

# Collected Essays on Austin Osman Spare

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## **SPARE PARTS**

Ramsey Dukes

**The following article is an introduction to Spare's 'Book of Pleasure'. It was written as an appendix to the unpublished 'Uncle Ramsey's Bumper Book of Magick Spells', then first published in issue four of the occult magazine 'Agape' in the early 1970s, and then in a slightly modified form for The Sorcerer's Apprentice edition of 'The Collected Works of Austin Osman Spare' with a postscript added to the original version. The essay was long considered to be the best available introduction to Spare's magical theories.**

The article summarizes the Book of Pleasure, helping the reader to find their own way through Spare's rather difficult prose. It also draws some parallels with other helpful texts. For a more detailed account of practical work with sigils etc I recommend two excellent books; Pete Carroll's 'Liber Null' and Ray Sherwin's 'Book of Results'. [Since writing this there have been several other books on the subject.]

### **1**

"On the brink of mystery, the spirit of man is seized with giddiness" thus wrote Eliphas levi in the Key of the Mysteries. Indeed we cannot live forever in a state of giddiness and so need to hide that brink behind veils. By the very decision to give a name or symbol to the Ultimate (e.g. God, Nothing, Tao) we save ourselves from having to see it face to face; the first veil is put up.

The philosophical system that is easiest to grasp, and the easiest to ridicule, is the one that has the most veils. For example the extreme simplicity of Zen Buddhism makes it less easy to discuss than the complex spiritual hierarchies of some other religions. In this sense Spare's philosophy uses comparatively few veils and this, together with his obscure way of writing, make it difficult to describe his ideas adequately.

For example: a basic theme of his writing is that we are not free, we are the slaves of our beliefs and conventions. This is quite obviously the case when we look at other people. We can laugh at the debutante who sorrowfully cries "Oh Mummy I CAN'T wear the same dress that I wore to Margie's party"; but alas the poor girl is right, she really can't! Consider also the novice soldier

who for the first time is asked to kill a man in defense of his country; as he aims the rifle he is in no position of authority, instead he himself is a battlefield on which Patriotism is struggling with the commandment 'thou shalt not kill'. Perhaps the clearest example of all is witnessed by the outsider when he sees a family squabbling, struggling in a net of strong interpersonal feelings which are meaningless to the uninvolved.

In each case the truth of Spare's statement is totally obvious and yet the PRACTICAL use of it flounders when we try to see our own actions in this light. This 'simple' turning inward of our gaze is in fact a basic problem of all applied psychology; and it is such difficulties (rather than the trouble of finding the tongue of a hanged man or the eye of a newt) which the student of Spare's magic will encounter.

Instead of forming our own plan we will turn over the pages of 'The Book of Pleasure ( Self-Love) the Psychology of Ecstasy', and outline Spare's system in the same sequence as he adopted.

## 2

He starts with 'Definitions' :

The Words God, religions, faith, morals, woman etc. (they being forms of belief) are used as expressing different "means" as controlling and expressing desire: an idea of unity by fear in some form or another which must spell bondage - the imagined limits; extended by science which adds a dearly paid inch to our height, no more.

Kia: The absolute freedom which being free is mighty enough to be "reality" and free at any time: therefore is it not potential or manifest (except as its instant possibility) by ideas of freedom or "means", but by the Ego being free to receive it. The less said of it (Kia) the less obscure it is. Remember evolution teaches by terrible punishments - that conception is ultimate reality but not ultimate freedom from evolution.

Virtue: Pure Art.

Vice: Fear, belief, faith, control, science, and the like.

Self-Love: A mental state, mood or condition caused by the emotion of laughter becoming the principle that allows the Ego appreciation or universal association in permitting inclusion before conception.

Exhaustion: That state of vacuity brought by exhausting a desire by some means of dissipation when the mood corresponds to the nature of the desire, i.e. when the mind is worried because of the non-fulfillment of such desire and seeks relief. By seizing this mood and living, the resultant vacuity is sensitive to the subtle suggestion of the sigil.

It is interesting to see that Spare in 1913 was already dismissing science along with religion. In this he was ahead of his time. Crowley, for example, emphasizes the positive virtue of science, that it had finally freed us from the tyranny of religion; whereas Spare saw that science too could in turn prove to be a limitation.

The page is decorated with some symbols, including the hieroglyphic symbol for the Kai, or 'ego' in Egyptian psychology. There does not seem to be any connection between this and Kia - I have yet to find the origin of that term, or of the name 'Zos' that Spare uses for himself. In the latter case I only note how often the Z sound occurs in inspirational writing: Zarathustra (Nietzsche's hero), Znuz is Znees (the title of C.F. Russell's autobiography), Jeezus, Zunnus (the last anagram word in the Septem Sermones ad Mortuos) and the mass of Zeds in the gnostic words of power.

Both A.E. (in *The Candle of Vision*) and Rudolf Steiner independently associate the 'S' and 'Z' sounds with snakes and procreation. In *'Earth Inferno'*, Spare's first book, the term *Zod-Kia* occurs without explanation.

### 3

The first chapter is entitled '*Different Religions and Doctrines as Means to Pleasure, Freedom and Power*'.

He starts by asking "What is there to believe, but in Self?" and then goes on to attack various alternative beliefs, showing how they all flounder because of the basic duality at the root of all consciousness. Instead the wise pleasure-seeker is urged to become a Kiaist and Riding the Shark of his desire he crosses the ocean of the dual principle and engages himself in self-love.

For example: Some praise the idea of Faith. They believe that they are gods (or anything else) would make them such - proving by all they do to be full of its non-belief.

Indeed, putting one's trust in faith is a little like trying to overcome a weak head for heights by forcing yourself not to look down: it only works if you repress your imagination. Spare concludes Then, this ambition of faith, is it so very desirable? Myself, I have not yet seen a man who is not God already.

He goes on to criticize prayer - except as a means of producing exhaustion. He criticizes those who endeavour to prove the unity of religion; those who elevate 'truth'; those who claim that everything is 'symbolic' ( and yet reject modern symbolism) those who say that only knowledge is eternal; and he criticizes the ceremonial magicians. In this last example he wins our hearts by saying : They have no magic to intensify the normal, the joy of a child or a healthy person...

The second chapter is entitled '*The consumer of Religion*' and describes "Kia, in its transcendental and Conceivable Manifestation". He starts by saying: Of name it has no need, to designate, I call it Kia - I dare not claim it as myself. The Kia which can be expressed by conceivable ideas, is not the eternal Kia, which burns up all belief - but is the archetype of 'self' the slavery of mortality.

The beginning of that last sentence recalls, not inappropriately, the first line of the Tao They Chug which has been translated, in the Penguin Edition of D.C. Lane:

"The way that can be told  
Is not the Constant way"

"The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;  
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.

Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets :  
But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations."

Which is again appropriate, except that the advice of the last line is more suggestive of the advice which will be quoted later from the Septem Sermones.

Spare goes on to say : The Kia which can be vaguely expressed in words is the "Neither Neither"

This Neither-Neither is explained in a later chapter. It is a thought process by which Spare endeavours to break through the limitations of dualistic thought in four steps. We start by considering any quality, for example 'light'. Duality immediately links that to the opposing quality 'dark'. The next step is to consider the combination of these two qualities - as in 'dusk' - and then we attempt to make the next step and meditate upon the absence of those two qualities - the 'Neither-Neither' as opposed to the 'Both-And'.

As a meditation this is reminiscent of the Zen Buddhists' koan by which practitioners attempt to confound reason and thus break through it. One example of this is the well-known koan "What is the sound of one hand clapping"? A very appropriate example especially as Spare later suggests that we try to see light by its own quality, and not in its contrast with darkness.

Spare's own description of the Kia is somewhat confusing. This is perhaps inevitable on account of the very nature of his subject and yet I cannot help comparing it with the, to me, very clear first sermon of the Septem Sermones Ad Mortuos by C. G. Jung, where Basilides describes the Pleroma - a possible equivalent to Kia.

This should be read in conjunction with Spare. I will attempt a summary, but it should be borne in mind that this is a poor substitute and that it necessarily omits to answer a lot of objections which are in fact dealt with in the full text of the Septem Sermones.

Basilides starts by saying that he begins with nothingness - which is the same as fullness. Nothingness is both empty and full - you might as well call it black, white or whatever you like, for having all qualities is the same as having no qualities. This nothingness is called the Pleroma and in it both thinking and being cease - it is quite fruitless to think about it for it would mean self-dissolution.

Creatura is not in the Pleroma, but in itself. True the Pleroma everywhere pervades Creatura but it is in no way coloured by it or shared with it, just as light cannot be said to colour a completely transparent body. Yet figuratively speaking this makes us parts of the Pleroma and, also figuratively, we are the whole Pleroma. So why does he bother to speak of the Pleroma if it is all or nothing? Answer: he's got to start somewhere! And he starts there to free you from the delusion that there is somewhere some fixed and unchangeable principle. The only thing you can be sure of is 'Change'; but Creatura is what is changeable, and so the only fixed and certain thing.

How did Creatura originate? Answer: it did not. Created beings come to pass, not Creatura. Created being, just as much as non-creation was inherent in the Pleroma and so came to pass. Distinctiveness is a quality of Creatura, whereas the Pleroma has all: distinctiveness and indistinctiveness.

Why go on about 'qualities' of the Pleroma after what has been said? Answer: man, being of Creatura, has distinctiveness as an essence. It is his nature to distinguish things. When we talk

about qualities of the Pleroma we learn nothing of the Pleroma, we are really revealing our own nature, or way of thought. We must be true to our nature and go on distinguishing.

Why must we distinguish things? Answer: if we cease to distinguish we fall into the Pleroma and cease to be creatures. "This is the death of the creature. Therefore we die in such measure as we do not distinguish". This is why non-distinction is a great danger for the creature.

At this point it seems that Basilides is recommending that we do NOT strive after Kia, he is telling us of its dangers. One could say that the danger is only to the CREATURE and if we wish to transcend that state then that danger does not concern us. However there are passages where Spare himself refers to the dangers of the freedom of Kia: "Total vacuity is difficult and unsafe for those governed by morality, complexes...."

It must be remembered that the duality is the BASIS of consciousness and manifestation; so that only a TOTAL dissolution can be rid of it. In practice the law of duality will ensure that any attainable ecstasy will tend to alternate with agony. Like a pendulum we swing between states.

What then can the Kiaist gain? To indicate an answer I continue to paraphrase Sermon I.

As was said we need to go through the play of distinguishing qualities of the qualityless Pleroma in order to foster our own distinctiveness. These qualities came in pairs : the Effective and the Ineffective, Fullness and Emptiness, Living and Dead, Light and Dark, Good and Evil and so on.

In the Pleroma they are not - being balanced and so void. But as we are the Pleroma itself ( see earlier) we have these qualities. But we are of Creatura, and so we do not have these qualities in a balanced and void state; as distinctiveness is of our essence we have them in a distinct form i.e. instead of balanced they are EFFECTIVE. "The Pleroma is rent in us".

We are now at an important point : we are moving from a philosophy of perfection - so far the 'Kia' idea could be said to amount to the perfectly true statement 'if you want to obtain desires then you must give up having desires' - to a liveable philosophy, or system of magic. So I will quote the next paragraph of Sermon I in full:

"When we strive after the good or the beautiful we thereby forget our own nature, which is distinctiveness, and we are delivered over to the qualities of the Pleroma, which are pairs of opposites. We labour to attain to the good and the beautiful, yet at the same time we also lay hold of the evil and the ugly, since in the Pleroma they are one with the good and the beautiful. When, however, we remain true to our nature, which is distinctiveness, we distinguish ourselves from the good and the beautiful, and therefore, at the same time, from the evil and the ugly. And THUS we fall not into the Pleroma, namely, into nothingness and dissolution."

With the possible exception of that last sentence this paragraph is absolutely in keeping with Spare's first chapter and his criticism of those who flounder after desire and so also gain their opposites.

As an example of the practical application of this idea consider Sermon V where Basilides, talking of 'spirituality' and 'sexuality', reminds us that we must not forget to distinguish ourselves from them. They are not OUR qualities, in the sense that we possess and contain them; rather are they of a nature above and beyond us.

So, of course, this way of thinking is out of keeping with our 20th century education (although utterly in keeping with much 'primitive' thought) and therefore it cannot be considered as an instant cure to anyone's troubles. However I would like you to IMAGINE the very great change which does in fact develop in the lives of those who encourage this idea to grow in their lives at the expense of the 'rationalist' hypothesis. Their sexuality for example, is no longer their 'possession'; instead it is something 'without' which visits one. In practice this means that sexuality is no longer a possession which one feels obliged to compare in power with one's own rivals, and there is no more fear of possessing too little or too much of it. Nor is there fear that it is a finite quantity that is in danger of being used up, or atrophying with disuse nor is it something that one can sell to another. Instead it is something which visits one. Therefore one must become the seducer in order to be seduced - to encourage sexuality one must make oneself attractive to it; to banish it one has at one's disposal the entire tradition of banishment of spirits. In fact this is an idea to be lived, not discussed.

This first sermon ends with the answer to the paradox: if it is so bad to strive for a quality of the Pleroma, then should we really strive after distinctiveness? We are reminded that in fact the Pleroma has no qualities - we create them through thinking. It is not our thinking but our BEING which is distinctiveness. Therefore must we in fact not strive after 'difference' as such but rather OUR OWN BEING. By striving after our own being we attain our goal; but, alas, thought estranges us from being. So the purpose of all the knowledge given in the Sermon was in fact that it should serve as a leash to constrain thought.

I think that Thelemites would therefore stand and applaud at the end of this sermon !

This second chapter of the 'Book of Pleasure' contains a sentence that demands some apology as it stands. Spare writes "As unity conceived duality, it begot trinity, begot tetragrammaton" In view of the usual nihilistic occult view of creation this is highly eccentric. As we have seen it is the Pleroma which necessarily begets duality ( $0=2$  in Crowley's formula) because everything which emerges from it comes with its opposite. (So only even numbers, that is to say the 'feminine' principles, arrive out of nothing) And in no way can the Pleroma be described as 'One thing'. But whereas it is absurd to talk of a man giving birth to a woman (unity begot duality) it is quite in order for a man to be born from a woman (a unity being found within a duality). Once we have the duality we have the foundation of consciousness, and it is consciousness which looks back at the original duality and perceives that it contains two units. Thus consciousness can extrapolate behind that duality and postulate a superior unity, calling it 'the action of extracting a duality from the Pleroma'.

This is of course a construct of consciousness' own workings and so ultimately trash. However it creates new complications because to talk about 'one act of creation' is to postulate a moment of time - to name a 'before' and an 'after'. As Spare says in his next sentence "Duality, being unity, is Time..." Thus we find Saturn or 'Time' ; represented in the first three sephiroth of the Tree of Life even though they do not yet contain sufficient material for three dimensional creation.

Spare closes the chapter with his observation on the inevitable ups and downs of existence. Ecstasy for any length of time is difficult to obtain, and laboured heavily for. With what does he balance his ecstasy? Measure for Measure by intense pain, sorrow and miseries. Various degrees of misery alternating with gusts of pleasure and emotions less anxious, would seem the condition of consciousness and existence. Duality is the law.

At this point the casual reader (I'd be less surprised to find a London taxicab at the South Pole than to find a casual reader still with us ) is inclined to drop the book in disappointment. Duality is the law - so Spare has offered us no hope of relief.

However there is a big difference. We may not be liberated from failure and misery, but we may be in a position to use it. Knowing the law of duality brings the possibility of distinguishing ourselves from its working. No more the blind slide into despair but rather the studied descent, and the plan to use that unavoidable despair in order to plan the next high point. This is the key to Spare's practical work, or living magic. I can only say that it does with practice and understanding indeed help to create the possibility of exultation in despair. I end with his nice symbol for creation:

"One form made of two, that is three-fold and having four directions."

#### 4

'Soliloquy on God-Head' is the next chapter: it criticizes some modern beliefs.

You disbelieve in Ghosts and God - because you have not seen them? What! You have never seen the mocking ghosts of your beliefs? Yea your very faculties and most courageous Lies are Gods ! Who is the slayer of your Gods - but a God!

The writings of Nietzsche are worth reading in conjunction with Spare, (many passages in, for example, the Dawn of Day have been already marked with this chapter in mind but I hope to restrain myself from quoting). In particular the style and feel of 'Thus Spake Zarathustra' is reflected in Spare's 'Anathema of Zos' (an automatic writing) in such phrases as: Let your pleasures be as sunsets, HONEST... BLOODY... GROTESQUE; together with Zos's references to the need for clean air and solitude.

However Nietzsche had much greater respect for science than had Spare; as was said before, in Nietzsche's time, science seemed to be the liberator rather than the tyrant. Spare asks us to be more critical of what science has given us. In Thundersqueak for example it is explained how every triumph of experimenting amateur technologists is later annexed as a 'Triumph of Modern Science', whereas in fact the only effect that can be INDISPUTABLY ascribed to science is its ability to STOP certain things from happening - e.g. religion or magic.

Spare describes how science has 'discovered' new diseases, thus creating then in our beliefs so that we suffer them and need to call again on science for their cure. He describes, how 'facts' are produced in opposing pairs: for example the discovery that the sun was millions of miles away rather than a few miles away meant that we had also to believe that it was much more powerful than we before believed - in order to justify the amount of heat we receive from it.

Spare illustrates how you are 'one' with a butterfly in an interesting passage. He adds: So if you hurt the Butterfly you hurt yourself. But your belief that you don't hurt yourself protects you from hurt - for a time ! Belief gets tired and you are miserably hurt!



You are fearsome of entering a den of tigers?.. Yet daily you fearlessly enter dens inhabited by more terrible creatures than Tigers [men that is], and you come out unharmed - why?

Science is the accursed doubt of the possible, yea, of what does exist! You cannot conceive an impossibility, nothing is impossible, you are the impossible! Doubt is delay - time - but how it punishes ! Nothing is more true than anything else ! What are you NOT - you ever answered, Truthfully?

## 5

The next chapter is called 'The Death Posture' A name which recalls Basilides's remark that the creature dies in so far as he does not make distinction.

Spare starts by warning that ideas of self in conflict cannot be slain, for it is your resistance that gives them their reality. He advocates a formula of non-resistance: Does not matter - please yourself.

Here he describes the Neither-Neither rule and tells us to remember to laugh at all times, to recognize all things and to resist nothing: then there is no conflict, incompatibility or compulsion as such.

...'Please yourself' is its creed. That last quote suggests to me that here in 1913 Spare was the mouthpiece for the negative or 'feminine' counterpart of Crowley' s very positive "Do what thou wilt". Two poles of the same 93 current as it were.

In support of these passages I could quote the whole of Taoist literature known to me. In the second chapter of the Tao Te Ching is : "Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action and practices the teaching that uses no words".

I will not quote at length the description of the Death Posture and the kindred practices. There are many preliminary practices as innumerable as sins, futile of themselves but designative of the ultimate means.

You strain to your full height, standing on tiptoe with neck stretched, hands clasped behind your back and arms rigid: breathe deeply and quickly until you feel giddy and exhausted. This prepares you for the Death Posture; you lie lazily on your back as in a yawn, sigh and smile. Forget time and the world.

Or else stare hard at yourself in a mirror until the vision crumbles, the effort is forgotten and you have a feeling of unreachable immensity. This should be practiced before the actual Death Posture in order to give some idea of the mental state.

Let him practice it daily, accordingly till he arrives at the centre of desire. Thus by hindering belief and semen from conception they become simple and cosmic. (The latter being a reference to the alchemical transmutation of sexual energy).

I like this sentence: The primordial vacuity (or belief) is not by the exercise of focusing the mind on a negation of all conceivable things .... bit by doing it now, not eventually. It suggests a quasi-Zen story which might describe a pupil who asks Spare how to achieve liberation and receives the

answer "There ! you've missed it". In other words: at any instant liberation is so close that the very act of asking the question was to miss by delay an opportunity to jump out of time and grab it.

It was not at all clear to me what the connection could be between Spare's magic system and the Egyptian system with its richness of Gods until I recalled the remarkable 19th and 20th verses of the eleventh chapter of the Divine Pymander of Hermes as given in G.R.S. Mead's 'Thrice Greatest Hermes' as 'Mind unto Hermes'. I quote part of the 20th verse which bridges this gap quite comfortably, being highly appropriate to Spare's work, yet surely of Egyptian inspiration:

"Then in this way know God; as having all things in Himself as thoughts, the whole Cosmos itself.

If, then, thou does not make thyself like unto God thou canst not know him. For like is knowable to like alone.

Make then thyself to grow to the same stature as the Greatness which transcends all measure: leap forth from every body; transcend all time; become Eternity; and thus shalt thou know God.

Conceiving nothing as impossible unto thyself, think thyself deathless and able to know all - all arts, all sciences, the way of every life.

Become more lofty than all height, and lower than all depth. Collect into thyself all sense of all creatures - of fire, and water, dry and moist. Think that thou art at the same time in every place - in earth, in sea, in sky, not yet begotten, in the womb, young, old and dead, in after-death conditions.

And if thou knowest all these things at once - times, places, doings, qualities and quantities; thou canst know God"

## 6

In his next chapter 'The Cloudy Enemies Born of Stagnant Self-Hypnotism', Spare endeavours to clarify for us his use of the word 'Belief', natural belief rather than the conscious 'faith' that he dismisses in his first chapter. He says :

The Nature of belief equals all possibilities ultimately true by identification through culture to an idea of time, so what is not timely is not true, and what is not true, prognostication. Thought of one thing implies the possibility of another idea as contradicting but not dissociated, belief is to make "one" more convincing.

The Centre of belief is love for one's self, projecting environment for fulfillment but allowing its distortion to simulate denial, an ambition to become ulterior to self-desire, but you cannot get further than the centre, so one multiplies (believes) in order to be more unaware of the fundamental.

Here Spare is obviously talking of different levels of belief, indeed he refers to those in desire as refusing to believe what they believe. It is the most deeply unconscious belief that projects the basic matter of the environment, the lesser and more conscious beliefs merely add fleeting

impressions or distortions until we come to complete consciousness which is baffled by this environment and struggles to master it. Thus the very conscious desire for, say, riches is going to evoke opposition from the environment, as it is inevitable that at some level there must be a belief which places a limit on one's potential wealth. This schism, or blindness, is necessary for we are escapists. If nature did not pretend to surprise us we would fall back into self.

The basic belief of science (and so of a fairly important part of any scientist's mind) is that the universe is ultimately dead and boring. The advance of science slowly kills the universe but there are little bursts of surprise on the wavefront. Television regularly announces amazing new discoveries or theories which threaten to overturn scientific thought - but we hear no more of them. Either they too prove boring or else they are clobbered to death in turn.

So we see that nature is in fact playing with science, throwing her scraps like feeding a caged monkey with nuts. Thus she is ever saving science from falling into the horror of ultimate success. The burning ecstasies of hopeless love illustrate how greater denial brings greater desire and less danger of reality.

So effective magic requires that we get our desire away from the Great Abortionist and down into the unconscious. The sigil system of Spare's is designed with this purpose in mind.

At last this chapter provides the cynic with the disappointment he invites. Spare does not overlook his philosophy's own limitations. We must use the Neither-Neither everywhere, we must disperse all belief in Spare's own writing by the Neither-Neither. Indeed we must dispel the conception of The Neither-Neither by the Neither-Neither and believe it is 'not necessary. Some of us will find that rather easy!

For another account of the transcending of dualities by their annihilation see the remarks on the Mystical Marriage in Aleister Crowley's 'Liber Aleph - chapters 20-25 in particular.

## 7

In 'Self Love as a Moral Doctrine and Virtue' we have a chapter which could almost have been assembled from quotes from Nietzsche and the Tao Te Ching. Consider the opening sentences :

The criterion for action, is freedom of movement, timeliness of expression, pleasuring. The value of moral doctrine is in its freedom for transgression. Simplicity I hold most precious.

Nietzsche would also have been happy to read :

The True teacher implants no knowledge, but shows him his own superabundance.

Which is nearer you, self-love and its immorality, or love and morals?

Perfect charity acquires, hence it benefits all things by not giving.  
Knowledge is but the excrement of experience.

In the comparison with the Taoist doctrine I will present Spare's quotes from this chapter in alternation with Tao Te King quotes, labelling them S and T accordingly.

S: Are not the most simple things in the world the most perfect, pure, innocent, and their properties the most wonderful?

T: The Uncarved Block though seemingly of small account is greater than anything that is under heaven.

S: When faith perishes then duty to moral doctrines perishes, we are without sin and endure for ever in all-devouring love.

T: Banish human kindness, discard morality, And the people will be dutiful and compassionate.

S: It is because I know without learning...

T : Therefore the sage... learns to be without learning.

S: Control is by leaving things to work out their own salvation...

T: Governing a large state is like boiling small fish [i.e. they must not be over-handled].

S: He is akin to the great purpose. His actions explained for him, good seen of his evil, without knowing, everyone satisfied with his will".

T: Therefore the sage takes his place over the people yet is no burden: takes his place ahead of the people yet causes no obstruction. That is why the empire supports him joyfully and never tires of doing so.

In illustrating these parallel quotes are we trying to prove that Spare has cribbed from earlier sources? No. Instead we are trying to get over the difficulty that Spare's term 'Self-Love' will be repulsive to many of us because it suggests something that we think we know about, and despise. But I ask you, is your idea of selfishness really deserving of the word 'Love' in 'Self-Love'?

By taking two, at first sight very different, texts and finding in them some similarity in their liberating ideas we hope to have illustrated alternative routes to Spare's theory which will help to dilute initial misunderstanding. On the other hand we've also made it possible to treble the misunderstanding !

A final cheek-moistening quote from Spare: May the idea of God perish and with it women; have they not both made me appear clownish?

## 8

In the 'Doctrine of Eternal Self-Love' earlier passages are summarised and further illustration of the qualities and merits of Self Love given.

If this book had a contents list, the title of the next chapter would draw our attention straight away; it is 'The Complete Ritual and Doctrine of Magic'.

Firstly he mentions secrecy, then he gives a definition of magic that would please an alchemist: Magic, the reduction of properties to simplicity, making them transmutable to utilize them afresh by direction, without capitalization, bearing fruit many times.

Spare then reminds us that we must avoid "Deliberation, over-consciousness and concentration". This is the most tricky part, the 'letting go' of the desire so that it can speed to the attainment of its goal; for conscious desire does not work. Nor will we need to hallucinate.

The process he describes is for those who have not transcended the law of duality (what a relief!) and so it needs to work within that law. Therefore the magician must wait until he has another desire that is of similar intensity to the one he wishes to achieve. This desire will then be sacrificed in order that the first should be attained. An example would be for the magician to choose a time when a friend has finally let him down, his belief in his friend has then collapsed and the sacrifice of this friendship will answer the purpose: This free entity of belief and his desire are united to his purpose by the use of sigils or sacred letters.

So the practitioner is in a state of despair, he constructs a sigil to formalize his wish and he seats himself in meditation. He calms his mind of all thought except of that one visualised sigil. (It is no longer a 'wish' that is in his mind, but rather a simple geometric shape). In meditation he draws his consciousness slowly into one part, so that no outside impressions disturb.

This produces a feeling of detached calm, of balance which recalls the passage in Crowley's 'Book of Lies' : "The Universe is in equilibrium; therefore he that is without it, though his force be but a feather, can overturn the Universe".

Only the sigil is retained in thought, it is to be used as the 'chalice'. Withdrawing his consciousness to a point gives a feeling of surrounding immensity. he is the point, around him is infinity - Crowley would describe this as Hadit and Nuit and indeed the ultimate marriage to which he refers is here reflected. For Spare says he must now imagine a union taking place between himself (The mystic union of the Ego and the Absolute). This should produce a sexual ecstasy, but it is not desired that it should become physical in manifestation. The nectar of this ecstasy - The syllabub of Sun and Moon - should be slowly sipped from the chalice.

The correct mental state should be one where he is beyond all desire, the original object of the operation is forgotten and no longer of interest, except that he is still holding this apparently meaningless sigil in mind.

But should he fail, and still be yearning for this desire, then he is in danger of being obsessed by it. Instead of being tidily packaged and dropped deep into the unconscious the desire is free to take over his mind at this moment of extreme vulnerability. All the free energy of his original disappointment is at its disposal.

So the next chapter is a 'Note on the Difference of Magical Obsession (Genius) and Insanity'.

He criticizes spiritualism in a way that is customary amongst magicians. Whereas the magician consciously chooses an obsession, and therefore has ultimate power over it through knowledge of how to bind it, the passive medium lays himself open to unknown obsessions.

Should the uninvited obsession in his mind become as strong as his own Ego then there is a split in personality, a loss of control.

Spare concludes that Disease and Insanity arise when there is a free energy within, which has no role to play in the vital economy. This free energy, which should have been used to vitalize a sigil, is like an unemployed work force which, having no part in the vital economy, will seek expression through resistance. (This suggests an analogy with some theories about cancer cells).

## 10

The next chapter called 'Sigils' (subtitled 'The Psychology of Believing') tells us very little about sigils, except that it reminds us at the end that the magical sigil should not be allowed to return to consciousness and known, but must be repressed and forgotten.

Spare suggests that the state of mind most productive of genius is one which is open to all perceptions and is immoral in that it allows free association of ideas without the strict rules of past belief or knowledge.

He asks what has happened to our childish wonder when we used to see things for the first time and marvel at them, asking 'childish' (i.e. philosophical) questions. Is it not that the world is now sterilized by our patterns of 'knowledge' (i.e. beliefs), which are like a curtain between us and surprise?

The difference between this receptivity and the scorned receptivity of the spiritualist in the last chapter is clearly one which calls for care - or at least 'innocence' !

## 11

Here follows a nice chapter called 'The Sub-Consciousness'.

He begins by announcing that all geniuses have active sub-consciousnesses, and they also have some, not relevant, powerful interest or hobby which serves to distract consciousness from their aim from time to time, with the result that the subconscious can work on it. Thus it is that inspiration comes at odd moments. It DOES demand a previous exhaustion of concentration but it is unlikely to arise at that time, but rather when the consciousness has wearily looked away, or we have 'slept on it'. (A booklet by W.H. Easton called 'Creative thinking and How to Develop it' reprinted from the August 1946 edition of Mechanical Engineering' supports this observation).

Thus it is that we must forget our wish once it is sigillised. An important note is that it is no good to wish the opposite as such, because that is too reminiscent of the original wish; instead we must consider irrelevant topics.

Spare's idea of the sub-consciousness is more akin to Jung's Collective Unconscious than any lesser function. Assuming an evolutionary history, he points out that just as our evolutionary history is illustrated in the development of the foetus, so also is it registered in our whole being. If

the human brain has developed from the basic mammalian brain - rather than having been miraculously and independently created - then its deeper ('deeper' for the evolutionary growth is apparently outward) structure must be common to all mammals including man. Progressing backward, the different branches of evolution converge and we find that we contain the blueprints for all creation right back to our cell structure which reflects the earliest forms of life.

So, by regressing into this 'Storehouse of Memories' we can contact all the strata of previous life forms. But evolution is largely a process of increasing complexity - resulting in decreasing competence and ability. By the slow processes of conscious thought Man has to struggle to overcome his obvious limitations. His technology has provided him with the swiftness of the leopard, the ability to fly, and resistance to the seasons; yet he is still not as mighty as the microbe! However we can contact these deep layers by the use of Spare's sigils and can thus tap their powers directly.

The only reason why our customary methods of learning and study ever produce results is that they can produce this exhaustion which diverts the concentration.

All ritual and ceremony is worthless - originally devised to amuse and later to deceive. But, as is customary, the deceivers end up by deceiving themselves more than their victims.

## 12

In 'Sigils. Belief With Protection' he describes his system of sigils. The exact process is not really important.

Throughout the book his illustrations are decorated with beautiful sigils of different styles. He has his own magical alphabets - he uses six different alphabets in this book and does not explain any of them, because a magical alphabet is a set of symbols you devise to communicate with your subconscious and so should be of your own private design (like the perfect 'personal' tarot pack). "Sigils are monograms of thought".

He suggests that we write in block capitals and superimpose the letters into a monogram. So 'WOMAN' could become for example :

In this way then he shows how the desire 'This is my wish to obtain the strength of a tiger' can reduce to a single monogram.

He goes on to describe methods of use in a passage which makes one wonder whether he is amplifying the instructions of his 'Complete Ritual' or whether he is giving an alternative approach. He talks of obtaining vacuity by some means, quoting as good examples: mantras and asana, women and wine, tennis and patience, or walking in concentration. He adds that none of these are necessary to someone who has for a moment attained the state of beyond-duality, as by the Neither-Neither; so perhaps this is a 'lesser' magic for those who have not mastered the Complete Ritual earlier discussed?

Indeed it appears that Spare has followed the best scheme for a book on practical magic: he has started with the theory of perfection - and thus repelled the merely curious - has proceeded to describe his 'High Magic' and thus repelled dabblers - and only now is he telling us 'how to do spells'.

When one is exhausted the sigil form is held in mind until it grows vague and vanishes - taking with it the desire.

### 13

The next chapter on 'Symbolism' extends the theory to symbols in general. He describes how an artist can know a truth in symbol form long before the scientist uncovers it. The Egyptians in this way understood the theory of evolution - as reflected in images of their gods - but they only understood it as far as was useful in their lives; they did not pursue this knowledge as we have done.

### 14

His views on art are enlarged in 'Automatic Drawing as a Means to Art'. He provides a parallel with his law of self-love which had been praised as a law which permitted its own transgression; for the laws of art exist and yet they need not tyrannize. As soon as one law begins to dominate we are free to create a whole new art form by breaking that very law.

He describes how to use a sigil as a basis for an automatic drawing. First you train the hand to be free of inhibition, to wander freely in easy loops and curls ( as distinct from the manic scribble of frustration). Then a sigil is used to tap the subconscious level corresponding to the desired picture (he illustrates a drawing based on a bird karma) whilst the consciousness is constrained elsewhere - for example by staring at your thumb in a moonbeam's light until "it is opalescent and suggests a fantastic reflection of yourself..."

### 15

He finishes with the chapter 'On Myself', in which he questions all he has done, and his worth or 'right' to do it. So cautious is he that he does not even dare to fully believe his own ideas and yet: "Poor though I be my contentment is beyond your understanding".

It is difficult to restrain oneself from asking a question about Spare which is only a slightly less subtle form of the old wisecrack: "If you're so clever why aren't you rich?". After all if it was really Einstein's genius which has lead to the discovery of the atomic power which now holds the world in balance, why did he fail to become a world dictator? Can you really believe that he did not try?

The Tao Te Ching says :

I alone am inactive and reveal no signs,  
Like a baby that has not yet learned to smile,  
Listless as though with no home to go back to.  
The multitude all have more than enough.  
I alone seem to be in want.  
My mind is that of a fool - how blank !  
Vulgar people are clear.  
I alone am drowsy  
Vulgar people are alert.  
I alone am muddled.



Calm like the sea;  
Like a high wind that never ceases.  
The multitude all have purpose.  
I alone am foolish and uncouth.  
I alone am different from others  
And value being fed by the Mother.

Austin Spare ends with the sentence:

Alas the futility of the idea of God has not yet reached its limit, all men are liars, appear striving for insanity its climax: while I alone as one prematurely aged, reason tottering on its throne, remain sane, in positive chastity, confessing no conscience, no morals - a virgin in singleness of purpose.

## 16

In this essay I have not mentioned his illustrations e.g. 'The Death Posture : Preliminary Sen'ation Symbolized' where the figure has no head and thus recalls the 'on not having a head' meditation (instead the face is in the heart region). Nor have I considered Spare' s life history. But I hope that these notes will encourage readers to persevere with the Book of Pleasure.

For the nature of Spare' s writing is such that it is possible to read the whole book for the first time and gain absolutely nothing from it. However do not be discouraged, repeated reading is satisfying. At least Spare has tie decency to make his books SHORT.

## POSTSCRIPT

One of the intriguing features of the 'Book of Pleasure' is its footnote reference in the introduction to several chapters which Spare had to omit. The list of omitted chapters sounds more exciting than the actual published contents, and a lot of people would welcome proof that they ever existed !

The first of these omitted chapters is called 'The Feast of The Supersensualists' and gives a clue to another influence upon Spare: Jacob Boehme' s tract 'Of the Supersensual Life'.

The trouble with Boehme is that his writing is cloaked in nauseating Christian imagery - I suppose you cannot expect much better from a 'mere shoemaker'? - but for those with strong stomachs, and the discrimination to sift the magical wheat from Christian chaff, I recommend studying this tract. A few quotes will illustrate its relevance to the Book of Pleasure.

"The disciple said to his master: Sir, how may I come to the supersensual life. The Master answered and said: "Son, when thou canst throw thyself into THAT, where no creature dwelleth, though it be but for a moment..... ."

And "It is in thee, and if thou canst, my son, for a while but cease from all thy thinking and willing"

Later "and thou will also love thyself; I say, love thyself, and that even more than every thou didst't yet".

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# The Bookplate Designs of Austin Osman Spare

by Robert Ansell

Illustrations first published in *AOS Ex-Libris*, Keridwen Press, 1988

Although the contemporary myth of a young AOS as the *enfant terrible* of Edwardian art society has ensured his subsequent notoriety; in truth Spare was keen to court and encourage the patronage of collectors he viewed as supportive to his cause.

Nowhere is this more evident than in his designs for "ex-libris" - the small ownership labels fixed into books to denote the library of origin. This peculiar art form appealed to AOS, combining his love of books with art. The small format forced him to focus his expressive energies in imaginative ways, as may be seen in his designs for Andre Raffalovich (1910) and Pickford Waller (1908). Here too may be seen some of his finest line work, reflected in his ex-libris for John Oswald (1909) and Sybil Waller (1909).

Although Spare's best work in this field appears between 1907 and 1910 he returned to the genre after the publication of *The Focus of Life* in 1921. These later designs, largely for his loyal patron Pickford Waller, fall into a period of intense introspection for Spare. Gone is the fine detail and recurring classical motifs of earlier work and instead we are offered satyrs and self-portraits amid swirling forms. Thus AOS chronicled his descent towards the publication of *Anathema of Zos* in 1927; and the death of patrons Pickford Waller and Desmond Coke in the early 30s.

It would be nearly 20 years before Spare undertook his final bookplate design, for the journalist Dennis Bardens, but throughout his career AOS relished not only designing printed ex-libris, but also exquisite hand-drawn examples. These he continued to execute for friends and patrons until the end of his life, often embellishing the book with his own distinctive brand of decoration as a special bonus. These unique ex-libris are the rarest of all his forays into this field and are the ultimate acquisition for every collector.

This list first appeared in *AOS Ex-Libris* (Keridwen Press, 1988) and has been edited and augmented for inclusion in the Fulgur Limited website.

