

P R E F A C E

How Witchcraft Saves Civilization

You have bent up the Pentagram, young man!

—MARIA OUSPENSKAYA, *The Wolf Man*



WHY I BENT UP THE PENTAGRAM . . . TWICE!

PREFACE: TAKE ONE, 1972

San Francisco

I began this book as an unbeliever in the occult. I leave it, if not believing, then not disbelieving. What is here is not everything you need to know about witchcraft, nor everything you need to know about the selling of God, sex, and the Age of Aquarius. What is here is not the sociology or anthropology of witchcraft, nor a taxitive compendium of horror movies, sex cults, pornography, and American law. What is here is not anti-Christian or anti-God. What is here, simply, is the popular culture of American sorcery.

The first manuscript pages of this book appeared in 1969, only a few days after a British vicar's widow, Maisie Pearson, confirmed an I Ching reading. She predicted for me a long occult adventure. "You must do it," she said.

Some time later, after meeting at midnight with Anton LaVey, who is the high priest of the Church of Satan, interviewing white witches, and attending Black Masses, I asked myself, "Is this any way for an exorcist to behave?" I had been ordained an exorcist in the Catholic Church in 1963,

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but my exorcising days, like my Catholicism, were gone with the winds of spiritual upheaval that blew with Vatican II. Hot knees bewitched mine beneath ouija boards from New York to San Francisco; witches invited me into their confidence; reportage became adventure. This was New Journalism at its gonzo best. The reporter, like Alice through the looking glass, participated in the experience. To get at the truth of craft, velvet gloves crucified me nude in a New York art gallery, and I was dipped naked in the healing waters of the Virgin at Lourdes.

Now astrology, magic, tarot, and yin-yang macrobiotics, as well as occult psychedelia, gender magic, and phallic worship, are no more exotic to me than the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, the theology of John Calvin, and the sadomasochistic erotica of the Inquisition. I do, however, understand why inside the table top of every altar in every Catholic church rests an altar stone containing human bones.

In the poker game of American spirituality, the witchcraft card trumps traditional religion. No longer a silent minority, witchcraft is part of the liberation movements of sex, race, and gender that are transforming American popular culture. Witchcraft labels Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as cults far less ancient than witchcraft. Most important, the U.S. Supreme Court constitutionally guarantees that witchcraft is a valid religion whose rituals are now part of the *U.S. Chaplains' Manual* for military bases.

Three hundred years after the Salem Witch Trials, witchcraft has saved civilization by leveling the playing field of spirituality. No longer can Christianity, Judaism, and Islam control American spirituality. The occult offers ancient answers to human needs repressed by these dogmatic religions that came along thousands of years after witchcraft ruled the earth. I mean this book to sound no more anti-Christian than I intend it to sound pro-occult.

Arthur Miller titled his 1953 Salem witch drama *The Crucible*. The present volume chronicles how American popular culture is shifting from crucifix to crucible. The crucifix nails religious dogma down to the four corners of a cross. A crucible is a scientific vessel for melting materials at high temperatures to analyze what they are made of. The counterculture revolution continues to test declarative faith, revealed fundamentalism, and dictated government. Liberation fronts are opening the interrogative possibilities of intellect and diversity. America works best as an experimental society when it is a crucible for progress.

In these times of fast change, necromancy seems better suited to match

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the continued questing of the American character, colonial to astronautical. For in the evolution of the world, obviously enough, old maps ill serve a new Columbus who walks on the moon, taking steps to the stars. The space program changes everything about earthbound religions, science, and customs. Old totems fall as fast as old taboos. We look in the last generation of this century for a spirituality progressive enough to match the frontiers of outer and inner space. We resensitize. We reconceptualize. Technology demythologizes the moon. Erich von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods* (1968) makes the Bible a documentation of UFOs with Christ as an extraterrestrial cosmonaut. *The Mushroom and the Cross* (1970), a best-selling book written by John Allegro, one of the original scholars of the Dead Sea Scrolls, rethinks Jesus into an acid hallucination.

American astronauts, covering both sides of providence, carry Bible passages, rosaries, and occult amulets to the lunar surface. Despite numerologists' warnings, NASA launched *Apollo 13* at 13:13 Houston time, and carried the 12th, 13th, and 14th men to the moon. Two days later, *Apollo 13* suffered a terrible space accident on Friday, the 13th of April, 1970. *Time* magazine asks on its cover *Is God Dead?* *The National Enquirer* knows Satan is alive and well.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the revolutionary pioneer who gave America soul—and the Over-Soul. Emerson raised the consciousness for alternative spirituality, including witchcraft. He dared tell Harvard Divinity School graduates (1838) that they were as divine as any Jesus. He wanted the American intellectual to be free of European dogma. He wanted American spirituality to be free of the kinds of Puritan theology that hated the body. He wanted personal rights unfettered by race, sex, gender, and religion. His transcendentalist group changed American society. They began the women's movement with Margaret Fuller; the children's education reforms of Elizabeth Peabody, and her sisters Mary and Sophia, of Salem; the commune movement at Brook Farm; and the abolition movement set afire by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, to whom Abraham Lincoln said, "So you're the little woman who started the Civil War."

