the natural world may be used to stain the skin other colours. Alder for example is given by Graves to give three dyes, red from the bark for fire, green from the flowers for water, and brown from the twigs for earth. He also remarks that the obsolete name *ro-eim* for alder glosses as 'that which reddens the face', calling to mind the crimson-stained heroes of the Welsh Triads and the powers of blood and fire<sup>144</sup>. The use of the alder leaves to make the skin green, the colour of the faeries, is also reminiscent of the fashioning of leafy masks, such forming the basis of the foliate head or Green Man. The vegetal mask as a representation of the verdant spirit moving through nature is found throughout time and place under many names and guises. More esoteric interpretations speculate that 'green man' imagery represents the annual cycles of birth, growth, decay and renewal, which is intriguing in light of some later Christian examples that depict leaves and tendrils unfurling from the eye-sockets and mouth of a human skull. We might see in this a correlation with the 'head set afire', the scarlet flame and blood being replaced by green vegetal matter and sap, both depicting a type of initiatory consciousness aroused by virtue of spine and trunk.

The foliate face of the Devil in Green is sometimes evoked through a telematic imagining of the mask, such being a ritual assumption of the Verdant Lord. An example of this is given by William Gray, which he purports to have been worked by Cochrane's coven, and involves envisioning a seven-pointed leaf over the face and touching specific points upon it as a prayer is recited to the Creator, who brought order from chaos<sup>145</sup>. Intriguingly,

143. *Ibid.*, p. 426.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

145. Gray, *Western Inner Workings*, p. 149.



whilst exhorting the Goddess to inspire and guide the participant, the points touched follow the pattern of a descending lightning bolt, before making the straight ascent from below to above. Within this one might discern the image of the deviating and serpentine descent of power via the paths upon the tree, and its subsequent return along the 'straight path' to the source, such being reminiscent of the deliverance or 'fall' of the Divine Child to earth and his later re-ascension to the heavenly realm; it is to reveal the true nature of his parentage and the manner of his eventual return.

This ascription of parts of the face to certain powers and faculties isn't alien to occultism in general, for besides the sagittal suture the face has seven openings that are ruled in the occult sciences by seven powers; "the right ear to Saturn, the left to Jupiter, the right nostril to Mars, the left to Venus, the right eye to the Sun, the left to the Moon and the mouth to Mercury"<sup>146</sup>. These are said by Agrippa to be placed in order of purity, those uppermost in man being the most noble, that is to say the eyes are the most pure, having an affinity with Fire, then the ears being comparable with Air, then the nostrils being betwixt Air and Water and finally the mouth, which partakes of Water (Earth is reserved for the fifth sense of touch whose power resides in the hand). Agrippa also asserts that the noblest senses are those which perceive the furthest, with Sight and Fire being most subtle whilst Touch and Earth are the grossest<sup>147</sup>.

These facial senses are considered by some as falling into a natural trinity; the eyes as the spiritual power that comprehends, the nostrils as the preservative and vivifying power and the mouth/ears representing the material Demiurgic power of the lower world as embodied in the creative Word<sup>148</sup>. This Word is the LOGOS, and born from this One Word are the seven powers that create the world, these being embodied in the seven breaths or vowel sounds. This Word as the causative agent of the casual world is also envisioned in the leaves sprouting and unfurling from the mouth of the foliate faced Green Man.

146. *Three Books of Occult Philosophy, A Complete Edition*, p. 72.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

148. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*.

Septenaries, quaternaries and trinities aside, the one face is also traditionally divided like the rest of the body into its sinistral and dextral aspects, those on the left corresponding with the feminine powers and those on the right with the masculine powers. In cabbalism the left and right sides of the face equate with Binah (Understanding) and Chokmah (Wisdom), which conjoined with Kether the Crown forms the Supernal Triad.

Returning to the subject of facial adornment, comparable to the faerie 'greening' of the skin and the wearing of vegetal masks is the ritual assumption of animal masks, such falling into the theriomorphic rites of shamanic guising. Transformation into animals is a feature of a number of cults, sects and religions, including those of witchcraft; the witch being considered capable of 'becoming' certain beasts. Such shape-changing is immortalised in the well-known folk song 'The Two Magicians', wherein the protagonists take on a series of bestial forms in order to outdo one another, such a theme being found not only in other tales, like that of Cerridwen and Taliesin, but also in the shape-changing formula given by Isobel Gowdie. It is obvious that such a change in form refers not to an actual bodily metamorphosis but rather to a more esoteric transformation of the 'flesh', which may be facilitated by the use of a series of masks and bestial skins, but may equally occur on a purely supra-physical level, such being exemplified in the tales of witches' spirits going forth in the guise of a hare or other beasts.

Herein we encounter the crux of the mask's power, for in wearing it we blur the line between our own persona and that of the thing we wish to become until the two are as if one, for unlike the scientist who would seek to understand his subject by examining its external form, the witch instead gains their knowledge by overcoming the barrier that separates the observer from the observed, becoming the perceived itself. In this way various animal powers may be called upon and assumed, such speaking of an alignment of human virtue with that of animalistic behaviour and power. This coalition of powers is exemplified in the mundane world by the likes of the medieval bestiaries, the use of bestial appellations (like 'wolfshead' for an outlaw) and various analogies that compare human traits to those of animals, such 'as strong as an ox', 'wise as an owl' or 'cunning as a fox'.



Within this practice there exists the echo of totemism, where a people's kinship with a certain spirit or god was often represented by the head of that animal with which their patron was associated. In this we are reminded of the many images of animal-headed gods and anthropomorphic beasts found the world over, but most well-known in Egyptian, Romano-Greek and Gaulish imagery. Although priests and kings often donned such animal masks so as to manifest the godhead and assume its cultic powers, these masks were also placed on altars, pillars and poles (the so-called 'totempole'), much in the manner that the witch hangs the grand array of the presiding devil upon her forked staff.