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**PICKFORD WALLER 1905**

*Robed figures on plinth with books and figures at their feet. 135 x 85mm. Monogram.  
Printed in sepia.*

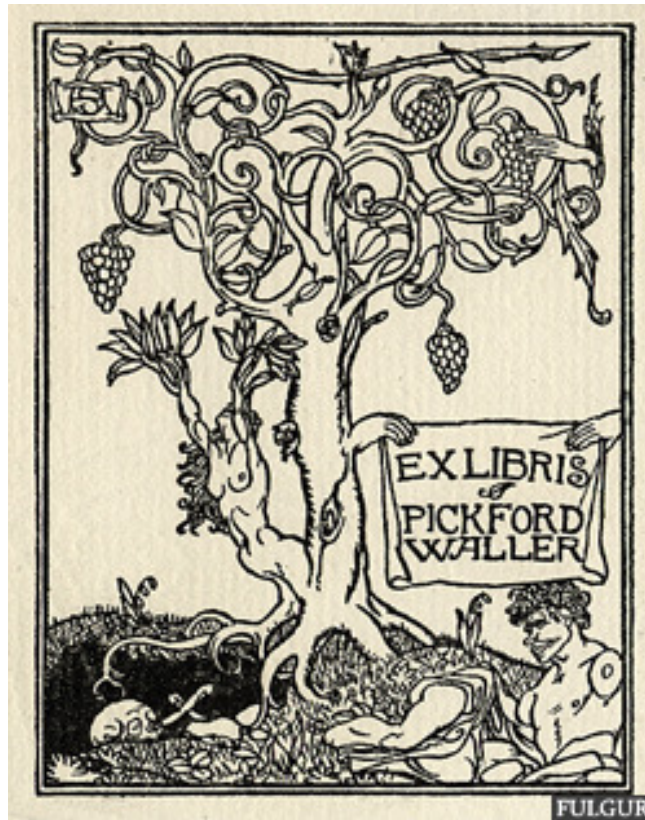
Pickford Waller was Spare's most important patron, supporting him from his earliest days through until his death in 1930. This is the first design for Waller and contains some of the motifs that recur in Spare's work of the period: the slipped mask, the drama of curtained space, dragons, plinths and other classical references.



**DESMOND COKE 1907**

*An array of objects befitting a collector, including silhouettes of the patron and artist.  
157 x 98mm. Monogram.*

Coke was a connoisseur and collector especially interested in silhouettes. His book *The Art of Silhouette* was published in 1913. He was a friend of Haldane MacFall and Claude Lovat Fraser, both contributors to Spare's journal *The Golden Hind*. Coke supported AOS until his death in Worthing in 1931.



**PICKFORD WALLER c.1907**

*Vine-tree with resident nymph bursting forth from root. 83 x 64mm. Monogram.*

This design clearly shows the influence of Charles Ricketts, particularly his illustrations to Oscar Wilde's *The Sphinx* (Elkin Matthews and John Lane, 1894)

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**RALPH STRAUS 1908**

*A library interior with an ostrich standing in foreground. 95 x 63mm. Monogram.*

Here Spare employs a visual pun, as “Straus” is German for “ostrich”. Straus was an earlier chronicler of Spare’s work and his article on AOS appeared in *The Booklover’s Magazine* in 1909



**AUSTIN O. SPARE 1908**

*Apollo and Daphne embracing, a plinth with a self-portrait bust to the right. 101 x 67mm.  
Monogram.*

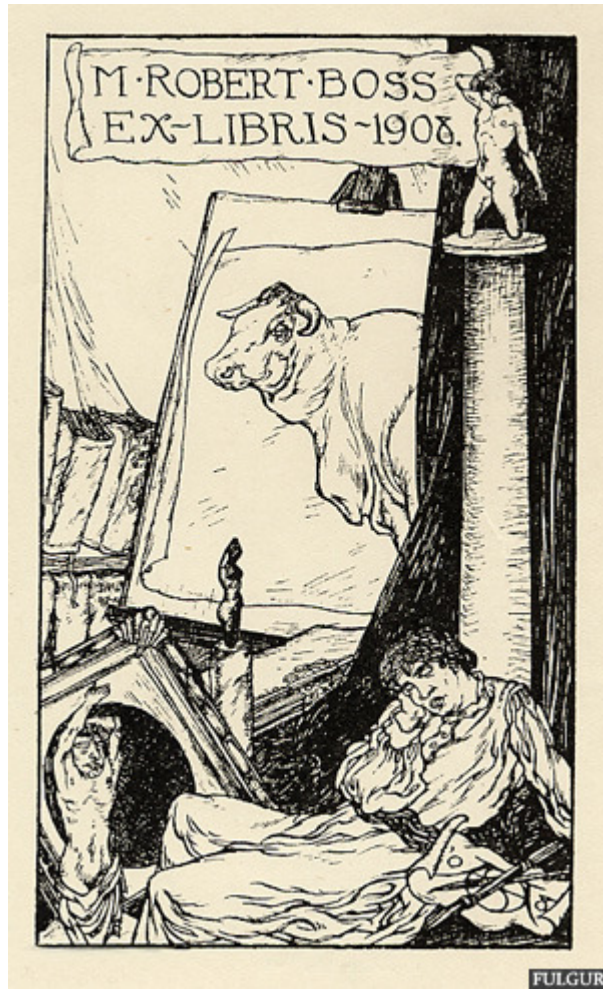
Inspired by his illustrations to C. F. Grindrod's *Songs from the Classics* (David Nutt, 1907) this design shows the genesis of Spare's lifetime obsessions: the interplay of the sexes, the bestial satyr representing atavistic experience, the power and myth of ancient culture, particularly Greece, and the ubiquitous self-portrait.



**PICKFORD WALLER 1908**

*A circular design with a self-portrait seated, surrounded by figures. 107mm diameter.  
Monogram*





**M. ROBERT BOSS 1908**

*A miscellany of books, pictures and figures, a cow looking rather majestic as a centrepiece. 110 x 64mm. Monogram.*

Here Spare employs another visual pun, as "Bos" is Latin for "cow".



**E. MURCH MITCHELL 1909**

*A classical Greek figure holding a lyre. 101 x 47mm. Unsigned. Printed in red.*

Elizabeth Murch Mitchell was one of Spare's childhood sweethearts. This design is very similar to those Spare drew for C. F. Grindrod's *Songs from the Classics* (David Nutt, 1907).



**CISSIE A. SPARE 1909**

*As above. 101 x 47mm. Unsigned. Printed in green.*

“Cissie” was the nickname given to Spare’s older sister, Susan Ann Spare.

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**AUSTIN OSMAN SPARE 1909**

*Self-portrait amid a sprouting "tree" of images, including Spare's birth sign the Capricorn goat. 115 x 79mm. Monogram.*

By 1909 Spare had two published works behind him and was developing towards *The Book of Pleasure*. Here his increasing confidence is evident. Rising from a sea of matter is an efflorescence of forms, including lizards, birds, flowers and a "botanical baby" - with a self-portrait central to the design. Here also may be found an early representation of the hand and eye motif.



**JOHN OSWALD 1909**

*An Edwardian interior with a variety of sports equipment to the left. 119 x 77mm.  
Monogram.*

The connoisseur John Oswald lived in St. James' and doubtless would have attended Spare's shows at the Ryder Gallery around this time. A highly detailed design and one of the few etchings Spare executed.



**SYBIL WALLER 1909**

*A double-headed bird with flaming sceptre in background. 103 x 90mm. Monogram.*

Pickford Waller's only daughter was a keen admirer of Spenser during her father's lifetime. A friend of James Guthrie, author of the introduction to Spenser's *The Book of Satyrs*, she later affirmed her classical leanings with a book of poems and essays entitled *The Kingdom of Pan* in 1952.



**ANDRE RAFFALOVICH c1910**

*A columbine formed from birds and a mask. 121 x 64mm. Initialled. Printed in sepia.*

Raffalovich, a “wealthy patron of the arts and letters” (Sewell, *Footnote to the Nineties*, p.1) invited Spare to his home in Edinburgh in 1910. Here Spare produced some memorable work, including an accomplished self-portrait that Canon Gray, Raffalovich’s lifetime friend, gave as a bequest to the Victoria and Albert Museum. This bookplate design, with its inventive simplicity, is arguably Spare’s finest contribution to the genre.

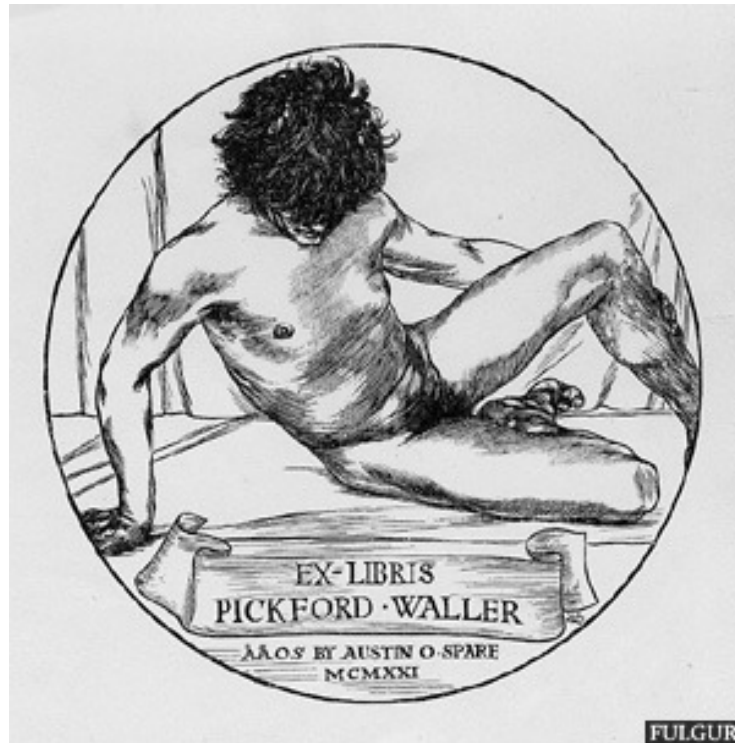


**PICKFORD WALLER 1912**

*A mallard evolving into a lily. 110 x 85mm. Signed with monogram.*

Another zoomorphic design involving birds and flowers, a common theme of the period.





**PICKFORD WALLER 1921**

*A circular design of a reclining androgynous figure. 99mm diameter.*

A woodcut by William Quick after A. O. Spare. Quick was responsible for engraving most of Spare's woodcut designs. Eyes cast downward, androgynous and vulnerable, the figure is a self-portrait, and compares curiously with his self-portrait frontispiece to *The Focus of Life* published in the same year. In this image Spare's face is obscured because his head is turned upward, whilst a strategically placed open book suggests sexual ambiguity.



EX-LIBRIS PICKFORD-WALLER-1922

**PICKFORD WALLER 1922**

*Self-portrait amidst flames. Original design 170 x 120min. Initialed.*



**PICKFORD WALLER 1922**

*Swirling masses with elfin self-portrait in foreground. 150 x 102mm. Initialed. Printed in sepia.*



**GRACE E. ROGERS** c1923

*Nude with ram's head amid swirling forms. 141 x 102min. Initialed.*

Reproduced in *The Golden Hind*, Vol. 1 No. 4, July 1923.



**PICKFORD WALLER 1923**

*Bust of Pan on column amid swirling forms. 145 x 103mm. Initialed.*

Reproduced in *The Golden Hind*, Vol. 1, No. 4, July 1923

*G.H.R. Mackey Ex-libris*



**FULGUR**

**G. H. R. MACKEY** c1923  
*Self-portrait. Initialled.*

Reproduced in *The Golden Hind*, Vol. 2 No. 5, October 1923



FULGUR

**ELLEN V. SPARE** c1924

*Head amidst twisted landscape. Possibly never printed. Initialled.*

Reproduced in *The Golden Hind*, Vol. 2 No. 6, Jan. 1924

Ellen V. Spare was Spare's youngest sister. Born in 1894, she became a professional artist illustrating fashion magazines and lived in Essex. They remained close until Austin's death.



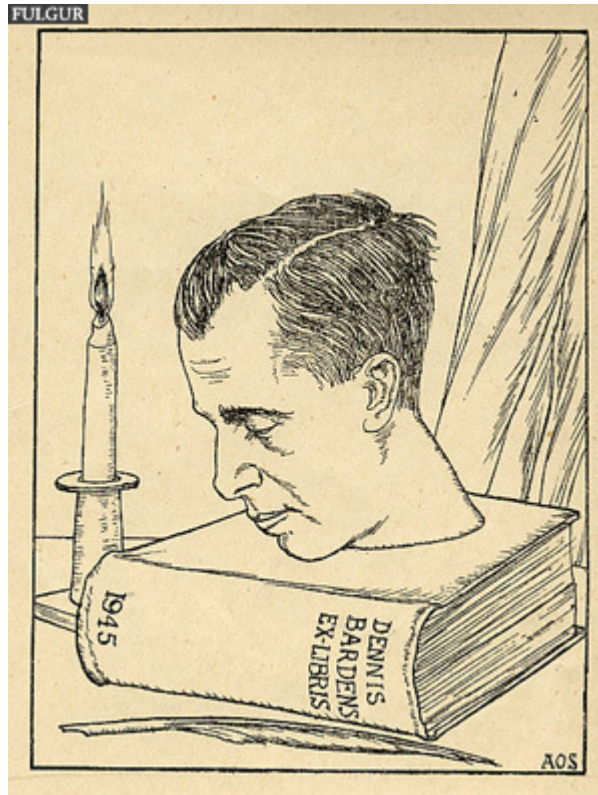
FULGUR

**GEORGE J. MITCHELL** c1924

*Self-portrait within swirling masses. Possibly never printed. Initialed.*

Reproduced in *The Golden Hind*, Vol. 2 No. 6, Jan. 1924





### **DENNIS BARDENS 1945**

*Portrait of Barden's head, decapitated and resting on a book. 102 x 71mm. Initialled.*

Dennis Bardens, a journalist, met Spare in the mid 1930s and they became close friends. He orchestrated Spare's 1938 show in the Walworth Road studio and contributed an introduction to the catalogue. This is only the second ex-libris to include a portrait of the patron, the first being for Desmond Coke in 1907. Bardens and Spare remained friends until Spare died in 1956.

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# Symbology in Aesthetics in Relation to the Art of Austin O. Spare

by Grace Rogers

First Published in *Artwork*, 1925

Among the many complexities that have transpired in the evolution of the present social order is the changing nature of artistic criteria and the more limited sphere of aesthetic service.

At one time art was the direct outcome of the needs of man for inter-relationship with forces governing his conditions, and indicative of strongly felt social emotions directed to functional service found the special channels for expression which handed down the ages the traditional form of dance, ritual, drama, architecture - the national heritage of mankind. But the relative values in life are changed. We are less simple and direct: language has become "a dictionary of faded metaphors," art a process of ornament added to decay; symbols have lost their original significance and the fundamental basis of traditional is obscured. Thus is it commonly realised emotions have given place to arbitrary inhibitions and "modern complexes" and art became a specialised function forced to serve an individual aim, which frequently limited the artist to a "coterie" of appreciators. In these days it is said "art is the transmission to others of a special feeling experienced by the artist," and though analysis might prove this to be equally true of any other period since art became individual in any sense of the word, yet it specially emphasises the need for change in the nature of our approach and acceptance. We, as spectators, are bound to participate in the individual vision and in the realisation of the aesthetic values which serve to convey the artist's intention rather than the expression of ideas as apprehended by the mass in general.

Ambiguity must occur, however, in an age of transition and unfixed belief. In the search for new aesthetic foundations principles are employed as ends rather than less obviously as means and much of the ultimate intention is frustrated or incomplete.

The language of the emotions expressed in arbitrary and unintelligible symbolism bewilders public and critic alike who are at a loss for some "aesthetic plumb-line" and the distance between the artist and the public perceptibly widens, for every picture cannot tell its story in terms of ideas associated with objects, although the general determination is it should. Moreover it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the absurdity veiling incapacity and the honest experiment. We are fearful of "fancy tricks" and "pose," blissfully unconscious we accept them every day in more discreet disguise.

Yet the truth is “one of the returns that haunt our civilisation and our art.” And in this return to Nature, even though it may take the form of more grotesque complexity, we again realise in art that condition allied to music itself, as rather an apprehension of conscious than rational representations, and it moves us similarly as the proportions and spaces of architecture (which Schopenhauer has aptly termed Frozen music), its harmonies manifest almost by some mathematical co-relation.

And as in the development of musical orchestration, a new factor was introduced through the divorce of the sounds from the words which had given a certain significance and shape which ed through the construction of musical composition upon tonality and rhythmic balance in statement, to the re-discovery of the principles which had been in existence from the beginning (which had their root and origin in the bodily movement of dance, the unqualified speech of the emotions that original “gesture” of mankind towards the forces conditioning his existence), thus in the same way it has come to be said of modern drawing, that its essence is a “dancing on paper” which exemplifies the artist’s ability to co-ordinate his ideas and emotional reactions, and like the Chinese draughtsmen of old - those past-masters in the art of linear expressiveness, “the strokes of his brush announce him in the nobility of his soul, or in its meanness and limitation.”

Personality then is the factor that counts; thus the secret of art lies with the artist himself and with Buffon we might say “le style, c’est l’homme.”



A cursory analysis of the elements of draughtsmanship could dismiss them briefly, linear and functional, the first concerning itself with the “calligraphic” property by which the artist expresses his dexterity and skill, while in the second the functional, the value lies in the expressiveness of the contour to clothe the inner form and which exists as the bounding of masses serving in the co-operation and co-ordination with other lines in the sense of part of living organic unity. But the term “line for line’s sake” which we might apply to the calligraphic “gesture” will have the virtue of line for form’s sake even though it may not fulfil the functional purpose of conveying the simplest and most effective resolution of a complex problem. We are told the Japanese “norm” of beauty lay in the curve of the letter S, which analysis might prove an abstract disposition of geometrical relations, the intellectual and emotional content of which lies buried as in a glyph and pertains to abstract qualities which reason ultimately cuts out of the universe, again among abstruse problems of personality and psycho-analysis we are informed by a certain professor on art that in the observation of a beautiful curve “it is also possible that there will be an effect on glandular secretions, which will in turn intensify the striped muscles” which, however, we incline to dismiss as reduction ad absurdum, or merely the crude recognition of physical re-action implying obscure psychical and symbolic significance. None the less, to return to drawing itself, do we find the preoccupation with the possibilities of line implied in the functional purpose, which in the extract of the structural essentials as directed by the genius or idiosyncrasy of the artist and the realisation of a unified whole created by the co-relationship of parts, in virtue of rhythmic movement or gesture becomes significant form.

And we are here confronted with the problem of what is “significant” form (another mis-used term), also with what have hitherto been termed peculiar divergences of the art known as E. and W. - (distinctions now being rapidly swept aside) but which for argument’s sake consist in the latter case, the preoccupation with problems of rendering the human form in three dimensions and the study of sequences of lines and masses necessary to hold groups or objects in recessive design, the two ultimate results being the idea of pure form, or that careful imitation of nature, where the importance bestowed to each particular detail ultimately tends towards the diminution of a sense of synthesised whole and to produce the effect of mere juxtaposed facts, while the other tendency has been toward the subservience of detail to the whole, as in the application of fact to functional end; Indian art overwhelmingly rich in detail is enclosed in rhythmic volume. In this way “the realisation of form is not merely a visual experience but rather the ultimate product of memory and imagination in which the basic element of composition is served in the establishment of definite relations between formal perceptions through which disparate elements can comprise an organic unity which has no existence in nature and is entirely arbitrary.” The ultimate success lies in the harmonious relationship of the variety of elements. This quality may apply to results achieved through pictorial representations as to abstract design, and here the general tendency is to confuse the issues. It is too obvious that some idea lies behind distortion, or the emptiest resolution of a problem of rhythm, or the abstract geometrical solution, but in the drawings of Austin Spare the principles are exemplified by certain traditional means, and the natural impulse is to attract to the elements of symbolism more of the values attached to actual objects. But although there may be elements of the conscious in his work, the fact is rather in common

with the greater draughtsman of the past, where we discover the similar and unceasing search for the grasp of structural principles and convention is indirectly served and continually reinforced by an intimate knowledge of Nature.

Therefore the problem is with Austin Spare as with the Chinese, not the actual application of abstract principles of design but arriving at an epitomised statement, the design or composition realised rather in the inherent nature of the matter itself, which from consummate mastery of the medium allies itself with the commentary sense of movement - as in the sense of rhythm impressing material things.

Thus if we come to the analogy of the rhythmical movements of the body where the expressiveness and power lies in the co-related order, and to the realisation that those precise aesthetic qualities we discover are not bound in the formal relation but by the fusing secret in the nature of the emotional re-action which directs the artist to selection, and pertaining to consciousness, unites the precise relationship of beauty with truth as subjective and psychological, being the harmonious occupation of consciousness with aesthetic impression, and becomes the natural functioning of the mind itself. Aesthetically then, the line functionality expresses the psychological content through which idea becomes implicit in the form. Thus, the fact that though the symbol is clear or the emotions transcribed seems ever a matter of conjecture, yet the artist seeks ever to make constructions consistent and self-contained which appear to have ultimate value in themselves.

Apart from this, however, art which is more directly expressive of the individual and obviously social emotions, which implies the retention of memory images and the re-expression of them as symbols clothed in analogous form, demands what a certain critic in considering these drawings of Austin Spare's at a recent exhibition at St. George Gallery described as occult initiation. Meaning (interpreting the term in his way), the power to translate ideas into terms of value attached to actual life. Yet, with all our knowledge of the abstruse problems of psycho-analysis, the discovery of the sublimated wish to kill our father and marry our grandmother is not furthering an appreciation of art as art.

Mainly in the drawings of Austin Spare we discover the ideals which inspired the finest of linear artists, and the final aim is incorporate as the principles, which are manifest through the conditions, rather than in the nature of the material employed, which invests him with the capacity, without recourse to symbol, to transcribe fact to idea. Therefore we see more than the object represented, something which arrests and profoundly moves us, even if it were by the exquisite power with which he (to quote again) "alternates those essays in pure classicism with hideous deformities" and which, by virtue of ART cease to be deformities.

For, as he himself has said, "Art is that beauty which may be born of anything; but not by a formula of balance and proportion, beauty itself"; and again, "Ugliness is that which the formula does not allow: hence there is never beauty without this ugliness which becomes transmitted by its super-abundance." This is nearer the realisation of the aesthetic values

of the “harmony of opposites” or the “union of contrarities,” which is the “free belief” of art and conditions of “vital allegory.”



Yet again as someone has put it, “every artist who carries furthest his own innermost feelings, and poignantly reveals the intimate impulses of mankind, shocks us as manifest revelations of ourselves.” We are affright, as confronted with the scalpel exposed to our disease. For truly are we ever governed by the “complexes” of morality and move continually toward a dream world wherein the ideal balance of mind and matter is stamped with the nature of our evasions. We look to art for mere moments of beauty, modes of escape from reality, achieved by sense of annihilation, which implies too vividly the need for stimulant or sedatives - as Nietzsche puts it, “to make life possible.” Yet art has no necessary concern with medicine and morals, though art can be employed in anything, in what are called unholy as more holy means invested with the grace of art - that consumer of antipathies. The “initiate” in this case is he who can accept his grace seasoned with salt. For has not Emerson, in describing the sceptic, acknowledged him, the mystic, who, unafraid to tread the vestibule of the temple, discovers in the Mount of Vision the beautitude is partial and deformed! With such an eye of inward vision did that other philosopher lament:

“I see and have seen worse things; divers things so hideous that I should neither speak of all matters nor even to keep silent about some of them, namely, men who lack everything excepting they have too much of one thing; men who are nothing more than a big eye, a big mouth; or something else big. Reversed cripples I call such men.”

“We are such stuff as dreams are made of.”

Inadequate expression, conglomeration of half-realised experiences - monsters and mutilated fragments. Mediaeval times more picturesque less squeamish, combined the head of dog and serpent's tail, angels and devils interchange confidence in that grotesquely unsophisticated intermixture of objectivity and subjectivity. Yet whatever the symbols, the function of art remains, the expression of an eternal verity, which, as in the art of Austin Spare, records a disinterested state of mind as the setting free of a disembodied function of the spirit.

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## Sex in Art

by Clifford Bax

First published in *Ideas and People*, 1936

*The Daily Mail* announced, when I was a youth, that the son of a policeman had succeeded, at the age of seventeen, in having a picture hung on the line at the Royal Academy exhibition. Moreover, I had seen a number of Austin Spare's extraordinary drawings - bulky women with stag's heads or hairy Mousterians or queer amalgams of primitive magic and primitive sexuality. And I had greatly admired the power and the distinction of his draughtsmanship.

When we met at a Lyons teashop I recognised at once what an odd and charming person he is. I liked his brawny build and the thick tough strength of his hair. I noticed that he was pallid, and wondered if the air and the food of The Borough were good for him. I noticed and liked his pale eyes which were always honest and often humorous. I realised at once that he was a shrewd though unworldly fellow who knew many aspects of London life which I had known only by hearsay.



At the teashop we planned our quarterly, deciding that it should be called *The Golden Hind*. We ought, in 1922, to have realised that quarterly magazines of art and literature belonged to the age of silk hats, hansom-cabs, drawing rooms and permanent marriages. It is only in the United States that men are not held in thrall by the past. We Europeans - and the Asiatics, too - have always some difficulty in realising that the world does move. Spare and I did not understand that a passion for speed and for machinery had cured society of its taste for art and literature. And Spare, making things worse, innocently filled our first number with so many backviews of massive nude females that Chapman and Hall, our publishers, blushed simultaneously, while Mr. Heffer (the Cambridge bookseller) gave one glance at *The Golden Hind*, snorted and sent our traveller packing. The irreverent instantly renamed our quarterly *The Golden Behind*.

Nevertheless, I am glad that we launched it because the duties of co-editorship brought Austin Spare quite frequently from his tenement-flat in The Borough to a thin and tower-like house in St. Petersburg Place whither I had recently moved. Now, a man may change his place of abode without much annoying his friends; but if he also decides to change his mode of life, they will find him hard to forgive. And that is what I had done. Having lived for eight years in a studio, cooking my breakfast while I had my bath, and feeding for the most part upon tinned food, and resenting any occasion upon which I should have to wear evening-dress, what did I now do but rent an elegant house, employ a butler and change every night into a dinner-suit? And as though all this were not sufficiently disconcerting, I had the inconsiderateness to grow (with how much trepidation) a moustache and a small beard. People do not like us to change. They deplore these minute revolutions in the life of anyone whom they know well: but I had realised that a bohemian existence in only one suit of clothes may well be enough when a man is thirty but that when he approaching forty it may become a little ridiculous.

Spare knew the taste of life as it is for people to whom a penny and a ha'penny are very different coins, and he lived in a high bleak barrack-like tenement-block, among men and women in whose life elegance and the arts had no place, and surrounded by their washing



and their cats. He said to me once “Don’t put ‘esquire’ on your letters. We’ve only one other esquire in my block, and they think we’re giving ourselves airs.” His attractive simplicity came out, too, when he said “If you are ever passing my place, do drop in”; for it is seldom that anybody happens to be passing The Borough unless he lives there.

In the kindness of his heart he had made for me a radio-set, and he came to lunch one day with the purpose of fixing up an aerial on the roof of my empty garage; and because we both liked him so much I invited a guest - Mrs. Norah Rowan-Hamilton - who had been one of Spare’s earliest friends and one of mine too.

“If you are fond of animals” he remarked at lunch, “don’t come to live in The Borough. The other day some kids threw a cat from a top window to the stone yard below. I had it poisoned.” Norah and I, brought up in a kindlier world preserved our British phlegm, “I hate brutality” he went on, “and what with wife-beating and cat-booting, it’s all around you in The Borough. I’ve got a white tabby now - a stray - but she has an ugly wound on her mouth. As a matter of fact, only a few yards from my place there’s a little court which everyone there calls ‘Catkiller’s Alley’. If you go there you quite often see a cat slinking about with no fur on.”

“No fur?” cried Norah. “What do you mean?”

“Oh,” said Spare, perhaps pitying our innocence, “the men pull the fur off, give the cat a clout on the head, and don’t wait to see if they’ve finished her off or not.”

Norah said “Don’t you ever interfere?” and then added, with imagination, “I suppose it’s too dangerous?”

“Dangerous?” laughed Spare. “There’s no danger. All those chaps are cowards. Of course, it’s easy enough to be philosophical, to leave life as it is: but we’re human beings first and philosophers afterwards. Now and again I do take a hand. The other morning I was in bed when the milk-boy arrived. I heard a howl, and I knew what was happening: so I jumped out of bed and of course I found the boy booting the white tabby. Didn’t I just give him a hiding!”

Then, recollecting his philosophy, he observed “Perhaps it is all of no use. What happens down here doesn’t correspond with what’s happening in the Real World. When I saved the tabby I may have killed four archangels; and it may have been God who was using that boy.”



Becoming more involved within the folds of metaphysics, he expounded a theory that a man's conditions are caused by his subconscious desires. The subconscious mind, being all-wise (he told us), wills the environment that shall strengthen the weak places of the soul: and he commented with a smile, "I suppose my own subconscious desire is to be poor! Whatever you really want, you can get. The want rises first in the conscious mind, but you have to make the subconscious desire it too. And you can do this by inventing a symbol of the thing you want, - wealth, a woman, fame or a country cottage, it's all alike. The symbol drops down into the subconscious. You have to forget all about it. In fact, you must play at hide-and-seek with yourself. And while you're wanting that particular thing or person, you must resolutely starve all your lesser desires. By doing that, you make the whole self, conscious and subconscious, flow toward you main object. And you'll obtain it."

When lunch was over, he climbed on to the roof of my garage and, not foreseeing what would subsequently happen to Gustav Holst, fixed the aerial to a telephone-pole: and just before he went back to The Borough, he gave me a piece of advice which at present I have not needed to apply. "When you find yourself mixed up," he warned me, "in a scrap outside a public-house, hit the other fellow first: you can count on it, he's got two or three pals in the crowd: and then, do a bunk as quickly as you can." After he had gone I told Mrs. Rowan-Hamilton how Spare had once been converted by the Salvation Army in the Waterloo Road. "I was tight one evening," he had told me, "and when I came to, I found a hymn-book in my hand and I was singing at the top of my voice." The hardness of his life had made him canny in some ways, but he had probably never realised that his work troubled many of those who might have become purchasers. They must have been puzzled by his peculiar form of occultism and they were certainly abashed by the savage sexuality of his early designs. No wonder! Men and women may be animals, but there is now so elaborate a pattern of thought or convention upon the surface of their minds that they are embarrassed if an artist requires them to look into the dark backward and abysm of consciousness. The popularity of Jurgen shows that Park Avenue, Mayfair and Fleet

Street can relish sexuality in a book if it is oblique and whispering. Spare shouted his proclamation with the full power of his lungs. And indeed there is danger in too much refinement or too much intellectuality. To lose touch with our basic sexuality must be as unwholesome as it is to lose touch with the soil. There are said to be American women so atrophied in their sex-instinct that they wish to be impregnated through a syringe; and it may have been excessive mentalisation which caused Gauguin to revitalise his instincts in Tahiti. Spare so frequently drew the monsters of the subconscious mind that the world's general understanding of psycho-analysis ought to increase his reputation. People can now look at strange and dreadful dreams which would once have seemed to them without significance and merely abominable: and Spare as an artist has so much power that in old age he may become even rich.

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## Pictures of the Occult by a Psychological Artist

First published in *The Sphere*, 1927

A selection of the extraordinary work of Mr. Austin O. Spare, who renounced material success in Mayfair to immerse himself in the slums of the Borough in the study of magic and the Occult. These pictures, the result of his researches into the hinterland of the soul, are now on exhibition at the St. Georges Gallery.



Two Studies of Satyrs, Mythical Beings of the Borderland Between Brute and Human, Conceived by Mr. Spare to Dwell in the Borough, South of London Bridge, where he Himself Lives

Steeped in mysticism and the study of ancient magic, Mr Austin O. Spare, once hailed as an infant prodigy, whose work was hung at the Royal Academy when he was only

fourteen years of age, is now holding an exhibition at the St. George's Gallery, George Street, Hanover Square.

His work is comparable in its nightmare conception with Dore and in its delicacy to the later manner of Aubrey Beardsley: but although he deals with his subjects from an allegorical point of view, he has neither the brutality of the great illustrator of the Bible, nor the bitter cynicism of the decadent.



To his mind, filled as it is with the lore of religions, almost now forgotten, the Borough, where he dwells in penury, is peopled with the beings of the woodland of ancient Greece, the Satyr band attendant on the great god Pan.

These beings, whose name has become a synonym for lust, live, maintains Spare, in their horned horror in the drab streets south of London Bridge. The ribaldry and coarse revelry of the slums is due to the influence of these beings of the Borderland, he believes - and he has materialised them on his canvases.

Some of his work is executed with the faery lightness of silverpoint while other examples are in colour. Certain pictures, such as the "Dream Phantasmagoria" reproduced above, were directly inspired by spirit control, perhaps the first automatic artistry that is the work of one who is both an automatist and an artist.



"The Fallen": A Nightmare Allegory in the Pessimistic Manner which sometimes characterises the Work of Mr. A. O. Spare

Too many spirit drawings in the past lacked the technique that renders at least semi-intelligible to the non-elect work of Mr. Spare. The artist believes that much great work - Hamlet for example - was created under psychical impulse, and even when not "automatising," he ascribes a spirit direction to his brush.

Mr. Spare, who served through four years of the War, is the son of a City policeman and is a skilled worker in stained glass. He utilises self-hypnotism on occasion to stimulate his production and to direct his work, but his hand has been uninspired for as long as three months at a time.

Despite the easy criticism that such work is the outcome of a brain possibly affected by the character of his studies, possibly transcending that of the average, the innate beauty of Mr. Spare's art sets this exhibition on a level of its own.

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# Neither-Neither: Austin Osman Spare and the Underworld

by Marcus M. Jungkurth

First published in *Austin Osman Spare, Artist, Occultist, Sensualist*, Beskin Press, 1999

Whilst much has been written about Austin Osman Spare, the artist and the magician, the psychological impact of his work seems to have attracted little attention so far. Leaving aside for the moment his fine art or his outstanding portraits with all their poetic strength, we will instead focus on Spare's symbolic and magically inspired drawings many of which have to be interpreted in the light of his written work. As modern depth psychology has shown, the human unconscious mind expresses itself in images, metaphors and symbols (1) rather than in words or contents of concrete meaning. Dreams, of course, are one example for the symbolic expressions of the unconscious we are all acquainted with and, according to modern models of the human psyche, they do not only occur during sleep but continue during daytime underneath the waking consciousness even though we are rarely aware of it. The psychologist and writer James Hillman has even gone further claiming that each individual appears to be re-living some archetypal drama from ancient mythologies prevailing as a main theme underlying individual life. These strata reside within the depths of our unconscious and formulate the continuous dream-state by re-enacting the respective mythological theme. Besides outer factors like individual experience, social interaction and education which constitute the human personality, consciousness as a whole thus embodies on a deeper level also one or more of the archetypal figures (2). Myths are thus far more than just fairy-tales from mankind's remote past, they constitute a living reality in the life of modern man. Mythology is no doubt an important theme occurring over and over in Spare's work, and in the following we will try to analyse which archetypes seem to have had an especially strong impact on his life as an artist.

According to the model laid forth above, human consciousness is composed of a multitude of layers of simultaneous activity, the distinction between the conscious and the subconscious thus being a convenient but arbitrary mode of trying to draw a map of mind. Human consciousness is able to actively concentrate or focus on one level at a time only, which is why one is tempted to assume that all other planes are inactive in waking state, but actually we just shift our attention all the time. While walking on the street on the way home the dream, which we thought had ended when waking up, continues, while concentrating on the traffic, we listen to inner dialogs or recapitulate the day, and yet we perceive consciousness as a continuity by simply shifting the point of view as the need arises. Now some people, notably creative personalities and artists, have a natural affinity to also become aware of the other levels which for the most of us remain hidden, and thus it doesn't come as a surprise that Spare termed the unconscious "the storehouse of

memories with an ever-open door”. Especially artists by virtue of their ability to directly express their creativity through the unconscious often have access to those layers; besides the artist whose works this exhibition is showing, authors like H.P. Lovecraft or the contemporary artist H.R. Giger, to name but a few, spring to mind. The artist directly translates the raw material which is rising from his unconscious into form and image, drawings or paintings, or clothes it in poetry, prose or music. “All geniuses have active sub-consciousness, and the less they are aware of the fact, the greater their accomplishments. Know the subconsciousness to be an epitome of all experience and wisdom, past incarnations as men, animals, birds, vegetable life, etc. etc., everything that exists, has and ever will exist” (4).

What separates nocturnal dream-sleep from an actual direct experience of the unconscious layers of mind is a very thin borderline only, and the crossing of this line has been aptly described as ‘the journey to Hades’ (3). As we know from classical mythology, the intervention of Hades invariably turns the world upside down; now phenomena are seen not only through the eyes of Eros and human life and love, but also through Thanatos: “‘Entering the underworld’ refers to a transition from the material to the psychical point of view. Three dimensions become two as the perspective of nature, flesh and matter fall away, leaving an existence of immaterial, mirrorlike images, eidola ...the Greek word Eidolon signifying an image (2). Spare described the state when consciousness has crossed this fine line as Neither-Neither or Inbetween, “not this - nor that”, out of which most notably his automatic drawings rose: “...the ‘Neither-Neither’ principle of those two, is the state where the mind has gone beyond conception ...The ‘I’ principle has reached the ‘Does not matter - need not be’ state, and it is not related to form. Save and beyond it, there is no other, therefore it alone is complete and eternal (4). The key to reaching this state is the attainment of a “total vacuity” of the conscious mind which concept is also an important part of Eastern religion such as the Buddhist path to enlightenment or Yoga and Tantra exercise. Spare seems to have been intuitively aware about the inherent dangers of his method, as he wrote total vacuity “is difficult and unsafe for those governed by morality, complexes” in which case an inflation of the unconscious followed by obsession is likely to occur. Spare’s goal was to explore the strata of the unconscious, the underworld, in a reverse evolutionary order in order to transcend the laws of cause and effect, thus to attain an absolutely pure and unadulterated state in which reality appears as truth as opposed to conception: “The law of Evolution is retrogression of function governing progression of attainment, i.e., the more wonderful our attainments, the lower in the scale of life the function that governs them.” This retrogression was to reactivate the sentient atavisms of evolution still present in man, examples of which can again be seen in many of Spare’s automatic drawings. Whilst this approach may seem to be directly opposed to the common idea that evolution consists of diversification and of structures getting increasingly complex, Spare’s idea in some sense still fits many religious conceptions as, e.g., the Buddhist goal of reaching nirvana, nothing, by reducing the ‘false’ views and conscious constituents of mind gradually until nothing but absolute silence remains. Whether or not Spare succeeded in this respect, we will not attempt to judge in this place, but one of the apparent dangers of this special and highly original method Spare employed consists of the risk of becoming obsessed by whatever contents arise from the deepest levels of the unconscious or, to express it in more occult terms, fall

prey to the spirits evoked in the accompanying states of trance. As Spare's "Note on the difference of Magical Obsession (Genius) and Insanity" (4) shows, he was well aware of this danger and therefore chose to consciously evoke magical obsession by using certain symbols or sigils which served as gateways to direct him to the unconscious levels he wished to explore. His systematic approach to categorise the strata experienced led to the development of his "Alphabet of Desire" with each letter, itself composing a symbolic representation of an archetypal and primordial state, representing a well-defined original principle with a strong emphasis on sexuality: "Twenty-two in number, they correspond to a first cause. Each analogous to an idea of desire, and are a symbolic cosmogony. ... By knowledge of the first letter, one is familiar with the whole alphabet, and the thousands they imply. They are the knowledge of desire" (4).