Emerson led the way for Henry David Thoreau, the conservationist author of *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* (1853) and *Civil Disobedience* (1848), as much as for the very Wiccan Walt Whitman and his magic epic *Leaves of Grass* (1855–1892) which, like witchcraft, is centered around nature, persona, and sexual energy. Emerson changed American intellect and spirituality by introducing the eastern mysticism of the Bhagavad Gita, the German idealism of Immanuel Kant, and the environmental

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British romanticism of Lord Byron, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelly, and William Wordsworth into the New World Magical Mystery Tour long before the Beatles refreshed his act.

Linear Western thought debates *to be or not to be*. Spiraling in circles, Eastern mysticism challenges global humans beyond *to be* into *to become or not to become*. Something in humankind's spiritual psyche refuses to buy our beginning with birth and our ending in a lazy eternal Elysium. Something in the way we move tells us we intersect romantically with the circles of nature, of the spheres, and of the expanding universe where no line is straight and no answer absolute. Witchcraft, like an ancient druid umbrella, covers the human existential situation.

Emerson's was the American mind that invented the self-help genre of the "power of positive thinking." He told men and women that—as "all that Adam had and all that Caesar could"—they as New World potentialities had and could also. Experience may have jerked Emerson and company up short, but as pop-culture scholar Marshall Fishwick says of the pre-electronic likes of Adam and Emerson, "Where Hannibal, Caesar, and Napoleon failed, Edison succeeded."

In short, electrical media make people real. Had Emerson guested on the TV talk shows, he could have transcended himself and become a pop star. Thoreau in *Walden* waxed skeptical about media as a vast wasteland: "The devil goes on exacting compound interest to the last for . . . our inventions. . . . We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas . . . may . . . have nothing important to communicate."

Marshall McLuhan notes that media make everything from the trivial to the important "global" in (his new term) the "Global Village." If television interviews a witch, the next morning that witch's book climbs the lists, giving astrologer Jeane Dixon a following, making British witch Sybil Leek a millionaire, and fixing Anton LaVey as the veritable face of the new Satan. No totem is so, but the media make it so.

American Zen Buddhism. Eastern postures of meditation; still popular in large urban areas, the movement achieved peak popularity in the late 1950s with the Beatniks: Jack Kerouac, Ken Kesey, and Allan Ginsberg, who wrote like William Blake on peyote.

Scientology. A Western mode of spiritual renewal founded by L. Ron Hubbard; a kind of Dale Carnegie approach to psychoanalysis through computer programming. Popular in Hollywood.

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Bahai. Founded in 1864, its architecturally stunning temple stands on Chicago's North Shore; the chairs of this supremely ecumenical religion face Persia.

Gurdjieff. This dervish cult became highly visible in the streets of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco in the early 1970s. Saffron-robed members shave their heads, leaving a ponytail at back of crown. Meditative ritual of dance and music. Ecstatic. Founder George Gurdjieff (1874–1949) wrote his incomprehensible *All and Everything*, and supported himself by dyeing sparrows yellow and selling them as canaries.

American Theosophical Society, Rosicrucians, Spiritualist Churches. Ethel Romm's July 1970 *Penthouse* investigation of America's multiple sects notes, "The Theosophical Society studies comparative religions, ancient and modern, alchemy, Cabala, etc. Started in 1875. . . . Others of this type go in for various occult practices like spirit card reading, seances, scrying (reading images in crystal balls, crystal rocks, mirrors, glass, ink, etc.). Some feature mentalists (who read minds), clairvoyants (who see things out of sight), mediums (who speak with the dead). Many of these grew rapidly with the rise of the once-popular Flying Saucer Cult."

Church of Satan. Founded in 1966 by Anton LaVey, later the author of *The Satanic Bible* (1969); San Francisco-based, former carnival man LaVey has reinstated a nonorgiastic Black Mass as well as Satanic baptisms, weddings, and funerals for his world membership of nearly ten thousand.

Black Magic or Demonology. Worship of the Devil as the polar opposite of the Christian God; orgiastic celebration of the body; nudity, sex, drugs, sadomasochism, sexual inversion. Purpose: to effect curses, celebrate evil; very little prescribed ritual, mostly ad-lib (and sometimes dangerous) innovations to the historic ritual of the Black Mass.