The most well-known example in the witch-cult of a mask to mediate one's patron gods is that of the Devil. The Devil is sometimes described in folklore as being literally 'two-faced', which is sometimes manifested in the rites as a mask worn by the magister upon the back of his head, an arcane imagining of the twin aspects of the witch god as Lord of the Beasts and Lord of the Green. Such a figure is evocative of the Janus, the two-faced guardian of the doorways, who himself is akin to Janicot and the horned god standing as guard and gate to the castle of wisdom, sharing certain similarities also with St Peter of the crossed keys<sup>149</sup>. Esoterically we might understand the god shown with two, three or four faces as representing the various 'faces' or 'guises' that are projected outwards from the centre of the one power, each reifying a different aspect that is encountered in the turning of time and season.

There is a particularly interesting relic wherein the mysteries of the veil and the revealed face meet in one, namely the Veil of St Veronica, who according to medieval legend handed her head cloth to Jesus as he made his way to Calvary. Having wiped the droplets of agony from his brow he handed the cloth back to her, and thereupon it she found the likeness of his countenance. A reference to this legend is found in an old folk magic charm, wherein a haemorrhage is staunched by writing St Veronica's name on the patient's forehead with their own blood whilst reciting a charm<sup>150</sup>. Furthermore, it is after its ability to speed healing and the similarity of the markings on its blossom to the face upon St Veronica's cloth, that the wayside flower of *Veronica chamaedrys* (germander speedwell) is so-named.

Besides the veil that conceals and the mask that reveals, there are those adornments that grace the neck and décolleté. Writing on the importance of the Star of David as it relates to the Sword and Broom, Cochrane writes that the balancing of the opposite yet complimentary centres of the throat, denoting Speech, and the third eye, denoting Sight, is the secret to gaining great power<sup>151</sup>. The décolletage is sometimes dressed with a necklace, which in orthodox Wiccan practice is considered essential attire for women.

149. Ibid., p. 430.

150. Froome, *Wicked Enchantments*, p. 70.

151. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 181.

Huson suggests it may be a remembrance of the *Brisingamen* (meaning 'glowing or flaming jewellery'), which is the elven necklace worn by Freya, supposed by some to have been fashioned of amber<sup>152</sup>.

Necklaces may be strung with 'beads' of various materials, such as metals, shells, stones and gems, bone, carved woods, seeds, nuts and fruits such as rowan berries, rosehips and acorns, each serving to draw upon the diverse powers therein contained. The traditional Wiccan necklace is often strung with alternate beads of jet and amber, both being of vegetal origin; golden amber having solar, protective and healing virtues, being sacred to the Son/Sun, whilst black jet is protective, wards nightmares and is sacred to the Black Goddess. In the Museum of Witchcraft (Boscastle), there are a number of witch necklaces from the West Country composed of snake vertebrae strung between red and blue beads, which Cecil Williamson says calls upon the spirit and power of the snake in spell making, along with the powers of blood and air respectively, thereby "conferring upon the witch a degree of magical spiritual power". Others suggest the snake's vertebrae evoke the serpent as magical force, wisdom and transformation, in particular the vertebrae recall the descent and ascent of the serpent along the spinal-axis as a simulacrum of the first tree.

Some assert that regardless of what is being strung on the necklace's thread they must be present in numbers sacred to the goddess, such as multiples of nine or thirteen<sup>153</sup>, thereby evoking her cycles of life, death and rebirth. Within the witch cult there is a belief that this necklace is a remembrance of the noose worn about the neck and thus evocative of the mysteries of the Fate Goddess and of sacrifice; this is more properly dealt with when we discuss the garter and girdle. We might also envisage it as being akin to the witch circle, whose boundary is demarked by cord and stone, indeed amongst papers alleged to originate with Cochrane is a drawing of a witch rite entitled 'The Necklace', which is described as being one of the 'five rings of witchcraft'.

152. Huson, *Mastering Witchcraft*.

153. Examples of which may be seen in the Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle.

There also exist various necklaces that are used to work magic, such as those strung of cowry shells to promote fertility and those of rowan berries for protection<sup>154</sup>. Such magical suspensions sometimes have lockets hanging upon them, within which spirits, charms or powders are contained. These are based upon the occult principles of suspension and alligation, Agrippa describing an 'alligation' as the principle of a thing impressing its virtue upon us when brought into contact with the body, and a 'suspension' as something wrapped up and hung about the neck by thread, all individual components being allied to its ultimate purpose<sup>155</sup>.

### Of the Hand and its Adornments

**T**he practical and numinous import of the hands is a subject far too vast to broach here, and so this discussion shall confine itself only to the nature of the hand as it relates to adornments. Through the hands we are able to 'feel' the world and receive subtle impressions and it is to preserve this sense of touch and to protect the hands from those elements that would destroy them that man covers them. One particularly germane example of this is the glove of the blacksmith, which allows him to work with the fire whilst protecting his hands from its destructive aspect. Gloves are also worn by kings, priests and some magicians not just for protection but also as a symbol of purity, that is to say as a veil upon the fleshly hand, a practice which finds certain correspondence with the white gloves of the modern Freemason.

Besides having an 'insulating' virtue, we encounter the glove in folk tradition as that proffered to another as a sign of kinship and faith, evoking the 'giving' of one's hand to another, and conversely in the throwing down of the gauntlet as a sign of challenge. Gloves, containing a link with their wearer, are also of use in 'image magic', such having been worked by the witches of Belvoir, who stole the glove of Lord Ross and dipped it in boiling water, stroked it upon the fur of their feline familiar Rutterkin and then pricked it whilst muttering incantations so as to procure his death. Furthermore does the glove figure in the old mysteries as a symbol of the hand

155. *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*.

itself. Cochrane describes it as “a symbol as potent as the ancient pentagram and often meaning much the same thing”, it is unsurprising then that in folk magic both the amuletic pentagram hand (as in “five, the symbol at your door O”) and the pentagram are considered protective. In particular the five points of the pentagram are assigned to the five fingers, thereby denoting the round of life, birth, maternity, wisdom and death; the hand becomes a mnemonic, enciphering the pentad as an expression of the natural cycles. Accordingly does the glove and the hand it fits, like the scabbard sheathing the sword, become symbolic of the generative organs<sup>157</sup> and the feminine mysteries connected with the tides of creation and destruction<sup>158</sup>. In this manner are hands a vehicle of ‘action’ through which things may be shaped, moulded and crafted into being or broken apart in accordance with the design seen in the ‘minds eye’, that is to say they are directed by head and heart. It is in agreement with this that the creative and destructive agencies are housed in the vessels of the right and left hands.

