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Preliminary Explorations of an Occult Trickster Aesthetic

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When courses on the Occult are among the most well attended at universities (Sontag, 1986), it is somewhat unwise to eschew these topics or fail to recognize what makes them so attractive. Given the explosion of Occult and New Age book stores since the 1980s, cultural critics should explore how Occult discourses may either reinforce dominant ideologies or possibly subvert them. This explanation, in turn, would presumably involve an analysis, both semiological and historical, of past manifestations of Occultism. Mere critique of the Occult as a reactionary practice steeped in religious ideologies, trapped as it is in the demystifying practices that Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno (1993) refer to as the "dialectic of enlightenment," may be insufficient because "the only kind of thinking that is sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive" (p. 4). By artificially dividing facts from values, Horkheimer argues, such modes of thinking separate knowledge from human interests (Bottomore, 1986). This self-destructive quality is all the more apparent in cultural studies, of course, given its implicit goal of attaining knowledge about human behaviors. If, as the publishers in Umberto Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum* (1986) discover, Occultism tends to thrive in cultures marked by confusion and the decline of traditional authority, then it is all the more important to sift through this confusion for new cultural directions. Although, with Occult-influenced media and television shows such as *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* becoming more and more prevalent, Occultism may have become a largely commodified set of mythologies, it pays to remember that Walter Benjamin (1999), in his study of 19th-century Paris, has envisioned more utopian uses of the commodity. For if capitalism has reified Occultism, this "standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, [a] dream image. . . . afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish" (p. 10). In other words, the spectacle of Occultism cannot be dismissed out of hand because its utopian element is precisely its ability to lead (however indirectly) to the unconscious networks of culture.

Another cultural critic of the 1930s, Georges Bataille, suggests that the religious rhetoric and imagery utilized so effectively in 1930s fascist discourses might represent an essential social impulse that the left must address if it is ever to garner true popular support (Stoekl, 1989). Bataille's general style of investigation, in fact, could be labeled as appropriative. Rather than the more traditional leftist posture of trying to avoid those practices which might be "bourgeois," "fascist," or otherwise, he instead looks to the successful deployment of these systems for tools that might serve a more progressive cause. In fact, a fundamental advantage that European fascist politics has maintained

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over socialist practices, according to Bataille (1990), is that the former "leaves no social faction inactive" (p. 154). When one contrasts the 1930s successes of fascist governments with the Frankfurt School's chagrin over Marxism's lack of popular reception, one can't overlook this difference. Viewing Bataille in such a light, his interest in such seemingly diverse topics as religion and eroticism makes more sense. In his "Preface to the History of Eroticism," Bataille justifies his focus on eroticism by stating, "Human reflection cannot be casually separated from an object that concerns it in the highest degree" (Botting, 1997, p. 238). Thus, it is of the utmost importance that Bataille not only writes about eroticism, but often writes in an erotic (what some would call pornographic) mode. One can not merely write about the erotic and religious functions, but must activate them within one's cultural production. The spectator must be sufficiently aroused in order to be roused to action of any kind, especially those acts which embody the so-called altruistic impulses. This does not mean, however, that the writer/critic/artist supports the reactionary interpretations of these human compulsions. Instead, he or she acts with the fundamental disrespect of Bertolt Brecht's Messingkauf who approaches the proverbial brass band to purchase their instruments as brass (Ray 1995).

In many ways, the cultural critic as Messingkauf is the critic as trickster figure. The trickster, like the Messingkauf, "helps us reshape, validate, revolutionize, subvert, or reinforce cultural categories by re-instituting their very semiotic properties" (Spinks, 2001, p. 9). In the case of the Messingkauf, one cultural category to be reshaped is the brass band, but this can only be done by returning to the very materials (brass) that allowed the band to exist in the first place. Brass as an element has far more potentiality than any one of its specific manifestations. The scandalous, disrespectful nature of the Messingkauf's request is ensured by culture's conservative tendency to perpetuate its modes of operation. To combat this tendency, one might draw upon the rhetorical possibilities of Occultism not by allegiance to either its traditional or commercial formulations, but instead by seeking the discursive (and subversive) possibilities of its basic materials, its "brass." This critical mode might be imagined in its object of study, in figures who might be labeled as "Occultists" by many, but who in their own ways are better labeled as appropriators rather than as followers of Occult practice.

