

AFTERWORDS

From *Babalon and Other Plays* by PAUL A. GREEN

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THE LAST WORDS ARE THE HARDEST. Writing is the first and last rite, an inner ritual. It is the evocation of imaginary entities, the exploration of imaginary realms, a fangling of language to create dazzling cracks in reality. “When a man imagines, he creates a form on the astral plane” (McGregor Mathers). And that’s the working hypothesis I keep returning to. Writing is the temporary construction of surreality.

So these plays are texts scattered along a pathway, their meaning fragmenting and reforming even as I reread them, like a long paper chase of torn Tarot cards that I followed down an alleyway in Toronto in 1972. I’m no magus, just a scribbler, a scribe of Thoth sentenced to a lifelong apprenticeship.

I was educated by the Jesuits, a useful training in ritual and magical visualization. Then Catholicism collapsed in my teens under the impact of discovering the Beats and exploring existentialism as popularised by Colin Wilson. Like the Surrealists whom I also idolised, I was trying to reconcile the visions and voices of the unconscious with radical action in the world. Simultaneously William Burroughs subverted linear concepts of space/time and causality. And I was reading a lot of science fiction – notably the apocalyptic dystopias of J. G. Ballard.

Yet there was also an underlying family influence. My father, outwardly highly conventional and nominally Catholic, collected strange books, to my mother’s bewilderment. His shelves included A. E. Waite on the Qabalah, Grillot de Givry’s *Picture Museum of Sorcery Magic and Alchemy*, the Symonds biography of Crowley, which I read avidly and Montague Summers’ *History of Witchcraft*. He admitted he’d corresponded with Summers as a young man discussing J. K. Huysmans, author of *À Rebours*, and modern witchcraft. He showed me a letter from July 1945, in Summers’ thick black handwriting. “Yes, I fear Satanism has been let loose upon the world. The dark powers are fearfully in evidence...”

I was intrigued by all this but during my early twenties “dark powers” seemed to manifest themselves quite overtly in the control mechanisms of the electronic media and the influence of the military industrial complex. Parapsychologists were experimenting with telepathy and sleep research and I wondered what might result if these techniques were developed to manipulate the private world of dreaming. So I wrote *The Dream Laboratory* as “an auditory assault for voices and music,” in pseudo-documentary format, focusing more on language and poetic imagery

than characterisation, in an attempt to exploit the peculiar power of the radio soundscape to evoke a unique subjective inscape in the mind of the listener. Although radio drama doesn't have a high profile now it is still very much a writer's medium, unlike the collective serfdom of film and TV. Indeed, all the pieces here were originally envisioned for radio.

Subsequent radio projects in the seventies led to interviews with Richard Cavendish, editor of *Man, Myth and Magic*; Crowley biographer Francis X. King; Golden Dawn historian Ellic Howe; EVP expert Peter Banda; and Colin Wilson, who by now had begun his own re-evaluation of the occult. I was particularly excited by Wilson's attempt to create a kind of unified field theory encompassing magic and the paranormal – perhaps overexcited, because when I interviewed him in 1973, having drunk too much of his red wine, I wore him out with my enthusiastic recycling of his ideas and he had a nervous collapse the next day.

By the mid-seventies, my own life was going through some turbulent phases, and I was drawn increasingly to explore the darker currents, to log the unpacking of my Undermind in what was becoming a magickal diary. The working-out culminated in *The Ritual of the Stifling Air*. I'd encountered the phrase in Pauwels and Bergière's *Morning of the Magicians* where they hinted that Himmler's SS conducted necromantic ceremonies in the vaults of Webelsburg Castle. It says much for my state of mind at this time that I found this idea really compelling. I invented a ceremony for a neo-Nazi magus, acolyte and clairvoyant. They were attempting to contact the spirit of the Fuehrer.

The resulting poetic drama was – amazingly – broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 1977, with music by my longtime collaborator Vincent Crane. The critics disliked it intensely, with the exception of Paul Ferris in the Observer who acknowledged “the concentrated power of the writing.” This power was acknowledged in a different way by the actors and technicians who insisted there had been a very sinister atmosphere in the studio, with persistent noise and interference in the control room monitors.

My next broadcast play – not included here – was a straightforward quasi-autobiographical drama about the world of punk rock, which I'd blundered into during this period. It was as if I'd side-stepped the issues raised by my increasing involvement in the esoteric.