The ascription of the five fingers to the points of the pentagram, and in turn to elemental powers and senses, is one explored by a number of occultists, although most notable in relation to this work are those made by Austin Osman Spare and Andrew Chumley in his *Azoëtia*. These examples aside, the hand and its parts may be divided up and ascribed to various powers, such finding practical manifestation within palmistry, the Hand of Mysteries (which is also found in the Coven of Atho), the ascription of trees to parts of the hands by Graves<sup>159</sup> and the language of the hands espoused by Cochrane, who declared that “each finger on the hands of a witch has a defined meaning and purpose”<sup>160</sup>.

Regarding the subject of adornment, this alignment of powers to fingers is made particular use of in the art of magical rings. Agrippa tells us that such rings when made in a certain manner are able to impress great virtue on man, the method he gives being to

156. Glass, Justine, *Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense*.

157. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, p. 261.

158. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 52.

159. Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 190.

160. Robert Cochrane, “Cord Magic” *The Roebuck in the Thicket*, p. 54 (First Published in *Pentagram*, March 1965).

take a metal, stone and herb ruled by the fortunately ascending Star when in a fortunate aspect with the moon and then to fix the plant matter beneath the stone, the whole being set in the metal band<sup>161</sup>. This of course is to be accompanied by other considerations, namely the making of signs, sigils and images upon the ring, the making of suffumigations and so forth. In this manner seven planetary rings might be wrought to gain power over the seven arms of fate, which is to make mention of those bands spoken of in Philostratus Jarchus and the divers other rings as mentioned in the grimoires, this being the main topic of the *Black Pullet*.

One particular ring stands out above all others in the grimoire tradition, this being the Ring of Solomon, which legend attests was once owned by King Solomon himself, having been revealed to him by the 'Most High and Sovereign Creator'<sup>162</sup>. This ring gave the power not only to speak to beasts and command spirits but also protected the conjurer when held before his face. This apotropaic virtue is encountered in those iron bands worn to drive away spirits and also in the simple early English rings that were fashioned of twisted wire so as to form an endless spiralling knot and thereby distract the attention of the 'evil eye'; from the 7th century onwards these were often hung about the neck as a suspension<sup>163</sup>. Solomon's Ring however is far more complex in structure, described by Arabic writers as being fashioned of brass and iron, on which were inscribed his commands to the good and evil genii respectively, and upon it were set four jewels gifted by four angels, giving him command over the four elements, and in the midst of these was emblazoned the name of god.

This enchanted ring is the prototype of that wrought and used by the many conjurers who work within the tradition of the Solomonic grimoires. However, different authorities have differing opinions as to the exact design inscribed upon the ring; many declare it as having a six-pointed star, evoking the alchemical marriage of fire and water, whilst others portray it with a pentagram, such featuring also on the Pythagorean signet ring<sup>164</sup>. Nonetheless,

161. *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*.

162. *The Key of Solomon the King* transcribed by S L MacGregor Mathers.

163. Pollington, Stephen. *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plant Lore and Healing*, p. 449.

164. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, p. 312.



other ring designs besides may be worn to distinguish those who have reached a level of attainment within a magical guild or mystery school, including those in the shape of the ouroboros and the various signet rings engraved with apposite mystical sigils<sup>165</sup>. Being testimony to the authority of its bearer and a symbol of power, such rings often form part of the regalia passed on through rites of kingly and priestly succession, with submittal to this divine authority being signified through the kissing of the ring by subservient parties.

The magician's ring engraved with words of power about its circumference, like the runic rings of Norse sorcerers, are evocative of the enchanted ring cast about the witch, its horizon bound by word, sign and sigil. It is in light of this that the sorcerous ring comes to partake of similar virtues to the magical circle, particularly those of enclosing, binding and focusing, further enciphering qualities of perfection, attainment and, being without beginning or end, eternity. Likewise does the magician's finger, as a baton directing power, become analogous to the axis mundi at the centre of the enchanted circle, that is to say the ring worn on the finger binds and concentrates power within it. Although the ring is most often worn on the index or 'venomous' pointing finger, it may be worn on different fingers depending upon whose patronage the work at hand is under:

- Forefinger (Index Finger) – Ruled by Jupiter and the Oak, this finger is held to denote the Holy Ghost or Divine Spirit and accordingly did priests once wear rings on this finger as a sign of their office, likewise is a band worn on this 'wilful' finger said to indicate boldness of spirit<sup>166</sup>.

- Fool's Finger (Middle Finger) – Ruled by Saturn and the Holly, this baleful finger rarely bares a ring, although Graves says when worn on this finger it naturally expresses a hope of resurrection<sup>167</sup>. It is also known as the *digitus impudicus* after its use as an aggressive sexual insult, its form suggestive of the upright phallus,

165. Such signet rings were also once used to make one's sign upon wax so as to seal a document, and magically might be considered as transference of virtue.

166. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Cassel, 1999.

167. Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 193.

hence its use as a gesture to avert the evil eye<sup>168</sup>. Intriguingly the Hand of the Mysteries depicts this, the longest finger, with a sun above it, and likewise do images in the Richel Collection show it as variously having a sun symbol, a triangle of dots or a glowing red tip<sup>169</sup>.