Hence, one should focus on the elements of Trickster associated with thievery; indeed, critics should steal from figures who are themselves thieves. In this process, it is not so important to deliberate as to whether a given figure is or is not a Trickster; instead, one should look for moments where the critic may adopt the tools of Trickster by looking to others who have behaved in a similar manner though in other contexts. Thus, cultural critics could move towards the popular by stealing from it in various ways. If critics envision themselves as a sort of avant-garde which transforms art in political directions, they must acknowledge the fate described by Andreas Huyssen (1986): "mass culture, not the avant-garde, has transformed everyday life" (p. 15). Taking Huyssen's cue that the "most promising art [or criticism] might combine modernism and mass culture" (p. 43), one might explore how an Occult critique would replicate and expand the successes of more popular figures. Such an approach would neither eschew mass culture as a tool of capitalist propaganda nor court pop culture as the newest site of subversion, but instead recognize how mass culture has enabled the success of certain political systems in this century as opposed to others. How can one appropriate the recent popularity of Occult discourses for the purposes of cultural studies? This latter goal should rephrase the Frankfurt school's disillusionment with mere critique while also echoing Nietzsche's desire in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1976): "that somebody might make my 'truths' appear incredible to me"(p. 441).

Interestingly, that archetypal trickster Hermes combines thievery and Occultism (Hermeticism) in his founding narrative and his subsequent cultural significance. Upon his birth, Hermes' first act is to invent that archetypal instrument of charm, the lyre. His second act, of course, is to steal Apollo's cattle. After his theft is revealed, Hermes quiets Apollo's anger by playing the lyre in his presence. When Apollo expresses his admiration for the song, Hermes charms him further by giving him the lyre as a gift. Henceforth Apollo's wisdom may be accompanied by aesthetic beauty; but what if cultural critics, as contemporary representatives of Apollo, were to accept a similar instrument from Hermeticists? If they did, no doubt, they would never be the same, for rhetorically speaking, Hermes is "[s]ly, slippery, and masked, an intriguer and a card. . . he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play" (Derrida, 1991, p. 122). Their criticism would be unpredictable, like the divination methods Apollo gave to Hermes, and ultimately uncharacterizable. A truly unpredictable, divinatory criticism would greatly contrast the deductive tendencies of contemporary cultural theory by opposing them with the "slide rule of intuition" (Ulmer, 1994, p. 206) and deliberate cultivation of contingencies that would prevent an identifiable method from congealing. This very absence of essential identity would align Hermes with the Fool in the tarot deck, "who is always on the road, always in the process of becoming" (Semetsky, 2001, p. 59), and hence allows nothingness to acquire a positive value.

Perhaps more than any other hermeticist, Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) embodies Hermes' values of generative absence. Stealing from Crowley or others like him, however, involves viewing him simultaneously as concept, character, and metaphor; furthermore, it involves applying this knot of perspectives to particular critical situations in a manner that Gregory Ulmer (1994) compares to method acting. Certain types of individuals, of course, lend themselves more easily to this approach, one which places greater significance on allegorical possibilities than biographical certainties, than others. Perhaps a prerequisite of individuals who lend themselves to allegorical readings can be summed up in Oscar Wilde's statement about himself, "I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age" (Kohl, 1989, p. 1). Surely Aleister Crowley, whom the English press dubbed "The Wickedest Man in the World" (Sutin, 2000, p. 307), also stood in some symbolic relation to his age. Key to such fascination, however, is an individual's symbolic mutability. Neil Sammells (2000), for instance, remarks that Wilde's cultivation of the "inauthentic" in its own ironic way *authorizes* the interpretive licenses that have been taken with him (p. 123). Likewise, Crowley was described in 1914 magazine article as "a man about whom men quarrel. Intensely magnetic, he attracts people or repels them with equal violence. His personality breeds rumors" (Sutin, pp. 242-3). In the framework of theft as a form of allegory, the heuristic device of rumor acts as both penman and postman, creating and disseminating creative possibility. This is also the heuristic of Trickster, who works with "masks, laughter, and freedom from social laws and inhibitions" (Rosier, 1997, p. 12) to assume more identities than would be available through conventional means.