Not only in Spare's automatic drawings, but also in his other work archetypal and mythological motives prevail. Already in Spare's rather early book *Earth Inferno* (5), we find the puzzling statement "Death is All", and as "Zos vel Thanatos" - one of his mottoes and title of his creed which so far remained unpublished - he identified himself with Thanatos, Death, which was also one of the bynames of the Greek underworld god Hades. As in the famous mythological motif of Hades' abduction and rape of Persephone which, as we have to remember, is not just psychopathy but a central initiatory mystery in the Eleusis myths, the archetype of Hades bears an intrinsic erotic component whilst, as indicated above, it is at the same time turning matters upside down. No wonder, then, that also in Spare's interior worlds Thanatos merges with Eros, the spirit and principle of life, who however in this context is to be regarded the brother of death and not the principle that will save us from it (3). Eros as an archetype also bears distinct female qualities relating him to the anima principle, both referring to the reflexive instinct which Jung associated with the basis of consciousness, and so he defined her as the archetype of life itself, as the personification which unconsciously involves us with larger collectivities of both inner and outer worlds (11). In this sense we can speak of the anima as the projection - making actor, the Shakti and the Maya that gives life to a person and in the artist serves as his muse. The concepts of death and sexuality are thus intimately interwoven which explains why in ancient mythology many of the early Goddesses like the Phoenician Astarte or even Aphrodite in Sparta and on Cyprus were both Goddesses of Love as well as of War and Death; many other examples can be found in Egypt, Mexico and Mesopotamia.

Spare's night-journey to the Witches' Sabbath led him to encounters not only with satyrs, ancient creatures and demons, but most notably with the dark side of the Great Mother, reminding us of the hero's travels through the Gates of Night as found in the myth of Ishtar, the Egyptian Book of the Dead or in Apuleius' famous description of the initiation into the mysteries of Isis. The symbolic reality of the terrifying female draws its images mainly from the interior world, the negative elementary character of the female expresses itself in fantastic and chimerical images which do not originate in the outside world. Thus it becomes evident that the terrifying or monstrous female is a symbol of the unconscious itself. As Erich Neumann (5) has shown, the experience of the negative or evil side of the anima is part of the mystery of inner transformation by the annihilation of the male or patriarchal consciousness and the subsequent reincarnation out of the female



womb. Again the motif of reduction or regression shines through, here by reaching backwards to the cellular level of the very beginning of life itself. A destruction of traditional values occurs during this process, the ideals of beauty and harmony which are too often but a by-product of society's current tastes, are turned upside down in order to release the anima or female within: "The desertion of the 'Universal Woman' lying barren on the parapet of the Subconscious in humanity; and humanity sinking into the pit of conventionality. Hail! The convention of the age is nearing its limit, and with it a resurrection of the Primitive Woman". (6) His identification of the "Universal Woman" - the mediatrix of the unknown acting as psychopompos - with the element of Earth underlines the dark aspect of his anima, her relation to death, decay and age, as the caverns of earth even in ancient times were both temples of initiation and tombs: the Great Mother taking all back into her what had originally emerged of her. Spare's encounters with his "Universal Woman", the luring quintessence of desire, with whom he "strayed into the path direct", led to the formulation of 'The new sexuality of ZOS', a sexuality not being limited to mere sensuality, but defined as pure cosmic consciousness embracing reality, freed from all convention and condition. For Spare, this woman, of whom actual woman was but an incomplete and distorted image, symbolized "all otherness", and to unite with her would lead to the realization and attainment of the Self. The anima's male counterpart, the animus, however remains strangely vague in Spare's work, he shows in zoomorphic forms or is reduced to partial representations as head or phallus. Whilst the androgynous figure, the divine hermaphrodite, as a symbol of the hieros gamos, the sacred marriage and reconciliation of the opposites, is an occasional motif in his drawings, it appears as idealized vision, cloudy and distant in its expression, as if not yet fully realized. One has the impression that especially during his later years, Spare embraced the left side of existence under the exclusion of the other half of reality, the whole of which he was no doubt longing for. Also his increasing withdrawal from the outer world can be understood as a sign of denial which often follows a one-sided identification with the interior worlds, the anima as the guiding spirit being responsible for depersonalisation, as it is her who provides the relationship between man and the world; depersonalisation must be distinguished from depression in this context, as it is less an inhibition of vital functions and the narrowness of focus than it is a loss of personal involvement with and attachment to self and world (10). Naturally one wonders whether this form of imbalance is not that which exactly constitutes the great artist, whether the resulting inner strain is not a prerequisite and driving force for artistic creativity. The creative genius rarely is a well-balanced individual as the biographies of countless renowned artists of the past clearly show.

Austin Osman Spare has left to us not only his extraordinary artwork which certainly makes him one of the most remarkable painters of his time, but also an interesting method and practical approach of gaining access to the unconscious. As, again, the unconscious ex-presses itself in symbolic ways only, art provides excellent means to enable us to enter communication with it. Besides other, more mental techniques like the active imagination, C.G. Jung also recommended to work with drawings or paintings as a means to get access to and express the archetypal contents of the psyche. Interestingly it does not matter whether the individual has artistic inclinations or not; to the contrary, the present author has found that the art created by the unconscious more often than not

shows abilities and even technical skills the individual would not be capable to exhibit in the ordinary conscious state of mind. Spare developed a special technique which he called the 'Death Posture'-a drawing of the same title is the frontispiece of his *Book of Pleasure* (4) - which he defined as "a simulation of death by the utter negation of thought" and which was to reactivate the deeply buried unconscious memories (9). In less uncanny terms the whole process can be roughly summarised as a silencing and drawing-in of the senses in order to become 'empty', a 'vacuity', so that all mental processes come to a halt. In nature any vacuum will not exist for long, *natura abhorret a vacuo*, as soon as the chance arises, it will fill itself; the vacuum within being attained, the archetypal contents are automatically drawn up, any conscious effort neither being necessary nor desired in order to avoid any censoring by the values of the conscious mind. The actual process Spare himself used to pass through when working with the Death Posture can easily be adapted according to individual needs and skills. For reaching a vacuity in the mind, a variety of Yoga exercises or meditations can be employed which we have already described elsewhere (7). A work-space with paper or cardboard, pencils, coal or ink is to be prepared beforehand; oil-based paints and the like should be avoided, as the contents usually arise quite sudden, and there will be no time for detailed and refined elaboration. As the reader will have noted, Spare's automatic workings are coal and pencil drawings or have only later been worked out. The inner vacuity once being reached, the unconscious will immediately respond and express itself. You just have to wait and start to draw as soon as any image arises. Part of the present author's personal work was to investigate and represent archetypal contents by means of art, and one of the most remarkable outcomes was that the artwork produced in the state of being "inbetween" opened a direct pathway to archetypes which could be made conscious also beyond the trance. Faces out of dreams, of the past long forgotten, the countenances of the inner male and female, ancient deities rose out of the trance, thus building a bridge between the underworld and upperworld uniting that which has been "divided for love's sake, for the chance of union" (8). The recommendation to put this method into practice, very often yields a 'I couldn't do this, I have no talent' as a reply - this is far from being true. We firmly believe that the artist is buried in each and every one of us, it is only matter of trustfully daring: "The soul has no language, levels or values, except its own, but it answers to all affectiveness" (9).

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# Late Nineteenth-Century Automatism and Proto-Cybernetic Communication: the case of Austin Osman Spare

by Chris Miles

## Introduction

The figure I will be talking to you about today, Austin Osman Spare (1886-1956), is uniquely suited to helping us investigate the shifting conceptions of automatism in the long nineteenth-century.

An artist, writer and self-described sorcerer, Spare was initially a celebrated young addition to the London scene of the late 1890s and early 1900s, earning enthusiastic praise from George Bernard Shaw and John Singer Sargent, amongst others. However, the decidedly unusual style and subject matter of his art, as well as his prickly temperament, began to increasingly isolate him from the bohemian establishment and by the time of his death in 1956 Spare was largely forgotten and his work mostly unshown.

His reputation has been progressively growing since the early 1970s, however, as a result of a number of books written by Kenneth Grant, a friend of Spare's later, down-and-out years and, not coincidentally, a disciple of Aleister Crowley.

Grant's enthusiastic support of Spare's art and writing has resulted in his work having a strong influence on modern occultism and his paintings, sketches and ephemera have recently begun to command high prices at auction.

Central to Spare's oeuvre are the small number of books that he published during his own lifetime that outlined his own personal magical belief system. This system affords automatism a key position and consequently, Spare is one of the few accomplished artists in history to have written extensively on their own use of automatic processes. What I hope to do today is to outline the manner in which Spare's automatism curiously synthesises the tension between the nineteenth-century spiritualist tradition and the subsequent move towards the '*scientification*' of the phenomena produced by that

tradition, using as a unique catalyst his magical interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution.

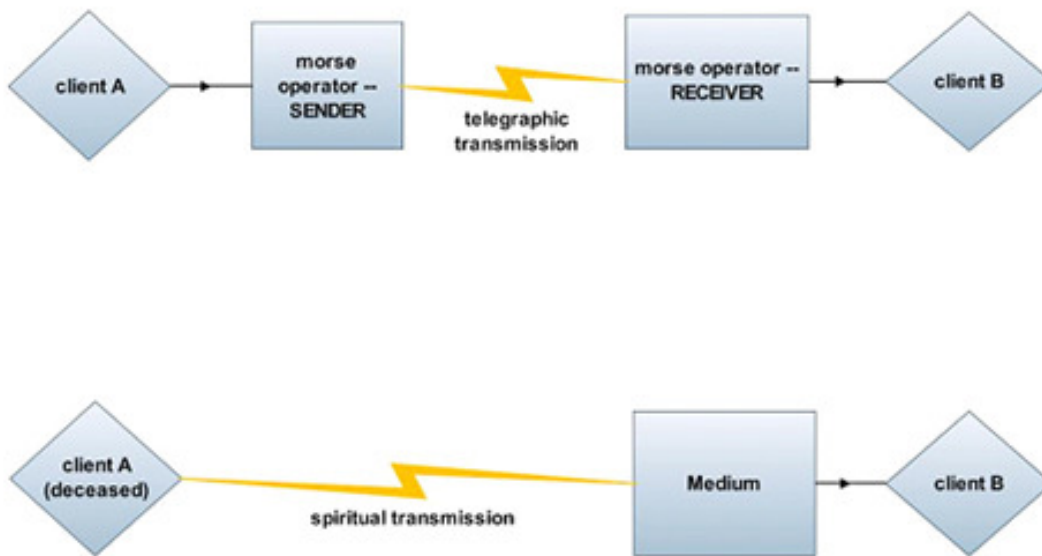
### **The Spiritualist Tradition**

Within the context of Spiritualism, taken as the rough cluster of beliefs and practices that evolved from the initial performances of Maggie and Kate Fox in 1848 and the years following, there are a number of processes often identified as automatism – automatic writing (practiced by Kate Fox herself), use of the Ouija Board or Planchette, table-tilting, automatic speech and automatic drawing. However, as has been pointed out, for instance by Daniel Cottom, Spiritualism does not represent a very clearly organised or homogenous movement: there was, from its inception, no single guiding voice, the Fox sisters apparently uninterested in providing any form of theoretical or methodological framework for their workings. Consequently, the Spiritualist movement demonstrates a wonderfully wide body of variations across matters of belief, practice and nomenclature. However, much of the early rhetoric produced by supporters of the Fox sisters and the movement that followed in their wake shares the use of the telegraph as a root metaphor. Phrases such as the “spiritual telegraph”, “telegraphic dispatches from spirits” and “celestial telegraph” were common ways of describing the table-rapping phenomenon.

Indeed, Andrew Jackson Davis, a monumental figure in the early history of American Spiritualism, framed the events in Hydesville (the Fox's hometown) as the final successful result of repeated attempts by Benjamin Franklin (that is, the spirit of Franklin) to establish an “electrical method of telegraphing from the second sphere to the earth's inhabitants” (Davis, 1851).

From this perspective, Spiritualism is *fundamentally* an automatism – the seer or medium (in whose presence the raps are manifested) is a telegraph station, a conduit for electrical messages that themselves echo the (by 1848) modish cadences of Samuel Morse's code.

Work by R. Laurence Moore and Werner Sollors, amongst others, has demonstrated the strong connections between the growth of the physical and spiritual telegraphs. For my purposes today, what is important about this relationship is the common communication scheme that makes the metaphor so appealing.



As we can see here, the telegraph, with its encoded and decoded tappings serving clients on both ends of a transmission conduit is an obvious analogue for the Spiritualist enterprise and one that neatly transferred an acceptable marketing model to the practice. It is noteworthy, indeed, that the communicative role of the medium quickly evolved from a vaguely-defined facilitator or *catalyst* to that of a more clear and familiar *operator*. Initially, the Fox sisters' *presence* brought on the rapping of tables – they themselves were not involved in any communicative action (speech, writing, etc.): people asked simple questions and then heard rappings which were interpreted as responses. However, as the crowds grew, news traveled and the opportunities for public demonstrations increased – and so there came a need for a more sophisticated and efficient, and perhaps more clearly performative, communicative turn. The initial steps taken were introduced by an acquaintance of the Foxes, Isaac Post, and consisted of a coding of the alphabet to enable the rappings to more practicably spell out words and sentences (rather than signal simply ‘yes’, ‘no’ and the lower numbers). Increasing refinements to the speed of communication in the séance resulted in an increased use of the body of the medium – the hands and the voice in particular became subsumed into the communicative network, or rather the lines of communication became internalized into the body of the medium. The planchette and prototypes of the Ouija Board enabled a far quicker processing of the alphabet but necessitated the highly significant surrender of the body to the spiritual telegraphic mechanism. This surrender was accomplished with little questioning or opposition in part due to the distinct lack of ideological framework around the Fox sisters' early performances and also in part due to the established (if distinctly marginal) traditions of Swendonborgian seership and Mesmerism. Responding to what well might have been external suggestion, the Fox sisters and those who rapidly followed in their wake, began to surrender their bodily autonomy in order to become living Morse keys.

The production of automatic text thus became a commonplace practice amongst the many varieties of Spiritualist gatherings. For Frederic Myers, a one-time President of the Society for Psychical Research, writing at the end of the 19th century in his canonical, two-volume work entitled *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, automatism, which he divides into sensory and motor varieties, provided the strongest evidence for “something transcending sensory experience in the reserves of human faculty” (Vol. 1, p.222).

Myers’ definition of motor automatism will now serve us as a convenient jumping-off point for an examination of Austin Osman Spare’s own understanding and practice. Psychologists and physiologists had, by the time of Myers’ writing, attempted to include automatism within their own disciplinary bodies. The physiologist William Carpenter’s 1874 coining of the term “ideomotor” to cover any human behaviour that does not depend upon volition was perhaps the initial step to begin to include the variegated phenomena of the automatisms as well as facets of mesmerism and hypnosis within the medico-scientific paradigm. Late nineteenth-century psychology, and in particular the school of dynamic psychiatry which was to influence the later Surrealists so deeply, began to try and offer non-Spiritualist explanations for the quite obvious and repeatable phenomena that automatism produced: Pierre Janet’s important *L’Automatisme psychologique*, published in 1889, was an attempt to analyse the practices of mediums in order to both *explain* them using Janet’s model of the mind and then *use* them for therapeutic purposes.

The scientific investigation of automatism included, on its periphery, the work of those ‘believers’ in the reality of spiritual communication who wished to bring empirical rigour to the examination of psychic or spiritual practices.

Foremost amongst such figures, of course, were the members of the Society for Psychical Research. The writings of Frederick Myers, an SPR member and President, provide us with a clear example of the attempted intellectual fusion of the medical with the spiritual in an attempt to position automatism within a scientific paradigm. The following quote serves to illustrate Myers’ rhetorical hybridisation of medical language:

In the first place, then, our automatisms are *independent* phenomena; they are what the physician calls *idiognomonic*. That is to say, they are not merely symptomatic of some other affection, or incidental to some profounder change. The mere fact, for instance, that a man writes messages which he does not consciously originate will not, when taken alone, prove anything beyond this fact itself as to the writer’s condition. He may be perfectly sane, in normal health, and with nothing unusual observable about him. This characteristic –provable by actual observation and experiment –distinguishes our automatisms from various seemingly kindred phenomena.

(Myers, Vol 2. p. 87)

Myers theorized that all of the automatisms were what he called “nunciative”, or message-bearing, but that in most cases those messages originated from “within the automatist’s own mind” (p. 88). This position enabled him to align himself, at least superficially, with the less-marginalised, more scientifically-established, work of contemporary psychiatric theorists and physiologists. However, for Myers, what this really meant was that there was a part of the mind that was innately sensitive to the spiritual or transcendent world and it was that part, the subliminal, as he referred to it, which was taking control over motor movements in a way that Myers (perhaps inadvertently displaying his Spiritualist sympathies) likened to a telegraph operator. For Myers, then, automatisms were a means for the subliminal self to communicate with the supraliminal self and so make the latter aware of a large ocean of information and impressions that it would normally be deaf and blind to.

### **Spare’s Automatism**

Austin Osman Spare’s theory of automatism can be seen as a parallel, if far more extreme, version of Myer’s attempt to frame automatism within the language of contemporary research upon the mind, drawing it away from its rather anti-intellectual roots in Spiritualism and the séance and attempting to couch it in more rational, scientific, if still quite *spiritual*, rhetoric.

Although Spare had little interest in the Spiritualist and séance scene he was deeply involved in the occult revival of the late 19th century: he was a member of Aleister Crowley’s *Argentum Astrum* Lodge, familiar with the writings of Eliphaz Levi and S. L. MacGregor-Mathers (one of the founders of *The Order of The Golden Dawn*) and also deeply influenced by H. P. Blavatsky’s Theosophy movement.

He was, however, first and foremost, an artist and automatic drawing for him was an important, practical element in his method as an artist.

In 1913, Spare published his third book, entitled *The Book of Pleasure (Self-Love): The Psychology of Ecstasy*. This extraordinary work is a collection of short chapters, heavily illustrated with automatic drawings of varying complexity and finish, that impart to the reader the details of Spare’s creed – his personal mythology, his sorcery, his magic.

One of the chapters is entirely concerned with an explication of the practice of automatic drawing and this, along with a more extensive article co-authored with his friend and fellow-artist, Frederick Carter, and published in ‘*Form*’ magazine in 1916, provides us with a detailed view of Spare’s theory of automatism.

Before moving on to an examination of these texts, a quick browsing of the illustrations to *The Book of Pleasure* will alert us to a few obvious features. Drawings which appear to be automatic in nature (they are composed of continuous, meandering lines often appearing to develop the figurative from otherwise abstract forms) are usually framed by a mixture of cryptic text, what look like letters form an unknown alphabet and stylised

miniature diagrams. Furthermore, there are some illustrations which have perhaps some automatic component but in other respects are far more 'worked out'.

We can, then, through a superficial examination of these drawings, get the general impression that for Spare automatism is an **integrated** part of artistic composition and design.

Turning now to Spare's own explication of automatic drawing – Spare tells us that "automatic drawing is a vital means of expressing what is at the back of your mind (the dream-man) and is a quick and easy means to begin being courageously original – eventually it evolves itself into the coveted spontaneous expression and the safe omniscience is assured" (TBOP, p.55)

Automatic drawing, then, is used by Spare to initially provide access to the "back of the mind" which can, through an evolution of practice, lead to "spontaneous expression". Spare's definition of Art is drawn in similar lines, it being for him "the instinctive application (to observations or sensations) of the knowledge latent in the subconsciousness" (p.55).

Although it might appear that for Spare, the "dream-man" is being passively channelled in the practice of automatic drawing, there is in fact a significant degree of interaction between the 'consciousness' and the "subconsciousness". Initially, for example, the artist must practice the easy, flowing production of "simple forms". Spare describes this as the hand being "trained from the accustomed practice to work freely and of itself" (p.55). The aim being to "allow the hand to draw itself...with the least deliberation possible" (p.56).

Of course, a traditional Spiritualist approach to the automatic banishes any possibility of conscious deliberation. The medium surrenders themselves to an entirely external message stream and training would be fundamentally anathema. Indeed, the use of the word 'sensitive' to describe many practicing (and professional) mediums indicates a natural ability to serve as a conduit for the spirit realm, rather than an achieved mastery of technique.

Furthermore, Spare's conception of the automatic process is strongly goal-orientated. So, once one has achieved the freedom to let one's hand draw on its own then one has to consider what one wishes the hand to draw.

Spare directs his automatism through the use of what he calls his "sigil method". Briefly, one condenses the written goal into a compact monogram which bears no visual relation to the sense of the desire. This 'sigil' is then concentrated upon in order to aid in the production of an oblivious or vacuous state in the conscious mind. Then the hand having been trained to draw on its own even when the conscious mind is not directing it, the automatic drawing is produced corresponding to the original desired goal.



Spare's method is a form of two-way communication, then. The sigil contains a goal stated by the conscious mind which is then encoded and presented to the unconsciousness, the "dream-man". The hand, trained (in an analogue to the highly trained hand of the Morse operator) to respond to the promptings of the unconscious thus expresses the visualised 'answer' to the conscious mind.

From the essay with Frederick Carter we may obtain an even clearer sense of the goal-directed nature of Spare's method:

"An 'automatic' scribble of twisting and interlacing lines permits the germ of ideas in the subconscious mind to express, or at least suggest itself to the consciousness. From the mass of procreative shapes, full of fallacy, a feeble embryo of ideas may be selected and trained by the artist to full growth and power. By these means may the profoundest depths of memory be drawn upon and the springs of instinct tapped"

(Form, p. 2)

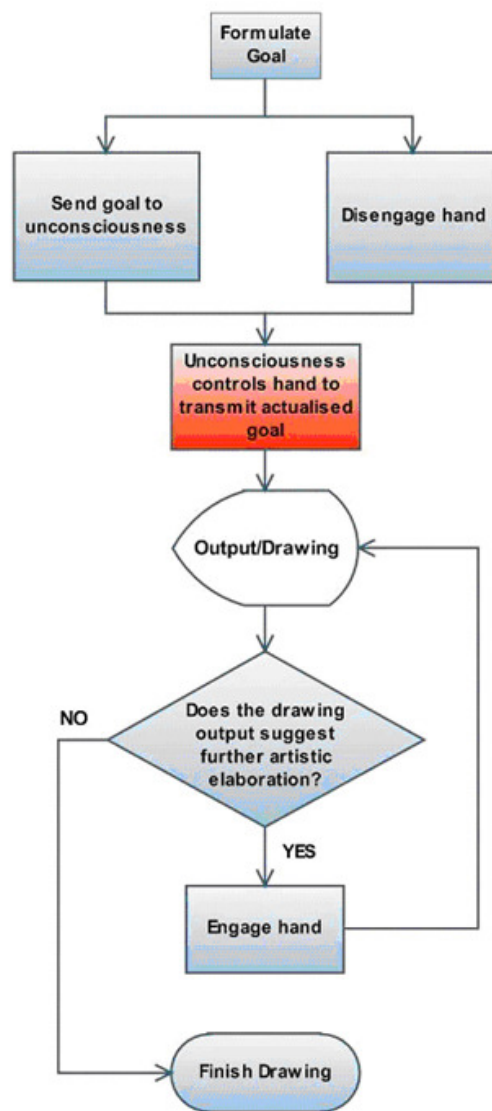
Although this essay is presented within the context of an art journal rather than being extracted from Spare's highly personal presentation of sorcery, the comparatively more svelte discourse highlights the strong sense of what I will call proto-cybernetics that informs his methodology. By proto-cybernetics what I mean is that the process Spare describes is one that can be formulated in terms of a goal-directed communication and control system that uses knowledge of results to self-correct. Although such terms belong to the early days of cybernetics, particularly the work discussed in the Macy Foundation Conferences during the 1940s and 50s, it is worthwhile noting that some of the core ideas that fed into the study of self-correcting systems were already present at the beginning of the twentieth-century in the form of theories of learning and behaviour based upon what was called "knowledge of results". The work of the American psychologist Edward Thorndike would provide a prime example.

Let me re-frame the Sparean conception of automatism within these terms:

- Automatism is a technique that focuses on goal attainment. The artist must first establish a system which works fluidly and dynamically to respond to a particular level of control.
- The "dream-man" and conscious mind are mediated by the hand – and the eye.
- The conscious mind forms a goal and proceeds to visualise this goal in a manner that it itself cannot interpret, but the "dream-man" can.
- The "dream-man", responding to the expression of the goal, proceeds to express its own attempts to attain this goal through the hand (which has now been uncoupled from conscious control).

- The eye observes the hand’s expression and then carries this information to the conscious mind. Spare’s language regarding the subsequent stage is important to remember now – the artist “selects” and “trains” the images – the unconscious is “tapped”: not allowed full dominance but rather actively nurtured. The artist, therefore, is responsible for using, adapting, “training” the flow of images from the “dream-man”-controlled hand.

Clearly, a delicate system is being articulated here, wherein the conscious artist, at certain points, steers the hand which otherwise is controlled by the unconsciousness. Indeed, what Spare would appear to be describing is a *negative feedback loop* designed to control for a particular goal and which needs to communicate at two different levels, the conscious and the unconscious.



When one considers the exact flow of communication and control in the system that Spare describes a number of features become evident. Although the unconsciousness is the initial source for the drawing, there is conscious judgement at play – at some point, when the artist’s eye notices an artistic opportunity, the hand is once more taken under conscious control. There is, it would therefore seem, an actually quite limited role for the unconsciousness – it provides the germ of an idea, the concentrated essence of something that the artist may immediately develop into something more designed or composed.

However, for Spare, the unconsciousness is *not* just producing random output for the conscious mind to elaborate upon, but rather unfettered, unmodified apprehension of what he called the “storehouse of memories” (p.47). Spare describes this in the following way:

“Know the sub-consciousness to be an epitome of all experience and wisdom, past incarnations as men, animals, birds, vegetable life, etc., etc. everything that exists, has and ever will exist. Each being a stratum in the order of evolution. Naturally, then, the lower we probe into these strata, the earlier will be the forms of life we arrive at; the last is the Almighty Simplicity.

(TBOP, p.47)

The admixture of terminology here from Blavatskian Theosophy and Darwinian evolutionary theory reflects the highly syncretic nature of Spare’s conception of the “storehouse of memory”. Centrally, the information and experience he alludes to are entirely internal to the artist yet they are, Spare contends, real “existences” contained within us. Spare uses, indeed, the word “Karmas” to describe particularly the earlier existences that an artist might wish to experience, such as the incarnation of a bird or bat. And yet, at the same time as he uses a term from such an obviously Orientalist-mystical background he is also invoking the empirical scientific aura associated with Darwin’s legacy. So, we read:

“The law of Evolution is retrogression of function governing progression of attainment, i.e. the most wonderful our attainments, the lower in the scale of life the function that governs them. Our knowledge of flight is determined by that desire causing the activity of our bird Karmas” (p. 47)

So, in conclusion, if automatism were seen by Spiritualists as message streams from the dead, and if psychiatry subsumed those messages into the individual, then Spare fuses the two perspectives with a pseudo-Darwinian theory of evolutionary history being contained within the individual unconsciousness. In this sense, the ‘dead’ that Spare is in contact with are dead evolutionary links, ‘atavisms’ from our pre-history that express themselves through the artist’s surrendered hand – in a cybernetically-controlled evolutionary telegraph.

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Note: This paper was delivered as part of the ‘Automatic Creativity’ panel at the ‘Minds Bodies Machines’ conference held at Birkbeck College, London, on 6th and 7th of July, 2007. I have dispensed with footnoting the paper and instead have provided a bibliography of works cited at the end of the piece.

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# Exploring Spare's Magic

by Lionel Snell

First published in *The Divine Draughtsman*, Beskin Press, 1987

## INTRODUCTION

*The Book of Pleasure* describes Spare's magical system and its philosophical basis. In it he introduces an ultimate called "Kia" (analogous to the "Tao", the Cabalistic "Unmanifest", or Jung's "Pleroma") from which all manifestation stems via a process of refraction through the principle of duality: we perceive, for example, black and white because they are manifest as a polarised pair, in the Kia they exist only in potential, being undistinguished and so unmanifest. It is clear from elsewhere in his writing that Spare was acquainted with Boehme's tract "On the Supersensual Life", where the disciple asks the master how he can come to know the supersensual life and is told "when thou canst throw thyself into THAT, where no creature dwelleth, though it be but for a moment..."

As humans we are caught up in dualities, divided against ourselves and ever seeking completion by living in desire, our universe being fragmented by our beliefs. Spare advocates a turning back to Kia and the end of all belief, denying all the dualities by his "neither neither": think of a manifestation, eg "white"; not white implies black; neither white nor black implies what? say grey; neither black, white nor grey implies what? ... and so on until our imagination is exhausted and consciousness teeters on the brink of the void - as in the Buddhist "not this, not that" meditation. Thus we get to know the Kia, and Freedom.

To practice Spare's magic one must disentangle a conscious desire from one's web of conscious and semi-conscious beliefs, distilling the essence of that desire into a simple sigil with no conscious associations, then carrying that sigil back into the Kia by exhausting oneself and collapsing into what he describes as "the death posture" - a total flop-out with no consciousness other than the awareness of the sigil, until that too fades. For greatest effect this should be done at a time of despair or disappointment, when some other desire has been thwarted and there is a pool of frustrated libido - "free belief" he calls it - to fuel the operation.

Such a bare description of his magic doesn't do it great justice. It is best to read his original works together with the commentaries listed at the end of this essay\*. Rather than repeat existing material, this essay suggests some further ideas for research.

## THE BIRTH OF AN AEON

In 1904 Austin Spare wrote - or rather "created" - his first book, which was published in 1905 as *Earth Inferno*: "created" because this book contains more images than words, and half the words in it are themselves quotation from other sources. The result is pretty incomprehensible - even with hindsight.

In the wake of the "fin de siècle" decadence, was this incomprehensibility just a deliberate attempt by a trendy young artist to create an aura of mystery and glamour? Reading *Earth Inferno* I have the impression of someone who has passed through despair to receive a glimpse of mystical truth, and who is now struggling to portray that realisation. It looks like a revelation which fails to communicate (to me) the essence of what the artist experienced. The fact that nine years later he is still earnestly trying to explain his discovery, and with slightly greater success, in his *Book of Pleasure* does confirm a genuine desire to teach rather than mystify.

In that case, what is Spare trying to communicate? Nothing less than an entire philosophy of life and magic; but one so simple yet so difficult to grasp that it is perhaps best approached by comparison and contrast with other better known systems. I begin with some comparisons.

## **CROWLEY AND SPARE**

The opening words of *Earth Inferno* are a picture caption (dated 1904), which ends with a prophecy: "Hail! The convention of the age is nearing its limit/And with it the resurrection of the Primitive Woman", so Spare is announcing some sort of turning point in history. In that same year Aleister Crowley received his *Book of the Law* which announced the birth of a new age. Interestingly one element of this revelation is a celebration of the "scarlet woman" - a female archetype unchained and reminiscent of Spare's "primitive woman". This element is even more clearly present in the work of Dion Fortune. In 1904 she too was writing her first book: as a young girl she was finding inspiration for her schoolgirl poetry on the coast near Weston Super Mare, an inspiration which later blossomed in the book *The Sea Priestess* set in that place and concerned with a magical operation to liberate society from the Victorian straight-jacket and announce a new female archetype - the priestly woman of power.

These coincidences suggest that Spare might have "tuned into" what one would call, depending on one's own beliefs, a ferment of ideas, a new current of thought, the spirit of the times, or the birth of a new aeon. There is other evidence of this surge of revolutionary thinking around 1904: this was the year when Jung became drawn to Freud and his concept of the "unconscious"; it was the year of another explorer of the unconscious - Salvador Dali; it was the time of Steiner's disenchantment with theosophy which led to the birth of "anthroposophy". Other works completed in 1904 to be published in 1905 include Einstein's special theory of relativity, and his paper on the photoelectric effect which won him the Nobel Prize in 1921 and which provided the first strong evidence to support the newly formulated quantum theory.

All in all 1904 was a most interesting year, and this was put most clearly by Crowley when he announced it as the year of the birth of a new aeon. So let us begin by comparing Spare's revelations with Crowley's.

Disappointingly there is no obvious comparison between Crowley's *Book of the Law* and Spare's *Earth Inferno* - one the work of a writer, the other the work of an artist. The nearest thing to "*The Book of the Law*" written by Spare is the first part of his later *Focus of Life*. It consists of three chapters of aphorisms dictated by three different beings - Kia, Zos and Ikkah - which first appear in *Earth Inferno*, and it therefore demands comparison with "*The Book of the Law*" which also consists of three chapters dictated by three beings. As the last words from Kia are "I - infinite space" it is immediate to identify Kia with Nuit and to try to see parallels in the two texts.

The only obvious parallels are in Spare's second chapter which contains some pretty Thelemic utterances, such as:

"The mighty are righteous for their morals are arbitrary";  
"Judge without mercy, all this weakness is thy self abuse";  
"There is only one sin - suffering";  
"... be surely what thou wilt" (an interesting comparison with "do what thou wilt");  
"Fear nothing - strike at the highest" ... and so on.

*The Focus of Life* was, however, written after Spare had been in contact with Crowley, so these similarities may well be due to Spare knowing *The Book of the Law*; but remember that he had rejected Crowley, so any influence would not be slavish imitation but rather ideas chosen because they were in accord with his own vision. The conclusion I'm suggesting is that one way to view Spare's magic is as his own interpretation of a new current which entered the group mind around 1904. He was seeing one facet of the whole; Crowley, Einstein, Jung, Fortune and probably many others were to pick up other facets of it. Each tried to explain what they saw: some like Crowley provided very full accounts, others like Einstein provided very detailed accounts of smaller parts of the whole. Spare was trying to give a full account, an entire philosophy of existence but did not communicate it very clearly. So we can understand his work better if we allow other people's ideas to cast light on it.

The first difference between Crowley and Spare that strikes me is that Spare's writing provides a simple, coherent theory where Crowley provides a detailed technology. It is possible to read Spare carefully and come up with the response "yes, but what are you supposed to DO?" - there is little practical instruction. Crowley, on the other hand, has provided an enormous corpus of ritual and other practices, more than any person could ever master in a lifetime, but there are times when one is hard to put to find one coherent theory behind all these practices - he went through his Golden Dawn phase, his Buddhist phase, his Thelemic phase and so on. By way of analogy you could compare Spare's writing to Einstein's - it may be hard to understand, but behind it lays a very simple model of reality. To obtain great energy, according to Einstein, it is only necessary to split the atom; to obtain a desire, says Spare, it is only necessary to remove it to the

unconscious, organic level and consciously forget it. But in practice the simple splitting of an atom requires a vast investment in technology; similarly, most people cannot follow Spare's simple instructions unless they have previously done a lot of self development along the lines of, say, Crowley's magical technology (there may be some with innate magical sense, but most of us are still adrift on a sea of beliefs and desires). So one approach to Spare is to use his world-view to help clear one's mind of a surfeit of gods, while actually practicing Thelemic techniques to strengthen one for Spare's magical methods.

I like the contrast between Crowley's "do what thou wilt" and Spare's "be what thou wilt" because it illustrates my feelings that Crowley and Spare represent, as it were, the yang and yin of the new aeon. Though Crowley recognises that existence is pure joy, his magic reflects the will to power where Spare's reflects the will to pleasure. There is much of taoism in Spare's writings. Paradoxically, however, although female forms abound in his art, "the feminine" plays little part in his apparently misogynist writings. It is the spirit of his ideas which is so yin - as if the Feminine was working at the unconscious level in Spare whereas the Masculine was driving Crowley's unconscious.

One example of the "yin" nature of Spare's system is his emphasis on the importance of forgetting. In his system you have a desire, you devise an apparently meaningless sigil to encapsulate that desire, you exhaust yourself in a frenzy of activity until the only object remaining in consciousness is the sigil, you hold on to it until it has become charged with "free belief", then you must do all you can subsequently to forget the original desire - for conscious desiring will impede the realisation of the sigil. This is the difficult bit. It is also rather puzzling because we find a big divide here in magical theory: those systems which emphasise the "not desiring" (eg Spare, taoism, zen) and those which advocate enflaming oneself with desire - as in Crowley's instructions for devotion to a deity, or as in the "self help" systems which demand a constant affirmation of one's objectives (I recall seeing an American lady doing Swedish drill while chanting "I MUST, I MUST, I MUST increase my BUST"). Both these extremes have a ring of truth, how can they be reconciled? It is not enough just to split the operation in two and say one needs to enflame oneself before it, and forget after - in traditional conjurations of the Holy Guardian Angel one goes on enflaming until success happens.

## **THE INNER AND THE OUTER**

One possible explanation is that the distinction may reflect the difference between introversion and extroversion. The extrovert is positive to the outside world, and negative to the inner world. When the extrovert attempts "inner" work he finds it a crazy place like Alice's looking glass world - you have to metaphorically walk backwards in order to move forwards. The introvert is much more at home in his inner world, but is more likely to be perplexed by the outer world: here the introvert finds that he has so often to go backwards in order to move forward. The introvert feels desire as such a vivid tangible force - perhaps more tangible than the actual object of desire - that the desire really does serve to block and render him impotent; thus the introvert is more often driven to using paradoxical methods in the outer world. This is in keeping with Eysenck's idea of the



extrovert as someone who needs greater stimulation to be effective, while the introvert needs to avoid overstimulation. If an extrovert wants his record in the charts he should plug it like crazy, but if the introvert wants to do the same he would do better to try to get the record banned! If the extrovert wants to become successful he should hang up “I’m the greatest” posters and constantly affirm his desire, while the introvert would do better to blow his desire on a sigil and then try so hard to fail that he eventually becomes an underground cult figure. Thus it seems that the magic of taoism and Spare is magic for introverts, while the out and invocatory stuff is better suited to the extrovert.

This is, of course, a gross oversimplification: no-one is pure extrovert or introvert; we are a mixture and so need to blend our magics. But it does suggest a useful concept to experiment with, and a possible answer to the problem that magic so often fails when the operator is too personally involved: if you wish to practice magic in a situation which seems very extroverted and “other” (like healing an unknown person at a distance), then you would well to “enflame yourself with prayer”. But if the matter is one which involves you very personally, then you would do better to follow Spare’s approach. Or perhaps the introvert would use Spare’s magic to operate on the outside world, and Crowley’s magic for inner working; while the extrovert needs Crowley’s magic for the outer and Spare’s on the inner? In either case, of course, the long-term object is to grow out of this slavery of the concept of intro/extroversion and start living!

## MAGIC AND THE MAN

Another interesting point is the distinction between the magic and the man. Anyone studying Spare’s magic books would expect the writer to be a sort of ascetic Zen master: “simplicity I hold most precious.” He advocates simplicity, asceticism: “Bed, a hard surface; clothes of camel hair; diet, sour milk and the roots of the earth. All morality and love of women should be ignored.” He rants against ritual magicians and all their parade and paraphernalia, but later in life he painted an altar piece for Grant’s Nuit Isis Lodge and was prepared to do work for Gerald Gardner as described in Grant’s *Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare*.

One answer is that many years had passed since his books were written - the man had changed. Another is that perhaps Spare was primarily just a channel for his magical ideas: someone to whom they were revealed but who never succeeded in fully realising them. Perhaps he too had difficulty in practising what he preached, being a man ahead of his time? His final chapter of *The Book of Pleasure* contains these words: “I... am impervious in purity (of self-love) - but I dare not claim its service! I am in eternal want of realisation... An opinionist, I fear to advocate an argument, or compromise myself by believing my own doctrines as such...” and so on.

The Austin Spare described by Kenneth Grant in his *Images and Oracles* sounds much more like a tribal shaman than a Zen master. Some people have asked, “which is the true Spare?” Grant actually knew Spare in his later years, so it is reasonable to assume that Spare was as he describes at that time, and we hear of Spare co-operating with ritual magicians, using such elaborations as an “earthenware virgin” for sex magic, and

muttering incantations as part of his procedure - elements which play no part in the system as described in *The Book of Pleasure*.