- Ring, Leech or Physic Finger – Ruled by Apollo (the Sun) and Hazel, this finger was used in the 15th century to stir, taste and apply medicines, whilst stroked on wounds would speed healing<sup>170</sup>. It is known as ‘the ring finger’ for it is upon this digit that the solar golden wedding band is popularly worn, sometimes by religious persons to denote ‘marriage’ to their patron god(s)<sup>171</sup>.

- Auricular Finger (Little Finger) – Ruled by the psychomp Mercury and Apple, this finger is said by Graves to be divinatory and almost necromantic in nature, for when it is used to stopper the ear as an aid to inspiration it gives rise to mysterious whispers within which secrets might be discerned. A ring worn on this finger is said to denote a masterful spirit<sup>172</sup>.

- Thumb – Ruled by Venus and Hawthorn, the Romans and Greeks wore their iron seal-rings upon this finger as a charm to preserve virility; the thumb evoking the phallus and the iron ring denoting the smith-god Vulcan, husband of Venus<sup>173</sup>. In images of the Hand of the Mysteries the thumb is depicted as being crowned, denoting the dominance of the will over the four elements, that is to say the one thumb over the four fingers, as expressed in the saying ‘under the thumb’.

Besides being an aid to the projection of the magical force, various powers can be bound within rings so that man might have influence over the natural and celestial realms. This is to work the

168. Morris, Desmond. *Gestures: Their Origins and Distribution*.

169. An archive of some 2,000 magical images and artefacts housed in the Museum of Witchcraft (Boscastle, Cornwall), some of which are reproduced in *The Occult Reliquary*, Three Hands Press, 2010.

170. Simpson and Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore*.

171. This ‘token of espousal’ has historically taken the form of a ring woven from the hair of the Virgin Mary gifted in ecstatic vision to St Dominic, and elsewhere as a ring-like weal arising upon the ring-finger or a jewel seen there in vision (Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game*, p. 40).

172. *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*.

173. Graves, *The White Goddess*. p. 192.

principle of the ring as a symbol of binding, calling to mind the use of the ring in the swearing of love and fealty and the making of oaths, a prime example being the exchanging of rings as part of the wedding vow, this dating back to the Roman times. Rings may also indicate oaths of a more magical nature, including those that bind man to his gods.

Rings can also be used as vessels into which spirits might be bound, such having especial use in the wedding of the sorcerer to his famulus. Familiars were often carried in rings during the ancient and medieval periods<sup>174</sup>, a technique outlined in grimoires and known to many witches<sup>175</sup>. Although some scholars wrote of demons bound in vessels, it was noted by Thomas Heywood that the familiar spirit given to attend every magician and witch is generally “confined so of their own free-will and voluntary motion”<sup>176</sup>, and it is a precept of the Pauline Art that the guiding spirit would in time reveal a design to the sorcerer, which was then to be set upon a ring to aid congress.

Being worn upon the hand the ring becomes a point of mediation and communication betwixt corporeal man and that which is disembodied, thereby enabling the sorcerer to call upon his spirit ally at all times, yet some scholars hold that should the ring become sold, exchanged or lost, the familiar is lost with it. Likewise, if the ring meets with accidental damage or purposeful destruction, the spirit will be released. Some of those whom were accused of having such conference with spirits had their rings destroyed as punishment, like Johannes Jodocus Rosa, whose ring was placed on an anvil and beaten with an iron hammer<sup>177</sup>.

With these famulus-rings the possessor was able to seek advice, discover news from far afield, learn of cures and remedies, gain secret knowledge, obtain magical aid and wreak retribution. The revelation of hidden knowledge was often obtained through scrying, especially where the ring was set with a garnet or crystal, quartz or obsidian, the indwelling daemon being thought to reveal the images in the reflective surface<sup>178</sup>. Others, however, drew secret

174. Tyson, Donald. *Familiar Spirits: A Practical Guide for Witches and Magicians*.

175. Froome, *Wicked Enchantments*, p. 55.

176. Rev. Edward Smedley, *The Occult Sciences* (1855).

177. *Ibid.*

178. *Ibid.*

knowledge from the ring by the practice of dactylomantia, which involves hanging the ring upon a thread and suspending it over letters or symbols, from which the meaning is deciphered<sup>179</sup>. Alternatively, knowledge from the mighty dead might be sought by virtue of a ring fashioned of bone, connecting one with their spiritual ancestors who might act as intercessors between this world and the other. This type of osseous adornment is not just of use within the necromantic arts but also in those of protection, the gaining of moral strength, fearlessness and peace of mind, all of which are won by accepting and learning to live with the living dead<sup>180</sup>.

Metal and bone aside, different materials might be used to make the ring, thereby enabling us to call upon their powers. There is a whole body of lore associated with the making of adornments from plant matter, for like the verdant garland we might also fashion rings, bracelets and necklaces by intertwining herbs and pliable branches in the manner of the child's daisy chain. Rings of wood, bark and other green matter can likewise be carved, woven or plaited for various ends, including the making of a binding oath unto one's plant famulus. Similarly does jewellery of leather, hide and sinew evoke bestial virtue, aiding in those works under the patronage of the Lord of Beasts, especially that of 'shape-changing'. One particularly notable example of the magical bestial ring is that containing the toadstone or toadbone, which once obtained and set in a ring is capable of conferring a great number of magical powers<sup>181</sup>.

These plant and animal rings are bound by virtue of the knot, which unites one end of the herbaceous or hide thong with the other, evoking the image of the sorcerous ouroboric ring. The knot works the principle of 'binding' magic, the powers being 'tied' into the ring, and it is notable that both knot and ring alike are symbolic of the oath and pledge, as articulated in the expression 'tying the knot'.