This disregard for social laws, however, is seldom tolerated en masse. As was the case for Wilde, Crowley's controversial demeanor aroused great resentment which, among other things, led to sodomy charges being brought against him in 1911. Even though Crowley was innocent of these particular charges, he was not called to the stand in his own defense because his counsel realized that "Crowley might behave in such an outrageous way in the witness-box that the jury's sympathy would be alienated" (King, 1974, p. 101). Considering the lack of success carried by Oscar Wilde in his brilliant

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witness-box sarcasm a few years earlier, this was probably a wise decision. Trickster's rhetorical hijinks, almost by definition, do not have a ready place in official culture. As Lewis Hyde (1998) explains, trickster figures "uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on" (p. 9). While these acts may very well be instrumental in maintaining necessary cultural flexibility, institutions as a rule do not welcome such disruptions with open arms. Rather, official institutions, what Louis Althusser (1995)

calls Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's), ensure their production by reproducing the conditions of their existence

(p. 101).

While Crowley and Wilde both embody trickster roles in their legal affairs, Crowley's failure to appear before the court symbolizes a more general silence in his character, an opacity that can be attributed to the mystery of Occultism itself. The extent of this opacity can be sensed in Crowley's encounters with another famous Occultist of the period, William Butler Yeats. Both Crowley and Yeats were members of the London-based society called The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This order, created in 1887 by William Westcott and MacGregor Mathers, was based on a manuscript found in a secondhand bookstore that Westcott determined to be "an extended skeletal outline for a series of five initiatory rituals" (Sutin, p. 58) designed to prepare initiates for a life of magic. By the time Crowley joined in 1898, the Golden Dawn consisted of more than 300 members. Two years later, the Golden Dawn was split by dissension.

Upon meeting Crowley, Yeats almost immediately developed an antipathy for him (Coote, 1997). Perhaps this attitude was due to, among other things, their differing views of magic. Yeats once referred to Crowley as "a much worse Captain Roberts" (Hutchinson, 1998, p. 77), alluding to a magician who once convinced Yeats to take part in animal sacrifice. Apparently the affair was so traumatic that Yeats' face "turned a bilious green" (p. 78), and thereafter Captain Roberts became a reverberating image of black magic's dangers. From Yeats' perspective, Roberts could have been the first of Crowley's many guises, one whose association with animal sacrifice alludes to Crowley's mercurial identity. Cats, to take one example, have long been associated with transformative abilities, and this may be the reason that when one of Crowley's acolytes died of gastroenteritis, it was assumed he got it from drinking cat's blood. There are numerous tales of villagers cudgeling cats and then finding bruises on a mysterious woman (i.e. a witch) the next day (Darnton, 1999, p. 94). Nevertheless, the issue is not so much sacrificial tendencies per se as Yeats' association of Crowley with animality. For Yeats, Crowley is always in the process of "becoming-animal," and all such processes "are absolute deterritorializations" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986) from traditional notions of humanism. Or, as Crowley himself describes in The Book of the Law (1976), the Beast is an "apostle of infinite space" (p. 20), one who disseminates the idea of dissemination. It is such a lack of identity, such a moving-away, that Yeats feared in Crowley. Crowley proved time and time again that this fear was not unfounded as he shifted selves and befuddled Yeats with "any number of false names"

(Hutchinson, p. 72). The process perhaps had already begun by the time Crowley's mother began to call him "The Beast," a title he would adopt, valorize, and (dis)embody for the rest of his life. In claiming the name, Crowley also identified with the mercurial messenger god of thieves, exemplar of tricky change. Despite the other historical and

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mythic meanings of Yeats' famous poem "The Second Coming" (1921), Crowley could not have been far from Yeats' mind as he composed the famous question, "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (p. 187). Although Crowley, upon joining the Golden Dawn, took the name *Perdurabo*, which means "He who endures till the end," as far as Yeats was concerned, Crowley should have been called *Perturbado*. Yeats' Golden Dawn name, in turn, meaning "The Devil is the converse of God," should have been changed to "Crowley is the inverse of Yeats."