White Witchcraft or Wicca. According to anthropologist Margaret Murray, this is the world's oldest spiritual discipline. Many sects currently in schism over ritual, nudity, homosexuality, and drugs. Purpose: to undo evil curses and effect good. The late Gerald Gardner revived the term *Wicca* and promoted witchcraft as "the Old Religion" in post-World War II Britain; he attempted to restore white witchcraft to its prehistoric purity. London's Alex Sanders succeeded Gardner with the white magic of the Alexandrian tradition. New York's Raymond Buckland is America's chief Gardnerian witch. In Chicago, bisexual Pontifex Maximus Frederic De Arechaga is the chief American practitioner of

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the Sabaeianist system of the Old Religion. White witchcraft covens number in the thousands in the United States.

Popular culture is by essence neophilic: in love with what's new. Witchcraft is old enough to be new, attractive enough to be commercial. It has style, sensibility, and appeal to body and mind. It opens, in this last generation of the twentieth century, the closet door of American sex.

However, ancient witchcraft sometimes seems snagged by modern religion. Witches might claim their hereditary origins in Wicca, the Old Religion. Yet some are still caught in a kind of inquisition: they let Christianity define them. Many witches forget their purity of source. Instead of *acting*, they *react* to Christianity. Real systems of witchcraft gain little power or altitude when white witches try to be "co-Christian" or black magicians are petulantly "anti-Christian." Actual witchcraft has its own identity. Witchcraft predates all known religions; it is based on instinct, intuition, and nature. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are revealed religions, subject to politics, cultures, and geography.

Witchcraft has always been liberal, natural, and global. No liberation movement should let spirituality, race, sex, and gender be anything less. Witchcraft is a seeing eye into the American spirit, which is about personal freedom.

Through phenomena like witchcraft, popular culture analyzes the American character. Witchcraft has always bubbled just below the radar of America's revealed religions. The founding fathers winked when they designed Masonic symbols into the seal of the thirteen (count 'em!) states, as well as the one dollar bill: the pyramid with the all-seeing eye of the god Horus, the son of Osiris, the god of the underworld. American revolutionary patriot Benjamin Franklin in 1772 joined the stylish London Hellfire Club, and designed coins with thirteen circles. Currently, rich and powerful government figures meet secretly and ritually at the Bohemian Club.

American culture is a crystal. It is the "Labrador spar" Emerson mentioned in his essay *Experience*: "A man is like a bit of Labrador spar, which has no lustre as you turn it in your hand, until you come to a particular angle; then it shows deep and beautiful colors."

That spar is the philosopher's stone. It makes us know ourselves.
As we dare scry such a crystal proof-rock, we see hidden facets.
The occult is one such face of the American experience.
We observe witchcraft because it is there.

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PREFACE: TAKE TWO, 2004

San Francisco

In the thirty years since I first bent up the Pentagram and wrote this book, witchcraft has become an even more popular template of American culture, which sees Satan everywhere. Various liberation movements that were then new now drive culture. The revolution in sex, race, and gender has actually enhanced the content of this book, as has my experience in life and my education with the Silva Mind Institute, at which I have also been a postgraduate guest lecturer. In fact, thirty years' passage has revealed one principle: how a country treats its women, children, and homosexual people is how a culture truly shows its character.

It may be of interest to note that everything that rises must converge. The 1960s' liberated world of the occult—particularly the Knights Templar aspects of gay leather culture, with its rituals, costumes, and lingua franca—found its way into this book, published in 1972, as it did into William Carney's *The Real Thing* (1968), and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Rice was then a longtime San Franciscan, living in the Castro where in coffee shops, bruncheries, and bars, the leather S&M talk was of tops complaining of hungry bottoms who were, as then defined exactly, "energy vampires." Although Anne Rice and I both lived in the Castro at the same time, soaked up the same vibes, and wrote and produced books four years apart (with strangely similar titles—hers in fiction, mine in nonfiction), neither of us knew the other. Both books nevertheless represent by genre certain insights into human truths—true at the time, and true universally in the world of the occult.

That said, witchcraft remains a perfect measure of human rights, persona, diversity, and acceptance. The principles of analysis, scholarship, and interview, as well as most of the examples cited, remain valid because most of the citations that were new to pop culture in 1970 have, like *Rosemary's Baby*, survived as classic benchmarks in witchcraft. Impressively, most of the occult books mentioned in the first edition have remained in print—and are even more popular. The teenage witch Sabrina has migrated from the pages of an *Archie* comic book to the television screen. Occult personalities who were popular (like Anton LaVey and Gerald Gardner) or notorious (like Aleister Crowley and Charles Manson) have become legendary. In fact, of all the priests I've known of any faith, Anton LaVey was one of the greatest and kindest.