So do we conclude that he was a changed man? That he had degenerated (or even advanced?) from the pure system he described to a form of shamanistic sorcery? Personally I prefer to accept Grant's overall view of him as a master shaman, and believe that through his innate skills he obtained an early vision of a new system of magic, a magic for the coming age. Rather than debating as to which was the true Spare, we should therefore look to him as a prophet rather than a perfect practitioner of his own system, and we should instead concentrate on developing the technology of that system for ourselves and for future generations. Is this not basically what the new school of magic known as "chaos magic" is all about?

## CONCLUSION

If 1904 was indeed a revolutionary year, it is reasonable to ask if there are any astrological phenomena to support this. The most obvious one to strike me is the entry of Uranus (planet of upheaval) into Capricorn (sign of structures).

Once before since its discovery Uranus had entered Capricorn, in about 1820. This was the year when Oersted demonstrated the link between electricity and magnetism - a revelation which was to have a profound effect on conventional ideas of physical reality.

Although I'm not aware of any great occult crisis at that time, James Webb (in *Flight from Reason*) did choose 1820 to mark the beginning of what he called "the Age of the Irrational". I suspect that the new electromagnetic theories of the time inspired the "etheric" occult terminology of the last century, just as Einstein's theories inspire the occultists of this century to talk of "other dimensions". But if the entry of Uranus into Capricorn was less significant in 1820, could it mean we are looking at a minor cycle which had exaggerated impact in 1904 because of an impending Aquarian age, or the transition to Crowley's "Aeon of Horus"?

Anyway, in late 1987 we are now at the end of the final or "twelfth house" phase of this Uranus in Capricorn cycle, making it a very suitable time for a major exhibition and re-evaluation of Spare's work before Uranus enters Capricorn again next February.

Is the convention of the age once more reaching its limit? And will 1988 be as fruitful as 1904 was?

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\* This refers to the commentaries included in the essay "Spare Parts", a thorough introduction to the Sparean system of magic. This essay has been published in *Uncle Ramsey's Bumper Book of Magick Spells, and other essays on science and magic*.

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# Austin Osman Spare: A Note on His Work

by Ralph Straus

First published in *The Booklover's Magazine*, 1909



One must never forget that in the best days of art there were no art critics, and I sometimes wonder whether a time will come when art-criticism will be included amongst the grosser crimes. It is so easy, and so monotonous, to speak dreary platitudes about the inexplicability of beauty with the firm intention of following them by a fairly minute exposition of its qualities.

It is so easy to be fulsomely adulatory or impertinent, or merely contemptuous, and no one has yet convinced me that interpretation is a necessary complement to an art. One may talk of the conquest of intelligence over imagination in modern work; one may speak of this school or that, and one may express a good-humoured, if slightly superior, astonishment at a particular work of art which does not seem to have been built up on what are known, rather curiously, as regular lines; but I honestly doubt whether the juxtaposition of modern artist and modern critic is adding very much to the art save from the standpoint of history. I may admire the composition and disparage the technique, or I may enjoy the colouring and fall foul of the subject; as critic, in fact, I have enormous powers - but the powers are probably uniquely immoral. 'A critic,' wrote Hazlitt, 'does nothing nowadays who does not try to torture the most obvious expression into a thousand meanings, and enter into a circuitous explanation of all that can be urged for or

against its being in the best or worst style possible' - which is the last goal at which I should wish to aim. 'To elevate and surprise,' continues the same author, 'is the great rule for producing a dramatic or critical effect.' Here again it is necessary to say that I have no thoughts of causing either surprise or elevation. Probably, however, I am not a 'critic' at all.'

At the beginning of this year there was an exhibition of drawings in the Bruton Gallery by a hitherto unknown artist, and the critics thereupon made many curious and contradictory discoveries. That the artist had 'undeniable power' was very generally allowed. That he had accumulated horrors was as certain as that his ambition was of the 'wrong' kind. To one writer this work suggested a 'jeering, loose-limbed image of life,' whilst another informed the world that the exhibitor had learned more than a little from Japan. The artist, according to the last-mentioned, 'might become an impressive and penetrating realist, but we are not yet convinced that he has the gift of imagination even in those regions-neither of earth or hell, and certainly not of heaven - in which he loves to dwell - we might have said to wallow.' To others his work was a weird imitation of Beardsley and Goya and Rops and Hokusai and Greiner of Munich. To one he was brutal beyond measure, or even decency; to another he was merely fantastic and immature. To one he was in deadly earnest, to another he was a rather morbid poseur. 'His gaze,' wrote a critic in *The Daily Telegraph*, 'has assuredly not been upwards; we hope that his fall may not be fatal. Falling let him embrace his mother Earth, and from her derive true strength and a measure of sanity.' The exhibition was described as a 'strange, uncomfortable show.'

CATALOGUE  
OF  
Black and White Drawings  
BY



Bruton Galleries,  
13 Bruton Street,  
Bond Street, London,  
W. . . .

FULGUR

I did not see that 'strange, uncomfortable show,' but it led incidentally to the penning of a sentence which I wish to quote. 'Nobody,' wrote Miss Sketchley in the *Art Journal* 'who saw the drawings in the Bruton Gallery can have been indifferent to them.' In view of what I have seen I can well believe those words. Whatever opinion might have been

entertained of their merits or demerits, the drawings of this unknown artist could not be ignored. Who, then, was this man who, with a small collection of curiously baffling pictures, had suddenly sprung himself upon the mercies of artistic, or inartistic, London? He turned out to be a boy of nineteen, the son of a retired member of the Police Force, and certain of the newspapers claimed to have already discovered him. In point of fact, he had been interviewed some time before in *The Daily Chronicle*, and his name was Austin Osman Spare. He was the boy-artist who had exhibited at the Royal Academy two years before, the South Kensington art-scholar and silver medallist - recommended to the school there by Sir William Richmond and Mr. Jackson, R.A. - a former designer of posters for Causton's at the lordly salary of five shillings a week, and the juvenile author of one, and the illustrator of two, books which had attracted the attention of more than a single connoisseur. I saw those two books, confessed to a bewilderment, recalled incidentally certain works of such widely different artists as Michael Angelo and William Blake, and set out to meet the artist. And when he came to my house I was irresistibly reminded of the Angel in Mr. Wells's *Wonderful Visit*. It needed no more than five minutes' conversation to make me understand that he possessed what, for want of a better description, I must call the 'odd' point of view; he looked on life, and on the components of life, not as men usually look on them, but from a standpoint peculiarly his own. He was obviously one of those rare creatures possessed, like Socrates, of a daemon. Now a man with a daemon is a phenomenon very much to my liking, particularly when he happens to be an artist, because in that case he will draw not so much what he sees as what he thinks; and my visitor with the wonderful hair and the face of a Watts' Knight - he has caricatured it hundreds of times in his work, sometimes, I suspect, for want of a model - had elected to entertain thoughts of the weirdest nature. I was not surprised to learn that he had long been enthusiastic over the mysteries of the East - Buddhism and its legends, Theosophy and its Mahatmas, Magic and its bevy of Enchanters, such as have fascinated the children of all generations and will fascinate them to the end of all time. He had, indeed, explored the strait passages which lead away from the Things of Men towards the Far Unknown. He had read and dreamed of the occult and the diabolic, and, looking into his deep eyes, I wondered whether I would cast out my commonplace philosophy and begin to believe in reincarnation. We talked, I remember, of tortures and fairies, of tapestries and blood and were-wolfs, of magic and book-plates and religion, and after that I followed him round London for a sight of such works as he had sold.

The result of that journey was to assure me that the work was no less interesting than the boy. Both, to my mind, were startlingly new, and the suggestion of immaturity was by no means pronounced. I saw exactly what I had expected to see - a medley of Gargantuan figures in marvellously intricate compositions, wolf-men and devils, monstrous bird-men and soul-haunting trolls, fairies and magic and mist. There were headless bodies and bodiless heads, and over all the suggestion of such power as is rare in this age of correct and conventional work. For we are correct and conventional, even the most original of us, and a generation or two will have to pass before we have freed ourselves from the chain of superstition which is bound close about us from infancy. The work of this boy, however, seemed at first to be breaking most of the recognised canons, wherefore I rejoiced.

My personal inclination for the grotesque received full measure of satisfaction, yet I did not somehow gather that these black and white drawings and water-colour sketches altogether suggested the grotesque. I saw 'deerskin-vested satyrs, crowned with ivy-twist, advance, and put strange pity in their horned countenance' - but a satyr need not be merely grotesque. The work, however, explained the artist, which was exactly its purpose, and as I did not pretend to understand the artist, I was not in the least disappointed to find that I understood little of his work. Some of it provided me with a series of horrible reflections which were only dispelled at sight of a caricature of Mr Crooks, M.P. - a delightful sketch well worthy of publication - in Mr Pickford Waller's collection, yet I was never reminded of Weirtz. Some of it was uncouth, some almost gross, but I was never repulsed; I only enjoyed - and wondered.



FULGUR

Miss Sketchley in her article had truly said that the form of Austin Spare's art is a process, not a conclusion, and that he has been occupied in reproducing the figures of his imagination 'almost without question or reason' seems patent. By consequence, his drawings for the most part are filled with the 'monstrous and morbid shapes' to which the critic I have quoted draws attention. On the other hand, I do not know that I am prepared to admit with Miss Sketchley the 'essential healthiness' of the boy's imaginative faculties. I do not say that they are unhealthy - I merely cavil at the critic's choice of word. Here, indeed, one touches upon a question which has worried the critic for a century or more, and worried him, so far as I can see, to no purpose whatsoever. At all times health is difficult of explanation, but surely the healthy in art is altogether beyond definition. I dislike definitions at all times, perhaps because I am grossly unmathematical; but when it comes to the question of health - or the other thing - in art, I am cold to the

most impassioned reply. I am certain that the work is himself, which is all I demand of him, and if, as I think, it occasionally suggests a superabundance of cruelty, I, who hate cruelty, may be wroth, not with the work or the worker, but only with the Providence which has elected to produce minds of a torturing disposition. Austin Spare's work is natural because it is himself, but why it should be dubbed either healthy or the reverse, I do not know. Personally - were I wishful to speak vaguely - I should call it 'unhealthy' merely because it produces no purely normal reflections, but in that case I should have to define normal, and that in its turn would lead to a wordy paragraph which might satisfy a good many unscientific people, but would probably mean very little indeed. Art and health, however, are not, or should not be, in the least inter-dependent. Wherefore it will be superfluous to say more than that this strange boy's work must be taken to be the expression of an unusual personality gifted with a talent not yet wholly in proportion to its inventive powers - one can hardly wonder at this in view of the fact that he has had no more than a rudimentary and occasional training - but striving for no more than a faithful representation of its innermost self.

Here, perhaps, whilst on the question of health, it maybe permissible to quote from Austin Spare's own published words:

‘Alas!’ he writes, ‘I am morbid,  
And have put a purple colour about my brow.  
All men seem eating and drinking the  
“Joy of the Round Feast,” while I am  
Melancholy and silent, as though in a  
Gloomy wood, astray.  
Strange images of myself did I create,  
As I gazed into the seeming pit of others,  
Losing myself in the thoughtfulness  
Of my unreal self, as humanity saw me.  
But alas ! on entering to the consciousness  
Of my real being to find fostering  
-The all-prevailing woman,”  
And I strayed with her, into the path direct.  
“Hail! the Jewel in the Lotus,”

They are pregnant words for a boy of seventeen.

The two books please me least of all his work, but they might have been far better reproduced. Speaking of the first, *Earth Inferno*, Mr. James Guthrie calls it ‘an elemental and chaotic thing, full of significant art, and of still more significant conception.’ These words bear out my own opinion. He has suffered, and he has seen, and his sufferings have strangely, matured his mind. He is seer as well as artist, just as the great poets are also the great prophets.

There is an interesting preface, written by Mr. Guthrie, to the second of Austin Spare's publications, *A Book of Satyrs*. ‘With the unflinching assurance of the optimist as to the

ultimate,' he writes, '[Spare] treads with reforming energy where the effeminate and parsonic would whimper and weep helplessly. His is no gently advancing theory, but his satires (or satyrs, as he loves to call them) arrive as full-fledged and assertive dogma.' Indeed he sees the sores and the humbugs and the pettinesses of life with a looming, fearless eye, and this perhaps is what Miss Sketchley had in mind when she wrote that the boy's art was healthy. In this book he has attempted in some measure to do with his pencil that which Zola did with his pen, with the difference that for the Frenchman's reality he has substituted a mystical realism - to use a rather awkward oxymoron - and he has crowded into some dozen cartoons the basis of a surprisingly mature philosophy. I do not know that I have ever seen so fierce an exposition of the sores of life crowded into so small a space. There is mysticism, but there is also stark truth. No one could possibly look upon the drawings without a shock or a shudder. 'In his art,' continues Mr. Guthrie, 'Spare continually achieves the unexpected; his pattern is always original, his characteristic line is of fine nervous quality, his types are powerfully visualised. The very subtle irony of his temper is apparent in a hundred whimsical ways - in attitudes, gestures, expressions too delicate to be more than contributory to the whole impression. This appropriate irony especially fits Spare for satire, and it is here [in *The Book of Satyrs*] to be seen and felt, for it can neither be disregarded nor forgotten - which words it is well to be able to write of one satirist in our day of curbed enthusiasm and polite art.' For my own part, I could at once recognise a drawing of Spare's and that in its way is a test of personality.

I have seen many hundreds of studies which this boy has made, and I can say with truth that I have never seen such magnificent composition. Even his earliest work shows the same brilliant invention although the actual workmanship is often weak. My dear friend Desmond Coke possesses a water-colour study entitled 'The Sacrifice', painted at the age of fifteen - it called forth no small eulogy from Watts himself - which to my mind is almost a marvel of artistic arrangement. The draughtsmanship is poor and halting, but there is in it the groundwork for a great picture, and great pictures are surprisingly few in number.

His best work is undoubtedly that in the Chinese black and white which were Beardsley's most successful media, yet in the few watercolours which I saw in Mr Pickford Waller's collection there is a wealth of colour, as might frighten the more timid and amaze the student, but which, like the drawings, cannot be ignored. In particular there are three unnamed pictures presumably relating to Eastern Magic which, in point alike of composition and colour, compare favourably with the far more highly finished work of some of the recognised masters. There is indeed a suggestion of that feast of colour which Brangwyn - himself, by the way, to be numbered amongst Spare's admirers - almost alone amongst our native painters can so successfully provide. Nor indeed has there been the smallest sign of a waning imagination. I do not think that in the years to come Austin Spare will be numbered amongst those who have degenerated into the correct painters beloved by the average philistine, nor do I suppose that he will ever feel inclined to paint that which the many might call beautiful. He will never become popular, unless circumstances impel him to undertake hackwork wherein his soul does not make its impression, but if his progress be unretarded, he will have to be numbered amongst the



elect. It were useless to say that he still has much to learn, and it were as useless to point out that his knowledge of anatomy, while much more than rudimentary, might scandalise the professors of that science, and I should be harking back to my trade of fiction were I to suggest that he had yet to become immured to that modicum of discipline which is necessary in every branch of art. There is indeed the germ of a discipline already apparent in his more finished work.

At the moment he is illustrating a book of poems by C.F. Grindrod and a work of his own, steadfastly experimenting in tempora, and he is ambitious to paint a few portraits which shall be “symbols of the persons,” in which connection I may mention that he has done a caricature of myself, which, whilst a “speaking” likeness, is undoubtedly the ugliest thing on God’s earth.

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## Austin O. Spare

by R.E.D. Sketchley

First published in *The Art Journal*, 1908

There must be few people in London interested in art who do not know the name of Austin Osman Spare. The recent exhibition of his drawings made a sudden reputation for him, and the few who before the bringing together of his work had knowledge of his extraordinary talent are part now of a considerable public. This, at all events, is certain: nobody who saw the drawings at the Bruton Gallery can have been indifferent to them. They may have stirred repulsion, or an ugly form of curiosity, only here and there rebuked by some pure beauty in the work, but no one can have seen them dully and forgotten what they are like. The drawing on the catalogue-cover had power enough to turn people away from the exhibition, or allure them to it, not only because power is interesting, but because of the kind of jeering, loose-lipped image of life suggested. It is a hateful image of evil sight, the coarse-fleshed face of the eighteenth century Satan-type, but expressive of no idea of energy even in destruction or accusation.



In the power shown in producing convincing form the drawing on the catalogue is a real introduction to the art of Austin Spare, and it is partly true, too, in its suggestion of a rout of foul shapes thronging into sight. But it is not completely true as an indication of the actual contents of this copious and forcible art, and I believe it to be no true introduction to what Spare has the power to create, if his art from being the almost involuntary utterance of all that seethes in his mind becomes a reasoned expression of the essential.

At present, it seems to me, the form of Mr Spare's art is a process, not a conclusion. He is still very young, and much of the work shown at the Bruton Galleries was done some years ago; at any time since he was fourteen. It is an extraordinary out-put for a boy, especially when one considers that what was shown is only a small part of what he has done. But this copious discharge of imagery is, I think, rather the preparation for creative art than the declaration of it. The passing from the stage when an idea possesses the mind to the stage when the mind possesses the idea, is held, in a true sequence of the seven ages, to mark the passing of youth to manhood. Though on the technical side Austin Spare has developed through discipline a considerable strength of self-criticism, he has been occupied with reproducing the forms of his imagination almost without question or reason. The present result of this unquestioning reproduction of the forms that rise before his inward eye is to fill his art with monstrous and morbid shapes. Yet it is not really paradoxical to assert the very violence and distortion in proof of the essential healthiness and naturalness of his imaginative faculties. It is not paradoxical. But needs explanation, since the reconciliation of the fantastical with the normal is in the personality of the artist, and that needs to be realised before his art can be appraised.



There is so much intelligence, and so little imagination, in modern art that the interpretation put on fantasies such as those of Mr. Spare is that they are the result of deliberate invention or imitation. There is an undoubted strain of likeness in much of his black-and-white work to that of Beardsley, and a similarity of mood in dealing with certain aspects of life. These qualities make it certain to the casual observer that the source of formal inspiration is the art of Beardsley, and that, having seen distorted ideas of good and evil enformed with beauty in the designs of the illustrator of 'Salome', Mr. Spare proceeded to an artificial intensification of 'fact', which should be more stimulating than the reality. More learned critics have assigned a great deal else in Austin Spare's work to the influence of other potent fantasists - to Goya, to Rops, to Hokusai, and to Greiner of Munich. As a matter of fact, Mr. Spare only made acquaintance with the art of Beardsley after he had done some of his most Beardsley-like designs, and with other of these "influences" he has not yet come into contact. When he does, if his work shows the effect, it will be - as the case of 'The Magician' and other designs that reflect the qualities of Japanese colour-prints - because he finds his own language used by a master who can teach him farther secrets of rhythm and contrast and phraseology.

The source of his art is himself, the deepest, not yet fully known or controlled self, from which, by thought, proceeds creative power of every kind. In his case the sense of inward sight is extraordinarily vivid. The drawing of himself removing the curtain from the mirror, and calling attention to what is seen therein, is as near possible to a precise image of his feeling about his work. Technically, of course, he identifies himself with it. If it is good, he feels striven to make it so; if it is bad, he must seek to remedy the failure. If with all effort it fails to be expressive of the effortless vision, he is the critic that destroys. But on "good" or "bad" qualities in his design other than aesthetic he has no self-criticism to

bestow, though he is as ready as though another hand had drawn them, to dislike certain more violent and repulsive of them.

Austin Spare's attitude is the normal and healthy attitude of the artist, but we are, most of us, so beset with self-consciousness that it is improbable we will ever be generally dissociated from what is morbid or extravagant in his art, or not be held to show immoral tendencies if his art expresses no moral judgements. But I think that he himself, in steadier and more complete realisations of true vision, will dissociate himself from characterisation of the foul and horrible.

The unimaginative reason which assigns the appearances of things to categories of good and evil is a law of prudence, not of creation, and therefore inoperative in art. Mr. Spare was wise about that at sixteen years old. In the *Earth Inferno* he wrote of "The Chaos of the Normal", and that chaos is the apparent divided into opposites by the unimaginative reason. But, in the same remarkable book, he wrote "revere the Kia", and the "kia" in the nomenclature that he, like Blake, has invented for his needs of expression, is the indivisible point, the spiritual reason in man, and, in greater creation, the boundless power of which it is the reflection. That single and pure reason, the harmony that is born of peace and strife and the union of all other opposites, is not the inspiration of art that elaborates the horrible and morbid. When - it may be now - Mr. Spare has realised his power to control and purify his imagination, it must be that the forms of his art will image no more a "Chaos of the abnormal", but a Cosmos, an ordering of beauty in the image of perfect beauty.

That is no mere hope generated by the desire that so strong and penetrative an imagination and a technique already remarkable in expressive draughtsmanship and imaginative colour, should fulfil a fine achievement. The art of Mr. Spare, as it now is, is not the true reflection of what is essential in his vision of life. The output of a phase of morbid imagination in an artist of twenty is not to be taken as significant of what he will do later, even if it agrees with the whole personality. But already Austin Spare is reaching towards greater simplicity of idea, and, at the same time, towards a fuller technical accomplishment, more assured draughtsmanship and composition, the use of colour in oil and tempera as well as water-colour. The imaginative and aesthetic issue must be a matter of deep interest to all who know his work and realise the sources of it.

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# Memories of a sorcerer': notes on Gilles Deleuze-Felix Guattari, Austin Osman Spare and Anomalous Sorceries

by Matt Lee, University of Sussex

My aim here is to introduce the philosophers Deleuze-Guattari to readers perhaps unfamiliar with their work and indicate something curious about their work, which is that it appears to have some sort of relation in a practical sense to the concept of the sorcerer. Whilst not a central figure in Deleuze and Guattari's work, the sorcerer and the witch are themes that do crop up in their texts more often than might be expected and play more than a simply 'metaphorical' role. I think that Deleuze and Guattari can provide a resource for those interested in sorcery, magic and witchcraft in two ways: firstly they can provide theoretical tools which can challenge or at least complement structuralist, constructivist and historicist accounts and so can be of use to researchers attempting to understand these phenomena; secondly, they can provide a theoretical resource for those *within* the magical community who at times attempt to theorise their practise with what are essentially philosophical concepts.



## Series, structure and anomaly

Gilles Deleuze died in 1995, committing suicide through defenestration after having endured considerable physical difficulty with breathing. He was part of the French post-structuralist movement that consists of figures such as Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida and

Lacan. He was always, however, a slightly oblique figure, never quite following the same lines of thought as his contemporaries. Like all the post-structuralists, he shared a concern with Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche but unlike his contemporaries Deleuze took his inspiration not only from Nietzsche but also from Hume, Spinoza and Bergson as well as numerous people 'outside' philosophy such as Gregory Bateson.

One of the driving forces of the 'post-structuralist' movement in philosophy was a 'theoretical anti-humanism'. This anti-humanism placed itself in opposition to any thought that centred on Man as the primary analytical category. Deleuze's particular contribution focussed on developing concepts of 'immanence' and 'difference' which put forward a univocal ontology - that is, which put forward a unified being, a thought of life that has no 'outside' or 'duality' but which contains within itself its own means of development. This univocal universe is full of flux and becoming, a constantly shifting ocean of change. The role of Bergson in Deleuze's thought is to give him the means to make this 'univocal ontology' move and evolve; the ideas of a *vitalism* which can be found within Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, for example, play a critical role for Deleuze because they provide an organic model of the universe that corresponds to the philosophical ontology. John Marks has also noted that in Deleuze's work, "*vitalism is a way of connecting with, of being in the presence of, this pre-individual world of flux and becoming*" and thus vitalism forms a way of both modelling the universe as a universe of becoming that allows the creation of a way of thinking that enables us to understand this constant flux.

Vitalism is still, as it were, a model. It is an interpretation or account and there is then the problem of what a concrete vitalism of thought and life would mean. To this end Deleuze uses a concept of 'desire' as the name for the flow, which includes the flow through us. Desire, crucially, is not a desire for anything that is lacking, as in both Freud, Hegel and Lacan. Desire is a constituting activity of becoming, it is the individual current within the oceanic mass. In this essay, looking specifically at the practices of the sorcerer and their becomings, the streams of desire are something that the sorcerer will 'plug into'. "*Becoming begins as a desire to escape bodily limitation*" according to Brian Massumi and whilst this does not characterise all becoming it points to the practices of the sorcerer with which this essay is concerned.

Having sketched out the twin concepts of vitalism and desire in terms of their role within this essay I want to now turn to one of Deleuze's late works, written alongside the radical 'anti-psychiatrist' Felix Guattari, in order to explore becoming in more detail. Early in the seventies, Deleuze and Guattari had begun work on a two part work called 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia', the first part of which was *Anti-Oedipus*, where the concept of desire is most apparent. The second part of 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia', not published until the eighties, was called *A Thousand Plateaus*. I want to discuss 3 subsections of the tenth chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* that go under the heading, 'memories of a sorcerer'. I will first sketch a little of their context.

The three sections come within a chapter titled "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible" which consists of 14 subsections, the first twelve of

which are subtitled 'memories of' something. The chapter begins with a discussion that quickly leads to a distinction between series and structure. This distinction is between two different forms of analogy. Analogy is divided between analogy of proportion and analogy of proportionality, the first being the analogy of the series and the latter that of the structure. The analogy of proportion is of the form 'a resembles b, b resembles c,' and as such posits a first term from which resemblance originates, "a single eminent term, perfection or quality as the principle behind the series". The analogy of proportionality is of the form 'a is to b as c is to d'. In this form of analogy there is no single series but rather a set of differences distributed across structures. The structure of 'a to b' and the structure 'c to d' and it is the differences between the elements that form the basis of an analogy. Whilst this may seem an obscure philosophical distinction it in fact represents two radically different forms of mapping the world. The first analogical structure of the series is assigned, as an example, to Jung and the notion of archetypes as analogical representations. In contrast with Jung the next figure in the text is Levi-Strauss, whose analysis of totemism brings forward, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a system of internal homologies rather than external resemblances. What fundamentally shifts when employing one form of analogy or another is the emphasis in the analysis and understanding of the forms under observation. In the former case we attempt to observe relations of identification or identity between terms, whether a resembles b and perhaps, through a series of steps, whether we can connect a to z. In the case of the structural approach we examine not the terms in themselves but rather the relations between terms. It is precisely this method that we would employ if we were to approach the translation of a symbolic system we thought of as an unknown language. The alphabetical series of a language would be constructed through discovery of internal homologies, which would begin to assign positions within the system to the elements based upon the existing knowledge of known languages.

These two systems, of series and structure, offer modes of becoming. To understand this, first think of the distinction between a difference in kind and a difference of degree. A difference in kind poses a break between the differentiated elements, forming different sorts of things. A difference in degree poses a difference between elements within a kind, measurable according to a unified criterion. There are, for example, differences of degree between temperatures but differences in kind between temperatures and pressures even though these two structures can be brought into formulaic relation under the laws of physics. The first system we are looking at then, of a series based upon resemblance, offers a basic ontology of continuity, with differences organised according to degree; whereas the second system, of structural relations, posits a pluralistic or regional ontology with differences of kind, in particular between 'Man and Animal'. In passing, however, we can note two ways in which these analogies might organise an understanding of magic. In terms of a series, whose pre-eminent term might be rational control of nature or something along those lines, we could argue that magic resembles science in its attempts to establish control or understanding of nature. Its resemblance is such that magic might be said to be 'lower' in form than science but might be assimilated into the history of science as a pre-cursor in a process aiming at the same goal. It would thus be brought within a 'historical series' that posited a particular goal or end point to progress. Alternatively we might say that magic plays a structurally identical role to

science within a particular society, operating as a sort of technology that we understand as different from, but again assimilable to, our own culture. The first account would be one of series, the second one an account of structures.

Deleuze and Guattari, however, suggest that the two forms of structure and series both ignore or reject something fundamental which can be named as the anomalous. In particular, whilst these two forms of understanding may well prove useful, Deleuze and Guattari asks whether “there is still room for something else, something more secret, more subterranean: the sorcerer and becomings (expressed in tales instead of myths or rites)?”. The sorcerer is introduced at this point as the figure of the anomaly. This can be perceived as simply a metaphorical use of the term ‘sorcerer’ and whilst a metaphorical use is indeed part of what is going on, ‘metaphor’ is a poor word to describe what Deleuze and Guattari are doing. Their method is to use ‘conceptual personae’ to express concepts, figures through which a philosophical concept is described and ‘diagrammed’. The sorcerer is central to their thought as just such a conceptual persona.

The figure of the sorcerer is introduced alongside what are called ‘blocks of becoming’, which are these anomalous events indicated by the date in the title of the chapter, 1730. “From 1730 to 1735, all we hear about are vampires”. This is an example for Deleuze and Guattari of the blocks of becomings. These blocks of becomings are not fixed points from which something becomes something else - this is the central aspect of their argument. The blocks of becomings in this particular instance are what Deleuze and Guattari will call ‘becoming-animal’.

The role of the animal within shamanic practice and as an aspect of the sorcerers art is indisputable in its existence if not in its exact function. Brian Bates, in his attempt to reconstruct an ‘indigenous’ neo-shamanic practice of the British Isles cites an example of ‘animal workings’. He first suggests, using the divinatory role of the crow as an example, that there was a central role for animals within the world view of the Anglo-Saxon world of the first millennium and from which he is drawing his inspiration. After a brief ‘universalist’ move in which he suggests other more contemporary indigenous cultures also have a clear role for animals with shamanic practice, he then suggests that there is an inherent alienation in the way in which we have divorced ourselves from animals and asks how we might work to “re-establish a degree of connection, identification, respect and even a sense of the sacred presence of animals”. Bates is not unaware of the problem of ‘pretence’ in any attempt to work with ‘finding a power animal’, that is, establishing some sort of sacred or magical-shamanic link with an animal. As he says, “done superficially it simply confirms our casual attitude towards the animal world, and our propensity to use animals like a psychological fast-food dispenser: instant guardian animal”. What Bates carries out is a six month long program of meditation, imaginal activity, visualisation and practical association. The critical climax of Bates’ account comes when he describes a session in which a participant is associating with a bear. She is engaged in what Deleuze and Guattari call a ‘becoming’, in this instance a ‘becoming-bear’. Bates says, “when she walked into the room, on all fours, and then sat back on her haunches, she was a bear - her ‘performance’ transcended mimicry; it was much more than the sum of its parts”.



Bates' account, makes a claim to a transcendence of mimicry. This opens up the problem of the 'reality' of the situation as well as the problem of our belief in this reality. Was she really, in any sense, a bear? The issue of belief and truth is still embedded within studies of shamanism and to a large extent is always posed when looking at magical practice rather than the history or theory of magical texts. Alan T. Campbell draws on a distinction from the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre when approaching this issue. MacIntyre, he says, distinguishes between understanding and belief, "making the point that an effort of understanding has inevitably to be made from the outside. If you're already a 'believer' there's no 'understanding' effort required. It's because we don't believe that we have to make the interpretative effort". MacIntyre's distinction is made in the context of Christian religion and in the tradition of 'rational theology' but it echoes a sceptical problem articulated very simply in a distinction drawn by Wittgenstein: "The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty". The whole game of questioning reality, if taken as a game of doubting, puts the issue of belief in the foreground. This is the sceptical cul-de-sac. To begin from a position in which disbelief in the phenomena prompts an attempt to understand it is to engage in a form of delusion itself, to cover over our own presuppositions contained in the worldview within which we are inevitably - always, already - situated. Issues of belief and the reality of the phenomena will rapidly fall into the dichotomy of the believer/understander, the insider/outside. We will find ourselves in an endless ramified series of questions about whether it is real, whether it be spirits, magic or the sorcerers practice itself. These are, in many ways, false problems.

The task is not to question whether what is happening is real, is out there, a 'fact' or objective thing, but to pursue further the question of 'what is happening'. The serial/structural models might aid in one way in cultural and historical analysis, but I have already suggested that Deleuze and Guattari argue that these will avoid the anomalous, precisely those events which seem the most 'unreal'. It is as a 'strategy of understanding' that the notion of a block of becoming might prove useful. The analysis of these blocks of becoming, as they pose them, have no beginning point or end point and thus no substantive realities or objects whose reality status needs assigning. It the wrong question to ask whether the woman is in fact a bear, since this simply confuses the block of becoming, in this case a becoming-bear, with the reality or object that we might call 'bear' within a different context. "Becoming is never imitating".

## **Blocks of becoming and the role of the pack**

The blocks of becoming produce no end result. We do not engage in a becoming-animal in order to end up as an animal, even temporarily, or in the imagination, or on a spiritual level. The blocks of becoming produce nothing other than themselves, neither belonging to a subject (I become) nor ending in an object (a bear). This is the first claim; "Becoming produces nothing other than itself". What then are these blocks of becoming? They are processes and activities, but they are not of the imagination, nor are they phantasies, rather they are real in themselves, "perfectly real". It is not a question of imitation because this simply avoids the matter of the becoming itself. We must stay with the phenomena and not assume its reality somehow depends on anything outside itself, either a subject or a term. This is the second claim, "the principle according to which

there is a reality specific to becoming”. Finally, becomings do not operate through ‘filiation’, that is, they cannot claim some sort of serial link to an object or image which they resemble either more or less. Rather there is another process that is in play, a process of alliance. It is not a matter of “establishing corresponding relations” such as the macrocosm-microcosm model, but is carried out by a form of folding activity, in which connections, networks of involvement and intertwining are the methods in an activity that is not an evolution but rather what Deleuze calls an involution: “Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative”. Three claims are evident then; (1) becomings produce only themselves, (2) becomings are perfectly real and (3) becoming is an involutionary and thus creative process.

This is the background to the three sections of the tenth chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the rough outline of the route up to the ‘Memories of a Sorcerer’ sub-sections and I want to now look at the figure of the sorcerer within these sub-sections. Certain aspects of the text will have to be passed over, notably certain particular formulations that would involve me in a far too slow and detailed reading taking me beyond the subject of this essay. One of these tropes or formations within the text is worth noting, however, and that is the way in which they identify with the sorcerer. They use the phrase ‘we sorcerers’ in critical places within the text; in the first ‘memory’, where they identify a type of knowledge, in the second memory where they deal with a contradiction and in the third ‘memory’ where they identify a particular practice or method. They also use the phrase ‘fellow sorcerers’ in the first memory when describing their ‘way’. It is worth bearing these identifications in mind in the following account of the argument within the sections under question.

We begin, we sorcerers, with the pack, Deleuze and Guattari argue. “A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity”. This is one of the first principles of much of their thought, this notion of a multiplicity, which differs from a multiple in that a multiplicity is singular and not composed of simply numerable elements. A multiplicity is, albeit slightly simplistically, a whole greater than its parts. This must be understood quite literally, in the sense of packs, swarms, shoals and mobs or crowds where an animal might be said to take on a different form from the more common model of the individual particular; the specific animal is, in this sense, transcended or gone beyond when in a pack mode. Crucially the pack is not some sort of stage within an evolution, which is why I specifically mentioned crowds and mobs. For Deleuze and Guattari “every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack”. The distinction that is being motivated is in terms of understanding animals in terms of modes of multiplicity not simply characteristics of the multiple. It is in terms of these modes that we encounter the animal.

At this point the argument draws on an example from H.P.Lovecraft and his story of Randolph Carter in *Through the gates of the silver key*. Deleuze and Guattari, calling this one of Lovecrafts’ masterpieces, recount a passage from section 4 of the story, where a multiplicity of Randolph Carters’ come pouring forth. Just before the passage quoted we find Lovecraft describing Randolph Carter’s realisation as he passes through the ‘Ultimate Gate’. “Now, beyond the Ultimate Gateway, he realised in a moment of

consuming fright that he was not one person, but many persons”. This passage, pointing explicitly to a notion of a multiplicity of selves, which would be understood as a mode of the human animal, reveals something of the role of the becoming-animal within Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. The ability to access this mode of multiplicity is what is meant by sorcery.

What we see throughout *A Thousand Plateaus* is this entanglement between philosophical arguments and examples from fiction. Deleuze and Guattari draw heavily upon literature as a resource for their work. Is the sorcerer, then, simply another name for the writer? “If the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming”. Yet the becomings are not a becoming something specific; they are not, for example, a becoming-writer. It is, rather, that the writers Deleuze and Guattari draw upon work with the method of becoming that belongs pre-eminently to the figure of the sorcerer. In particular the writer and the sorcerer, the writer as sorcerer, work with “feelings of an unknown Nature”, called affects. This affect is a positive created force, a power that derives directly from the pack, from the mode of the animal as pack and which brings forth the multiplicity that will throw “the self into upheaval and make it reel”.

The first memory sub-section focuses, then, on the pack and the multiplicity. One danger might be to think this pack in terms of tribe or filial community and associated with the notion of pack goes a second characteristic or ‘principle’. “A multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor? It is quite simple; everybody knows it, but it is discussed only in secret. We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity”. The object at this point is to try and establish certain principles of method and understanding and to break down or pose alternatives to ideas of series and structure, of lineages. The pack, as multiplicity, works on a level of multiplicities, whereby it spreads through contagion. These two principles form, for Deleuze and Guattari, the path that any becoming-animal will take. A counter-principle is next put forward or rather a counter-point, where each multiplicity will express the ‘exceptional individual’. This will be the anomaly.

Whilst every animal has a mode as pack and packs propagate through contagion, each pack will also contain its anomaly or anomalous point. Deleuze and Guattari are explicit in that this seems to pose a contradiction to the model they are putting forward of the process of becoming. If we begin from multiplicities then how can we logically reach a concept of the ‘exceptional individual’? It is a contradiction to put forward both the multiplicity and the exceptional individual. “We sorcerers know quite well that the contradictions are real but that real contradictions are not just for laughs”. What is meant by the anomalous? It is first pointed to by again bringing in Lovecraft and his ‘Outsider’ or Thing, “teeming, seething, swelling, foaming, spreading like an infectious disease, this nameless horror”. The exceptional individual is in fact not a specific, singular individual; Deleuze and Guattari explicitly proffer the term ‘individual’ only to retract it as they develop their concept, putting forward the idea that this ‘individual’ is in fact the focus of the affects they earlier brought into the discussion. This is why Lovecraft provides such a perfect example of description in that the Thing, the nameless horror, whilst individuated and specifiable to a degree is not in any sense an ‘individual’ with a sense of continuous self, nor even a physically specific identity.

The anomalous accompanies each multiplicity and this anomalous is in fact nothing other than the “phenomenon of bordering”. The anomalous is the specific point at which the pack is divided along a line, where an edge is seen. The difficulty with this concept is that it includes both the situation of an alpha individual within a wolf pack and the situation of mosquitoes in their swarm. There are, it is clear, very different forms of this anomalous individual. It may be a specific animal that divides the pack into left and right, and the alpha wolf, with the pack streaming to the sides in something resembling a flight formation, is a strong image that might be drawn on in this situation. We would see the same thing again in the swarming rats, flowing over the banks and ditches of a woodland and James Herbert’s stories of *The Rats* always feature some sort of over-large, over-intelligent or over-vicious individual that has taken the swarm into a new place, transforming them into a murderous beast of many forms. Within the mosquito swarm, and perhaps the same with flocking birds, the position of the anomalous individual is constantly shifting and the specific individuals flow through this role of the anomalous individual in turn as they become the edge of the whole. It is worth noting that there is no real hint of a leadership within this anomaly and at the point at which the anomalous is assigned to a position of hierarchy, as is the danger in the example of the wolf alpha structure, we find the concept of the pack being transformed again into the state. It is this curiously difficult distinction in collectivities that Deleuze and Guattari are aiming at. The pack may become the state, the family, the group but in itself is more than these more rigid structures; the pack is a mobile multiplicity, spreading through contagion and with a border formed through anomaly.