We have only scratched at the surface of the oft-neglected and diverse art of ring magic here, and haven't even begun to contem-

179. Leland, Charles G. *Etruscan Roman Remains*, 1999 p. 362.

180. Froome, *Wicked Enchantments*, p. 207.

181. *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6.

plate the numerous healing rings, such as those made of silver coins to alleviate cramp and those made of coffin nails to ward rheumatism, although these have other ritual uses aside<sup>182</sup>. So famed are the many properties of rings that they passed into myth and legend as being able to confer immortality, grant wishes and bestow great magical powers, the gifting of enchanted rings also bewitching others or causing them to fall in love with the sorcerer. All of these draw upon the virtue of the ring's circular eternal form, the manifold materials of which they are made, its power to bind, wed and bewitch and their placement upon the finger that points, projects and conducts the powers.

Hands might also be adorned by means of bracelets, with wide wristlets of venereal copper or lunar silver being a fairly common adornment in the modern witch's ceremonial dress. Writing of the Coven of Atho, Valiente relates that besides a sword, horn and black cloak 'for secrecy', the coven's regalia included a silver bracelet to be worn by the 'Witch Maiden'; Mary Cardell's being engraved with the name of their witch goddess, 'Andraste'<sup>183</sup>. However, Paul Huson asserts that the bracelet is in fact worn by both sexes and should feature the secret name of the witch and an emblem representing their coven<sup>184</sup>. Such bracelets share the 'encircling' and 'binding' virtues of rings, and in this respect are rather evocative of the use of iron cuffs, the binding of hands in initiatory rites, the practice of hand-fasting and the enchaining 'cuffs' worn by bishops as a symbol of their bond to god. The art of making bracelets is biblically considered to have been taught to mankind by Azazel, along with the working of metals and the use of jewellery to fascinate<sup>185</sup>, although the occultist Franz Bardon says that the spirit Canali (26° Libra) "has been since the days of yore the initiator into jewellery of any kind...the magician may also learn of many interesting things from Canali in this respect"<sup>186</sup>.

Other than those of metal, bracelets sometimes take the form of woven thread, and in this we are reminded of the use of cord to

182. Glass, *Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense*.

183. From an entry in Doreen Valiente's diaries, held at the Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle, Cornwall.

184. Huson, *Mastering Witchcraft*.

185. This is related in the *Ethiopic Book of Enoch* in 8:1 and 9:1-14.

186. Bardon, *The Practice of Magical Evocation*.



make ligatures and bindings upon the body, as well as the manner in which the child of light was bound hand and foot to the cross of sacrifice. Cochrane, when discussing arms bound with red and white woollen thread whilst bent in such a manner as to depict horns, revealed that a spiral pattern of binding is a common magical practice amongst witches<sup>187</sup>. Related to this is an image, purportedly

187. Glass, *Witchcraft: The Sixth Sense*. It is worth comparing this with the tying of cords and magical herbs about the body, and in particular the arms and legs, so as to tie virtue and desire within the physium and the use of Jewish prayer straps, one of which is bound tightly about the left arm, so as to be close to the heart; man literally becomes knotted and bound into the prayer.

by Cochrane, that portrays a spiral flowing through the left arm and right leg; RJ Stewart gives such a cord position as a means of aiding evocation or invocation<sup>188</sup>. When coiled about the bough-like arm the cord is somewhat reminiscent of the serpent, and this binding is particularly advantageous in facilitating the flow of power through the arms, hands, legs and feet.

Besides the plain woven band, bracelets are sometimes made by stringing beads of stone, crystal, wood or herbal matter upon a thread of plant or animal origin, exemplified in both the charm of rowan berries strung on apotropaic red thread and the devotional rosary. Although an intrinsic sacramental of Catholicism, rosaries are used by many other faiths beside in the recital of prayers, thereby freeing the mind from keeping count and enabling it to focus on the mysteries themselves<sup>189</sup>. The rosary is traditionally strung with dried rosehips and carved rose-wood, evoking the mystic rose as the still hub at the heart of the world, signifying the immortal soul that manifests itself in the eternally-changing and ever-renewing material world that spins about it.

The name 'rosary' derives from the Latin for 'rose garden' (*rosarium*), evoking the sacred enclosure, and like the encircling ring, bracelet, crown and girdle, it is considered a fetish of the circle cast about witch, magician and sorcerer alike. Within Christian tradition the round of beads strung about the rosary relate to a meditation upon the mysteries of the life of the light-bearing Christ, thereby evoking the trials and obstacles on his journey from birth to death to resurrection. It is of course the ordeals and adversities that we face, the so-called 'trials of fate', that give rise to the reward of the spirit. In the witch cult, the beads strung upon the red thread similarly become aligned with the footsteps taken by the 'wanderer' as he makes his way about the circle of eternity, treading throughout all lands and seasons, each bead passed through the fingers becoming a fateful step on the journey about the encircling boundary of the horizon, the very edge of the world.

The encircling or perambulation of a plot has much to do with staking a claim over it. It is to define the borders of the land over which one is ruler, exemplified in the kingly royal tour and the old

188. Stewart, RJ. *The Spirit Cord*.

189. For more on the the rosary see Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game*.

rite of beating the bounds wherein the procession re-affirms the boundary and lays claim over the parcel of land therein enclosed. Such a survey of one's land also gives great knowledge of it, for in coming to view the terrain from many vantage points and through many seasons, different facets of the one plot are revealed. Likewise, whilst passing through the beads in contemplation and prayer, the ancient secrets encrypted in the cipher of the rosary are revealed in gnosis; herein the encircling witch dance and the counting of the beads are revealed as syncretic paths to transcendental awareness, giving rise to epiphany and the transmission of secret wisdom.