This text connects the dots for the analytical modern reader. For instance,

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the government persecution and martyrdom of the cross-dressing Joan of Arc for sorcery in 1431 is noted as archetype for the 1990 government persecution of the gay photographer Robert Mapplethorpe for obscenity, driven by a subtext of Satanism.¹

The new American inquisition, begun by fundamentalist religionists, reveals how deeply the personal freedoms inherent in witchcraft threaten those who refuse to separate church and state. The forever-onward-marching Christian soldiers are waging a culture war that they aggressively declared. Satan is spied behind every aspect of popular culture including high school shootings, rap and heavy metal music, goth fashions, *Harry Potter* novels, New Age lifestyles, the war on drugs, hypnotherapy, and government-funded art.

Nevertheless, the fair-minded cannot indict Christianity for the excesses of some fundamentalists or some popes anymore than one can indict witchcraft itself for the excesses of its practitioners, from Gilles de Rais to thrill-killers who call themselves Satanists.

Thirty years on, I have gently opened up my text without breaking the historicity of the original period piece.

Facts that were censored in 1970 are restored.

Facts that were secret at first publication are inserted where they would have appeared in the first edition if the people involved had been able to speak freely thirty years ago.

Brief thumbnails and dates are added to names, titles, and places, to allow modern readers instant access to arcane information that was common knowledge thirty years ago.

Within these edits, I have tried to honor the book's original 1970s voice and update its accuracy for the casual reader, the research student, and practicing witches who encouraged me to prepare this edition for the twenty-first century.

This was the first book on popular American witchcraft.

This was the first book to touch upon the women's movement and witchcraft.

This was the very first to deal with gay witchcraft, and, in that, gay men's emerging spirituality.

Thirty years have proven that Ray Browne, Marshall Fishwick, and Russell Nye were absolute visionaries when they founded the American Popular Culture Association in 1969 for the purpose of shedding the immediate light of analysis and scholarship on American culture. In 1968, as a twenty-something assistant professor at Western Michigan University,

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I had written such articles for their *Journal of Popular Culture* as “Hair: The Tribal Love–Rock Musical” (1968), “Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*: A Sleep and a Forgetting” (1968), and “Originality in Mart Crowley’s *Boys in the Band*” (1970). I thank Ray Browne particularly for daring at a 1969 cocktail party to say yes to my proposal to write this book, which was first published by his Popular Press at Bowling Green State University.

Actually, the watershed year 1969 lit the pop-culture fuse on an endless litany of changes that included those in sex, witchcraft, women’s liberation, gay liberation, race, space, and the antiwar movement. By 1969, seventy million baby boomers had become teenagers and young adults. That year, Richard Nixon was inaugurated. Shirley Chisholm became the first black woman to sit in the U.S. House of Representatives. Gloria Steinem wrote her first feminist article, “After Black Power, Women’s Liberation.” The world grew smaller with the first flights of the jumbo jet (the Boeing 747) and the supersonic Concorde. *Midnight Cowboy* was the first and only X-rated movie to win an Academy Award for best picture of the year. *Life* magazine published, every seven days, the faces of the young American soldiers killed that week in Vietnam. *Easy Rider* changed Hollywood. Woodstock delivered up live sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. Anton LaVey, who had played the Devil the year before in *Rosemary’s Baby*, published *The Satanic Bible*. Gay icon Judy Garland, who declared “I’m not a witch at all” in *The Wizard of Oz*, died on June 22 and was waked by twenty-two thousand mourners at Frank Campbell’s Funeral Chapel in Manhattan on June 27—the very night that her mourners at the Stonewall Bar in the Village rebelled against the New York Police Department and kick-started gay liberation. On July 20, two American astronauts stepped out onto the face of the moon. On August 9, ten days before the historic Woodstock concert, the Manson Family murders immediately changed the public idea of cult, coven, and evil. Suddenly, America believed in witchcraft. When I had begun this book in April 1969, people had thought witches existed only on Halloween cards.

In 1972, I wrote, “I began this book as an unbeliever in the occult. I leave it, if not believing, then not disbelieving.” The truth is, I never left it, nor did it leave me. For thirty years, parts of this book, particularly the legendary interview with Anton LaVey, have been quoted and reprinted in other books and articles and at websites. For as many years, in the month before Halloween, universities, church groups, and radio stations have invited me to tell them the secrets of witchcraft, magic, and religion. As if I could. Or would.

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Actually, since we crossed the millennium, time has revealed only one bit of wisdom.

If the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride the political whirlwind of war and religious terror that blows through the world, there is a distinct human worth to blessing water, burning candles, invoking guardian angels, conjuring sex, achieving ecstasy, and worshiping something of one's own free choice.

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