“The relation with the anomalous is one of alliance. The sorcerer has a relation of alliance with the demon as the power of the anomalous”. At this point Deleuze and Guattari are attempting to locate the sorcerer within this conceptual structure of multiplicities within which there is a clear and rather privileged place for the sorcerer. This world consists of multiplicities, what are called at other times aggregates, which might be visualised as crowds, mobs, swarms or packs. There are many of these, at every level, from the cellular to the stellar, forming a vision of an interlocking, chaotic soup of multiplicities. The primary form of ‘communication’ and change or exchange between these multiplicities is via contagion, through infection or transformation or the one multiplicity by the other, across borderlines. These borderlines form a continuously changing series of edges, which trace out lines of rapid communication from one area to another and it is in these borderlines that we find the sorcerer and where one must go to become a sorcerer. The borderlines are the constant critical areas of becoming. The reason for alliance is that the borderline poses a need to be at once on both sides. To even know that the edge exists it is necessary to have stepped over but in such a way that it is not simply forgotten. Moving from one aggregate to another, whilst it may involve a border crossing, will never produce awareness of the border except as a memory, almost a necessary memory. The alliance provides the means by which the sorcerer is capable of living at the border, since it enables a relation with both sides that enables the border to actually exist as a becoming that is no longer reduced to its terms, to either one side or the other, one thing or another.

This analysis of the sorcerous sections of Deleuze and Guattari's work needs one final addition before moving on. The overall structure of the analysis Deleuze and Guattari give is one that wants to retain the reality peculiar to becomings. These realities are what Deleuze and Guattari call the blocks of becoming. These blocks of becoming are multiplicities within wider structures of borderline or liminal contagion. The blocks of becoming have no 'beginning' or 'end' point but their dynamics are, however, capable of being further understood as being between the molecular and the molar. These are not opposites within a single structure but differences in kind. As John Marks says, "the distinction between the molar and the molecular is not a distinction of scale; it is qualitative rather than quantitative". The molar is the level of the organised, where we might find the state, whereas the molecular is the realm of desires' flux and flows. The tension touched upon above, where the pack might become the state, is precisely what happens when the pack becomes molar, organised and static, in effect ceasing to be a pack. The multiplicity of the pack is a molecular multiplicity.

Deleuze and Guattari do not provide simple models for analysis. What they do provide is a concerted attempt to bring forward working models for a mobile philosophy, a philosophy of becoming. As such they provide a huge resource for the study of phenomena of change and transformation, such as the study of liminal phenomena, of which sorcery and shamanism are key examples. They attempt to provide a systematic way in which we might study such phenomena, although the systems they attempt to establish are open systems. Deleuze argues in an earlier collection of interviews "a system's a set of concepts. And it's an open system when the concepts relate to circumstances rather than essences".

## **The anomalous becomings of sigils**

The concept of becomings, including becoming-animal, is only one concept amongst the open system of Deleuze and Guattari's work. Another fundamental concept, motivated primarily by Deleuze, is the emphasis on a fully affirmative philosophy, one that breaks with the dialectic of Hegelian philosophy, the central tool of which is the power of negation. This philosophy of the affirmative that Deleuze and Guattari push forward might, with minor reservations, be said to be a Dionysian-Ariadnean philosophy. From this point connections with a sorcerer such as Spare can be traced out, starting from the "point of transmutation or transvaluation" that is central to this Nietzschean inspired affirmation of affirmation. One possible way of thinking this connection is of two different dynamics coalescing around this point of transmutation, one inspired by theory (the philosopher), the other by practice (the sorcerer).

Having given a brief and theoretical account of an element of the work of Deleuze and Guattari I want then to turn to a specific example of magical practice in the form of the work of Austin Osman Spare. Spare has become increasingly well known over the last few years because of his association with a form of sorcery that is known as 'chaos magic'. Spare came into the occult scene at the turn of the twentieth century, publishing his first book of text and illustrations, *Earth Inferno*, in 1905. He is reported to have briefly become a member of Aleister Crowley's magical order, the *Argentum Astrum*

(A.A.). Apparently Crowley made the comment “Artist: can’t understand organisation” with regard to Spare, perhaps indicating a temperament unsuitable to the structures of the A.A. Spare’s own comments on ceremonial magicians within *The Book of Pleasure* betray a little more hostility to the ceremonial magics of Crowleyian and Golden Dawn traditions however: “Others praise ceremonial magic, and are supposed to suffer much ecstasy! Our asylums are crowded, the stage is overrun! Is it by symbolising we become the symbolised? Were I to crown myself King, should I be King? Rather should I become an object of disgust and pity. These Magicians, whose insincerity is their safety, are but the unemployed dandies of the Brothels”.

*The Book of Pleasure* is perhaps Spares’ principal work and what is interesting in the comment above, aside from the obvious hostility to a particular form of magic, is the no less obvious methodological objection to the role of symbol and symbolisation within magic. It is important to distinguish very clearly Spare’s form of sigilisation from any traditional notion of symbolism. There are a number of models that can be distinguished: a symbol can stand for something; it can point to something; it can contain something or it can communicate something. In each situation the symbol is essentially an adjunct of ‘something’, which we might describe as its ‘meaning’. In essence the symbol is not the meaning but rather has a meaning and the basic structure is one of being a medium or container for this essential, non-symbolic reality. William Gray, for example, asks after the nature of a symbol and says, “in effect it is the good old ‘outward sign of inward grace’, or a practical link between objective and subjective existence. It is a body containing a soul, matter holding a meaning, a focus of force, a condenser of consciousness or a ‘thought-tank’.” To a large extent, of course, these accounts of the symbol as tool are practical and true - we do, in fact, use symbols in exactly this way. This factual use of symbols does not, however, imply that this is in principle the only way symbols can be used. The fact that symbols are used as tools does not imply that either they are tools or that they must be tools.

Spare uses symbols in a way that is far closer to an artistic use of stroke or colour. The paint stroke does not stand for, contain, transmit or somehow make us able to see the real picture behind the strokes and colours but is in fact the picture itself. This process is a manifestation or creation. It is an act itself, not a means. This active symbolisation disturbs the very concept of symbols themselves, with a split in Spare’s work between ‘symbols’ and ‘sigils’. In *The Book of Pleasure* Spare focuses explicitly on the construction of both symbols and sigils. It is in one of the sections on sigils, subtitled ‘the psychology of believing’, that we find the following: “We are not the object by the perception, but by becoming it”. This shift from perception to becoming signals a connection with a Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy.

It is worth, at this point, placing the techniques Spare motivates within *The Book of Pleasure* inside the more general ‘metaphysical’ schema with which he operates. This centres on the two names KIA and ZOS, hence the name of the ‘Zos-Kia Cultus’, the magical ‘current’ or ethos associated with Spare as well as with Kenneth Grant and later, via Peter Carroll’s work, with the Illuminates of Thanateros, the central magical order in the ‘chaos magic current’.

Carroll suggests, in his work *Liber Null*, “the twin functions of will and perception is called Kia by magicians. Sometimes it is called spirit, or soul, or life force, instead”. He goes on to say of Kia that it “is the consciousness, it is the elusive ‘I’ which confers self-awareness but does not seem to consist of anything itself. Kia can sometimes be felt as ecstasy or inspiration, but it is deeply buried in the dualistic mind”. Magic, therefore, is for Carroll, “concerned with giving the Kia more freedom and flexibility and with providing means by which it can manifest its occult power”.

Now Carroll is writing a working grimoire or grammar of magic, focused on a practical orientation, and as such his metaphysics is simply there to assist in the establishment of such a practical end. These comments on Kia are little more than a pragmatic use of certain names that enable the magician to explain to the student the basics of their working activity. For example, the fact that Carroll says that ‘magicians’ use the name Kia is in many ways disingenuous if you were looking for an accurate historical reading, since Spare is the principle magician to initiate the term. More importantly, though, Carroll’s metaphysic converts Kia into a force which the magician then harnesses or expresses through their activity, enabling the new-comer to the field of magic to place their activity back within some sort of cause-effect paradigm, except this time one that relies upon the great life-force Kia, rather the laws of physical nature.

Spare, however, has a slightly more subtle and in many ways more interesting role for Kia within his work, particularly if the focus is maintained on *The Book of Pleasure*. Within this text Kia, whilst possibly a ‘life force’ is perhaps more adequately described as life itself. “Anterior to Heaven and Earth, in its aspect that transcends these, but not intelligence, it may be regarded as the primordial sexual principle, the idea of pleasure in self-love”. This Kia, then, has numerous ‘aspects’, of which one is creativity itself, creation as process rather than object or product - Kia in this aspect takes the place of any ‘creator’ and it is this removal of the role of the creator that is central. Kia is self-manifesting. It is, in this regard, akin to what Deleuze calls ‘difference’, which is not a difference from or between anything but which is immanence itself, not immanent to anything. This is a form of pantheism before theism, a self-moving universe, a vitalism.

The basic worldview or ontology of Spare relies upon a vitalism that is shared with Deleuze. Of course, this vitalism is something Deleuze picks up from thinkers such as Bergson and so the similarities extend beyond Deleuze and Guattari. It is, however, the connection of the vitalism with the technique of a concrete embodiment of desire within the sigil that draws Spare and Deleuze and Guattari closer still. Spares’ techniques are fundamentally techniques of becoming. The difference of emphasis that is found when drawing Sparean Sigilisation towards Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming is fundamentally away from the problem of belief. To focus on techniques of becoming is to shift the emphasis away from simply ‘removing’ beliefs into a more positive activity. The removal or dissolution of beliefs is still a central theme in Spare but work on belief structures is nothing more than a pre-requisite for the techniques of becoming.

The ‘primordial sexual principle’, for example, is what Spare refers to as ‘the new sexuality’, which the technique of the ‘death posture’ is intended to access. This is a form

of meditation, both physical and mantrical, using the formula of “Neither-Neither” to attain a state described as “Does not matter - need not be” which is formless. Called ‘the death posture’ because it aims to create “the dead body of all we believe” the intention behind this meditative practice is the removal of belief, both in content and form. Whilst the chaos magic current uses a technique called ‘paradigm shifting’ in order to break down ego structures, this is often posed in terms of a technique to break free from ‘consensual reality’. This technique, whilst practical, rests upon an apparent paradox, in that it seems that the magician believes in their ability to not believe and as Julian Vayne suggests, “the chaos magick system rests upon a paradox. Namely that the system claims that ‘nothing is true’ and yet itself emerges from the 19th century attempt to create a grand theory of magick”.

In this sense chaos magic rests upon an attempt to negate or suspend belief, an odd situation akin to philosophical scepticism. Philosophical scepticism, however, has a number of forms, one of which is Pyrrhonism, elucidated by writers such as Sextus Empiricus, where the aim of the sceptical process is a condition of bliss known as ataraxia, which follows the suspension of belief, known as epoche. This ataraxia is a state of quietude. It allows a release from scepticism through pursuing it to its end, in such a way that the sceptical doubt that is so easily established with regard to knowledge claims no longer has its disorientating power to produce a nihilism of belief. Whilst Spare’s work at times resembles a powerful form of scepticism it would be rather strange to suggest that the aim is a form of quietude. In fact it would be more accurate to say that the techniques Spare puts forward produce exactly the opposite of a quietude, what might be called a form of orgiastic consciousness, which is this strange thing he calls ‘the new sexuality’. This is an expanded and increased creativity, not a settled and contemplative quietude.

Is this right, however, since Spare talks about the Kia as the ‘Atmospheric I’? Kenneth Grant reads Spare as close to a Ch’an or Zen like contemplation, “the adepts of which do not permit the mind to adhere to any of its thoughts”. Although this is a claim that would need considerably more substantiation, my own feeling is that Spare’s magical philosophy may resemble a Taoist rather than a Buddhist, even a Zen Buddhist, approach, where the activity on belief is less a process of negation and deconstructing than a process of freeing up and allowing a full flow of life. This is a subtle difference but may be said to be a question of whether the focus is on removing the ego and dissolving the self or whether it is on the expression of a fuller pre-individual life, such that the question of the ego or self is, in some ways, secondary, to the reality of manifesting an orgiastic consciousness. “So long as the notion remains that there is ‘compulsory bondage’ in this World or even in dreams there is such bondage”.

The therapeutic approach that may be found within the Pyrrhonian sceptic and which I would also suggest lies at the heart of ‘ego-negating’ strategies perceives, in the first instance, a problem to be overcome, a problem of the ego, the self. Removing or destroying belief results in a form of nihilistic scepticism, provoking spiritual crises that once more call forth therapies of quietude and acceptance. One of the key themes within Deleuzian thought is a struggle against such strategies of negation. The emphasis on



strategies and models of becoming presupposes a fluid structure to belief but doesn't believe this to be anything other than a forerunner to a creative process. The struggle against belief is only necessary, after all, if belief restricts something and to forget what it is that is restricted, the impulse behind the struggle against belief, is to end in the nihilism against which Nietzsche warned.

For example, despite all the techniques that seem to deny belief in Spare's work, contained within a formula of 'Neither Neither', this is not a negation. It is a subtle shifting away from any 'belief' but it does not allow any duality to exist, no 'not X'. It prevents negation with suspension, hence the suggestion that it is in fact close to the epoche of the sceptics, a technique which also lies at the heart of Edmund Husserl's 'phenomenology' in which the epoche is used to suspend the 'natural attitude'. Spare's attitude to belief is in fact an attempt to free it up, as it were, from restrictions placed upon it by the consciousness, not an attempt to simply remove or deny it. It is, in essence, a technique of allowing the becoming of belief. "Belief, to be true, must be organic and sub-conscious".

It is to achieve this organic belief that the technique of sigilisation is introduced. In effect the sigils are not symbols containing anything, but rather they are expressions in which we consciously carry out specific operations in such a way as to allow an intuitive sub-conscious or pre-conscious desire to manifest. It re-orientates the sorcerer away from an ego centred strategy since the magician is never, in principle, capable of really knowing their desire except on this sub-conscious level. This sub-conscious level is pre-individual. It is not beneath or below or created through the ego or super-egoic structures but prior to and more fundamental than these. This is strongly akin to Deleuze's account of consciousness as a 'transcendental field' that "can be distinguished from experience in that it doesn't refer to an object or belong to a subject". In itself this transcendental field is nothing more than a "pure plane of immanence" that is constituted as a transcendental field by the production of the transcendent entity that is 'consciousness'. The pure plane of immanence - the great ocean of becoming - cares nothing for consciousness and only becomes a 'transcendental field' when it produces consciousness as an effect. Beneath all the currents of thought is the ocean from which they arise and into which they fall back, an ocean of becoming that has no concern with anything other than its own becoming. Consciousness in effect becomes a sort of self-defeating capacity when it is used to fulfil life; it is a detour, which we must consciously step back from. We, of course, have in principle no ability to know beforehand quite where or how this might be carried out - hence the need to employ an experimental approach. Sigilisation marries a true experimentalism of automatic drawing with the conscious thought that 'this X is our desire', a desire no longer possessed by us but by which we are possessed. Spare is Deleuzian in the sense that he no longer wants a focus on the 'magician' as controller, perceiver or creator. Sparean sorcery is a technique not of ego dissolution but of practical experimentation with a pre-individual plane of immanence, the ocean of becoming.

"The Sigil being a vehicle, serves the purpose of protecting consciousness from the direct manifestation of the (consciously unacknowledged) obsession, conflict is avoided with any incompatible ideas and neither gains separate personality" Spare says and it is this

subtle fictionalisation process that is the true heart of the sigilisation process. What is anomalous in Spare's sigilisation process is that it is a paradoxically conscious practice aimed at releasing the sub-conscious: it is, in effect, a deliberate attempt to consciously do something that can't be done consciously. It is an attempt to plug into the orgiastic consciousness, the Sparean sub-conscious, in an experimental, structured and repeatable operation.

## **Molecularity and becoming**

At this point I want to try and draw the threads of this essay together, through the notion of becoming as an experimentation. Deleuze and Guattari provide a model through which we might approach becoming on its own terms. This accomplishes, in a different manner, a similar goal to that put forward in Spare with regard to belief. This is a process of stepping outside the problem of belief. Once this is done another positive problem can be posed, the problem of creation and becoming. Deleuze and Spare share two fundamental aspects in their positive thought and practice. Firstly, they both work with a model of a universe of becoming and secondly they share the attitude that the appropriate technique in such a world is experimentation.

In *The Book of Pleasure* we find a sort of 'definition' statement by Spare: "Magic, the reduction of properties to simplicity, making them transmutable to utilise them afresh by direction, without capitalisation, bearing fruit many times". This is the process I have called 'plugging into an orgiastic consciousness', which makes fluid the concepts of matter, thought and being, in such a way that limitations are little more than temporary boundaries of actuality, not possibility. It is both a practical and a theoretical process, one which Spare calls 'magic' and which, in a Deleuzian vein we might call 'making the difference'. Spare supposes the 'properties of simplicity' that Deleuze and Guattari call the 'molecularity' of becoming. Magic in this reading would therefore be a difference making activity within a world of becoming characterised by the flux of fundamental simplicity or molecularity at the heart of the universe.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian model of becoming gives us a structure through which we might see this process of 'plugging into' the orgiastic consciousness as the principle technique of the sorcerer. The multiplicity of multiplicities, all ever shifting, form the plane of activity but the border crossings are never, in principle, predictable even if some may be more familiar than others - the role of drugs for example provides an unpredictable if familiar route to crossing borders of consciousness. Drugs in fact provide a crucial example of the way in which the practical thought of Deleuze and Guattari could be used and is intended by them to be used. The famous maxim of Deleuze and Guattari, which they take from Henry Miller, is that we should attempt "to succeed in getting drunk, but on pure water". The success of such a process rests upon the structures of becoming that are similar to those underlying Spare's attempts at creating organic beliefs through sigilisation but both of these processes are techniques of experimentation.

Deleuze and Guattari's thought enable the sorceries of Spare to be retrieved from the linear arrangements made by someone like Kenneth Grant who wants to assimilate him to

a particular magical current whilst allowing such suggestions to provoke an interesting series of connections. They also offer a model of matter that no longer needs concepts such as 'aether' to allow non-causal connections. It brings the role of the writer and the artist to the fore rather than the model of the mystic and prompts experimentation and open structures rather than ideas of verification and inexpressible experientiality contained within assimilations of magic to science combined with the role of the secret. Magic is another form of knowledge, often relying upon the secret of the inexpressible experience, but such an approach is in danger of forgetting the other side of activity, that in which 'knowledge' is an embodied, active process of experimental learning. Any emphasis on an over simple concept of knowledge will fall prey to the permanent danger of a debilitating scepticism. I have only been able to give some very broad suggestions in this essay, but the purpose is to put forward a notion of another current within magical practice, one that runs alongside all human activity; the activity of the experimental and anomalous becoming which may be found at the heart of any notion of freedom. As such magic - like philosophy - has less importance for knowledge than for an ethical practice of relations with the living.

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## The Living Word of Zos

by Robert Ansell

A Personal Recollection first published in *AOS: A Celebration*, 14th May, 2006

In life we sometimes encounter an individual who has a profound influence on the way we see the world, and more rarely, on the way the world sees us. Many years ago, I met such a man. Our first contact, through the pages of a book, made only a slight impression on me, but I was young and the distractions of that volume many. Six years later my love of books brought me to into the service of the auctioneers Sotheby's and here, one morning in 1986, the artist and publisher Austin Osman Spare and I were formally introduced.



My professional mentor was Simon Heneage, a man of exceptional kindness and generosity. Simon was astute in recognising a rebel without a cause and, no doubt for this reason, he asked me to comment upon a small pen and ink drawing. It was a design for an Edwardian ex-libris, but somehow the artist had brought life into an impossible pairing; the head of a mallard bursting out from a strange floral composition. It was at once exquisite, unsettling and masterful. I studied it intently as Simon introduced me to the story of the artist – a boy genius, gifted, flawed, later a London recluse and mystery. It seemed an extraordinary life, mythic and full of pathos, but as I gazed into the intricate lines of the drawing I was overwhelmed by a sense of absolute familiarity. A few days later, and years before I understood what such an undertaking involved, I announced to bemused colleagues that I was going to write a biography for the artist. In retrospect it was more of a commitment to the man than to his life, but my rôle had yet to be made clear for me, and the enthusiasm of youth is seldom concerned with detail.

During the early winter of 1986, my cursory research into the life of Austin Osman Spare revealed an artist dismissed by his contemporary critics. Common themes seemed to involve him “dabbling in the occult” and “turning his back on society.” These clichés seemed glib even to my inexperienced eye, yet if these obstacles stood in the way of a more intimate understanding, events were to change my perspective within weeks. In the November of 1986 I was asked at short notice to attend a house visit for an important client. It was my first such visit for Sotheby’s and I felt ill-prepared, but despite reservations I found myself dispatched to deepest Dorset in search of a house referred to simply as ‘The Eye.’ After stopping for directions in Corfe Castle, I arrived at the gate to a discrete drive flanked by a high hedge – there was no name – but on the gatepost my gaze was met by a cyclopean eye motif that glared hypnotically out at the world.



The house was the home of the reclusive composer Kaikhosru Sorabji, then ninety-four years old. After my long journey Sorabji's assistant, Alastair Hinton, welcomed me into a large drawing room full of strange and exotic antiques. The scene seemed to have lain unchanged for decades and to my naïveté it held an unfamiliar glamour. Uncertain and nervous, I raised my eyes and found, to my astonishment, a large pen and wash drawing by a very familiar artist. I recall identifying the picture and Alastair guiding me towards a signed vellum copy of *The Book of Pleasure* and a deluxe copy of *The Focus of Life*, before leaving me to continue with my professional assessment. Standing alone in that silent and dusky room, with a shaft of sunlight streaming onto Sorabji's parlour grand and his shelves lined with exquisitely bound rarities, I looked up at the drawing and breathed the air of an era still vital, yet long passed. In these few moments AOS seemed to transcend glib cliché and become a living truth. Seldom does life offer such profound clarity.

In early 1987, armed and encouraged by Simon, and seemingly beckoned by my subject, I ventured tentatively out onto the path I now know so intimately. In search of my quarry I made enquiries to various booksellers and thankfully these produced a copy of Kenneth Grant's *The Magical Revival*. Here I found an entirely different man from the failed artist of the fine arts academia, AOS had become ZOS: mythic, potent and sexed. It was to become the entrée to another Spare, warm and humorous, later enfolded by the intimate record of *Zos Speaks!*, but at that time a man glimpsed through a glass darkly. Whilst I grappled with reconciling this 50s Brixton sorcerer to the Edwardian maverick artist, fate once again intervened to provide a crucial segment of the puzzle. A casual remark led one of my colleagues at Sotheby's, Dendy Easton, to mention he had recently met an elderly man who claimed to have known Spare well. I was intrigued and in the January of 1987 found myself writing to an unexpected Frank Letchford.



If Sorabji had represented Spare's elitist Edwardian heights, Frank represented the Elephant and Castle humanitarian. Warm, engaging and ever helpful, Frank opened many doors for me, brokering introductions to Dennis Bardens, Ian Kenyur-Hodgkins and eventually, to my great friend and co-conspirator, Gavin Semple. Working together Gavin and I found camaraderie and ultimately inspiration; for it was during this time our research unearthed an early notepaper design by Spare as a 'Publisher of Rare Editions.' In this moment was revealed the fulgurant path that now lies for so many years behind us, born of a seemingly unfulfilled dream.

These events are now memories, yet still the hand of Spare draws a line across the pages of my life – sometimes almost unperceivable, at others unmistakable, dancing, twisting, but always living, an influence that outlasts all others. His early experiments with automatism and the philosophy of the "Neither-Neither" were pioneering excursions into the nature of creative vision and these have been a source of inspiration to me, as they have to many others. That my early understandings of the man have now given way to a wiser insight has perhaps more to do with the lessons of my own life than of knowledge gained from books and meeting those who knew him well. For, when you strip away the myths and fallacies surrounding Spare's long creative path, what remains is the story of an incredibly driven man who, despite the endless hardships dealt to him by fate, refused to give up or compromise. Fifty years after his death it is this resolve, the Stoicism of Zos, that seems a much more authentic legacy than the cults of acquisitive formulae descended from popular myth. To suffer greatly and find therein a deeper understanding of the human condition is perhaps the most humbling of all ennoblements: Spare lived and limned that life, lest we forget. Austin Osman Spare, philosopher, mystic, artist and Stoic – your legacy lives on still.

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# Aida

by Vincent Pronova

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"Aida" by Austin Osman Spare is a rather large (30W x 20H) pastel on board picture. Executed in 1954 this piece represents an excellent example of the artist's "automatic" drawing.

The head and torso of an enigmatic woman of regal bearing and wearing an Egyptian headdress, (Ureas), dominates the center of the composition. She peers haughtily to her left, breasts bared at the lower edge of the depiction, illuminated from below by a dim, reddish light. Aida's line of sight seems to be directed at a weird facial image emerging from the chaotic field to her left and front. To her right background, unformed shapes swirl mindlessly upward.

Despite the seeming lack of distinct focal points, this artwork possesses a strong sense of depth, arising from the forceful presentation of the queen, her position relative to the formlessness to her right, and to the emergent visage to her left front. The unformed void area is distinctly behind; the chaos field and face are distinctly forward. The contrast between the crisply drawn features of Aida and the wild vagueness within which she is surrounded further accentuates the visual depth of this work.

Remember -- A.O. Spare was a gifted draughtsman, with formal training including the Royal College of Art. His technical ability cannot be disputed.

Inasmuch as artistic efforts may be manifestations of True Will, visual artworks are magickal works. A.O. Spare's skill as an artist has found some critical acceptance, less so, his abilities as a sorcerer. Now, AOS's occult skills are once again being understood, and with this understanding, his magick is becoming re-known. Spare's art has been characterized as of magical inspiration, and in some cases of being intrinsically magickal. Not all works have a full measure of both -- intuition strongly suggests that Aida does.

When viewing the picture, the question: "Who is she?" lurches to the forefront. AOS drew for himself, and as the agent of those beings to whom he was receptive. What then of Aida? A temporal door? An invitation? The opportunity to experience the Spareian vision, or the vision of Aida...?

By account, AOS often relied upon middle aged men or older prostitutes for his models, yet in Aida, he imbued his subject with beauty, power, and majesty: This may be a woman who has experienced the world, but in doing so clearly has not lost her authority or her destiny. She appears as the Empress, or perhaps the High Priestess...?

Wherein lies the source of her power? To what end has this force been imparted to her? By what means?

This drawing is a magical icon. An entity evoked by the artist, Aida has been made corporeal within the visual spectrum by Spare's application of color upon the board.

Art may be more powerful than words. In his "Focus of Life", AOS states: "Art is the truth we have realized of our belief." Assuming that he was referring to his artwork, this seems to validate the speculation offered by Jaques Rigaut/Genesis P. Orridge in the essay "Virtual Mirrors in Sound T.I.M.E.":

"All his writings are symbolic, they were never intended to be taken literally... They are appendices to the REAL work... His drawings, paintings, and images... They are in fact, the essence of his sorcery."

Upon viewing "Aida", her characterization of visual formula becomes reified -- Effecting some depths of mind, she becomes an access point to "otherwhere". Her moment, encompassing her existence, manifests her creation and her destruction; her coming from



and going to, hence opens as a portal to her All. This drawing is Magick. To again cite "Virtual Mirrors":

"Spare's pictures can hold the entirety of the images and entities that he represents... They are there."

What character the name "Aida" may have been assigned to is irrelevant to experiencing this picture; as noted the woman depicted is queenly, yet also priestess-like. Whether she is an Empress or the Hierophanta may be a subjective determination. An exploration of her charms and wonders promises to be lengthy.

What remains immediate and apparent, is that this picture has magickal attributes, and that these energies are potent enough that discussing them does not diminish them. As in another quote:

"Such drawings are themselves the gateway to the Sabbath; one is drawn into a vortex and whirled down the funnel of consciousness which explodes into unknown worlds."

This then, is "Aida", who at the very least, leaves us with an apprehension of A.O. Spare's Sorcery.

"What is time, but a variety of one thing." ---AOS

--Vincent Pronova

### **Austin Osman Spare and the Zos Kia Cultus**

**from The Magickal Revival  
by Kenneth Grant**

H.P. Lovecraft, in one of his tales of terror, alludes to certain entities which have their being "not in the spaces known to us, but between them. They walk calm and primal, of no dimensions, and to us unseen."

This aptly describes Austin Osman Spare. The circumstances of his birth emphasize the element of ambivalence and inbetweenness which forms the theme of his magic. He told me he was not sure whether he was born on the last day of December 1888, or on New Year's Day, 1889; whether, as he put it, he was Janus backward-turning, or Janus forward-facing. But whichever aspect of the deity he more closely represented, it is a fact that his life was a curious blend of past and future. Despite his inability to remember quite when he was born, the place was certainly Snowhill, London: he was the only son of a City of London policeman.

When barely twenty years of age he began writing *The Book of Pleasure*, in which he used art and sex to explore the subconscious mind. *The Book of Pleasure* reeks of diabolism to such an extent that Mario Praz in *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford, 1933) refers to Spare as an English "satanic occultist", and he places him in the same category as Aleister Crowley.

Spare's intense interest in the more obscure aspects of sorcery sprang from his early friendship with an old colonial woman who claimed descent from a line of Salem witches that Cotton Mather had failed to exterminate. Spare always alluded to her as Mrs. Paterson, and called her his "second mother". She had an extremely limited vocabulary composed mainly of the fortune-teller's argot, yet she was able to define and explain the most abstract ideas much more clearly than could Spare with his large and unusual vocabulary.

Although penniless, she would accept no payment for her fortune-telling, but insisted on the odd symbolic coin traditionally exacted as a sacrifice fee. Apart from her skill in divining, she was the only person Spare ever met who could materialize thoughts to visible appearance. Aleister Crowley- who met and attracted all kinds of psychically active individuals- met two only in the course of his life who had this particular siddhi (Allan Bennett was one; the other, Crowley did not name).

Mrs. Paterson, when visited for purposes of fortune-telling, would read a person's character immediately as a matter of course before going into details about the future. If she prophesied an event she was unable to describe verbally, she would objectivize the event in a visual image and the querent would see, in some dark corner of her room, a clearly defined if fleeting image of the prophesied event. And this never failed to follow at the appointed time.

It was undoubtedly Mrs. Paterson's influence that stimulated Spare's innate interest in the occult, which, allied to his remarkable skill as a draughtsman enabled him to reproduce through his art the strange entities he encountered in transmundane spheres. He drew several portraits of Mrs. Paterson, one of which appeared in *The Focus of Life*, published by the Morland Press in 1921. Another drawing of her by Spare recently appeared (1971) in the part-work encyclopaedia *Man, Myth and Magic*, where she is shown after having "exteriorized" herself in the form of a nubile girl.

Spare too was able occasionally to conjure thought-forms to visible appearance, but whereas in the old witch's case it was an unailing power, in his own case it was erratic and uncertain. On one occasion it worked only too effectively, as two unfortunate persons learnt to their cost. They were of the dilettante kind, mere dabblers in the occult. They wanted Spare to conjure an Elemental to visible appearance. They had seen materialized spirits of the dead in the seance room, but had never seen an Elemental. Spare tried to dissuade them, explaining that such creatures were subconscious automata inhabiting the human psyche at levels normally inaccessible to the conscious mind. As they almost always embodied atavistic urges and propensities, it was an act of folly to evoke them as

their intrusion into waking life could be extremely dangerous. But the smatterers did not take him seriously.

Using his own method of elemental evocation, Spare set to work. Nothing happened for some time, then a greenish vapour, resembling fluid seaweed, gradually invaded the room. Tenuous fingers of mist began to congeal into a definite, organized shape. It entered their midst, gaining more solidity with each successive moment. The atmosphere grew miasmic with its presence and an overpowering stench accompanied it; and in the massive cloud of horror that enveloped them, two pinpoints of fire glowed like eyes, blinking in an idiot face which suddenly seemed to fill all space. As it grew in size the couple panicked and implored Spare to drive the thing away. He banished it accordingly. It seemed to crinkle and diminish, then it fell apart like a blanket swiftly disintegrating. But while it had cohered and hung in the room like a cloud, it was virtually opaque and tangible; and it reeked of evil. Both the people concerned were fundamentally changed. Within weeks, one died of no apparent cause; the other had to be committed to an insane asylum.

Although Spare was convinced that an occult Intelligence frequently painted, drew, or wrote through him, he was unable to discover its identity. He was, however, in almost daily contact with a familiar, a spirit-guide, known as Black Eagle whom he had clearly seen and drawn on several occasions. But he was convinced that Black Eagle was not the sole source of his automatism. Spare had but to turn his head suddenly and he would sometimes catch a glimpse of the familiar spirits that constantly surrounded him. Several times he had "caught" one of them long enough to make a lightning-swift sketch.

Spare's frequent traffic with denizens of invisible realms led to his evolving a graphic means of conjoining all thoughts- past, present, and future- in the ever-fluid ether of Consciousness. His graphic symbology represents a definite language designed to facilitate communication with the psychic and subliminal world.

It was Spare's opinion that for this language to be truly effective, each individual should evolve his own, creating his sigils from the material nearest to hand- his own subconscious. He gave as a reason for so much failure in divination the fact that, although the operator sometimes succeeded in annexing traditional symbols to his own subconscious awareness of their true values, many of the symbols eluded correct interpretation; they therefore failed of nexus and were consequently sterile.

Not only could Spare "tell fortunes" in the usually accepted sense, he could also use the cards for influencing the host of subtle entities which swarm in the astral light, and with their cooperation he accomplished much of his magic.

He designed and used a pack of cards which he called the "Arena of Anon", each card bearing a magical emblem which was a variation of one of the letters of the Alphabet of Desire. (The basis of this Alphabet, together with many early examples of the letters composing it, is given in Spare's 'The Book of Pleasure', on which he began working in 1909 and published privately on completion, in 1913.) When vividly visualized, the

emblem or sigil mysteriously stirs the subconscious and a corresponding image, or set of images, arises in the mind. In proportion to the power of belief in the sigil, so is the clarity of the image which it evokes. If the sigil taps a layer of ancient or cosmic memory, some astonishing images surge into the mind and the skilful sorcerer is able to project them into the astral mind-stuff of other individuals, so that they imagine the image to be a palpable presence.

Spare could influence elemental phenomena as well as the minds of other people. Great danger lies in possession, and Spare wisely refrained from writing too openly about the processes he employed. What I know about his methods I learnt from personal contact with him.

Even as a child, Spare employed these curious sigils. One is reminded of Yeat's words in *The Trembling of the Veil*: "Mathers described how as a boy he had drawn over and over again some event that he longed for; and called those drawings an instinctive magic."

When he was seventeen Spare stayed at the home of the Rev. Robert Hugh Benson, author of *The Necromancers* and other occult novels. They went out for a walk one summer day; a serene and cloudless blue sky shone overhead. It had been fine all day, and Benson was curious to know whether Spare could, in such unlikely circumstances, produce rain by magical means. Spare said he could, proceeded to trace a sigil on the back of a used envelope, and, pausing in his tracks, concentrated all his attention upon it. Within ten minutes small clouds began to appear; they massed at a point immediately above their heads and discharged violently. Both Benson and Spare were drenched to the skin.

A year or two later, Benson introduced Spare to the Hon. Everard Feilding, Secretary of the Society of Psychic Research. At the time Feilding was associated with Frederick Bligh Bond, the President of the Archaeological Society who, by psychic means, had discovered the buried Edgar Chapel at Glastonbury Abbey. Like Benson, Feilding wanted proof of Spare's magical powers and, when the latter offered to oblige, proposed the following test: Spare was to materialize an object which Feilding mentally visualized without giving any clue as to its nature.

Spare drew one of his magical sigils, which, instead of being symbolic of the unknown desired object, was the ideograph of a familiar spirit whose services he frequently employed when any mind-reading was required.

After some time, Spare received a vivid impression of the object in Feilding's mind. He then drew a second sigil, told Feilding he need no longer concentrate, and proceeded to do so himself. These proceedings were interrupted by a knock on the door. Feilding tiptoed to the door, opened it, and was amazed to find his valet proffering a pair of slippers. Feilding turned to Spare and asked him how he had done it!

An essential part of Spare's technique lay in deliberate forgetfulness, and this is the part which a novice finds extremely difficult. One is reminded of the king who lavished a

fortune on an itinerant alchemist who had successfully manufactured the Philosopher's Stone. After giving the king lengthy and complicated instructions, which the king repeated by heart, the alchemist smiled and said approvingly: "Yes, your Highness has remembered every detail perfectly; there is just one further point to remember. For three minutes before the Alchemical Substance congeals, you must concentrate your mind upon its lustre as it seethes in the alembic, but during this time you should on no account let the thought of greenness cross your mind for even a moment." The king thanked the alchemist and prepared to make the Stone. Everything went according to plan until the last few minutes, when the mind of the king was invaded by an army of green objects which he was powerless to banish.

With Spare's sigils the case is somewhat similar. The reason he gives for forgetting the desire at the time of invoking it lies in the fact that for the operation to succeed the conscious mind must have no inkling of the transaction. Consciously formulated desires take time to materialize; subconscious desires can be made to materialize very swiftly. Consciousness of the desire vitiates the entire process, so a method had to be found of forgetting the desire during the period of magical evocation. Spare called the process "union through absent-mindedness" and advocated the yogic method of emptying the mind of all but the sigil. This is not always successful so as an alternative he suggests the sigillization of perennial desires, desires that are sure to arise periodically, as for instance the desire for beautiful women. Several such desires are then sigillized, scrambled together, and laid aside for several days. On reassembling the cards upon which they have been drawn, the operator is unable to remember precisely what sigillizes what! The rite is then comparatively easy to accomplish for it requires only concentrated thought.

Spare often supplemented the process by a sexual formula which endowed it with added efficacy. He derived most of his sex-magical formulae from a Delphic Pythoness who communed with him during sessions of automatic writing. This Delphic Oracle was probably the spirit of old Mrs. Paterson, guiding him from beyond.

One such formula enabled him to "give life to the autistic, by an earthenware virgin". In view of the present-day predilection for auto-erotic aids to ecstasy, the resuscitation of the dildo (At the time of writing, my attention has been drawn to "the first European sex paper" which reflects the current obsession with purely mechanistic aspects of self-love. Nevertheless, such methods employed in a magical manner may place the practitioner in direct contact with his daemon or genius.) and the widespread curiosity about the sorcery of sex, Spare's formula of the Earthenware Virgin is of particular interest, though for Spare it had an exclusively magical aim.

Until he received this formula he had, as he put it, "copulated merely with the atmosphere, or rode whores, witches and bitches of all kinds, there being few virgins".

In order to translate a specified desire from the level of subjective consciousness to the material or objective plane, the Pythoness instructed him to construct an urn in conformity with the dimensions of the erect penis. Sufficient space- but no more- was to be left at the end of the vessel in order to form a vacuum when the phallus was inserted.

The cavity was to contain the sigillized wish, which was automatically consecrated at the moment of orgasm. The greatly enhanced pleasure induced by the suctional power of the vacuum increased the size of the penis and caused an unusually prolonged orgasm. At the critical moment, the desire was to be vividly visualized and held steadily in mind for as long as possible. When the mental image began to wane and disappear the urn was hermetically sealed and buried in a casket filled with earth, or in the ground itself.