Other than witnessing animal sacrifices, in fact, Yeats' other great fear surrounding Occult practices was the possible loss of identity. When Yeats felt the possibility of possession at one séance, he stayed away from spiritualist ceremonies for months (Coote, 1997). By contrast, Christopher Isherwood describes Crowley's almost Nietzschean infidelity to everything in vivid, if negative terms: "The truly awful thing about Crowley is that one suspects he didn't really believe in anything. Even his wickedness" (Hutchinson, p. 7). While intellectual infidelity presents itself as a nightmare to a leftist writer like Isherwood, one wonders to what extent it might be valuable to those individuals with more right-wing, hierarchical convictions (of whom Yeats would be one of the more benign manifestations). Especially in the context of the inter-war period, one could argue that as much harm was caused by an abundance implacable convictions as a complete lack of them. Cultivating a mercurial personal identity would in effect help institute an aesthetic of revision rather than fidelity, a mode of being that could be applied to politics as well as personality. This is the sort of aesthetic André Breton describes in presenting Robert Desnos as the most superior of Surrealist mediums not due to an immense effort or talent, but due to his mercurial experimentation "in the course of the multiple experiences to which he has lent himself" (Caws, 1977, p. 8). For Yeats, whose most nightmarish vision of history involves watching a rough beast slouch inevitably onward, the self-styled Beast Crowley might have proved useful. In all of his practices, including the alleged animal sacrifices, The Beast was always sacrificing himself in order to become something else. Rather than recognizing this fact, Yeats began to develop fantasies that he was the object of Crowley's sacrificial tendencies. When MacGregor Mathers sought to wrest control of the Golden Dawn from William Westcott, Crowley fought for Mathers' cause by traveling to London and staging a coup of its inner sanctum, the Vault of the Adepti. Crowley appeared at the Vault in "Highland dress, a black mask over his face, and a plaid thrown over his head and shoulders, an enormous gold or gilt cross on his breast, and a dagger at his side" (Hutchinson, p. 71), yet neither the costume nor the weaponry was enough to stop Yeats and an associate, who were lying in wait. Accounts vary as to what happened next, but the most interesting one has Crowley being physically thrown out by the two defenders. However the expulsion actually took place, it did not have a psychological counterpart. After failing to enter the Vault by force, Mathers sued for control of the Golden Dawn while Crowley gained control over Yeats' mind. In a letter to Lady Gregory, Yeats expressed his concern over the outcome. If Westcott loses the case, Yeats writes, "it will give Crowley, a person of unspeakable life, the means to carry on a mystical society, which will give him control of the consciences of many" (p. 73). As things wore on, Yeats expressed fears that Crowley had thugs on retainer to maim or slaughter him. Yeats' fears were, to say the least, overdetermined, even "unspeakable." As such, they allude to disruptive forces one would do well to explore.

Robert Anton Wilson, friend of Timothy Leary and Crowley devotee, does just this in a novel entitled *Masks of the Illuminati* (1981). Like many postmodern novels,

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Masks of the Illuminati intertwines historical fact and fiction, taking advantage of this hybridity in order to discover Crowley's "symbolic relation" to his age. Wilson trades on Crowley's star status, a combination of alienation and outrageousness that is not unsimilar to the "bad boy" rock star image inaugurated by Elvis, perfected by The Rolling Stones, and made archetypal thereafter. Indeed, if The Stones invoke Oscar Wilde in their public personae (Kohl, 1989, p. 122), then Crowley's rock star counterpart might be Marilyn Manson, who quotes Nietzsche in his defense of the AntiChrist as a necessary archetype while posing for photographs with Anton Lavey, founder of the contemporary Church of Satan. In all these figures, both past and present, one witnesses what Benjamin Buchloh (2000) refers to as "the travesty of the artist's aspirations to construct the critical act of avant-garde intervention in the guise of rock and roll" (p. 333). In Wilson's novel, Crowley's interventions (many of which are based on actual Crowley anecdotes) are simultaneously vampiric and cupidian. Chopping the fig leaves off statues and circulating rumors that nursery rhymes have Satanic power, Crowley provides one model for an avant-garde that refuses to be ignored precisely because he turns people not into the traditional toad, but into camels (p. 111). Wilson suggests the virtues of such playfulness by adding a cast of characters who either act as foils to Crowley or are wise enough to interpret him in the proper light. Of course, there is Albert Einstein whose scientific mind can find the rational explanation for unusual events but whose explanations are so bizarre as to defy traditional notions of credibility. Then one has James Joyce, a writer with the creativity to appreciate Crowley yet the consummate novelist's distrust of hocus-pocus. He speaks disparagingly, in fact, of overly sincere Occultists like Yeats, of whom Joyce specifically complains that he sees the world "as a spiritual adventure full of Omens and Symbols" (p. 172). When protagonist Sir John (an English version of the schlemiel figure) feels suffocated by a magical transformation-room Crowley has prepared, however, Joyce is willing to admit, "We're just being expelled. . . to a new world" (p. 329). Sir John, in fact, represents everything that an Occult Trickster aesthetic might wish to avoid. He is simultaneously the most naive character in the book and the most enslaved to Occultism. Investing massive amounts of time and energy into spiritual enlightenment, Sir John is also the most susceptible to Crowley's nursery rhyme jokes. Ironically, John dismisses people like Joyce and Crowley as libertines who cannot tell right from wrong (p. 314). This judgmental attitude grows more invidious in John's associates, most notably in Reverend Verey's account of a "sinister Oriental gentleman" (p. 157) who haunts his town and accompanies a string of mysterious events. With this revelation, Wilson seems to equate pat judgments either for or against the Occult with the oversimplified prejudices that Said critiques in Orientalism