But questions kept haunting me. Could we attain levels of reality beyond the consensus of our current scientific paradigms? Was there

a ghost in the machinery of our meat? Moreover some interpretations of quantum physics allowed parallel universes, reversed-time causality, action at a distance, or even shadow matter. Were there interpenetrations with the Qabalistic Sephiroth, Crowley's Visions and Voices, or Dr Dee's Enochian channelling? Whence originated the entities of visionary experiences?

I wrote my way into this interzone between science and magic via a novel *The Qliphoth* using a range of techniques to develop the narrative. I experimented with cut-ups and automatic writing, following Qabalistic correspondences as per Crowley's 777, logging the logic of dreams, lucid or otherwise, as odd synchronicities flowed around me, creating a working method that is on-going in the sequel *Beneath the Pleasure Zones*.

I began a novel about Crowley, but was overwhelmed by the sheer mass of data. It was like trying to lasso a whale with a piece of string. However, I conceived the notion of writing a series of plays in which Crowley hovered like a spectral presence in the lives of others – Montague Summers, Graham Bond and Jack Parsons.

I had wanted to write a play about Parsons the occult rocketeer since learning about the tragic arc of his career from Francis King's Crowley biography. But when I began work in the late nineties, there were no Parsons biographies. I drew on Michael Staley's excellent essay "Beloved of Babalon," Shedona Chevalier's comprehensive Parsons website (now defunct), the online archives of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Russell Miller's biography of L. Ron Hubbard, *Barefaced Messiah*, and of course Parsons' own *Book of Babalon* and *Freedom is a Two Edged Sword*, as well as other Crowley biographies and random gleanings from the Web. It was, of course, a speculative exploration of the Parsons myth, in all its paradoxes and the story line was subject to the compressions and elisions of dramatic narrative in an audio medium. My submission to the BBC was championed by producer Ned Chaillet, who asked me to rewrite it for a smaller cast. This gave me the opportunity to add insights gained from John Carter's *Sex and Rockets*. Although the BBC mysteriously rejected it at the final stage of the commissioning process (nervous perhaps about not offending the Scientologists) it was discovered by Alison Rockbrand who adapted it for a successful live performance with her Travesty Theatre group in 2005.

Since then there has been more research into Parsons and the Baba-

lon Working. George Pendle has written a well-documented biography *Strange Angel*, while Spencer Kansa's *Wormwood Star* investigates the life of Parsons' magical partner Marjorie Cameron. Parsons' work has been explored in articles by Joel Birocco and Brian Butler, among others, and he is now a counter-cultural icon on the Web, linked to every cult conspiracy from Operation Majestic to the Philadelphia Experiment. There are rumours of Hollywood movies in development, although the emphasis might be more on the rocketry than the occultism.

My chronology has been speculative at some points. There are differing accounts of Hubbard's arrival at Agape Lodge and Jack's first meeting with Cameron. I also followed Frieda Harris's account of Crowley dying "perplexed." But the union of Beast and Babalon is at the core of Thelema so I gave him a final "Rosebud moment" (as in *Citizen Kane*). To quote Jean Cocteau: "Art lies in order to tell the truth."

Obviously both *The Mouthpiece* and *The Magus of Klook's Kleek* deal with the sonic magic of music. They could also be read as warnings about the risks of the magical path, whether embarked on by chance, as in *The Mouthpiece* or sought with a reckless lust for result, as in the tragic saga of Graham Bond. I saw him several times in his sixties R&B phase, a big exuberant warlock of a man with a Fu Manchu moustache who played manic Hammond organ and alto sax (sometimes simultaneously) and sang with a voice like burning anthracite. As his involvement with magic deepened he released extraordinary albums like *Holy Magic* and *We Put Our Magic on You*, where he growled "the barbarous names of power" from Thelemic and Golden Dawn rituals over the drone of deep funk organ and wailing horns.

In researching the play I read Harry Shapiro's biography *The Mighty Shadow* and the late Dick Heckstall-Smith's autobiography *The Safest Place in the World*, but I also drew on friends and acquaintances who had encountered the man, whether on the bandstand or in London's occult bookshops. I can never erase that final image of Bond, having wrecked his family and career, mesmerised by his addictions and demons (real and/or imagined), lurching towards death under a subway train.