Accordingly should the sorcerer construct his rosary carefully, the materials of the beads, their size, shape, number and arrangement all conspiring to evoke the Work and the Mysteries as understood by its maker<sup>190</sup>. Many are the materials from which the rosary might be constructed, including glass, precious stone, fossil, bone, antler, horn and wood, each having especial significance to the sorcerer and their work. Beads may also be made as vessels so as to enclose sacramental relics, waters, ashes and smokes. These differing beads might be arranged in many manners, but in considering the alignment of the rosarium fetish and the Circle of Art, it behooves us to fashion one after the manner of the Hallowed Acre, so that as we pass the beads through our fingers we encounter the many patron deities in their proper station, the whole united at the point of Midnight where beads or fetish-pendants redolent of the Lord and Lady should be bound.

## The Binding Girdle

**T**he most common adornment to be worn about the waist is the belt or girdle, its practical function being to bind shut the cloak of secrecy and night. Within magical traditions this often takes the form of a cord, such being symbolic of the individual's thread of fate, woven by the Three Weavers. This thread, representing one's own personal journey, becomes braided with the personal threads of others, fate woven with fate, many strands from many times and many places all interweaving to fashion

190. Schulke, *Viridarium Umbris*.



the One Cord that describes the border of the One Great Circle, thereby do all things become entwined as One.

As a representative of man's journey through life, such a *cingillum* (Latin for girdle) is given to the modern Wiccan at the time of their initiation, its colour denoting their rank and grade in the coven, and thereby their current station on the circle that constitutes their journey. This degree system has been borrowed by some other traditions of witchcraft, and herein coloured cords are likewise used to denote the progress of the initiate, generally using the colours of the three aspects of the Witch Goddess, these being white, red and black<sup>191</sup>. In other traditions just one cord is used, woven of three strands in recognition of the three weavers, and although sometimes braided of three colours, more generally it is only red in colour, representing the golden essence of one's life blood and the serpentine power carried therein. The cord may be ritually 'reddened' by the dipping of a white cord into a vat of scarlet vegetal dye to which has been added a few drops of one's own blood, evoking the scarlet path from sacrum to cranium.

In those whose traditions are influenced by the Solomonic grimoires the *cingillum* is often nine feet in length. This enables the cord to be used to fashion the Circle of Art, with one end being fastened to a sickle, which is driven into what shall be the centre of the circle, and the other attached to the knife, which is used to draw the circle's circumference<sup>192</sup>. Such a working tool is rather redolent of the Mason's skirret, by which the foundations of the intended structure might be marked out. Although some assert it should be nine feet long, the length of the girdle does vary from tradition to tradition. In some covens the girdle is made so that its length is equal to the height of the individual wearing it, so becoming a 'measure of the man'.

In the making of the circle we discover how the girdle is akin to the cord of birth, an umbilicus connecting the central hub to the circumference, the circle being the expression of the point, just as the child is of the mother. In this we might draw a parallel between

191. Gwyn, *Light from the Shadows*, p. 67.

192. *The Key of Solomon the King*, Book 2, Chapter 9. Certain grimoires specify the girdle be made of the skin of a black cat, such as *Conjuration For Magicians and the More Learned Sort of Conjurers* (1665).

the symbolism of the cord and that of the compasses in Freemasonry, both partaking of the nature of the 'path' uniting one thing with another, in this case the cause with its manifest expression, one being still and unmoving and the other cyclical. The path works to unite point with point, heights with depths and the unmanifest source with the manifest realm. It is the bridge between the journey's origin and its culmination, and by working the path of return the umbilical-cord becomes a means of joining the witch with their primal ancestor.

Such a philosophy is represented in the two ends of the cincture, one end symbolising life and the other death. Notably, whilst some wear cingillums with two knotted ends, others tie a knot at one and a noose at the other. The tasselled knot is analogous with the bull's tail and an expression of the witch god, whilst the noose is a symbol of death, evoking the halter or garrote used to despatch sacrificial victims to the gods, and more esoterically the things we sacrifice in pursuit of the faith. In recollection of the garrote, some witches wear the cord not just about the waist but also around the neck, this 'necklace' being a remembrance of divine sacrifice and ritual 'death'. Whether worn about the waist or neck the knotted end is passed through the noose, just as the tail of the ouroboric serpent is swallowed by its own gaping mouth. Hereby are the two made as one, reminding us that growth and decay are but expressions of the one eternal and cyclic process, the knot of unity being the underlying condition.

An extension of the girdle's ability to unite is its capacity to provoke love and its relationship with sexuality. It is this aspect that we encounter in the girdle of purity and chasteness worn by Artemis, the love-inspiring girdle of Aphrodite and the girdle of fertility worn by the Assyrian and Babylonian goddess Ishtar, which renders the land barren when removed. Further correlating the belt with fertility, Graves likens the woman's girdle (the Greek *zone*) to an orgiastic round dance about a circle of oaks in honour of the goddess, the loosening of the girdle being representative of the disrobing of a woman, and therefore sex and marriage<sup>193</sup>.

As a symbol of the Circle of the Horizon, the encompassing cord is sometimes knotted, these knots being akin to the beads upon the rosary, indeed, Cochrane informs us that such a knotted cord might be used as a meditational device<sup>194</sup>. Each of these knots are as though stations on the great round of life, met with in turn as we feel our way along the guiding thread<sup>195</sup>, and various authorities give differing numbers of knots to be tied within, depending upon the tradition being worked. Some give 9 (or less often 13) for ‘the moon’, Cochrane expands on this and says that these 9 knots consist of five for the pentad, three for the Fates who oversee this round of life and the knot tying the noose for Hecate as Goddess of life and death<sup>196</sup>. Others say 7, which of course evokes the alchemical marriage of the three-fold Goddess and four-fold God, combining spirit with matter to give rise to the Child whose one body combines the inheritance of both. However, it will be noted that even with a cord fashioned of 9 knots, one securing the tail and the other the noose, there are indeed seven centres of power along its serpentine length. In ceremonial magic the seven powers are sometimes represented in the sash of seven colours, which is wrapped thrice about the magician’s waist and tied with a single knot.