Spare maintained that this was the formula used by the ancient Greek urnings; hence the designation. In one of his unpublished writings he give the following instructions: "Bury the urn at midnight, the moon being quartered. When the moon wanes, disinter the urn and- while repeating a suitable incantation- pour its contents as a libation on to the earth. Then re-bury it."

As the sperm would by that time have congealed, Spare advised a replenishment before the second "burial". He describes the Earthenware Virgin as "the most formidable formula known; it never fails and is dangerous. Hence, what is not written down must be guessed.

"From this formula was derived the legend of the genii of the brazen vessel associated with Solomon."

Whether this is so, I do not know, but there is a curious illustration in Payne Knight's celebrated Discourse on the Worship of Priapus (London, 1865) which is not satisfactorily explained in the text. It is in two parts and depicts a male figure with sexual organ erect; in his raised right hand he holds a vase-shaped sheath which he is about to clamp upon the phallus. The second part of the illustration shows the same image, but with penis drooping languidly after ejaculation, and the waist of the figure girdled with fruits symbolic of the rite's fulfilment. There are also one or two illustrations in Reinach's Repertoire des Vases Peints (Paris, 1899), which suggest a similar magical practice.

Spare could undoubtedly materialize atavisms from his own subconsciousness and clothe them fleetingly in the sexual ectoplasm (or astral semen) of his atmospheric copulations.

Occasionally, these entities actually achieved a degree of density sufficient to make them visible- and even palpable- to other people. He called them "elemental automata" or "intrusive familiars". They frequently copulated amongst themselves, engendering offspring simultaneously. Spare has depicted many of these creatures in their peculiar pursuits and has written several accounts of the Sabbath which he attended in their company. Old Mrs. Paterson's influence is here very marked, for he used her likeness as the type of the ancient witch in many of his drawings.

One of Spare's constantly recurring themes concerns the transmogrification of age into youth. The first time Mrs. Paterson transformed herself before his eyes, the sorcery of it left a permanent impression which inspired many of his later works. One moment she was the lined and wizened old crone, then, in a flash, she appeared to him as a syren equipped with all the allurements of sex-appeal, an image that fulfilled his penchant for

full voluptuous contours. How she projected such a glamour he was unable to discover, and although he never surprised her secret, he tried- with partial success- to emulate her example. This he did by a magical induction of ecstasy which enabled him to function at levels of high emotionalism. He was at such times creatively active for days on end, needing neither food nor sleep. Enhanced sexual activity accompanied this condition. On the few occasions when he did not sublimate this energy and direct it to artistic creation, he regretted it. Such was his hunger that in one night alone he coupled with eighteen women. He called these outbursts "Dionysiac spasms of pan-sexualism", in which he had a vision of "all things fornicating all the time".

Spare wrote down his witch-guide's instructions and, over the years, worked them into several books which he illustrated by some of the best of his drawings. It was only towards the end of his life, however, that he concentrated the mass of Mrs. Paterson's teachings into definite form. This consisted of a series of aphorisms and a magical grimoire which he was working on at the time of his death in 1956. Both these works survive in manuscript. He intended calling the Grimoire *The Book of the Living Word of Zos*, the name Zos being his magical name in the Witch-Cult.

The Grimoire is not so much a resume of the Witch Tradition as a highly individualized system of sorcery reflecting his creative genius and aesthetic theories. He also developed and extended his magical alphabet, the Atavistic Alphabet about which he had first written in *The Book of Pleasure* in 1913. Each letter represents a sex-principle potent to awaken remote atavistic strata of the psyche. Examples of its use are given in the Grimoire, where he allies it with Witchcraft. The following is a literal translation of one of his favourite spells:

O mighty Rehctaw! Thou who exists in all erogenousness, We evoke Thee!  
By the power of the meanings arising from these forms I make. We evoke Thee!  
By the Talismans that speak the secret leitmotif of desire, We evoke Thee!  
By the sacrifices, abstinences and transvaluations we make, We evoke Thee!  
By the sacred inbetweeness concepts Give us the flesh!  
By the quadriga sexualis Give us unvarying desire!  
By the conquest of fatigue Give us eternal resurgence!  
By the most sacred Word-graph of Heaven We invoke Thee!

This prayer or evocation embodies traditional Sabbatic concepts and might be described as the Alpha and Omega of Spare's doctrine.

Rehctaw (Watcher) is spelt backwards, not for the reason given in connection with Dee and Kelly's angelic communications but because the "backward" symbolism conceals the key to the reification of desire, the final absorption of the ego-current in its source- the Self. Hence Spare's emphasis on Self-love, or autotelic ecstasy. Rehctaw is the symbol of reaching backwards in time to infinite remoteness by the mechanism of intense nostalgia. Whether it is symbolized by the Moon presiding over the nocturnal orgies of the Sabbath, or by the back-to-back dance of the witches and warlocks (see *de L'Ancre*), or by the infamous kiss of the Sabbath which is applied to the anus of the Demon; all such symbols

indicate an infinite regression which causes atavistic resurgence and the inversion of sex to Self-love.

"Shall I speak of that unique intensity without form? Know ye the ecstasy within? The pleasure between ego and self? At that time of ecstasy there is no thought of others; there is no thought." (The Anathema of Zos, by A.O. Spare; London, 1927)

The opening line of the evocation resumes the method employed at the Sabbath for conscious wish-fulfilment through self-pleasure, and it is glossed by the words: "Except in the sensuous impact of flesh on flesh there are no meanings." The Self lives in, permeates, and is identical with, Reality- the enduring and ever present Consciousness- the living flesh compact of endlessly reifying dream.

The second part of the evocation refers to the sigils and letters of the sacred alphabet wherewith Zos (i.e. the body considered as a whole) produces its subtle spells by projecting its Self on the mists of matter, without. In other words, the language of desire and its meanings penetrate the silent regions of consciously forgotten experiences, evoking by its reverberant power the ineluctable memories that abide perpetually in subconsciousness.

"The Talismans that speak the leitmotif of desire" are, primarily, the two major magical instruments of Spare's system- the Hand and Eye of which the phallus and the kteis are the secret symbols. They are both used, as in Crowley's Cult, for evoking or provoking "consciousness in touch; ecstasy in vision".

The fourth clause of the Sabbatic Prayer refers to the occult maxim that great achievements proceed upon total exhaustion of energy in one great burst of release, after a period- long or short- of sacrifice or abstention, during which time the necessary energy is accumulated and intensified. "The Sabbath is always secret, communal and periodic; an enforced consummation for almost unlimited wish-fulfilment."

"Prolonged voluntary abstinence, repression and sacrifice, is released in mass sexual congress and sublimated to one end: the exteriorization of a wish, which is thus achieved by a great saving and a total spending." (From an unpublished manuscript, Formula of the Witch's Sabbath as first told me by a Witch, by A.O.S.)

The "transvaluations" are effected by the sloughing of conventional ideas and beliefs, and by the absorption of the energy thus liberated. Spare terms such energy "free belief". It is this aimless energy that is seized upon at the Sabbath and directed to given ends.

The fifth clause of the Prayer introduces one of the most important aspects of Spare's magic, that of inbetweenness.

In everyday life one craze or "belief" follows another. By a process of not-believing, of emptying the craze, or obsession, of its content, we can surprise the tendency of belief to appear as one thing rather than another, or as one thing after another. We can in this way



break through into that ecstasy of communion with the Atmospheric "I" which Spare calls the Kia, the state of inbetweenness, or Neither-Neither.

The primordial belief is "Self", "God", or Kia (it does not matter what we call it). It is the only belief that is self-evident because it is experienced by each one of us at every moment of our existence. It is also the only belief that is truly free of belief, because to be is to be-live it- as Spare aptly expresses it. It is void of necessity to become anything else, for it is all things all the time and can only and always be itself. If we can realize this we shall not fall into the error of conceptual thought, which constantly breeds other thoughts with which we temporarily identify ourselves: the Buddhist cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

In a few words, Spare states the crux of the doctrine: "By hindering belief and semen from conception, they become simple and cosmic." Only when desire has become cosmic can the total ecstasy, which characterizes Kia, dawn in the individual consciousness, because it is then no longer limited or personalized consciousness, but cosmic in scope and free to enjoy itself eternally.

In other words, one must enlarge belief or desire until it embraces all things; Spare urges us to will "insatiety of desire, brave self-indulgence and primaevial sexualism" (*The Focus of Life*, by Austin O. Spare. The Morland Press, London, 1921.), for belief freed from conception merges desire with the Infinite, creates a unity of Self-Knowing (which is also supreme Self-Love) and transcends the two poles of objectivity and subjectivity, discovering in between the two, the Real Self, Kia, the Atmospheric "I".

After the Oath which constitutes the fifth stage of evocation, the refrain changes from "We evoke Thee!" to a demand to the hidden Watcher to 'Give us the flesh!' The petition is for the material medium whereby the desire will actually substantiate itself.

From certain historical accounts of Witchcraft we learn that the roasted flesh or children and animals was sometimes sacrificed to the infernal powers as a sacrifice potent to achieve realization of the desires of the celebrants at the Sabbath. The literal performance of this sacrifice was a degeneration of the original magical act of transubstantiation effected by the sorcerer when he "sacrificed" the child of his loins, i.e. when he consumed or burnt up his sigillized wish in the fire of forgetfulness.

The next stage of the rite evokes the "quadriga sexualis" (the four horseman or powers of sex) which adumbrates the various mystical attitudes (forms of congress, postures) employed at the Sabbath. Although these are numerous, there are four main kinds. Firstly, the gesture of constant congress; secondly, the gesture of abstract creating (a masturbatory gesture) involving the Hand, the Eye, and the Atmosphere; thirdly, the gesture of simulation or astral reflection, symbolized by the Formula of the Divine Ape; and fourthly, the gesture typical of the Witch Cult which involves the sodomitical use of the female organism.

Comparisons with Crowley's Cult of Sexual Magick will spring to mind, but Spare elaborates these four great gestures as follows:

In the first instance he interprets "constant congress" as the perpetual interplay of the Will (symbolized by the Hand) and the Imagination (symbolized by the Eye), for it is Will and Imagination that cause things to appear. The Tibetan Yab-yum is the Oriental mode of representing this constant interplay of the active and passive potencies. The gesture of constant congress, therefore, resumes the prime function of the Sabbatic Rite, which is "ex-creation", or evolving from our "innerness" through living contact with "all otherness"- typified by the world without.

The second gesture- that of abstract creating- is performed by a special kind of mantric vibration, and the Mouth is the symbol of the magical implement which performs it. Reverberant evocation, prayer, adoration through song, incantation or mantra, conveys the energy of desire by tonal nuance to the necessary stratum of the subconsciousness. The technique of making the utterance effective, of resounding the depths of cosmic memory and making the "sacred alignments" is a major arcanum of the Zos Kia Cultus. "What sounds the depths and conjoins Will and Belief? Some inarticulate hieroglyph, or sigil, wrought from nascent Desire and rhythmized by unbounded Ego." (From The Grimoire of Zos.)

The second gesture therefore resumes the formulation of the Great Wish on the astral plane, prior to its "excreation", projection, and subsequent embodiment.

The third gesture of the "quadriga sexualis", the concept of simulation, reveals the means of reifying the Great Wish. The archetype of all such simulatory techniques is the state of total vacuity which Spare named the Death Posture. By feint, the means of reification is concentrated through a simulation of death or annihilation. This posture is explained in the next chapter.

The fourth and final gesture, that of re-organization, re-arrangement, or "abortive congress", implies a magical formula deriving from the ancient Draconian Cults of Egypt. Either Moon Magic is implied, or the Formula of Gomorrah, both of which appear in the Crowley Cult as aspects of the IX! and XI!, O.T.O., respectively. The re-organization of magical power within the human organism involves consolidation of the reified wish until it exhausts itself through "non-necessity". Hence the gesture of the "quadriga sexualis" impregnates the glamour already projected on the astral plane, endowing it with the energy of the sorcerer himself so that it becomes a living entity, capable of reverberant copulations through "increative" congress.

Spare explains the Sabbath as "an inverse-reversion for self-seduction; an undoing for a divertive conation. Sex is used as the technique and medium of a magical act. It is not only erotic satisfaction; the sensualist is made detached, controlled, until final sublimation. His whole training is designed to render him submissive and obedient [to the Witch] until he can control, transmute, and direct his magical energy wherever desired,

by cold and amoral passion." (From an unpublished manuscript entitled The Zoetic Grimoire of Zos.)

Following upon the appeal to the "quadriga sexualis" are the words "Give us unvarying desire!" Desire, without variation of any kind, undifferentiated and undifferentiating, leads to the consummation of an unvarying bliss which is free from all concept, and therefore habitually infinite. "Ecstasy is our outspan, touching reality: a potent generative instant; its surplus may be used abstractly [i.e. by mantric vibration; see the Second Gesture] to incarnate another wish," and so on, endlessly. This is what is meant by "reverberant evocation".

The seventh stage of the rite concerns "the conquest of fatigue" which is essential to effective Sabbatic functioning; it is (or should be) sustained somatic, cerebral and psycho-magical energy insuring intense ecstasy when the Great Exhaustion makes possible the voidness necessary to the projection of the sigil; the voidness that is the chalice containing the Great Wish. This recalls Crowley's innumerable sex-magical operations for "Sex-Force and Attraction". (See The Magical Record of the Beast 666, edited by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant.)

The penultimate petition, "Give us eternal resurgence", is a plea for the constant return of the primaevally remembered rapture, until a continuum of bliss is established wherein the Kia is seen, felt, and known to be the background of all possibility, the source of creation and the aim of all pleasure. It is the doctrine of atavistic resurgence.

The Sabbatic prayer concludes with an invocation of "the most sacred Word-graph of Heaven". The Word-graph of Heaven is a glyph of the Goddess, and it conceals the true purpose of the Sabbath. It is a secret glyph of Zos Kia Cultus; it invokes the Goddess, whereas the preceding stages of the rite evoked Her. Invocation is a call to the Spirit to appear subjectively; evocation is a calling forth of the Spirit to objective appearance. The hidden Rehctaw is evoked to visible manifestation "by the power of meanings arising from these forms I make".

According to Spare, the witch presiding at the Sabbatic rite is "usually old, grotesque, worldly, and libidiously learned; and is as sexually attractive as a corpse. Yet she becomes the supreme vehicle of consummation. This is necessary for the tranmutation of the sorcerer's personal aesthetic culture, which is thereby destroyed. Perversion is used to overcome moral prejudice or conformity. By persistence, the mind and desire become amoral, focused, and entirely acceptive, and the life-force of the Id (the Great Desire) is free of inhibitions prior to final control.

"Thus, ultimately, the Sabbath becomes a deliberate sex orgy for the purpose of exteriorization, thus giving reality to the autistic thought by transference. Sex is for full use, and he who injures none, himself does not injure."

Spare believed that the personal aesthetic culture (that is, the individual's idea of what constitutes beauty and ugliness) when exalted as the criterion of value in itself, has

destroyed more affective affinity than any other "belief". "But he who transmutes the traditionally ugly into another aesthetic value has new pleasures beyond fear."

In Liber Aleph, Crowley enunciated a similar thesis. The magical ecstasy liberated by union with grotesque or hideous images usually associated with aversion, repulsion, or horror, is super-abundant compared with that released by the union of (usually accepted) opposites. One is reminded of Salvador Dali's observation that the wished-for treasure islands may lie precisely in those images of horror and dread that are naturally repellent to the conscious mind. Such a transformation of values, a rebours, improves health and leads to self-control, tolerance, understanding and compassion. Not only an adjunct to the rite, it accelerates the fulfilment of the Great Desire.

"Nothing is attained merely by 'wanting'; epistemology, even eschatology will not help, not Gods; but- spake Zos- the 'as if' simulations have been prolific as objective realities. Sublimation of all 'reason' to the 'blind' life-force is the whole of wisdom." (From The Grimoire of Zos.)

Spare's drawings were always inspired by the New Aesthetic, the New Sexuality. They amount almost to masturbation in line; the line coils and curls upon itself and mounts the steep incline of ecstasy as the amazing sigils are woven into a complex web of dream. To follow closely the line of some of his Sabbatic drawings is to leave earth and dive obliquely between those spaces that Lovecraft celebrated in his nightmare tales. Such drawings are themselves the gateway to the Sabbath; one is drawn into a vortex and whirled down the funnel of consciousness which explodes into unknown worlds. Spare would not reveal the magical graphs that unsealed the cells of these eldritch dimensions.

Of the Sabbath itself he said that it was always secret, communal and periodic; a concentrated consummation for unlimited wish-fulfilment:

*The hyper-eroticism induced by this grand scale hysteria or saturnalia has no essentially sado-masochistic basis; simulation can and often does replace it. Before the ceremony, each participant plays his or her allotted part which usually develops into chaotic promiscuity. The initiates are trained in their parts individually; they play a passive role, while the witches take the active part; thus the symbolic levitation by besom handle.*

*There is a secret meeting-place and an elaborate ceremony which is an extensive hypnotic to overwhelm all psychological resistances; thus, the sense of smell, hearing and sight are seduced by incense, mantric incantation and ritual, while taste and touch are made more sensitive by the stimuli of wine and oral sexual acts. After total sexual satiation by every conceivable means, an affectivity becomes, an exteriorized hallucination of the predetermined wish which is magical in its reality. No one can say whether certain things happen or not; each individual may have very different and equally vivid experiences; but some form of levitation seems common to all. My own experience of many Sabbaths is that there is consummate exteriorization [of latent potencies] and that subsequent memories are of reality.*

*All excessively sadistic acts are mainly symbolized by the witches, and what simulation there is follows closely the patterns of all erotic love rites. The whole ceremony is based mainly on an inversion of orthodox religious services.*

In another writing (also unpublished), Spare declared that "Sorcery is a deliberate act of causing metamorphoses by the employment of elementals. It forges a link with the powers of middle nature, (i.e. The astral plane, between the spiritual and physical realms.) or the ether, the astrals of great trees and of animals of every kind. Will is our medium, Belief is the vehicle, and Desire is the force combining with the elemental. Cryptograms are our talismans and protectors."

The will, or nervous energy, must be suppressed in order to create tension, and released only at the psychological moment. "At that time, gaze into and beyond the immediate vista, into the Aeon- the spaciousness beyond your meannesses, beyond your borrowed precepts, dogmas and beliefs- until you vibrate in spacious unity. Indraw your breath until the body quivers and then give a mighty suspiration, releasing all your nervous energy into the focal point of your wish; and as your urgent desire merges into the ever present procreative sea, you will feel a tremendous insurge, a self-transformation. And the Devil himself shall not prevent your will materializing."

## **Artist and Familiar**

**by Joseph Nechvatal**

**"The predominant element in the pleasure to be obtained from overthrowing Power, from becoming a master without slaves, and from rectifying the past, is the subjectivity of each individual. The cause of free self-realization must always embrace subjectivity - and thus cease to be a cause. Only from this starting point can we accede to those vertiginous heights where every gratification falls within the grasp of each." ~ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life***

### **I**

Austin Osman Spare is an artist in whom we cannot be satisfied. Among the many complexities that have transpired in today's society primarily due to the delirious effects of information-communication proliferation, is the changing nature of artistic definition. Recently contemporary thought has been concerned with the poststructuralist deliberation on the notion of the subject; in order to question its traditionally privileged epistemological status. Particularly in respect to the artist, there has been a sustained effort to question the role of the artist/subject as the intending and knowing autonomous creator of art - as its coherent originator. For me, the semi-automatic drawings of A. O. Spare from the 1920s have become emblematic of the rigorous scrutiny of what Jacques Derrida has described of as logocentrism: the once held distinctions between subjectivity

and objectivity; between public and private; between fantasy and reality; between the subconscious and the conscious realm.

Today these distinctions are breaking down under the pressure of our speeding and omnipresent computer communications technologies. We are now part of a technologically hallucinogenic culture that functions along the lines of a dream, free from the strictures of time and space; free from some of our traditional earthly limits which have been broken down by the instantaneous nature of electronic communications. The modernist existential concept of the singular individual has been supplanted by the media-reproduced individual, in a way liberated from what used to be thought of as historical time, vaporously existing in a technologically stored eternity (simulacrum-hyperreality). This quality of phantasmagorical and perverse displacement has formulated a new vision of existence which Baudrillard has called pornographic and what Deleuze & Guattari call schizoid. Teleologically, both of these descriptions apply aptly to the drawings of A.O. Spare in a collection of ways which I will make apparent shortly. For those, and they are numerous, who are not familiar with the work of Spare, let me first provide some rudimentary background on him.

Austin Osman Spare (1888? - 1956) was born the son of a London policeman. Doom loomed large in Fin de Siècle England as Spare came to age; and thus his development into what can now be recognized as a late-decadent, perversely ornamental, graphic dandy in the manner of Felicien Rops and/or Aubrey Beardsley can be contextualized. As a young man he was for a brief period of time a member of the "Silver Star"; Alister Crowley's magical order. Spare's lifelong interest in the theory and practice of sorcery was initiated, he recounted, by his sexual relationship at a very young age with an elderly woman named Paterson. To perform sorcery, for Spare, was a practice meant to ensorcel, to encircle, and to ensnare spirits. It is not quite the same thing as practicing magic, which is the art of casting spells or glamours. For Spare, as well as for Crowley, Tantrixesque sex held the means of access to their magical systems. However it is in Spare's conception of radical and total freedom, consisting in the unrestricted expression of what he held to be the "inherent dream", where we first detect the seditious and chaotic philosophy which drove a prong between himself and Crowley and every other esoteric system but his own brand of chaos magic. In 1905, at the tender age of 19, Spare self-published his first collection of drawings in a book of aphorisms entitled EARTH INFERNO . In it, he lamented the death of the "universal women lying barren on the parapet of the subconscious's", and he called for a revival of the "primitive women", castigating what he called the "inferno of the normal". EARTH INFERNO disparages the world of humdrum banality in favor of an exotic orb which Spare began to reveal in a spate of awesome drawings somewhat reminiscent of the decadent artists previously mentioned.

In 1907, Spare self-published a second collection of drawings in a publication named THE BOOK OF SATYRS which contained acute insights into the social order of his day. In 1909, Spare began work on a third book of drawings entitled THE BOOK OF PLEASURES on which he worked for four years. In 1914 he held his first one-person exhibition at the Baillie Gallery in London. It included many of the semi-automatic

sketches he drew while half asleep or in a self-induced trance. Most of Spare's semi-automatic work from 1910 onward were produced in self-induced trances which he claimed were sometimes controlled by intrusive occult intelligence's working through him. He considered his best accomplishments those which he said were produced through him rather than by him, often by the hand of the revenant spirits of Blake, da Vinci, Holbein, and Durer. Not bad virtual company. Spare quite wildly would declare that his was the automatic hand utilized by these deceased masters. Through this automatic and delirious technique he claimed to be able to draw upon "...the profoundest depths of memory.." and to "...tap into the springs of instinct." It is in this highly extravagant practice of openness and swank self-denial that Spare's relevance to the post structuralist - post internet conceptions of the decentered subject are found with his obvious bearing on the antisocial aspects of collective on-line self-permutation. By participating wholeheartedly in his insertion (and semi-faux disappearance) into the transpersonal symbolic economy of the sign through the assumed equivalence of life and death (in what perhaps can be imagined for us as digitized-stored existence after personal death)

Spare remains truly individual if not altogether alone. Such a radical egoless gesture (at the same time, what a bogus collaboration) he fabricated - creating an imposing egotistical conception of a collective and collected self - is a view which counters the long-standing Western Metaphysical phallocratic heroic portrayal of male-selfhood which we all know too well. And yet, doesn't this view of a compiled self, akin to the essence of the death of the subject, offer just a sort of resistance to the structures of logocentric civilization that simulationist theory claimed was impossible? Spare's quite early conception of the illusory coherence of the "I", renders everyone and everything equally phantasmatical (as fabula) akin to the way the electronic-computer-media network can do. In effect his "I" exists only as the passive construct of a system of forces which act through him on the creation of an occult synergistic complex image. This synergistic compounding of the mnemonic threshold encapsulates our current postpostmodern-networked predicament in that the fabulated digital-self today feels sublimated and eclipsed but also freed up by the mammoth computer-media-web. Phantom information bits flow continuously around and through us in a vague endless whirl of unverifiability. This questionable (and perhaps imaginary) data proliferation forms slowly, imperceptibly, bit by bit, into an extensive hypothetical aggregate somewhere deep in the abstruse recesses of our collected digital subconscious, awaiting discharge and reformation.

Perhaps Spare can be understood then as an expression of this eternal verity, recording as he does, vis-a-vis the disinterested trance, this releasing of disembodied fabula. His remarkable magical method suggests a resurgent atavism based on obsession and ecstasy. The subconscious is impregnated by a sustained desire that becomes energized by the supposition that deep memory, the void, responds to longings and can relive original obsessions. Each era has its circumlocutions, its compliances; yet Spare felt it his privilege, even his obligation to sally forth, and to be inordinate in his openness to past representations; but not in any placating or merely plausible way, as often the meager appropriatists and samplers do do. For Spare, only excess may be recompensed. Only opulence which borders on the decadent can offer us this kind of examination of the

illusory self, as it arises out of the present day climate of technological and information abundance. Only ideas of multiple selves can adequately represent artists as social communicators anymore. Only transformative notions of the self can accurately reflect the massive transformational effect of webbed high-technology.

## II

It is extremely relevant then to consider Spare's means of becoming courageously individual through this kind of frenzied tranced-grouping of the Superego - a transgression of (and by!) his artistic "Masters". The internet is the collective Superego now. In one of Spare's artistic statements he wrote, "Speed is the criterion of the genuine automatic. In the ecstatic condition of revelation from the sub-memory strata, the mind elevates the sexual or inherited powers and depresses the intellectual qualities. So a new atavistic responsibility is attained by daring to believe - to possess one's own beliefs - without attempting to rationalize spurious ideas from prejudiced and tainted intellectual sources! Art becomes, by this illuminism or ecstatic power, a functional activity expressing in a symbolic language the desire towards joy."

In terms of the exact copy's importance to our electronic era's conception of information as simulation, Spare's claim to meta-individuality in his production seems prophetic. If a substanceless collectively reverberates internally in each of us, if in each of our computers a Superego beyond propensity and will exists and dominates us, than an inner magical detoxification of authority indeed seems futile. We can only act with what authority has passed down to us. But if the search is more simply directed towards not repeating what has been taught, and if what we have learned can be cracked open and drained and transfigured through disinterested trance, then novel panoramas and multiple personalities do have room to emerge. What happens, for example, when our fast paced dumbness and reactionary media codes are problematized by a shift in speed - a slowing down - a halting? Would a new phase in consciousness come when all our previous attachments to speed have been obliterated? What about light? For example, Spare would first exhaust himself before beginning to draw in a somber candle lit room and in a slight trance with no particular idea in mind, thereby reaching deeper and more remote layers of memory, while all the time continuously abhorring the accepted values and maudlin conceits of his day.

The fact that Spare was an occultist and quite possibly a Satanist should not misdirect our appreciation of his endeavor. The logic of the postmodernism internet and of the entire electronic media society is satiated with a parallel overindulgence and counter fusion. One must go all the way through the information society and emerge from out the dark rim of telepresence. It has been said that the hyper-overproduction of simulated perversion is the only site of contestation left today; the only virtual space from which to launch a theoretical attack on the reification of consciousness. I tend to agree. Spare is a metaphor for a viral attack on the whole system. He is the big bang which sucks the virtual economy into the throbbing digital black-hole which awaits to unite and compress and explode.



The ineffable spell of Spare's semiautomatic drawings, with their multifarious and allusive search for something antithetical to the established norm, and with their morbid deviation and subversion of the concept of individuality and authorship, play well upon today's desire to egregiously delimit signification through art and magic. Their form enmeshes and contravenes, alters and disrupts the mundanity of communications in an inexorable, unrecognizable and chimerical way. Like all modes of decadent artistic practice (i.e. Hellenistic, High Gothic, Mannerist, Rococo, Fin de Siècle, Postmodernism) they oppose a dogmatically imposed paradigm with a hyper-logic. Today it is in the endlessly duplicable digital image where we can probe, much as Spare did, for a private occult expression. With Spare the abolition of time was made possible and the barriers between the deceased and living abolished through trance. The extremity of the internet is non-time, is non-death, is repetition, is trance.

A.O. Spare tended to reject what is given him in the world in favor of magick, metaphysics and *mise en scene*. In his own fashion he created a sphere where deep-memory threatens the common order and questions originality and supplied social codes. His artfulness subverts the Modernistic conception of production- with its emphasis on origin, author and finality - but without merely accepting the artificial, the copy, the simulation, the model. His conjunction of these elements lives with the abstraction of our technomediocratic society but deploys the effects of trance to transcend its limitations. He does not allow the reproductive technology to defeat or negate his arts spiritual significance because he has abandoned the Enlightenment baggage of authorizing categories. Spare explicitly eschewed categorization and instead sought to problematize the authority of the category. He sought to compel us to take notice of the various ways artistic conventions have molded our responses and regulated discursive meaning. The possibilities of a complex entangled erotic configuration springing forth from the Id, in opposition to the judging Superego, made up of mercurial symbols and concepts in opposition to recycled representations - provides an interesting insight into the way Spare's art (with its convoluted compositions made up of vague confiscations) directs us towards the conception of the transformative possibilities of techno-magic.

The hope that Austin Spare's art will show us a way to resist computer software reification is a fragile hope indeed in our electronically-homogenized cyberspace. Such a hope may be less than we deserve, but it also may be more than we usually allow ourselves to envision. Computer-networked storage makes up a massive electronic subconscious mind, this epitome, this subtle and infinite compendium of all cultural memories which through the use of autism holds the potential of penetrating reification to the level of automatic instinct where "...the I becomes atmospheric". When belief detaches itself from the accessories of convention, desire stands revealed as the ecstasis of the self, ungoverned by its simulated forms. "For I am all sex. What I am not is moral thought, simulating and separating." (Spare)

To not dismiss A. O. Spare (and his concept of the tranced collective self which for us can be reconceived as techno-magical thought) as dilettante folly is to become aware of the fact that underlying everything is the web of connections upon which we can exert

more manipulative pressure than we are normally led to believe by the computer-media society of the spectacle.

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## Austin Osman Spare 1886-1956

by Haydn Mackay

Radio script, 1956

There has just died here in London an artist who, though little known to the vast general public, has long been deemed by artists to be one of the most remarkable draughtsmen of his time. I am referring to Austin Osman Spare, who at the age of sixty-nine years departs this world, leaving behind the evidence and influence of his great achievements. Great achievements, whether we regard the superlative craftsmanship of his drawings and pastel paintings; the insight apparent in his writings; the profundity of his speculative incursions in psychology, magic, the Occult and automatic suggestion, or regard only one such aspect of this many-sided-artist.

To in any way adequately describe the work of the artist Spare to an audience unfamiliar with some examples of it is an insuperable problem, for he falls into none of the well-known categories. His normal way of life was that of a visionary obviously impervious to any worldly deficiencies of his material existence; completely indifferent to all the usual urges of self or profit; (money was but the necessary “tram-ticket” that entitled him to conveyance from halt to halt in penurious journeys of travail); Content with the most modest existence in circumstances of frequently material discomfort and to any but Spare, quite inadequate equipment for the purposes in view. Had he been other-wise a very large income as a portraitist was ever within his reach, but he avoided or ignored all such commissions; that he might paint only that to which his vision urged him; and for which he only asked the most ridiculously modest prices.

Spare first exhibited at the Royal Academy at the early age of sixteen. Later he had exhibitions in Bond Street and the galleries of the wealthy; but in still later years he abandoned showing work in any conditions but those of his own devising. And this brings us to Spare’s early environment and the later choice of neighbourhood in which to live and which was to supply him with the models and inspiration of much of his work.

He was born, the son of a city policeman, in the City of London, at the end of the 1880’s, when the solemn pomp and stilted circumstance of the latter years of Queen Victoria’s reign became pregnant with revolutionary expressions in the Arts and was thus doomed to lose its middle-class reputation in the “naughty nineties”. Sham Gothic medievalism, hack Renaissance idioms, or decayed Romanticism, were to be ousted by a cynical,

vicious, and decadent reaction to the respectabilities of the conventional, but pharisaical, Arts of a lingering Puritanism.

The grotesque and jewelled decadence of the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley opposed the anaemic religiosity of the Burne-Jones cult; the preciousness of the painter Whistler and the writer Oscar Wilde and the affected Pagan elegance of their satellites, the “Aesthetes”, opposed the Academic; And the manner of the Baroque swirls and blobs of intricate ornament appearing in the sculpture designs of Alfred Gilbert, heralded the rise of “L’Art Nouveau”; That fashion which grew like a scandal, and swept like a plague, through the studios of all Western Europe, in the opening years of the 20th Century.

Such was the Art atmosphere that greeted Spare, with his precocious talents, at a most impressionable and tender age. It had its effect in influencing his early work, but with his timely maturity he rapidly developed and outlived it, to evolve an original, individual and distinct expression, firmly based on the great historic traditions of Western Europe drawing; and the best examples of his figure drawing are unsurpassed by any draughtsman of our period. In the sincerity, profundity, the dexterity of his drawing he immediately became conspicuous, and it is this quality, amongst all his many qualities, that most triumphantly justifies all the strange productions of his adventurous, rambling and eternally questing spirit.

And strange indeed was much of his work, for he was early in touch with the esoteric thought of the period, visionary, occult, magic, with which he somehow seemed to bring a precise, stark, and awful significance to the drawing of the most natural object that appeared in his design. Like all truly imaginative work, there was no reliance on a mere vagueness of statement for unknowable mysteries, but rather on an excessive reality given to the incredible. A definition of form, a sharpness of focus, a semblance of textures, that produced the crisp shock of sudden and unpredicted vision; A hidden world suddenly revealed in the glare of a powerful search-light. In the verity of his visionary productions we find him of the company of Blake and Fuseli and their circle, but far superior to any of them in the mastery of representational craft. The English “Pre-Raphaelites” have been suggested as an influence, in view of Spare’s meticulous detail; but I cannot accept that view. He is much more akin to Durer in the engravings and Holbein in the drawing. What is most apparent and of the very essence of Spare’s work is the all-pervading unity of arrangement, of tone, of texture, that is quite alien to the “Pre-Raphaelite” practice.

Spare had some formal training at the Lambeth School of Art and at the Royal College of Art; and brief as was his stay at the Royal College, he has become something of a legend amongst R.C.A students; and many are the artists who have acquired examples of his work. The only mention I ever heard him make of his R.C.A. experience was when he told me that during his period there he had to appear for some small rebellion and with a fellow student before the Board of Education in Whitehall. The most impressive memory he retained of that interview was of a group of very solemn old gentlemen gathered at one end of the longest table he’d ever conceived as possible, even in a dream. An enormous table that stretched in a vast perspective from the end at which, meek and lowly, he and

his fellow delinquent stood. The effect of that huge table was all that he seemed to regard as of any significant interest. What decisions were arrived at, affecting his conduct, career or prospects, on that solemn occasion I never learnt from him. The whole incident, apart from the colossal table, had long been dismissed from his mind.

I first came across work by Spare nearly half a century ago, but only came into contact with his extraordinary personality at the close of the First World War. And though I have seen much of him and his work since he still appears in my memory as the impression he made on me at that first meeting. A pair of appraising eyes set in a pale face; surmounted by a great shock of dun-coloured hair. Too intent on his dedication to be other than careless of mundane appearances or circumstances, he was a slim figure with loose but energetic gait. He was aloof and shy with strangers, especially those who might be deemed to have some social or conventional importance. This, combined with the constant urge of his work, made him something of a recluse. He had a satirical humour, but appeared incapable of personal malice or jealousy or greed. In common with most of those dedicated beings whose persistent and controlling activity is creative work, the essential solitude to such individual endeavour invariably appears to an observer as an uneventful life and lacking in incident. But the work shows the adventures, the excitements survived, the travelling done in that strangest of all the unexplored countries of the mind by such courageous pioneers as was Austin Osman Spare as he mapped his territories of sensation, desire and creative will.

Whilst the greater mass of his work consists of figure drawings and compositions of occult, “psychic” and dream fantasies, he also published various books of drawings, as *Earth Inferno*, and *A Book of Satyrs*; also certain occult and symbolic drawings and writings, such as *The Book of Pleasure* and *The Focus of Life*. He also edited with the poet and “supertramp” W.H.Davies a sumptuous publication *Form*, and with Mr Clifford Bax, a quarterly, *The Golden Hind*; to each of which he was a principal contributor. He also produced a few etchings and lithographs. Mainly he worked in pen, pencil or pastel, but rarely turning to other media.

Spare’s automatic or psychic drawings may appear as undisciplined and abstruse; as all such drawings, of their very nature, must appear to be; as also is the case with much of his esoteric writings. But there can be no shadow of doubt regarding the technical mastery of his expression in the figures and the various accessories; animal, vegetable or mineral; mythical or mundane, which ornament and crowd so many of his compositions. He was an exceedingly rapid worker, frequently producing a picture with no more than a couple of hours work; and rhythmic ornament grew from his hand seemingly without conscious effort.

For his nudes he seldom employed professional models, declaring that they were too mannered by art-school practice; and for his portrait drawings, he found his types in the streets of his neighbourhood - the historic but unfashionable Borough of Southwark where for the greater part he had lived and worked. It is a poor over-crowded neighbourhood south of the river and sheltering a most characteristically “Cockney” population; costers and barrow-boys, bruisers and barmen, hucksters and higglers and

their women folk, all in their appropriate settings of tenement dwellings; of street markets, and “gin palaces”. In these portrait pastels he developed a realism that, whilst still a vital portrait, was yet something more. A searching commentary on type, a meticulous localisation of the individual in the type, a history and a prophecy read from, and into, the forms and features of a head. A collection of these pastel portraits should be publicly owned as a national treasure and housed in one of the London Galleries. As a native of the City, surely the City Guild Hall Art Gallery would be a most appropriate place, as being of such importance to the age and nation as are, to France, the pre-Revolutionary portraits by that great 18th Century pastelist, Quentin de la Tour. The Windsor collection of Holbein drawings deal faithfully with personalities at Henry VIII’s Court; Spare’s pastels deal equally faithfully with a vastly different, hitherto slighted, but less narrow strata, of our ever-changing urban communities. As human records of human beings, such works are profitable to human understanding. In this “Age of Common Man” the portraiture of an elite is not the only record worthy of preservation.

In 1918 I found Spare in the Army, he had been placed in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and with the rank of Sergeant, was employed in making drawings for the medical history of the war. Thus was acquired a collection of somewhat perfunctory, but technically impeccable drawings, now in the possession of the authorities. He worked in the solitude of a studio provided by the army, and the only military convention to which he had to conform was the wearing of the uniform; and I have never seen a queerer figure in a soldier’s garb. He wore the most dilapidated uniform I have seen outside a refuse dump, and it was worn in the most negligent manner conceivable. It is not surprising that on occasion he was held by the police as a rogue wearing unauthorised badges and uniform, and only released by them on a statement of his authenticity by his commanding officer.

It was in Spare’s company that I met the poet W.H. Davies (The Super-Tramp), when they together came to see me to invite me to contribute a drawing or two to the quarterly they were jointly editing. They made an amusing pair, and when we adjourned to a local tavern for lunch, they proved most entertaining conversationalists, with much in common regarding their general outlook on life and human society: a horror of gentile pretensions, of official snobbery, of artistic cliques. But beyond that they parted - Davies, the Welshman, yearned to flee the town and tread the open roads, rest in bosky dells, muse on birdsong or the patient cattle grazing that taught their lesson, whilst Spare, the Cockney, loved the grey city of his birth, and its poorer neighbourhoods and their populace, which fed his humour, his excitement, his profound sense of man’s geocentricity in an ever menacing circumstantial existence, of the soul in a gutter of life, and of creative desire entombed in the flesh.