(1978). By contrast, Wilson strongly implies that time in the

transformation-room provides key inspiration for those people, namely Joyce and Einstein, who enter it with a proper openness.

For Wilson, then, Crowley is an agent or enabler of the transformative properties associated with Trickster. These transformations may be produced by, as Joyce terms them, "shaman's tricks," but they are tricks which give Joyce and Einstein the respective germs of Ulysses and relativity (pp. 352-3). What gives Crowley this power of transformation? To answer this question, one must move beyond Wilson's novel to the most important document Crowley ever produced, The Book of the Law. Concerning the composition of this book, Crowley writes in his Confessions (1989), "My entire

previous life was but a preparation for this event, and my entire subsequent life has been not merely determined by it, but wrapped up in it" (p. 393). In understanding the significance of this book, it is important to note that it is, as Crowley calls it, an "event." Unlike an inert, reified object, like a book, an event represents an open, unpredictable intersection of space and time that extends beyond authorial control. In an event, "the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterances" (Derrida, 1991, p. 104). Thus, a true event is a space in which extreme otherness can always enter, which would seem indispensable in the turning of self into other that constitutes, discursively, the art of transformation.

From the outset, the circumstances of The Book of the Law, as narrated in Crowley's Confessions, were characterized by the intrusion of otherness. On a trip to Cairo with his wife Rose, whom Crowley had originally married merely out of "Shelleyan indignation" (p. 364) when he learned, shortly after meeting her, that she was forcibly betrothed to another, the newly-met newlyweds began an even stranger relationship. At first Crowley was annoyed at Rose's reiterated insistence, "They are waiting for you" (p. 393). Attempting to impress Rose with his magical skills in an exotic environment, Crowley was not in the mood for her to "offer independent remarks" (p. 394). As previously suggested, however, such otherness is an indispensable element of all transformations, be they physical, mental, or spiritual. An event can only take place, or even *steal* place, when that place has been made open to intrusion.

Yet, Crowley was eventually convinced to allow his wife's input, thanks not only to her insistence but also to the intrusion of coincidence. Wandering through a museum which they had never previously visited, Rose identified an "obscure and undistinguished stele" as the god who was transmitting communications through her. The coincidence which the Beast could not ignore was the catalogue number of this stele, 666.

Dismissing such a coincidence as a mere product of chance is not really material in this case or, for that matter, in any case, since chance itself is the means through which the coincidental comes to appear miraculous. When one submits to its principles, he or she is admitted "to an almost forbidden world of sudden parallels, petrifying coincidences. . . flashes of light that would make you see, really see, if only they were not so much quicker than all the rest" (Breton, 1960, p. 19). This form of superstition is progressive to the extent that it operates beyond the level of individual control, thereby encouraging one to move in unpredictable directions, outside one's habitual horizon of movements.