Some suggest that each of the knots made thereon should ‘tie in’ a significant memory on one’s path<sup>197</sup>, this being somewhat akin to the practice of tying a ribbon about a finger to recall a memory, the cord becoming the fateful thread of time that leads us from memory to memory and instant-to-instant in an ever-turning circle. The making of ritual ligatures so as to bind oath, desire, power, numinous virtue and so forth into a material vehicle is alluded to by Christ, who says “*whatever you knot fast on earth will be correspondingly fastened together in the world beyond*”<sup>198</sup>. Like the rosary, the knots of the cingillum are passed through the fingers as the many repetitions of the charm are made, each knot a beat of our heart on the journey through the round of Fate, and as it is turned

194. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 35.

195. In this we are reminded of the journey of Theseus through the dark labyrinth by virtue of Ariadne’s guiding thread.

196. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 141.

197. Jones, *Witchcraft: A Tradition Renewed*.

198. Matthew 16:19.

the ring of time turns with it, whether counted backwards to unravel the worlds and effect a great return to the primal initiatrix, or forwards to bring the dream into manifestation.

In similitude to the focussing and protecting virtues of the circle, the cincture tied about the waist likewise works to protect the sorcerer and concentrate power within them; they literally become 'girdled with power'<sup>199</sup>. Herein does the navel-centre in the midst of man's body become aligned with the 'hot point' of the rite; the waist becomes the mirror reflecting the powers residing in the great circle above, exemplified in the necklace and crown, and the great circle below, exemplified in the garter worn upon the legs. Many powers can thus be bound about and focussed within the witch's body depending upon the materials and fetishes plaited into the girdle, which may be of animal or plant origin, such as the snakeskin or leather garters worn by male witches<sup>200</sup> or the bindweed that is considered in folklore to be the Devil's very own garter. In occult thought various virtues are thereby said to be passed to the magician, as exemplified by the leather belts which were thought to lend various bestial powers, such as those of strength and dominance<sup>201</sup>.

One particular magical practice related to this is that of shape-changing, wherein the girdle encircles the sorcerer with its indwelling powers and virtues, much like an enshrouding cloak of plant matter or hide. On this subject, Nigel Jackson relates the use of a warlock's belt fashioned of wolf-skin and inscribed with runes in order to allow its wearer to become enveloped with the entire form and skin of the beast<sup>202</sup>. In his pamphlet *A True Discourse*, outlining the murders of Stubbe Peeter, "a most wicked sorcerer who in the likeness of a wolf committed many murders", George Bores relates that it was by agency of such a girdle, gifted by the Devil, that the sorcerer was able to commit his crimes. He writes how when Stubbe Peeter put it about his waist he turned into "the likeness of a greedy, devouring wolf, strong and mighty, with eyes

199. We are here reminded of the mythological power-rendering girdles, such as the *Megingjardir* worn by Thor, which doubled his strength.

200. Huson, *Mastering Witchcraft*.

201. Bardou, *The Practice of Magical Evocation*.

202. Jackson, *The Compleat Vampyre*.

great and large, which in turn sparkled like unto brands of fire, a mouth great and wide, with most sharp and cruel teeth, a huge body and mighty paws"<sup>203</sup>.

So it is then that the fiery blood-red cord fastened about the waist becomes a symbol of the deadly but wise serpent, encircling the witch with wisdom and power, such being aligned with the ring of time and the river that bounds the world's horizon<sup>204</sup>.

## The Shod Foot of the Wayfarer

**H**aving considered all those parts above the waist, we come finally to the legs and feet. Being planted on terra firma, many occultists relate the lower body to earth as the grossest element, and because like the arms they are directed by the heart and head, many consider them to be 'lesser'. However, it is in the four limbs that we find analogue with the four roads that lead us to the castles of our patron gods, they constitute the elemental cross upon which the spirit hangs, and this is sometimes represented by the four-square castle or pyramid with its centre/apex. Moreover, just as the hands express the design of heart and head through craft, so too do the feet carry us forth along the path of our desire, they are the force of motion; they are paths of mediation between the inner and outer. Without these limbs of reification our dreams would remain just that, no idol would ever be forged and no path would be trodden, we would never progress, rather we would stagnate on a single point.

The feet then are the means by which we tread the many paths emanating from the point and the vehicle by which we traverse the horizon of the circle, each being a type of pilgrimage whose way is shown by the light of the heart. It is only by eternally wandering through many lands that we come to know the many mysteries, the eternal wanderer with no fixed home being personified in the exilic figure of Cain, ancestor of the witches<sup>205</sup>.

203. Froome, *Wicked Enchantments*, pp. 163-4.

204. Interestingly, the girdle about the middle of the Jewish priests is likewise said to represent the oceans that surround the earth, as represented by the linen robe (*Secret Teachings of All Ages*, p. 435).

205. For more on the nature of pilgrimage, see 'Way and Waymark' by Daniel Schulke, *The Cauldron* no. 122, November 2006.

When treading sacred space the feet are often kept bare, such expressing a sense of humility and respect, for shoes lift man from the earth, implying a sense of not just separation but also superiority. It is notable that Moses was instructed to remove his shoes when approaching the burning bush, “put off the shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground”<sup>206</sup>. Removing one’s shoes is also symbolic of a return to the original state of man, being a shedding of those mundane things accumulated in his material existence. However, bare-feet are also more sensitive, and being a medium insulating the foot from the ground, shoes can have a protective function, as exemplified in the placing of apotropaic iron or herbal charms within shoes and by the concealment of shoes in buildings.