I find it difficult to talk simply of Spare, the man. I think it must be so to anyone who knew him; for in his case a knowledge of the artist so heavily overshadows the simple man. He was normally so retiring, always seeming to protectively efface himself by an assimilation, both in careless attire and Cockney bearing, of the habit and vernacular of his poor neighbours and unprofessional models.

His compositions of magic or occult purpose always bore an air of antiquity. The actual drawings themselves seeming ancient and as being a timeless work rescued from a long past; and dealing with a primordial world of distant memory: The work of the universal "ID" of Freud's psychological system, rather than that of a conscious will. They emphasise no deistic transcendence, but the urge of the senses, the animating dust, and the universal lust of earth-bound sensibility. A brooding inevitability, even in their eccentricities and distortions, informed all, despite the nightmarish incongruities which haunt them.

That a genuine automatism played a greater part in Spare's work than is to be found in that of any of his contemporaries, is, I think, beyond doubt. And whatever there is to be said for "Surrealist" theories, their most effective expression is to be found in his works. Spare was the first, and I think by far the most convincing "Surrealist" of our times. He did not produce haphazard merely frivolous incongruities for their own sake; for that is not the main characteristics of dreams. Dreams are mainly vivid emblems serving desire or distress. And in the dreams of Spare, desire and distress were eternal and evolutionary, in atavistic resurgence, life succeeding life, self-creating self, and whatever may be deemed of such ideas, they are at least presented by a compelling beauty of craftsmanship.

A really representative selection of Spare's works should certainly, and long since, have been made and acquired for the national collections. But so far as I know, there is only a very early work in the British Museum, a couple of drawings of minor importance in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and one in the National Museum of Wales. Probably the opportunity to acquire typical works by the inspired Londoner at the extremely modest prices Spare was content to ask is now past. The Directors (as the one-time Curators are now styled!) of our public galleries do not seem to have considered the desirability of acquiring representative works by one of the subtlest, searching and profound of our draughtsmen. One who has consistently pursued throughout a lifetime of frequent perplexity and pain, the course of his obvious and curious dedication, quite irrespective of any professional or social profit. Can it really be true that all the opinions of professional contemporaries are worthless? Such of Spare's early days, as those of G.F.Watts, O.M., John Singer Sargent, R.A., Sir Frank Brangwyn, R.A., Rickets and Shannon and a host of other distinguished artists regarding Spare's precocity, and to-day of almost every traditionally competent artist familiar with his mature work? How comes it about that our galleries can afford thousands of pounds for what so many of the profession consider inferior examples of stranger contemporary artists, but could not find a fiver for a Spare during the lifetime of this professionally acclaimed "Cockney" artist whose life of dedication from the cradle to the grave, was spent within a mile or two of our great London galleries and museums.

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# Magicians in London: A Recollection

by Oswell Blakeston

This extract was first published in *The Uncertain Element*, [1950]

And it was in London, and not in Istanbul, that I met my best black magician. People had told me about him. They said: "He's an old man now, but his hair is still dark and wild. He lives in a tenement. You'd never dream what a lot of magic is still practised there. Why! He can remember when there was a cage of skinned live cats on exhibition in the street, and there was a boy who bit the heads of live rats for a sixpence. It's atmosphere, isn't it?"

Well, there was a strange little card on his mantelpiece. I asked him about it. "That!" he shrugged his shoulders. "That's nothing much. Just a sigil to make it hail tomorrow."

I did the unforgivable thing. In spite of the atmosphere, I said, "Will it?"

"Umph!" he said reproachfully, of course it does depend on "interferences" by others black magicians." His face brightened. "Once," he said, "I put a card up to make it rain. I had to make some days before my influence was sufficiently established to counteract the wishes of others magicians. But when it did rain, my card was so strong I could not get it to stop.

"I said, "That's all right, I've proved my point." I burnt my card and willed the rain to cease. But I had underrated my own power. I had to will for days before the rain actually stopped. Think of that!"

I thought about it, and he watched me with burning eyes to see if I was impressed.

He said: "Have you a match? I used to light cigarettes without matches, but I found it wasted so much power. I must keep my power for the really big things. For instance, I made the mistake of trifling with horses.



“I once drew a special pack of cards to tell me the winner. A magic pack of cards. If there were a dozen horses in the race, I laid out thirty cards and concentrated to make the pack tell me the thirtieth horse. That forced my conscious mind to give up, and brought my unconscious into play.

“Well, for a bit I couldn’t understand what was wrong. I didn’t seem to be making any money. But then it came to me. My magic was right but - the judges were wrong.

“Judges are fallible human beings, you know, and they make errors about the horses and the tape. My magic could only tell me the horse that really won, not the horse which deceived the judges. Of course, this was in the days before the photo-finish.

“But, you see” it doesn’t do to trifle.”



He leapt to his feet. "I'll show you something," he cried wildly, "I'll show you something."

He picked up a rusty biscuit tin. I wondered if he was going to produce a dried toad or a dead baby. He took out a piece of cheese. Then, with a pocket knife, he delicately removed some pairings.

"For D.P.'s lunch," he said, as he dropped the shavings outside a mousehole. "I call him D.P.," he added; "it's short for Death Posture."

"Is he your familiar?" I suggested.

"He is," the black magician boasted, "the most amazing mouse in London."

We sat watching the hole. I didn't know whether I was expected to will anything, so I tried to fill my mind with cheese.

Presently a mouse peered, sniffed, darted forward, gobbled the cheese, retreated.

"There!" shouted the black magician in triumph, "that was D.P. You see I keep a tame mouse instead of a cat. He relies on the lunch I give him, and so he's jealous of his food he won't allow another mouse near the place."

"Yes," I conceded, "that certainly is magic, But," I went on as a doubt occurred to me, "would you call it black?"

He despaired of me. "I'll have to ask you to go," he said crossly. "There is an inner rite I must perform. But before you go, I wonder if you'd mind giving me a had to rig up this box camera?"

"Elementals, you know, walk in straight lines. You must know that - the Chinese knew it millions of years ago. Well, there's a demon due to haunt my room tonight. But no elemental can bear to have his photograph taken. That only happens under the pentagram of compulsion. When my haunt sees the camera he'll automatically turn round. Then he'll have to walk in a straight line all round the earth before he can get back to my room. It ought to keep him quiet for a bit."

I did my best to help with the camera, and as I was about to leave the black magician relented.

"Come back one day," he invited, "and I'll show you all your future in a vision on the wall. You'll like that, won't you? All your future spread out like a map before you". Yes, do come back. I think D.P. has taken a fancy to you."

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# Poor Painter with Cats

First published in *The Leader* magazine, 1948

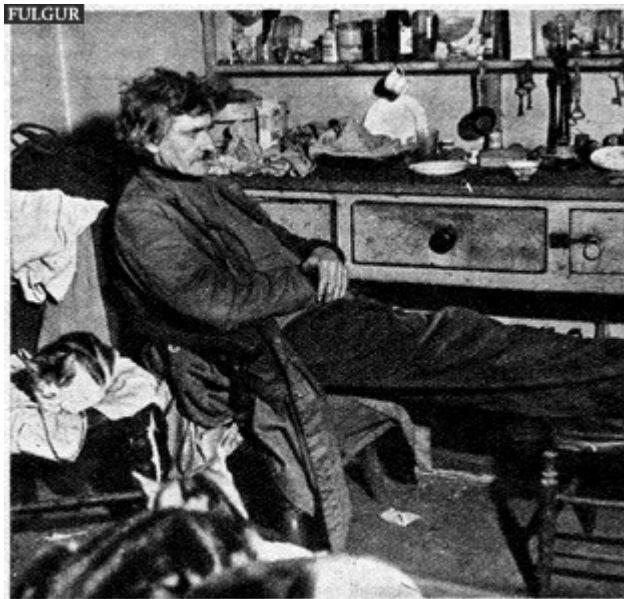
Keeping alive the romantic tradition that painters ought to live in extreme discomfort, somewhere near starvation level, is Austin Osman Spare, who has just held an exhibition at London's Archer gallery, with over 150 studies in "Psycho-Physiognomy" and, to quote his catalogue, "an admixture of spivs, ghosts, hoboes, layabouts, fiddlers and others."



THE PAINTER'S PETS

*There are five in this picture, even more in the room. In fact every stray is welcome, and get as good a feed of milk as ever he had*

Austin Osman Spare, a policeman's son, once looked like being a fashionable painter. But Mr Spare decided to paint in London's Elephant and Castle, choosing as models the ordinary people of Lambeth. He rarely charged more than £5 each for them, but they became collector's pieces.



**THE PAINTER'S BED**

*In fact he has no bed at all. This is how Austin Spare sleeps at nights, by the side of the dresser with its odd crockery and bottles. Cats get the comfort*

In 1941, fire and high explosive totally obliterated his studio flat, depriving him of his home, his health and his equipment. For three years he struggled to regain the use of his arms and now at last his work is on view again, paintings which he has done in the cramped basement in Brixton where he now lives with eight or nine cats as company. This studio flat is a mass of litter, the artist himself works in an old Army shirt and tattered jacket. He has no bed. But he still charges an average of £5 per picture.



**THE PAINTER'S STUDIO**

*Austin Spare occupies a Brixton basement. His studio is six feet square, filled with canvas, easels and assorted litter*

Spare's hobby is the occult. "By turning my head involuntarily" he announces, "I can always see my alter ego, familiars or the gang of elementals that partly constitute my being."

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# Introduction to The Book of Pleasure

by Kenneth Grant

First published in *The Book of Pleasure*, 93 Publishing, 1975

Austin Osman Spare was born at Snowhill, London, in 1886. Apart from William Blake, John Martin, Aubrey Beardsley, Sidney Sime, and a mere handful of others, England has produced no artist to equal Spare for sheer ability and imaginative fecundity.

Spare was not only a graphic artist; he wrote four books on what he described as symbolic sorcery *The Book of Pleasure* (1909-1913), *The Focus of Life* (1918-1921), *Anathema of Zos* (1924) and *The Book of the Living Word of Zos* (1951-1956), a collection of aphorisms and magical formulae which remains unpublished to this day.<sup>1</sup>

Spare published some of his drawings in books such as *Earth Inferno* (1905), *A Book of Satyrs* (1907), and in periodicals; he also illustrated a few books by other writers, but the four works mentioned above are all that survives of his extensive occult researches. They trace the evolution and development of the curious system of sorcery with which he was preoccupied until his death in 1956. They were, however, mere punctuation marks, pauses, between the steady outflow of graphic work which he produced almost continuously during an obscure, outwardly uneventful and impoverished existence.

Although Spare had no specific teacher where his art was concerned,<sup>2</sup> he did have a teacher - or perhaps guru would be a more appropriate term - in a “magical” sense. During his most impressionable years circumstances led him into the company of a self-confessed witch, a mysterious Mrs. Paterson who befriended him and initiated him into the mysteries of her craft. He was extremely reticent about Mrs Paterson. All that I was able to elicit from him during the eight years of friendship was that she was very old when he met her and that she claimed descent from a line of Salem (New England) witches that Cotton Mather had failed to eradicate.

Spare did not get on with his mother and he looked upon Mrs Paterson as a “second mother”. What little he said about her explains much of his work and his life-long devotion to the occult. She was able to transform herself on certain occasions into a woman of alluring loveliness: this she had done in his presence as a proof of her magical powers.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, she gave him the keys whereby he gained access to the Witches’ Sabbath, the genuine extra-terrestrial event of which the popular version is but a debased and grotesque parody. It was during his exultation to the dimension where this event occurs that he was taught how to explore the subconscious with the use of sentient symbols and the alphabet of desire described in [*The Book of Pleasure*]. These methods, once demonstrated, had to be brought down and “earthed”, and it took several years for Spare to integrate them with his own creative techniques.

*The Book of Pleasure* embodies the first vague searchings into the subconscious regions that he was to explore more fully in later books, for it should be understood that there was no creed of the Zos and the Kia - the Imagination and the Will - in the teachings he received at the Sabbath; they were of a purely practical and magical nature. It was Spare who wedded the practices of witchcraft to the doctrines of the Neither-Neither and the Atmospheric "T", which he interpreted with fantastic manual dexterity. These doctrines were inspired by his early studies, for Spare was an omnivorous reader, and some of his more obvious influences - from Laotze to Aleister Crowley - are readily apparent.

Spare was drawn to Crowley in 1910 when he became a member of the *Argentum Astrum*,<sup>4</sup> shortly after contributing some of his drawings to Crowley's periodical, *The Equinox*.<sup>5</sup>

Spare claimed to be one of the first surrealists. He had visualized the irrational and transcribed his vision directly from subconscious strata of the psyche; he was also able to galvanise primal centres of awareness by a formula of atavistic resurgence that few artists - and fewer occultists - have succeeded in re-activating with impunity to their work or to themselves.

*The Book of Pleasure* contains a unique method of obtaining control of the subconscious energies latent in the human mind in the form of primal atavisms. It is evident that if such energy can be tapped and channelled, it can be directed to creative or destructive ends on a scale infinitely beyond anything achievable by the mind in the more limited state that characterizes "waking" consciousness. But the subconscious does not yield to conscious suggestion for it is founded on sensation, not upon thought, hence a tactual and visual means must be employed if it is to be penetrated and permeated with the vitalizing current of will or desire. The process must be symbolically enacted, and its intent not consciously formulated, for "unless desire is subconscious, it is not fulfilled". A method had to be found of by-passing the conscious mind and planting the desire directly in the soil of the subconsciousness. To this end Spare evolved his own system of sentient symbols which took on a secret meaning and which constituted a "sacred" alphabet of desire of which "each letter in its pictorial aspect relates to a Sex principle". From this alphabet it is possible to construct the words of a mysterious language of sensation that reifies the imagery of appetite.

Spare believed that the hieroglyphics of ancient peoples such as the Egyptian and Amerindian are the remains of an occult language. That the Egyptians practised a form of sorcery involving a process similar to that of Spare's formula of atavistic resurgence is suggested by the fact that the hieroglyphics are usually in zoomorphic form.

It is known that the priests of antiquity assumed animal-headed masks when performing rituals designed to produce magical effects; also, that when dormant forces were awakened, the magician was shaken to the very depths of his being as he manifested the atavisms that his spells had invoked. The convulsions of Tibetan "oracles"; the strange phenomena of spirit possession common to most peoples of antiquity are proof of Spare's

theory; proof also that some cosmic forces then possesses the human vehicle and enables the magician to perform superhuman feats.

The mainspring of the formula of atavistic resurgence is - as one might suppose - a form of sexual sorcery. The Adepts of old concealed the process from the eyes of the profane (i.e. those whose ineptitude would destroy them), for once these atavisms are unleashed, magical obsession occurs and there is no reversing the course of events any more than one can reverse the flow of semen on the point of its leaping forth. If the magician is unable to control the power he has invoked, or if he is unable to permit its unhindered movement as it wells into consciousness, then he is literally blasted into death or insanity.

The secret of this sorcery is analogous to that taught by Crowley in his Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.) where it was - and still is - the fulcrum of magical power and the means of gaining access to trans-human dimensions and of communicating with the denizens of other worlds.



Spare maintained that he was in communication with extra-terrestrial Intelligences and conscious forces possessed of superhuman power and knowledge. He referred frequently to Black Eagle,<sup>6</sup> who inspired many of his “magical” drawings. Black Eagle seems to have been a concentration of sinister trans-cosmic current which, according to H.P. Lovecraft,<sup>7</sup> had been tapped in its primordial phase by the witch cults of New England. Perhaps Black Eagle was the alter ego of Mrs Paterson, for it was not long after her death that this current began to manifest in Spare’s work.

Whatever the identity of Spare's genius - Mrs Paterson, Black Eagle, or one of the "host of familiars" by which he was habitually surrounded - the fact remains that Spare produced a large amount of work during abnormal states of consciousness or self-induced trance. He was not mediumistic in the usual sense of the term, nor did he produce automatic drawings in the way that spirit mediums produce automatic texts. Rather, Spare transmitted his work in much the same way that *The Book of the Law* and other magical writings were transmitted by Aleister Crowley,<sup>8</sup> i.e. he entered consciously and magically into communication with superhuman Intelligences.

Towards the end of his life, when Spare lived more or less reclusively in a Dickensian South London slum, he was asked whether he regretted his lonely existence. "Lonely!" he exclaimed, and with a sweep of his arm he indicated the host of unseen elementals and familiar spirits that were his constant companions; he had but to turn his head to catch a fleeting glimpse of their subtle presences.

I have described some of Spare's transactions with his "host of familiars" in *The Magical Revival*, but the reader of *The Book of Pleasure* will have little difficulty in imagining what these creatures were like. Imagination is the operative word, for Spare's sorcery is a form of veritable imagination or image-making; of "dreaming true". He exalted the imagination above every other faculty and claimed that "dreams shall flesh" if the requisite ability to reify them has been absolutely mastered. Herein lies the key to his sorcery; the ability to "visualise sensation" and to convey a world of imaginative reality to the observer.

Augustus John regarded Spare as one of the great graphic artists of his time, and many years earlier John Singer Sargent, G.F. Watts, George Bernard Shaw, and others praised him in similar terms. Spare sent a copy of *The Book of Pleasure* to Sigmund Freud who described it as one of the most significant revelations of subconscious mechanisms that had appeared in modern times.

Whatever the value of Spare's contribution to art and psychology, his contribution to experimental occultism is supreme, for he discovered a method of reifying the dream world under the controlling aegis of the fully conscious will.

KENNETH GRANT  
Winter Solstice 1974 e.v.

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## NOTES

1. Subtitled *The Zoetic Grimoire of Zos*. Zos was Spare's "magical" name. A selection of these aphorisms, together with an introduction to Spare and his work is to be published shortly by Frederick Muller Ltd., London, under the title

- Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare*, by Kenneth Grant. [Published in *Zos Speaks!*, Fulgur Limited, 1999]
2. He was a student at the Royal College of Art in Kensington, London.
  3. A similar phenomenon occurred in the presence of Aleister Crowley when an ageing sorceress transformed herself into a “young woman of bewitching beauty”, for purposes of vampirism. See *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* (ed. Symonds and Grant), chapter 42, Jonathan Cape, London, 1969
  4. The Order of the Silver Star.
  5. *The Equinox*, “The Encyclopaedia of Initiation”, appeared in eleven numbers, ten of which were published between the years 1909 and 1913. Two only of Spare’s drawings were reproduced. See *The Equinox*, vol. 1, number 2, pages 140 and 161.
  6. See *The Magical Revival* (Frederick Muller Ltd. 1972), plate facing page 149, for a reproduction of Spare’s impression of Black Eagle, painted in 1946.
  7. Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937). The New England writer whose tales of terror involve traffic with extra-terrestrial entities.
  8. See Crowley’s *Confessions*.
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## **The Sorceries of Zos**

**from Cults of the Shadow  
by Kenneth Grant**

Sorcery and witchcraft are the degenerate offspring of occult traditions coeval with those described in the second chapter. The popular conception of witchcraft, shaped by the anti-Christian manifestations that occurred in the Middle Ages is so distorted and so inadequate that to try and interpret the symbols of its mysteries, perverted and debased as they are, without reference to the vastly ancient systems from which they derive is like mistaking the tip of an iceberg for its total mass.

It has been suggested by some authorities that the original witches sprang from a race of Mongol origin of which the Lapps are the sole surviving remnants. This may or may not be so, but these 'mongols' were not human. They were degenerate survivals of a pre-human phase of our planet's history generally- though mistakenly- classified as Atlantean. The characteristic that distinguished them from the others of their kind was the ability to project consciousness into animal forms, and the power they possessed of reifying thought-forms. The bestiaries of all the races of the earth are littered with the results of their sorceries.

They were non-human entities; that is to say they pre-dated the human life- wave on this planet, and their powers- which would today appear unearthly- derived from extra-spatial



dimensions. They impregnated the aura of the earth with the magical seed from which the human foetus was ultimately generated.

Arthur Machen was, perhaps, near the truth of the matter when he suggested that the fairies and little people of folklore were decorous devices concealing processes of non-human sorcery repellent to mankind.<sup>1</sup>

Machen, Blackwood, Crowley, Lovecraft, Fortune, and others, frequently used as a theme for their writings the influx of extra-terrestrial powers which have been moulding the history of our planet since time began; that is, since time began for us, for we are only too prone to suppose that we were here first and that we alone are here now, whereas the most ancient occult traditions affirm that we were neither the first nor are we the only ones to people the earth; the Great Old Ones and the Elder Gods find echoes in the myths and legends of all peoples.

Austin Spare claimed to have had direct experience of the existence of extra-terrestrial intelligences, and Crowley- as his autobiography makes abundantly clear- devoted a lifetime to proving that extra-terrestrial and superhuman consciousness can and does exist independently of the human organism.<sup>2</sup>

As explained in Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare,<sup>3</sup> Spare was initiated into the vital current of ancient and creative sorcery by an aged woman named Paterson, who claimed decent form a line of Salem witches. The formation of Spare's Cult of the Zos and the Kia<sup>4</sup> owes much to his contact with Witch Paterson who provides the model for many of his 'sabbatic' drawings and paintings. Much of the occult lore that she transmitted to him suffuses two of his books- The Book of Pleasure and the Focus of Life.<sup>5</sup> In the last years of his life he embodied further esoteric researches in a grimoire<sup>6</sup> which he had intended publishing as a sequel to his two other books. Although death prevented its publication, the manuscript survives, and the substance of the grimoire forms the basis of this chapter.

Spare concentrated the theme of his doctrine in the following Affirmation Creed of Zos vel Thanatos.

*I believe in the flesh 'as now' and forever . . . for I am the Light, the Truth, the Law, the Way, and none shall come unto anything except through his flesh. Did I not show you the eclectic path between ecstasies; that precarious funambulatory way . . . . But you had no courage, were tired, and feared. THEN AWAKE! De-hypnotize yourselves from the poor reality you be-live and be-lie. For the great Noon-tide is here, the great bell has struck . . . . Let others await involuntary immolation, the forced redemption so certain for many apostates to Life. Now, in this day, I ask you to search your memories, for great unities are near. The Inceptor of all memory is your Soul. Life is desire, Death is reformation . . . . I am the resurrection . . . . I, who transcend ecstasy by ecstasy, meditating Need Not Be in Self-love . . . .*

This creed, informed by the dynamism of Spare's will and his great ability as an artist, created a Cult on the astral plane that attracted to itself all the elements naturally orientated to it. He referred to it as Zos Kia Cultus, and its votaries claimed affinity on the following terms:

- Our Sacred Book : The Book of Pleasure.  
Our Path : The eclectic path between ecstasies; the precarious funambulatory way.  
Our Deity : The All-Prevailing Woman.  
(And I strayed with her, into the path direct'.)  
Our Creed : The Living Flesh. (Zos):  
(Again I say : This is your great moment of reality- the living flesh').  
Our Sacrament : The Sacred Inbetweenness Concepts.  
Our Word : Does Not Matter-Need Not Be.  
Our Eternal Abode : The mystic state of Neither-Neither.  
The Atomospheric 'I'. (Kia).  
Our Law : To Trespass all Laws.

The Zos and the Kia are represented by the Hand and the Eye, the instruments of sentiency and vision. They form the foundation of the New Sexuality, which Spare evolved by combining them to form a magical art- the art of visualizing sensation, of 'becoming one with all sensation', and of transcending the dual polarities of existence by the annihilation of separate identity through the mechanics of the Death Posture.<sup>7</sup> Long ago, a Persian poet described in a few words the object of Spare's New Sexuality.

*The kingdom of I and We forsake, and your home in annihilation make.*

The New Sexuality, in the sense that Spare conceived it, is the sexuality not of positive dualities but of the Great Void, the Negative, the Ain: The Eye of Infinite Potential. The New Sexuality is, simply, the manifestation of non- manifestation, or of Universe 'B', as Bertiaux would have it, which is equivalent to Spare's Neither-Neither concept. Universe 'B' represents the absolute difference of that world of 'all otherness' to anything pertaining to the known world, or Universe 'A'. Its gateway is Daath, sentinelled by the Demon Choronzon. Spare describes this concept as 'the gateway of all inbetweenness'. In terms of Voodoo, this idea is implicit in the Petro rites with their emphasis upon the spaces between the cardinal points of the compass: the off-beat rhythms of the drums that summon the loa from beyond the Veil and formulate the laws of their manifestation.<sup>8</sup> Spare's system of sorcery, as expressed in Zos Kia Cultus, continues in a straight line not only the Petro tradition of Voodoo, but also the Vama Marg of Tantra, with its eight directions of space typified by the Yantra of the Black Goddess, Kali: the Cross of the Four Quarters plus the inbetweenness concepts that together compose the eightfold Cross,

the eight-petalled Lotus, a synthetic symbol of the Goddess of the Seven Stars plus her son, Set or Sirius.<sup>9</sup>

The mechanics of the New Sexuality are based upon the dynamics of the Death Posture, a formula evolved by Spare for the purpose of reifying the negative potential in terms of positive power. In ancient Egypt the mummy was the type of this formula, and the simulation by the Adept of the state of death<sup>10</sup>- in Tantric practice- involves also the total stilling of the psychosomatic functions. The formula has been used by Adepts not necessarily working with specifically tantric or magical formulae, notably by the celebrated Advaitin Rishi, Bhagavan Shri Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai,<sup>11</sup> who attained Supreme Enlightenment by simulating the process of death; and also by the Bengal Vaishnavite, Thakur Haranath, who was taken for dead and actually prepared for burial after a 'death trance' which lasted several hours and from which he emerged with a totally new consciousness that transformed even his bodily constitution and appearance.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that Shri Meher Baba, of Poona, during the period of amnesia that afflicted him in early life, also experienced a form of death from which he emerged with power to enlighten others and to lead a large movement in his name.

The theory of the Death Posture, first described in *The Book of Pleasure*, was developed independently of the experiences of the above mentioned Masters about whom nothing was published in any European language at that time.<sup>13</sup>

The Rosicrucian mystique of the pastos containing the corpse of Christian Rosencreutz- dramatized by MacGregor Mathers in the 5<sub>1</sub>=6ú Ceremony of the Golden Dawn- resumes the mystery of this essentially Egyptian formula of the mummified Osiris. Spare was acquainted with this version of the Mystery. He became a member of Crowley's A.^A.^., for a brief period, in 1910, and the Golden Dawn rituals- published shortly afterwards in *The Equinox*<sup>14</sup>- may have been available to him.

The concepts of death and sexuality are inextricably connected. Saturn, death, and Venus, life, are twin aspects of the Goddess. That they are, in a mystical sense, one idea is evidenced by the nature of the sexual act. The dynamic activity connected with the drive to know, to penetrate, to illumine, culminates in a stillness, a silence, a cessation of all effort which itself dissolves in the tranquillity of total negation. The identity of these concepts is explicit in the ancient Chinese equation 0=2, where naught symbolizes the negative, unmanifest potential of creation, and the two the two polarities involved in its realization. The Goddess represents the negative phase: the atmospheric 'I' symbolized by that all-seeing Eye with all its ayin symbolism;<sup>15</sup> and the twins- Set-Horus- represent the phase of 2, or duality. The lightning-swift alternations of these terminals, active-passive, are positive emanations of the Void, i.e. the manifestation of the Unmanifest, and the Hand is the symbol of this creative, power-manifesting duality.<sup>16</sup>

The supreme symbol of Zos Kia Cultus therefore resumes that of the Scarlet Woman, and is reminiscent of Crowley's Cult of Love under Will. The Scarlet Woman embodies the Fire Snake, control of which causes 'change to occur in conformity with will'.<sup>17</sup> The energized enthusiasm of the Will is the key to Crowley's Cult, and it is analogous to the

technique of magically induced obsession which Spare uses to reify the 'inherent dream'.<sup>18</sup>

One of the foremost magicians of our time- Salvador Dali- developed a system of magical reification at about the same time that Crowley and Spare were elaborating their doctrines. Dali's system of 'paranoiac-critical activity' evokes echoes of resurgent atavisms that are reflected into the concrete world of images by a process of obsession similar to that induced by the Death Posture.

Dali's birth in 1904- the year in which Crowley received The Book of the Law- makes him, literally, a child of the New Aeon; one of the first! His creative genius adumbrates at every stage of its flight the flowering of the essential germ that has made him a living embodiment of New Aeon consciousness, and of the 'Kingly Man' described in AL.

Dali's objects are reflected in the fluid and ever-shifting luminosity of the Astral Light. They resolve themselves and melt continually into the 'next step',<sup>19</sup> the next phase of consciousness expanding into the further image of Becoming.

Spare had already succeeded in isolating and concentrating desire in a symbol which became sentient and therefore potentially creative through the lightnings of the magnetized will. Dali, it seems, has taken the process a step further. His formula of 'paranoiac-critical activity' is a development of the primal (African) concept of the fetish, and it is instructive to compare Spare's theory of 'visualized sensation' with Dali's definition of painting as 'hand don colour photography of concret irrationality'. Sensation is essentially irrational, and its delineation in graphic form ('hand done colour photography') is identical with Spare's method of 'visualized sensation'.

These magicians utilized human embodiments of power (shakti) which appeared- usually- in feminine form. Each book that Crowley produced had its corresponding shakti. The Rites of Eleusis (1910) were powered, largely, by Leila Waddell. Book Four, Parts I & II (1913) came through Soror Virakam (Mary d'Este). Liber Aleph- The Book of Wisdom or Folly (1918)- was inspired by Soror Hilarion (Jane Foster). His great work, Magick in Theory and Practice, was written mainly in 1920 in Cefalu, where Alostrael (Leah Hirsig) supplied the magical impetus; and so on, up to the New Aeon interpretation of the Tarot (The Book of Thoth), which he produced in collaboration with Frieda Harris in 1944. Dali's shakti- Gala- was the channel through which the inspiring creative current was fixed or visualized in some of the greatest paintings the world has seen. And in the case of Austin Osman Spare, the Fire Snake assumed the form of Mrs. Paterson, a self-confessed witch who embodied the sorceries of a cult so ancient that it was old in Egypt's infancy.

Spare's grimoire is a concentration of the entire body of his work. It comprises, in a sense, everthing of magical or creative value that he ever thought or imagined. Thus, if you posses a picture by Zos, and that picture contains some of his sigillized spells, you possess the whole grimoire, and you stand a great chance of being swept up and attuned to the vibrations of Zos Kia Cultus.

A little known aspect of Spare, an aspect that links up with his friendship with Thomas Burke,<sup>20</sup> reveals the fact that a curious Chinese occult society- known as the Cult of the Ku- flourished in London in the nineteen-twenties. Its headquarters may have been in Peking, Spare did not say, perhaps he did not know; but its London offshoot was not in Limehouse as one might have expected, but in Stockwell, not far from a studio-flat that Spare shared with a friend. A secret session of the cult of the Ku was witnessed by Spare, who seems to have been the only European ever to have gained admittance. He does, in fact, seem to have been the only European apart from Burke who had so much as heard of the Cult. Spare's experience is of exceptional interest by reason of its close approximation to a form of dream-control into which he was initiated many years earlier by Witch Paterson.

The word Ku has several meanings in Chinese, but in this particular case it denotes a peculiar form of sorcery involving elements which Spare had already incorporated in his conception of the New Sexuality. The Adepts of Ku worshipped a serpent goddess in the form of a woman dedicated to the Cult. During an elaborate ritual she would become possessed, with the result that she threw off, or emanated, multiple forms of the goddess as sentient shadows endowed with all the charms possessed by her human representative. These shadow-women, impelled by some subtle law of attraction, gravitated to one or other of the devotees who sat in a drowsy condition around the entranced priestess. Sexual congress with these shadows then occurred and it was the beginning of a sinister form of dream-control involving journeys and encounters in infernal regions.

The Ku would seem to be a form of the Fire Snake exteriorized astrally as a shadow-woman or succubus, congress with which enabled the devotee to reify his 'inherent dream'. She was known as the 'whore of hell' and her function was analogous to that of the Scarlet Woman of Crowley's Cult, the Suvasini of the Tantric Kaula Circle, and the Fiendess of the Cult of the Black Snake. The Chinese Ku, or harlot of hell, is a shadowy embodiment of subconscious desires<sup>21</sup> concentrated in the alluringly sensuous form of the Serpent of Shadow Goddess.

The mechanics of dream control are in many ways similar to those which effect conscious astral projection. My own system of dream control derives from two sources: the formula of Eroto-Comatose Lucidity discovered by Ida Nellydoff and adapted by Crowley to his sex-magical techniques,<sup>22</sup> and Spare's system of Sentient Sigils explained below.

Sleep should be preceded by some form of Karezza<sup>23</sup> during which a specially chosen sigil symbolizing the desired object is vividly visualized. In this manner the libido is baulked of its natural fantasies and seeks satisfaction in the dream world. When the knack is acquired the dream will be extremely intense and dominated by a succube, or shadow-woman, with whom sexual intercourse occurs spontaneously. If the dreamer has acquired even a moderate degree of proficiency in this technique he will be aware of the continued presence of the sigil. This he should bind upon the form of the succube in a place that is within range of his vision during copulation, e.g., as a pendant suspended from her neck; as ear-drops; or as the diadem in a circlet about her brow. Its locus should be determined

by the magician with respect to the position he adopts during coitus. The act will then assume all the characteristics of a Ninth Degree Working,<sup>24</sup> because the presence of the Shadow-Woman will be experienced with a vivid intensity of sensation and clarity of vision. The sigil thus becomes sentient and in due course the object of the Working materializes on the physical plane. This object is, of course, determined by the desire embodied in and represented by the sigil.

The important innovation in this system of dream control lies in the transference of the Sigil from the waking to the dream state of consciousness, and the evocation, in the latter state, of the Shadow-woman. This process transforms an Eighth Degree Rite<sup>25</sup> into the similitude of the sexual act as used in Ninth Degree Workings.

Briefly, the formula has three stages:

1. Karezza, or unculminating sexual activity, with visualization of the Sigil until sleep supervenes.
2. Sexual congress in the dream-state with the Shadow-woman evoked by Stage I. The Sigil should appear automatically at this second stage; if it does not, the practice must be repeated at another time. If it does, then the desired result will reify in Stage.
3. after awakening (i.e. in the mundane world of everyday phenomena).

A word of explanation is, perhaps, necessary concerning the term Karezza as used in the present context. Retention of semen is a concept of central importance in certain Tantric practices, the idea being that the bindu (seed) then breeds astrally, not physically. In other words, an entity of some sort is brought to birth at astral levels of consciousness. This, and analogous techniques, have given rise to the impression- quite erroneous- that celibacy is a sine qua non of magical success; but such celibacy is of a purely local character and confined to the physical plane, or waking state, alone. Celibacy, as commonly understood, is therefore a meaningless parody or travesty of the true formula. Such is the initiated rationale of Tantric celibacy, and some such interpretation undoubtedly applies also to other forms of religious asceticism. The 'temptations' of the saints occurred on the astral plane precisely because the physical channels had been deliberately blocked. The state of drowsiness noted in the votaries of the Ku suggests that the ensuing shadow-play was evoked after a fashion similar to that obtained by a species of dream control.

Gerald Massey, Aleister Crowley, Austin Spare, Dion Fortune, have- each in their way- demonstrated the bio-chemical basis of the Mysteries. They achieved in the sphere of the 'occult' that which Wilhelm Reich achieved for psychology, and established it on a sure bio-chemical basis.

Spare's 'sentient symbols' and 'alphabet of desire',<sup>26</sup> correlating as they do the marmas of the body with the specific sex-principles, anticipated in several ways the work of Reich who discovered- between 1936 and 1939- the vehicle of psycho-sexual energy, which he named the orgone. Reich's singular contribution to psychology and, incidentally, to

Western occultism, lies in the fact that he successfully isolated the libido and demonstrated its existence as a tangible, biological energy. This energy, the actual substance of Freud's purely hypothetical concepts- libido and id- was measured by Reich, lifted out of the category of hypothesis, and reified. He was, however, wrong in supposing that the orgone was the ultimate energy. It is one of the more important kalas but not the Supreme Kala (Mahakala), although it may become such by virtue of a process not unknown to Tantrics of the Varma Marg. Until comparatively recent times it was known- in the West- to the Arab alchemists, and the entire body of alchemical literature, with its tortuous terminology and hieroglyphic style, reveals- if it reveals anything- a deliberate device on the part of Initiates to veil the true process of distilling the Mahakala.

Reich's discovery is significant because he was probably the first scientist to place psychology on a solid biological basic, and the first to demonstrate under laboratory conditions the existence of a tangible magical energy at last measurable and therefore strictly scientific. Whether this energy is termed the astral light (Levi), the elan vital (Bergson), the Odic Force (Reichenbach), the libido (Freud), Reich was the first- with the possible exception of Reichenbach<sup>27</sup>- actually to isolate it and demonstrate its properties.

Austin Spare suspected, as early as 1913, that some such energy was the basic factor in the re-activation of primal atavisms, and he treated it accordingly as cosmic energy (the 'Atmospheric I') responsive to subconscious suggestion through the medium of Sentient Symbols, and through the application of the body (Zos) in such a way that it could reify remote atavisms and all possible future forms.

During the time that he was preoccupied with these themes Spare dreamed repeatedly of fantastic buildings whose alignments he found quite impossible to note down on waking. He supposed them to be adumbrations of a future geometry of space-time bearing no known relation to present-day forms of architecture. Eliphaz Levi claimed a similar power of reification for the 'Astral Light', but he failed to show the precise manner of its manipulation. It was to this end that Spare evolved his Alphabet of Desire 'each letter of which relates to a sex-principle'.<sup>28</sup> That is to say he noted certain correspondences between the inner movements of the sexual impulse and the outer form of its manifestation in symbols, sigils, or letters rendered sentient by being charged with its energy. Dali refers to such magically charged fetish-forms as 'accommodations of desire'<sup>29</sup> which are visualized as shadowy voids, black emptinesses, each having the shape of the ghostly object which inhabits its latency, and which IS only by virtue of the fact that it is NOT. This indicates that the origin of manifestation is non-manifestation, and it is plain to intuitive apprehension that the orgone of Reich, the Atmospheric 'I' of Austin Spare, and the Dalinian delineations of the 'accommodations of desire' refer in each case to an identical Energy manifesting through the mechanics of desire. Desire, Energized Will, and Obsession, are the keys to unlimited manifestation, for all form and all power is latent in the Void, and its god-form is the Death Posture.

These theories have their roots in very ancient practices, some of which- in distorted form- provided the basis of the mediaeval Witch Cult, covens of which flourished in New

England at the time of the Salem Witch Trials at the end of the 17th century. The subsequent persecutions apparently obliterated all outer manifestations both of the genuine cult and its debased counterfeits.

The principal symbols of the original cult have survived the passage of aeon- long cycles of time.<sup>30</sup> They all suggest the Backward Way.<sup>31</sup> The Sabbath sacred to Sevekh or Sebt, the number Seven, the Moon, the Cat, Jackal, Hyaena, Pig, Black Snake, and other animals considered unclean by later traditions; the Widdershins and Back-to-Back dance, the Anal Kiss, the number Thirteen, the Witch mounted on the besom handle, the Bat, and other forms of webbed or winged nocturnal creature; the Batrachia generally, of which the Toad, Frog, or Hekt<sup>32</sup> was preeminent. These and similar symbols originally typified the Draconian Tradition which was degraded by the pseudo witch-cults during centuries of Christian persecution. The Mysteries were profaned and the sacred rites were condemned as anti-Christian. The Cult thus became the repository of inverted and perverted religious rites and symbols having no inner meaning; mere affirmations of the witches' total commitment to anti-Christian doctrine whereas- originally- they were living emblems, sentient symbols, of ante- Christian faith.