Following his wife's directions, Crowley entered a designated room at noon on three successive days, April 8, 9, and 10 of 1904, and left exactly one hour later each day. Crowley was instructed to "write down what I heard" (p. 395), not what he thought. This designation is crucial, even if it only refers to a state of mind, since it prepares one for the intrusion of the aleatory. As John Cage said of his famous piece *4'33"*, "What [the audience] thought was silence. . . was full of accidental sounds" (Hyde, 1998, p. 150) coming from the environment of the auditorium. Lewis Hyde devotes an extended section of Trickster Makes This World to Cage's idea that by submitting to the dictates of chance--for instance in the use of the I-Ching to determine musical compositions--one is able to escape the confinements of the ego. Such an

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escape would seem indispensable to all but the most superficial of transformations. The text of Crowley's Book of the Law does indeed show evidence of operating, at least somewhat, according to the logic of chance. The dictator of this spiritualist transmission, called "Aiwass"(which could be a pun on "I was" i.e. a speaker in transition), declares that spelling "is defunct" (1976, p. 39) and that worship occurs in "the ill-ordered house" (p. 40), thereby suggesting an aesthetic similar to dadaist collage. Furthermore, Aiwass demands that his utterances forevermore be published "always with the original in the writing of the Beast; for in the chance shape of the letters and their position to one another: in these are mysteries that no Beast shall divine" (p. 47). In this missive, the paradoxical coincidence of chance and magic is formulated.

Yet, just as the content of John Cage's individual coin tosses are not so important as the general subversion of the ego instigated by use of the I- Ching, so also is The Book of the Law relatively unimportant in comparison to Crowley's willingness to programmatically follow the dictates of chance. Crowley submitted to chance throughout his life, even if for the most part he referred to his activities as "Magick." Crowley's infamous home on Loch Ness, eventually purchased by Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, was found "by chance" on an excursion through Scotland (Cammell 1962). In an excursion *from* Boleskine manor, Crowley met Rose by chance as well. That this house was reputed to cause dizziness, one might dare say, was more due to the vertiginous presence of Crowley than anything else. Crowley is like a ghost who haunts the very notion of the stable dwelling place with contingency, reminding one that the German words for "uncanny" and "to haunt" are *unheimlich* and *heimsuchen* respectively, words situated around the German root *heim* or "home." While Cage may have tossed the I- Ching in order to structure his musical compositions, Crowley tossed the I-Ching in order to determine where he would place his infamous Abbey of Thelema, a place that, despite its relative insignificance, aroused so much suspicion that Crowley was actually kicked out of Italy by Mussolini. To hear Crowley tell it, he escaped with his life by passing unseen through a group of fascists, a trick performed by directing their attention away from him toward a "random" object (Cammell 1962).

But, to return to Ulmer's idea of method acting as a model for research, how might cultural studies (in its broadest sense) inaugurate the transformative powers of figures like Crowley? Or, to take an example even more immanent to Trickster's Way, should criticism be merely about Tricksters, or might it in some way adopt Trickster's own hermeneutics, heuristics, and other sundry tools, the truly disruptive ones as well as those that are more easily assimilated? The answers to the two previous questions would be both ethical and methodological in nature. While some of the ways in which Crowleyanity and Tricksterism might be incorporated have already been suggested in this essay--procedures that involve some element of theft, a commercial and culturally symbolic shock value, and chance--the ethics are perhaps even more tricky. As already stated in reference to Althusser, ideological apparatuses do not readily accept the presence of radically heterogeneous elements, and there is no reason to suspect that academic discourses, even Trickster studies, would necessarily be any different. It does seem that by reversing the subject-object relations of traditional research, allowing Trickster to possess us, we might be closer to getting beyond the either-or logic that C.W. Spinks wrestles with in Issue 1.2 of Trickster's Way. To Spinks' list of "Doing Trickster, Studying Trickster, Telling Trickster, or Being Trickster" one might add the possibility of "Being Possessed By Trickster." The results of such possession no doubt could be as unpalatable as they are to Crowley biographer (and friend) Charles Richard Cammell, who more than once alludes to receiving texts from Crowley that were so

blasphemous he burned them after one reading. Yet, the proper response to fears of possession is not running away after the manner of Yeats (and I am not claiming that he always ran, for he credits his later and best poetry to the visions dictated by his wife Georgie), but, as Wilson tells us in *Masks of the Illuminati*, the art of bibliomancy, which involves "opening the Bible at random, sticking in a finger, and reading the verse so discovered" (p. 123). For my part, I know that the next time I hear coins jingling at the stroke of noon, I won't immediately assume it is nothing but spare change.

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