It is also the feet that tread out the pattern of the mysteries, bringing the celestial virtues to earth and grounding them in the manifest world. Accordingly do those influenced by the Solomonic grimoires wear white leather shoes marked with the signs and characters of their work, thereby impressing the correlating powers within the sacred precinct of the rite as they work their way about the circle<sup>207</sup>. Intriguingly, when speaking of the empowerment of the ring, Cochrane informs us that the power drawn through the right shoulder spirals through the body and is emitted through the left foot, and this in turn is drawn back up through the right foot to the base of the spine so as to awaken the serpent power, which properly stimulated ascends to the seat of the head; herein is encrypted something of the channelling of divine force and the twain paths of descent and return<sup>208</sup>. In this we are reminded also of the manner in which the earth sustains man, and vice-versa, and “by way of this ongoing alliance between sorcerer and land, a continuum of gnosis is achieved which nurtures the present stream of lore, revealing it anew, whilst remaining true unto the blessed traditions of the past...The Faith beneath the Wanderer’s Heels”<sup>209</sup>. In en-coiling a cord along the limbs after the manner of the serpent

206. Exodus 3:5. Compare also to Acts 7:3 and Joshua 5:15.

207. *The Key of Solomon the King*. The relationship existing between the foot and the earth upon which it rests is one that is also worked in those arts of folk magic wherein earth bearing a footprint acts as a magical link to the person whose print it is.

208. *The Robert Cochrane Letters*, p. 174.

209. Schulke, ‘Way and Waymark’.

such a rite can be greatly aided, the spiral binding upon the leg being somewhat related to the garter, which like the necklace, cord, ring and bracelet, partakes of the virtues of ligation and binding<sup>210</sup>.

Within orthodox Wicca a garter is worn as a part of the witch's regalia, some positing a relationship with the girdles worn by Aphrodite and various other goddesses. Such is not completely alien to historical witchcraft, one French writer in 1892 commenting that "the bad people [witches] form a brotherhood, which is directed by a female witch...this woman wears a garter as a mark of her dignity"<sup>211</sup>. Huson relates that the garter should always be worn above the left knee during the witch rites, and further proposes that when adorned with bells are reminiscent of those worn by English Morris dancers<sup>212</sup>, such bells being held by some to repel evil spirits. However, the garter worn at the knee has been the subject of much, generally baseless, speculation by some modern Freemasons, Rosicrucians and writers on the witch cult, especially those who, influenced by Margaret Murray, have sought to forge a link with the Order of the Garter.

Instructions for the making of a magic garter are found within the pages of the *Key of Solomon*, a tube formed of stag hide being packed with mugwort and stained with magical glyphs using the blood of a hare<sup>213</sup>. In the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight it is encountered as a protective amulet, having a symbolic reading that at once deals with both the spiritual and the sexual, which is unsurprising considering its relative proximity to the genitals. Accordingly does the garter feature in sex and fertility folk magic, being a means to help induce dreams of one's future beloved, whilst in superstition the bride's garter brings good luck to the one who secures it after marriage, this being the precursor of the modern bouquet-catching custom. One old fertility charm involved a virgin girl going to a field in secret, taking a wheat straw for every son she hoped for and an oat straw for every daughter, these being plaited into her garter whilst reciting a charm evoking the baby

210. Intriguingly, Idries Shah notes that the Arabic word for garter is the same as that for the Sufi mystical tie or bond (Shah, *The Sufis*).

211. Lemoine, Jules. *La Tradition*, 1892.

212. Huson, *Mastering Witchcraft*.

213. *The Key of Solomon the King*.

Jesus in his manger<sup>214</sup>. Akin to these are those charms tied to the thighs and worn like garters, such as the so-called 'pregnant-stone' or 'eaglestone'<sup>215</sup>, which when bound to the thigh by use of animal hide stemmed labour pains and made for an easy birth, whilst tied to the arm prevented miscarriage and brought popularity and victory.

In the realms of folk cures, a red garter was considered to alleviate rheumatism, whilst those of corks or eel-skin could avert cramps. In another instance, calling to mind the various stroking cures of rural charmers, one Yorkshire witch cured a man of ear pains by taking off her garter and crossing his left ear with it three times<sup>216</sup>.

The 'garter' is also mentioned in some papers allegedly originating with Cochrane as a name for the witch's magic circle. In these the garter is identified with the 'Ladder of Devotion, that is to say the cord as a rosary-like meditational device that is tied on 'the knot of death', recalling the 'garter worn at the neck' as the noose of subjugation. In this we might consider the various ligatures to be connected, with the garter worn at the head, waist and leg evoking the three worlds and their sacred centres, the circles above and below united in that bound about the navel-centre.

214. E & M Radford, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions*.

215. The eaglestone is the *aetites*, a type of hollow geode containing loose pieces within that rattle when shaken.

216. *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions* by E & M Radford, Book Club Associates, 1974.



## Conclusion

Within this work I have attempted to show that although in essence ‘naked’, man is enshrouded within a robe, such being the vessel into which the spirit is poured. Similarly, on his journey does man come to take on many more adornments that can either shackle or free him, some working to clothe the witch in pneuma and power, and others merely burdening him like the allegorical beast. In ‘wearing’ symbols of the very powers we seek to mediate, we are able to read the many secrets therein encrypted, the colours, forms and uses of the adornments becoming a veritable cipher of the mysteries. In its apotheosis the witch as wayfarer becomes crowned at head by the stellar crown and shod at foot by the iron shoe<sup>217</sup>, the powers of the heights and the depths being girdled with power at the centre. Similarly is the witches’ forked stave, as the altar-like fetish-idol of the wanderer’s patron, crowned and shod; the mommet of the exilic nomad, dressed in mask and robe, steadying the walker’s step as he traverses the precincts of the horizon. Yet ultimately, whatever robes or adornments we choose to hang upon our bodily frame, these must eventually be cast aside, the woven gossamer threads falling back into the cauldron from whence they came, just as Mary’s winding sheet unravelled upon her ascension to the heavenly realm. Naked as we came into the world, it is ultimately ‘Naked’ that we must return.

217. For more on the iron shod foot and its kinship with the witch’s stang as a mommet of the Witch God see “The Shod Stang” by Martin Duffy, *The Cauldron* No. 131, 2009.



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