When the occult significance of primal symbols is fathomed at the Draconian level, the system of sorcery which Spare evolved through contact with 'Witch' Paterson becomes explicable, and all magical circles, sorceries, and cults, are seen as manifestations of the Shadow.

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### footnotes

(1) See *The White People, The Shining Pyramid, and other stories*. This theme is a frequent one with Machen. The hideous atavisms described by Lovecraft in many of his tales evoke even more potently the atmosphere of cosmic horror and 'evil' peculiar to the influx of extra-terrestrial powers.

(2) See *The Confessions, Moonchild, Magick Without Tears, and other works by Crowley*.

(3) Frederick Muller, 1975.

(4) 'The body considered as a whole I call Zos' (*The Book of Pleasure*, p.45). The Kia is the 'Atmospheric I'. The 'I' and the 'Eye', being interchangeable, the entire range of 'eye' symbolism- to which repeated reference has been made- is here applicable.

(5) First published in 1913 and 1921 respectively. There has been a recent republication of *The Book of Pleasure*, with an introduction by Kenneth Grant. (Montreal, 1975).

(6) This was to have been divided into two parts: *The Book of the Living Word of Zos and The Zoetic Grimoire of Zos*; in the present chapter it is referred to simply as the grimoire.



(7) *Vide infra.*

(8) *See previous chapter.*

(9) *The significance of the number eight as the height, or ultimate One, is explained in Aleister Crowley & the Hidden God.*

(10) *i.e. the assumption of the 'god-form' of death.*

(11) *See Arthur Osborne: Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge, London, 1954.*

(12) *See Shri Haranath: His Play and Precepts, Bombay, 1954.*

(13) *i.e. 1913.*

(14) *The 5<sub>j</sub>=6ú Ritual was published in Volume I, No.3. in 1910.*

(15) *See Chapter I.*

(16) *By qabalah, Hand=Yod=10; Eye=Ayin=70. The total, 80=Pe (Mouth), the Goddess, Uterus, or Utterer of the Word.*

(17) *Crowley's definition of magick. See Magick, p.131.*

(18) *i.e. the True Will.*

(19) *Crowley defined the Great Work in terms of the 'Next Step', implying that the Great Work is not a remote and mysterious thing, unattainable by humans, but the realization of the 'here and now', and attention to immediate reality. Both Spare and Crowley castigated the prevaricators who, scared of the idea of work, look to the 'future life' and the unattainable, instead of seizing reality and living NOW. 'O Babblers, Prattlers, Loquacious Ones, . . . learn first what is work! and the Great Work is not so far beyond' (The Book of Lies, Chapter 52).*

(20) *1886-1945.*

(21) *Hell is the type of the concealed place symbolic of the subconsciousness; the 'infernal' region.*

(22) *See Chapter 10.*

(23) *Vide, infra, p.204.*

(25) *i.e. a solitary sex act.*

(26) Described in *The Book of Pleasure* (A.O. Spare), republished 1975.

(27) See *Letters on Od and Magnetism*; Karl von Reichenbach, London, 1926.

(28) *The Book of Pleasure*, p.56.

(29) See *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*, New York, 1942.

(30) They were carried over from the Draconian or Typhonian Traditions of pre-dynastic Egypt. See *The Magical Revival*, Chapter 3.

(31) *The Way of Resurgent Atavisms*.

(32) Hecate, the witch or transformer from dark to light, as the tadpole of the waters to the frog of dry land, as the dark and baleful moon of witchcraft to the full bright orb of magical radiance and enchantment exemplified for Spare by 'Witch' Paterson who changed from the hag to the virgin before his eyes. See *Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare*, 1975.

## **An Interview with Gavin Semple**

**February 2001 c.e.**

1. Zos Kia was a significant introduction to Zos and his works; how much preparation went into this particular title? The reproduction of the paintings seems quite beautiful, was it difficult getting the collectors to have such images photographed?

Well, the text itself was written fairly quickly, even partly 'automatically'; I'd reached a stage in my research where certain ideas needed to be brought firmly together, for myself initially, and so it really welled-up and out of me. An outburst of years of furious obsession and marvel. It was intended as a brief resumé which would extend the interest of those familiar with AOS, and provide a point of ingress for others to whom he was just a name. Obviously it doesn't go in 'at ground level', but as the basic information about Spare was, and is, available elsewhere I don't think it needed to. Some people have said it's difficult to read because of that, but I think it's a text you can return to and read new things into - at least I do, so I'm still very fond of it. I sometimes wish I'd written it, but the spirits took possession of it somewhere along the line! There are a lot of references which are significant, but aren't stressed - the Platonic influence, and the Tao, or Taliesin for instance; they were all put in for canny readers to spot and follow up if they so desired. They'll be developed in future books. Again, the book is written on three levels - though I didn't realize that at the time - which means there are any number of ways to jump across and between ideas, make different connections; it's quite densely packed in

that respect, for all its brevity. There's often a poetic turn of phrase, which was necessary to encompass several ideas in one- and there are some deliberately buried treasures which I expect no-one will ever find., though I'll be delighted if they do! Mainly I wanted to find a way to reconcile the rather austere yet joyful (in the Nietzschean style), mystical philosophy we find in *The Book of Pleasure* with the image of the skulduggerous sorcerer which emerges in the works of Kenneth Grant. Sigils for practical ends on the one hand - rather low magic - and on the other the sublime heights of the Shunyavata, the doctrine of the Void, presented in his psychology of the Kia. Spare demonstrates this close interlocking, of course, within the pages of *The Book of Pleasure*, but I thought it would be useful to explore these themes through later periods of his life, and see if they would still dovetail so exquisitely - and of course they do. I wanted to broaden the readers' perspectives, instead of endlessly reiterating the so-called 'witchcraft' aspect, which, as we can now see was something of a masque he assumed in dealings with certain occultists in the 1950s, just as in the 'thirties he had proclaimed himself a Surrealist - with tongue firmly in cheek. Since the publication of *Zos Speaks!* the fallacy of subsuming Spare the magician within some 'tradition' becomes clear; look at the texts - where is the witchcraft, exactly? Even the text of 'Witches' Sabbath' refers explicitly to 'Ehr', which is Li Ehr, otherwise known as Lao Tzu, the Taoist sage. And how would you square Plotinus with any kind of witchery? I hope it all forces a long-overdue rethink in some quarters. I suppose the fact that he also drew African tribesmen means that he spent some time getting initiated in the Congo? In fact Spare was able to create masterful glammers that have protected and preserved his work, and will continue to carry it forward - and that's a very stylish and slick work of sorcery!

The colour illustrations of *Zos-Kia* are beautifully done; this was largely due to the skill of a remarkable photographer named Alex Brattell, who did a marvelous job, and to the repro house that printed them. We have many kind and loyal friends among collectors of Spare's work, and they have all been incredibly generous and supportive in every way. Those pictures have become very popular on the internet, I notice. In a way it's absurd to publish fine limited edition books in the era of the Web; but that's one of the virtues of Fulgur, I think - we are permanently out of step, which gives us a lot of independence in our field. We're alone it, in other words! Compared with the ethos of the website, which is a thing that doesn't actually exist except as tiny electrical impulses and people's interpretations of them, our books are virtually hand-made. In the same way we applied artisan values to all aspects of the production - which in the case of *Zos-Kia* involved me cutting and hand-stamping several hundred talismans to be inserted in the books. Many happy hours we have whiled away tying ribbons on talismans, and Robert and Hayley have personally overseen the production of the books, standing over the printers at work to make sure they don't fuck up. It is important to give all the books a visual and tactile resonance - they should be fondle able and ogle able - stimulating to the body as well as the mind. The colours and typography are chosen for specific reasons. *Witches' Sabbath* would have smelled of goats but we didn't have time to perfect a method of perfuming them. We also paid close attention to creating a cohesion between pictures and text, which had never been done before in books on Spare; if you're going to mention Spare working in his flat, or Spare in the pub, then let's see him there as well. *Death Posture?* -

here's a drawing of him doing it. It works, and it's been one way of utilizing the fruits of our research, rather than saving it all up for the biography.

2. Any plans on a Fulgur reprint of the essay? I noticed recently it was going for £80 a copy (December, 2000).

Yes, the prices for secondhand copies have suddenly spiraled haven't they? We made about 650 copies and they sold out in a year - six years on the value has increased sevenfold or more. Is it because people want to read it, or just to own it because it's a rare thing?: it's impossible to tell - one hopes the former - but no, we don't plan to reprint it. It encapsulates a particular period, a moment - one of those things that was right at the time, but our intention is always to move on to the next project, and not to retrace our steps.

3. The biography - which is our major and long-term project - covers Spare's entire life of course, but we considered publishing the 1909-1913 section as a comprehensive introduction to our reprint of *The Book of Pleasure*. In the event we decided to concentrate on unpublished material rather than reissuing Spare's own books. That didn't seem to be much of a challenge. It was really a question of weaving together the strands of information from various sources and drawing useful conclusions - which suggest some intriguing speculations. Those years were pivotal in several ways for AOS; for one, he was in contact, and ultimately in conflict, with Aleister Crowley. As Crowley is one of the yardsticks of modern occultism it's fascinating to watch the interplay between AC's work and Spare's, at the time that the artist was fully realizing his own mythos, his approach to creative magic - immersing himself in his vision. At the same time he was reaching the high point of his material success, his standing in the London art scene - and he got married, so it's really a time when we can see Austin seizing opportunities, and dealing with all sorts of responsibilities and pressures, mundane and other-worldly. It's a balancing counterpoint to the AOS we know from the 1950s - it reveals the contrasts which he lived, gives insight into the man through his response to situations, and illuminates the continuing threads even more clearly. It'll be published in due time.

4. Do you foresee an advancement in the recognition of AOS in the art world? In America, it seems that many just dabble with the concepts and art of Spare, viewing him as an oddity and running head first into Chaos Magick. All of the while missing the point entirely. Do you think that with the quality publishing groups like 93 Publishing in the 70s and Fulgur in the 90s it can combat the ignorance of so many would-be sorcerers in the scene? How many volumes before a weary eye is opened to discover their own doctrine?

There's certainly been a continued advancement of Spare's status if that's to be judged by the prices his work can command. The collection of his friend Frank Letchford is being sold at present (at [www.occultartgallery.co.uk](http://www.occultartgallery.co.uk)), and a number of sketchbook drawings from the 'forties and 'fifties are being sold as separate items; I think that speaks volumes about the appreciation of Spare's art, that these are now valued as pieces in their own right, worthy of being framed and hung, and enjoyed. But I don't believe AOS will ever take a place beside 'the greats' (so-called) in the view of the art world, and I don't think

he'd want to - he put a lot of effort into rejecting all that while he was alive, he carved himself a very unique niche, and that's where he is likely to stay. Though he likes to gatecrash the party now and again. Astrid Bauer reckons he'll end up like Van Gogh, and it may very well be. But the art world runs on money, pure and simple - it's about investment, returns and consumption - and if you look at the rubbish that sells for millions, even by living artists, it becomes very obvious that the whole scheme is another racket; the artworks themselves only exist as tokens in the game of buying and selling, and profiteering. There is a certain amount of hustling amongst dealers in the Spare world, but with the prices reckoned in hundreds or a few thousand at the most it's definitely the cheap end of the market. When your pictures fetch a million, that's when people sit up and take notice. Spare's work carries something very different and very special within it, and it seems to attract certain people, and perhaps even deter others - as if his own personality and intent radiate through the pictures. Lots of people have noticed that - often those who aren't magically-minded at all. Apart from this he's very difficult to categorize; he was always out of step with movements in the art scene - too late for the 'nineties, too early for Surrealism and so on - and art people - both dealers and academics - like to think in shoebox terms; where can an artist be fitted in? Spare doesn't fit, he doesn't want to fit, and that's one of the strengths of his work - its brazen individuality. Dr. William Wallace published his ground-breaking study of Spare's books (cite ref.) which has put a foot in the door of the academic world at least, and there are now one or two scholars who have turned their attention to AOS in their university theses. The more attention from any side, the better, I think. It would be a shame if he was left closetted with occult enthusiasts, to the detriment of his reputation in the broader scheme. Spare's popularity seems to rise and fall in waves in America; the atmosphere of his work - particularly the writings - can often be somehow terribly English, and I don't know how well that transfers to the States. I get the impression that Americans can be very adept at swift assimilation, of objects, of information - naturally, for a society that encourages consumption, competition, free-trade - and that works pretty well when dealing with Crowley - I mean, you can set up a church and get tax-exemption, sell baseball hats, t-shirts and '93' bumper-stickers! With Spare you really have to go a lot deeper - he hasn't made it that easy for anyone, on any level, even down to his use of syntax and outlandish words - so perhaps that's why a lot of people have just grabbed at the Chaos Magick end of the thing and not tried to penetrate any further. Chaos Magick is virtually extinct in the U.K., but at least the trend helped to put Spare's name forward, albeit on a superficial level. As a movement in modern occultism Chaos did quite a similar job to Punk Rock in Britain - people were beginning to realize that the conventions of their magic were often indefensibly silly, and that there was a whole generation of budding magicians who simply wouldn't accept the old regime; they weren't going to jump through hoops for years learning their prayers before they could do some really exciting experiments in demonology and go a bit mad. It was useful at a certain time for clearing out dead wood - although, tragically but perhaps inevitably, it ended up bogged down in the hierarchy game, just like its predecessors whom it hoped to lampoon. 'Battle ye not with monsters...' It was good for the AOS propaganda campaign, nevertheless, so we should remember it fondly for that at least. Anything that keeps Spare's name forward is to the good, I feel. I did spend some time manouevring around the London magical scene from about 1988 to 1991, and it became clear at a certain point that virtually everyone I met

who claimed to be interested in Spare actually knew fuck all and didn't really care - the subject seemed to be another cipher in the game of impressing people and commanding attention. The perspectives were very narrow: 'Spare was a shaman!' was the typical opinion - in spite of the fact that the shaman is a professional magician who is expected to avoid innovation in his craft, with a specialized role, a servant of the community; while Spare deliberately sought out social contexts in which he could remain a misfit, an outlaw, did his best to flout convention at every turn, and continually introduced innovations into his art. He didn't have a drum either. Moreover, none of the frontline Chaos magicians had any real interest in art - with one honourable exception, Chrys Livings, who is a very talented illustrator - and this absence of aesthetic sensibility seemed to me to run counter to the whole of Spare's effort. That was a bit of a disappointment. So part of our aim with Fulgur was, I confess, to spring AOS from the Chaos trap, after it had become revealed as such, and put the whole thing on a new footing - to give more than another dull take on 'how to do sigils' mixed with tedious in-jokes and ill-digested particle physics, which was all that was on offer at that time. I think that's been accomplished. My feeling on encountering Spare's work in 1983 was that here was someone who was prepared to cut through all the nonsense in magic and say 'Here's how I do it - how are you going to do it?'; I thought he made it blindingly obvious that he was forging a totally personal path to realization, to vision and imagination, and that he expected the rest of us to do the same. But my influences had mostly been artists, writers, musicians out of the subculture - from the Decadents onwards - not magicians at all, so perhaps I had a fresher eye when I came to study magic. And it was probably sheer luck that AOS beckoned to me at that time - or maybe not. I reckon any dedicated magician will gradually formulate their own system once they've experimented with a range of methods, and most do - but AOS, certainly with his Book of Pleasure thesis, tends to favour the short path of antinomianism - challenge everything, kick over the traces, and see what happens and what is left when you've demolished the idols - in other words, confront all your conditioning head-on and ask 'How do I believe what I believe?' - look from angles which allow you to observe the process of your believing, instead of just exchanging one set of beliefs for another. So in a way his motivation is very much in the tradition of the early Gnostics - particularly the Cainites and their ilk - and therefore his approach lies much closer to the early traditions of Western magic, really quite divorced from the type of ceremonial psychodramatics that had developed by the beginning of the twentieth century, and the kind that's familiar to us after the 1960 and 70s revival. But there are cycles and parallels, inasmuch as Spare took the step on from Golden Dawn-style magic that others would later take when that old material became freely available again in the 1970s. 'How many volumes before a weary eye is opened'? you ask; well, I think you either get the point or you don't - it's probably always been that way - and it's the same when dealing with any creative individual. You can get hung up on someone's painting technique, or a writing style, and be oblivious to the motivation behind it, and the intention and outcome of that particular process. Now the fashion for 'occult artists' is to embellish their pictures with distinctly Sparesque sigils; it's probably just a phase, but let's be honest, what value would Surrealism have if they'd all painted soggy watches? Who ever produced anything of lasting interest from cut-ups apart from Burroughs? Spare's work opens the doors to a vast range of possibilities which people can capitalize

on, or they can let themselves get stuck in another form of idolatry, another set of conditionings - the choice is up to the individual. Does that partly answer your question?

5. How did Zos Speaks! manage to sell? Is this edition still available? I am sure the price of distribution must have been enormous; will anything as extensive be issued again by Fulgur?

ZosSpeaks! is still available, though it is selling very quickly. It was quite a step for us to do the book, as it's very large and copiously illustrated; quite a change from printing small editions of short books - almost stepping over into mainstream publishing territory, in fact. It is, and will remain, the authoritative book on AOS, so we feel privileged to have been given that opportunity - although, who else could have done it? Robert Ansell and Hayley Tong made an incredible job of the production, but I do not envisage that we will want to publish anything as ambitious again. Robert's shrewd financial sensibilities made it possible - even with the cost of distribution and so on, it's an astonishingly low-priced book, considering its format and content. If you don't know anything about AOS the book will tell you a lot; if you already know a lot, you'll be amazed all over again. I like to look at the pictures and dribble.

6. How would you define Zos Kia Cultus, and what do you see as its future and purpose?

It's a vexed question: on the one hand there are people who nurture the belief that 'ZKC' is a 'thing-in-itself' - some club or gang that you can be on nodding terms with, or even join and belong to. That's the t-shirt mentality at work - this urge to label and compartmentalize one's self. It can work for some people as a motivation for action, but ultimately it's a dead end. On the other there's the attitude that it's a convenient nominalization, coined by Kenneth Grant in the 1950s, for the current of thought - or the impulse, wherever it comes from - that impelled Spare's work and, quite literally, exudes from it. I prefer that one, it allows for change and a continual development of the actual vehicle of the impulse - that is, the way each person receives it and passes it on. There were a lot of Dada and Surrealist artists, and a whole gang of 'Beat' writers, but some of them came to epitomize these terms and overshadowed the others. Perhaps 'Zos Kia Cultus' relates to Spare in the same way, except that there was only one of him to begin with! It's a name to conjure with though, isn't it? - and perhaps that is why Grant thought it up - he has a knack for creating glammers, weaving mystique for specific ends. His interpretation of the term has changed over the years, or at least he has been conscientious in presenting it from different perspectives - changing the mask, so to speak, just when people have got used to the last one. Andrew Chumley and one or two others have taken up the idea that ZKC is, or should be, an elite coterie of artist-occultists, which is an interesting proposition - though I would suggest that, for an artist, such self-labelling undercuts the strident individualism that is crucial to the whole conception. These notions usually come from people who like to be in groups, and preferably in charge of them. It's not to my taste. And anyway, why restrict it to the visual arts? Dance, drama, poetry, music - the whole gamut of creativity - can be exploited as paths to knowledge and vision, the realization of will and imagination which is the essence of magic. As regards music, Coil have begun to use 'ZKC' as an explicit

frame of reference, even projecting the words onscreen during their live performances - but then their kinship with Spare's creative methods, the fact that they share an instinct with him, has been implicit in their work from the start. They have exploited, in a very creative way, particular regions of consciousness which were obviously familiar to AOS - and that's exactly what he was urging people to do, from *The Book of Pleasure* right through to his *Logomachy* and other texts of the 1950s. Exploring, experimenting, drawing conclusions - and presenting them in the context of art. And there's a lot of bizarre humour in their work, which he no doubt appreciates. I'd see them as a prime exemplar of ZKC manifesting - though in reality there is a whole network of subcultural influences culminating in their work. Of course, there are a number of others working along similar lines, but not so well-known. All power to them. (John Balance of Coil gave his views on the subject in *Fortean Times* ? [www.forteanimes.com/artic/coil/coil.html](http://www.forteanimes.com/artic/coil/coil.html) ) One would hope that if ZKC is anything, it exists in that moment of contact between Spare's work and the individual's mind, open to its subversive influence; and then in the fruit of that communion, an inspiration and a creative response. The moment remains - the transmission continues. After all, the world has been made such a bloody miserable place to live that the only way to go is into the imagination, and through that into - somewhere else. I'm probably paraphrasing Spare in saying that, but it's the way I feel about the future and purpose of anything - not just Zos Kia Cultus.

## **Zos Kia: Unparalleled Focus of Magickial Will**

**By Michael W. Ford**

*"I have not me tragedy, no, not in this life! Yet, whether I have spewed their doctrines upon the tables of the Law or into the troughs, at least I have not cast away the flesh of dream!"*

-ANATHEMA OF ZOS-THE SERMON TO THE HYPOCRITE-

There has been much talk and focus on the English Artist and Sorcerer Austin Osman Spare (1886-1956) and his Zos Kia cultus. Austin, the son of a Police Officer, grew up in South London near Kennington. His interest in art began at a very early age and luckily, was supported by his mother who aided in his creative awakening. As teenager, Spare came into contact with Mrs. Paterson, a witch who claimed decent from a line of Salem Witches. Her powers, among what seemed to be many, were based on hypnotism, divinity and spell working. Mrs. Paterson fascinated young Austin and a close friendship developed which lasted until her time of death. Mrs. Paterson had demonstrated to Austin her power to project thought forms. She, at least on one occasion cast upon the image of a beautiful young woman, which brought forth a significant sexual intensity which would later aid in the influence of his magickial awakenings. It was though this that Mrs. Paterson passed on the "power" and allowed AOS to become properly initiated into the magickial current which would drive him the rest of his earthly life.



Austing's first publication, "Earth Inferno," was privately published in 1905 and "set in stone" what was to be his path. The images of sexuality, the macabre and of death provided an intense aura of mystery and sensuality.

Spare had expanded more into the inspired and powerful web of interlocking his art with magick, and how so were both intertwined! Around the year 1906, AOS had begun signing his paintings and drawings in what was to become a Sigil, which is described as a "*Representation of Will, delimiting Belief and rendering it transvaluative through Desire*" (Zos Kia An Introductory Essay on the Art and Sorcery of Austin Osman Spare, by Gavin Semple, FLUGUR LIMITED, Oct. 31, 1995) for which much of the latent experience of Belief can be absorbed into an Eros-Thanatos combination of life making elementals. The publication, "A Book of Satyrs" was published and further demonstrated Austin's talent for the hidden and truth - devoured reality beyond the watchful and often passed eye.

Austin Osman Spare signed the Oath of a Probationer in the presence of Aleister Crowley in 1909, assuming the magickial name of YIHOVEAUM, which SPare would later have a slight falling out with Crowley, thus never reaching beyond the Probationer initiation of the A:A. Spare continued to develop and tap into what is to be loosely called the Sabbatic Craft, based on the dreaming aspects of witchcraft and working with extraterrestrial spirits. His development of the Zos Kia system came to an awakening with the publication of the grimoire, "The Book of Pleasure" in 1913 which described Kia as: "*The Absolute freedom which being free is mighty enough to be 'reality' at any time. Therefore is not potential or manifest (except as its instant possibility) by ideas of freedom or 'means,' but by the Ego being free to receive it, by being free of ideas about it and not believing. The less said of it (Kia) the less obscure it is.*" Zos was described as the realization of the self as entity, belief in flesh of which "*The body of the whole*" described each method of focus and realization.

Beyond this time, AOS created into day side reality the Alphabet of Desire, a system of point of congress and otherness, a grammar unspeakable yet exceptionally understood in the points of creation and vision. *Inspiration against all costs.* This system would allow a union of Zos and Kia and behold a view and vision of strength and wonder.

Sigils would be designed in a fashion which would describe and incode the actual sigil with the desire of the sorcerer. Once the sigil is designed, one would concentrate it with focusing upon it with a developed gnosis contributed to what Spare termed the "death posture," of which one loses all connection with Zos through extreme discomfort and possibly a black out. The result would be the absorption of the sigil until it was forgot by the conscious. The subconscious can not operate towards the sigil's goal and purpose until all was forgot by the conscious. This would prove rather difficult for the beginner and only encrypted in Spare's writings of which the acquainted student could understand and learn from this system.

A description of the "death posture" was detailed in "The Book of Pleasure":

*"Lying on your back lazily, the body expressing the emotion of yawning, suspiring while conceiving by smiling, that is the idea of the posture. Forgetting time with those things which were essential reflecting their meaninglessness, the moment beyond time and its virtue has happened. Standing on tip-toe, with arms rigid, bound behind by the hands, clasped and straining the utmost, the neck stretched - breathing deeply and spasmodically, till giddy and sensation comes in gusts, give exhaustion and capacity for the former. Gazing at your reflection till it is blurred and you know not the gazer, close your eyes (this usually happens involuntarily) and visualize.*

*The light (always an X in curious evolutions) that is seen should be held on to, never letting go, till the effort is forgotten. This gives a feeling of immensity (which sees a small form), whose limit you cannot reach. This should be practiced before experiencing and foregoing. The emotion that is felt if the knowledge which tells you why."*

Austin Spare also was later adept in the practice of dream control and assuming various god forms thereof. The most significant forms were of Thanatos and a building association with the Black Eagle. It was by this that Spare was present in the Astral Witches Sabbat, a conclave of desired astrals joined in a blissful union of their belief. Much continues in this latent form beyond this time.

Austin Spare's work with Atavistic resurgence has proved well linked with the Zos Kia cultus. Atavisms are a resurgence of characteristics which have elapsed many generations. It is also possible to connect with pre-human embodiments through such elementals. Atavisms exist in the deepest recesses of the mind and often are characterized as half beast, half man. Such creatures do not emerge spontaneously, however can be invoked through several methods of automatic "shamanism" and focus pathworkings.

An article by **Kenneth Grant** published in *Cavendish's "Man, Myth and Magic"* further delves into examples of AOS and his magickial abilities. "Spare's 'formula of atavistic resurgence' was based on the use of symbolic pictures, which gave a visible form to various atavistic urges and desires deep within the mind. He claimed that he had only to visualize one of these pictures for the atavistic impulse to surge up. An example which he gave was an occasion when he needed to move a heavy load of timber, with no one to help him. Spare closed his eyes for a while and visualized a picture which symbolized a wish for the strength of tigers. Almost immediately he sensed an inner response. He then felt a tremendous upsurge of energy sweep through his body. For a moment he felt like a sapling bent by the onslaught of a mighty wind. With a great effort of will, he steadied himself and directed the force to its proper object. A great calm descended, and he found himself able to carry the load easily.

On another occasion, two people pressed Spare to conjure up an atavistic spirit in visible form. He warned them of the dangers involved, explaining what these creatures exist within the mind at levels not normally in communion with the conscious mind; that it was foolish to evoke them because they embodied the atavistic urges and desires of those who would behold them. But the couple insisted. Spare again used the symbolic picture method. He closed his eyes and waited. It was not long before a green substance like

tenuous seaweed began to invade the room, particularly obscuring the objects it contained. It resembled a coiling mass of vapour, which slowly congealed in a definite shape. It gained more and more substance with each successive moment until the terrified dabblers panicked and begged Spare to banish it. Before it faded, however, they saw a vast face peering out of the mist; the eyes of it were like pools of black and burning oil.

Spare died in 1956, in a basement flat in Brixton, in poverty and obscurity.

The essence of sorcery through this method draws lines of mental danger to those who normally should be of sound and strong mind, for even an obsession weakness, if preyed upon by such elementals, could aid to madness and failure.

The emphasis of Shamanistic magick is present, coinciding with the parallel system of Crowley's Thelema, meaning WILL in Greek. Focus and difference being not of dual aspects. However, always present in its need of balance. Spare's system still requires much attention and focus, not just for the sake of study, but to build a stronger Alphabet of Desire for the aspiring sorcerer who will always be apt to transverse the spheres of both light and shadow, the angelic and the demonic.

## **Live Like a Tree Walking!**

**by Kzwleh Elagabalus**

*"Thought is the negation of knowledge.*

*Be thy busyness with action only.*

*Purge thyself of belief:*

**live like a tree walking!**

*Take no thought of good or evil.*

*Become self-active causality by Unity of thine, I and Self."*

-Austin Osman Spare: Aphorism I; The Focus of Life

In 1890, James George Frazer, an English Sociologist and Anthropologist, published "The Golden Bough", an anthropological investigation on the links between Magic, Folklore, Religion and Science in different cultures from all continents. Although the book had the typical rationalist point of view that most positivist English scientists of the time had, it contained an invaluable description of many magical practices in several different cultures, and it became a must read for every occultist at the beginning of the 20th century. So it's possible to assume that Austin Spare read it.

"The Golden Bough" contains a chapter about the Arboreal Cults which offers several insights about the ideas which predominate in all rites devoted to the trees. In some cultures the predominating conception about Arboreal Spirits is that the Spirit is incorporated in the tree: it animates the tree and dies when the tree dies; although some other cultures consider that the tree is not the body of the Spirit, but its residence and the

Spirit can enter and leave the tree according to its own will. After this introduction, Frazer deepens in the Arboreal Cults and concludes that these Spirits have regency on the weather, the rain, the reproduction of the cattle, the fertility of the harvests, human procreation; that is to say: they have regency on procreation. Therefore, the Spirits of the trees have a transcendental role in several rites which are practiced to guarantee the abundance of human, animal or vegetal procreation.

There are several cases in which the Arboreal Spirit is simultaneously symbolized under a vegetal and a human form, one placed next to the other, expressing a continuum between them, as if one was the explanation of the other. In fact, most Arboreal Cultures represent the Spirit of the tree under a human form; and each Spring Solstice a procession headed by a person dressed as a tree (i.e: covered with leaves and branches) is made. This person receives the name of the tree during the ceremony, there's no distinction between the person and the tree. The tree-man or the tree-woman doesn't represent the tree, but they **are** the tree during the procession, and therefore their Spirit is the Arboreal Spirit, the producer of all fertility and procreation. This "walking tree" generally crosses the village and receives different gifts from its inhabitants and these offerings are related to the entities in which procreation should be manifested.

The Zos Kia Cultus, as it was defined by AOS, is a cult devoted to the body as a whole, or Zos, this Total body includes both the physical and the mental aspects of the body (i.e, the mind itself); on the other hand, it's a cult to the Kia, the name which AOS used arbitrarily <sup>(1)</sup> to define the "Atmospheric I", that which is *neither one thing - nor another one* (the "Neither-Neither"), or as AOS said: "*the absolute freedom which being free is mighty enough to be reality*". Zos is the active aspect, that which can also be called the Will; Kia is the passive aspect, the imagination where all dreams and possibilities reside.

Nevertheless the Zos Kia Cultus is not a dual system, but a system based on an extreme monism; Zos and Kia are united by means of the New Sexuality, that is called "New" because it remains always identical to itself, without ever mutating. The New Sexuality is not the immutable law, but the absolute absence of law, the great emptiness. It's not a dual sexuality, but the monism of the great emptiness of that which is neither-neither.

The New Sexuality is the encounter of Zos and Kia, an encounter which is manifested in the Death Posture; the state of supreme union in which all dualism is transcended. The transcendence of all dualism doesn't happen by means of uniting opposites, but by its negation, the emptiness. If we remember another phrase of AOS: "*There is neither thou nor I nor a third person - loosing this consciousness by unity of I and Self; there would be no limit to consciousness in sexuality. Isolation in ecstasy, the final inducement, is enough -But, procreate thou alone!*" <sup>(2)</sup>, then it's not hard to understand why Austin Spare felt inspired by the Arboreal Cult and the rites of the "man-tree" or the "tree walking".

Returning for a second to Frazer's Golden Bough, we'll remember the three examples that the book offers about how the Cult to the trees is manifested:

a) an animism in which trees are inhabited by a Spirit whose function is to induce/guarantee procreation.

b) a reciprocity in which a man placed next to a tree serves so that each one explains reciprocally the other.

c) like rites of fertility in which a disguised man transforms himself into a tree and his Spirit becomes the Arboreal Spirit, producer of fertility. And thus he walks across the village to scatter procreation.

Of course, these three cases never occur in an isolated way, in all Arboreal Cults the three forms are present in a greater or smaller way. A tree exists in a constant Death Posture, in permanent contact with the Arboreal Spirit, the Kia; it's the perfect symbol for the New Sexuality. It's possible to say that the body of a tree (its trunk, branches, leaves, etc) is Zos and the Arboreal Spirit is Kia: a Spirit that although "inhabits" the tree, also exceeds it -if that was not the case, it wouldn't make sense to invoke it to induce the procreation of anything different from the tree itself. Indeed, the Arboreal Spirit is the "Atmospheric I" of the tree, which is and is not in the tree... or more precisely, is neither within, nor without the tree.

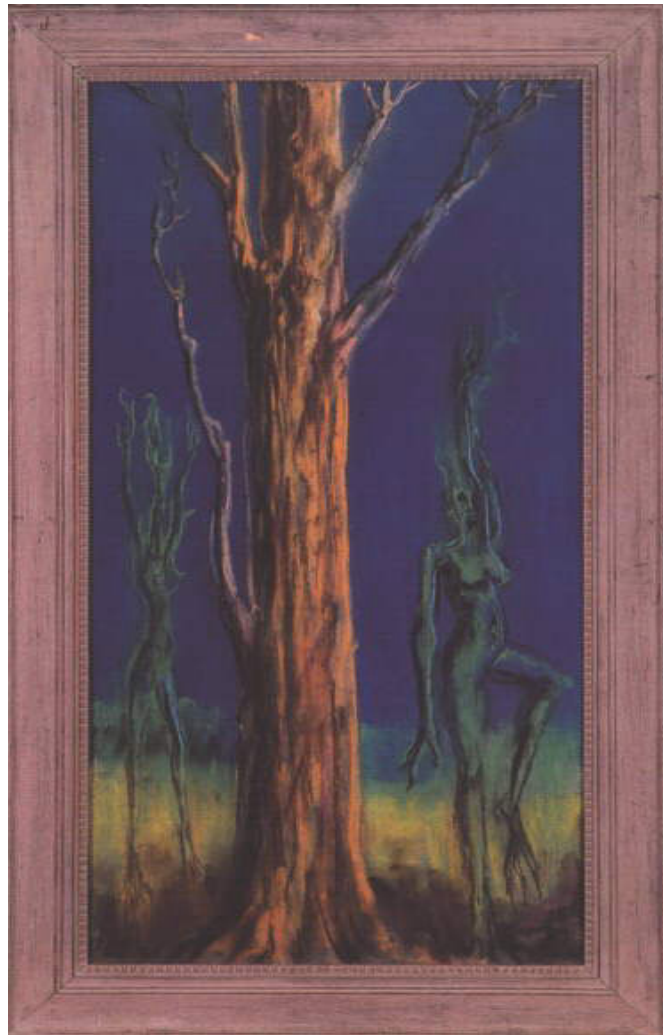
Now it's easier to understand those words from The Focus of Life: "*Live like a tree walking!*" and "*Procreate thou alone!*". Those "men-tree", possessed by the Arboreal Spirit (the "Atmospheric I") walking across the village in order to cast procreation among all things are a perfect allegory for the Zos Kia Cultus: the ecstatic satisfaction of the ecstasy which is cast upon all things as procreation.

Kzwleh Elagabalus - 11/06/00

#### **NOTES:**

(1) Some authors consider that "Kia" is not an arbitrary name, but a transliteration of Qoph Yod Aleph, which equals 111

(2) Aphorism I, The Focus of Life



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# Obituary

First published in *The Times*, May 16th 1956



Austin Spare, an artist of unusual gifts and attainments and even more unusual personality, died on 15th May 1956, in hospital in London at the age of sixty-nine.

A dreamer of dreams and seer of visions, he had that complete other-worldliness so often depicted in romantic fiction and so rarely found in real life. Money meant nothing to him. With his talents as a figure draughtsman he might easily have commanded a four-figure income in portraiture, but he elected to live quietly and humbly, rarely going out, painting what he wished to paint, and selling his works at three or four guineas each. Even in outward aspect he conformed to type - with his untidy shock of hair, small imperial, and a scarf instead of a collar. But for most of his life he did not mix in what are called "artistic circles". Not Chelsea, Fitzroy Street, Bloomsbury or Hampstead claimed him, but for years a little flat "in the south suburbs of the Elephant", far removed from the coteries, deep-set in the ordinary life of the people.

Austin Osman Spare was born in Snow Hill, near Smithfield Market, London on 31st December 1886, the son of Philip Newton Spare, a City of London policeman. Leaving his elementary school at the age of 13, he took his higher education into his own hands, working not only at art but at general subjects, in particular the occult. He had some formal tuition at the Lambeth School of Art and the Royal College of Art. He was already exhibiting at the Royal Academy at the age of 16, but in later years ceased to send anything there. In July 1914 he had his first one-man exhibition, at the Baillie Gallery, showing a number of his so-called "psychic" drawings and some very powerful generalizations of animal nature.

Just after the 1914-1918 war Spare became friendly with John Austen and Alan Odle, figure draughtsmen differing considerably from him and from each other, but each having certain aims in common with his. From October 1922 to July 1924 Spare edited, jointly with Clifford Bax, a sumptuously produced quarterly called *The Golden Hind* for Chapman and Hall. It collapsed for lack of support, but during its brief career it reproduced large scale some really superb figure drawings and lithographs by Spare and others. In 1925 Spare, Odle, Austen and Harry Clarke showed together at the St. George's Gallery. Two years later Spare showed alone, at the Lefevre Galleries, and in 1930, at the Godfrey Phillips Galleries.

Thereafter Spare was rarely found in the purlieu of Bond Street. He would teach a little from January to June, then up to the end of October, would finish various works, and from the beginning of November to Christmas would hang his products in the living-room, bedroom, and kitchen of his flat in the Borough. There he kept open house; critics and purchasers would go down, ring the bell, be admitted, and inspect the pictures, often in the company of some of the models - working women of the neighbourhood. Spare was convinced that there was a great potential demand for pictures at two or three guineas each, and condemned the practice of asking £20 for "amateurish stuff". He worked chiefly in pastel or pencil, drawing rapidly, often taking no more than two hours over a picture. He was especially interested in delineating the old, and had various models over seventy and one as old as ninety-three.

During the last war, while on fire watching duty, he was blown up and temporarily lost the use of both arms. His memory was also affected, but in 1946 in a cramped basement in Brixton, he began to make pictures again, starting, as he said, from scratch. In 1947 an exhibition of no less than 163 of the pictures he had painted in the previous few months attracted many people to the Archer Gallery, in Westbourne Grove.

Spare's alleged "automatic" and "psychic" drawings tended to lack discipline and were on the whole inferior to his "straight" work. The last chiefly comprised nudes, which combined strength and delicacy of a high order and had a wonderful three-dimensional feeling. His minute draughtsmanship may have owed something to the Pre-Raphaelite influence, though in general his art was much more human and full-blooded than that of the "brethren". Of his technical mastery there can be no doubt. The collection of his drawings may yet become a cult.

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