Terminal Poet depicts the poet as another kind of shambolic shaman. Charles Kenning is cursed with a gift that goes viral, and uproots language from its anchorage in everyday interaction. The "magical word battles" between Kenning and the street rappers and the hysterical

glossalia that overcomes Dworkin's congregation as they speak in tongues foreshadow a semiotic collapse. As in *The Dream Laboratory* malignant agencies have attempted to manipulate an essentially magical phenomenon for their own ends, yet it is their intervention that has spread this "Babel virus" and initiated an apocalyptic social breakdown.

Obo Cocteau posits a different sort of reality fracture, in the schism between the protagonist's personae as Tex the rocker and Roy Cocteau the avant film maker. This project, with its homage to Jean Cocteau's film *The Blood of a Poet*, was very much a "Third Mind" operation, for Lawrence Russell's original short story developed a whole new identity as we exchanged drafts across the Atlantic. Our imaginary Saharan city-state of Obo, with its ex-pat culture of movie shoots and night-clubs menaced by Islamist guerrillas, has parallels with today's media landscape. But as Tex, entranced by the beauty of Naomi, is immersed in the world of Cocteau's movie the boundaries between fantasy and reality blur until the dream is shattered by violence.

Astral FM, like *The Mouthpiece*, is a monologue. But whereas embittered saxophonist Joe Cameron is a very physical presence, an Ancient Mariner of the sixties counter-culture desperate to share his story of the magic Atlantean mouthpiece, the anonymous DJ is a disembodied entity, a composite of dead radio voices that drift across the light years to the stars. He evokes himself into existence through the connotations and memories encoded into the fragments of music he plays. The seed for this was probably the Friday midnight slot I held decades ago as Brother Saul on CBU-FM Vancouver – 50,000 watts of soul from the Arctic Circle to the 49th Parallel – crackly late-night radio of a mystery voice constructing its identity from the mystique of old records, a secular showman/shaman who only existed momentarily behind the grill of a radio speaker.

I took a less oblique approach to the mysteries of survival in *The Voice Collection*. The play is to some extent a homage to Nigel Kneale (*The Stone Tape*, *Quatermass and the Pit*) and develops the necromantic theme from *Ritual of the Stifling Air*. There's also a debt to Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* in which Krapp rewinds and reviews his audio diary of a long-lost and doomed affair. My own research into the Electronic Voice Phenomenon has proved inconclusive yet the enigma fascinates me. Thomas is convinced that he has heard dead Gillian's voice via his "special mixer" – and as listeners we hear it too – but it isn't audible on replay to Rosemary.

Like so many ESP phenomena it will not repeat itself in a laboratory situation. Moreover, he has repressed the knowledge that her death in a freak electrical accident was caused indirectly by his own obsessive jealousy. The Voice Collector is trapped.

After my father's death I rediscovered the three letters he'd received from Montague Summers. This renewed my obsession with this curious figure whose inquisitorial denunciations of witchcraft almost certainly concealed a deep fascination with it. The question of his ordination as a priest in the Catholic Church has been much debated – his status was certainly irregular. He played a prominent part in London's theatrical circles in the 1920s and after a period of school-teaching (and with the support of a private income) he concentrated on writing after the success of his first book on witchcraft in 1926. He was gay and was involved with groups like the Society for Sexual Psychology that promoted gay culture.

He attended my alma mater Trinity College, Oxford, where he apparently adopted the pose of decadent 90s aesthete but his signature in the college register was the only trace of him in the archives. The one slim biography by Joseph Jerome aka Father Brocard Sewell dwells on his piety and his scholarship as an editor of Restoration drama while Summers' autobiography *The Galant Show* consists mostly of literary and theatrical reminiscences. He was supposedly planning a second volume about his supernatural interests but many of his papers were lost after his death. Some have now surfaced over sixty years later in the USA but there is no sign yet of this elusive document. Crowley's death would have certainly prompted him to reflect on his own past. They met on several occasions and rumours circulated about occult activities in his earlier career, including a "Black Mass" in 1918 – although Crowley was not involved in this episode. Summers was also arrested for alleged offences against choir-boys in 1908 but was acquitted. Records of the case are apparently lost. Charles Cammell was a mutual friend of Summers and Crowley and subsequently wrote a biography of 666 published in 1951, in which he recalled their shared love of literature and recounted how their friendship ended over "a lady and a sum of money" – a debt owed to his wife Iona. Wrenne Jarman, a journalist and poet who lived in Richmond in the 1940s, was part of Cammell's circle. A devout Catholic, she nevertheless enjoyed various passionate adulteries. We don't know whether she had a liaison with Crowley but he apparently made a very powerful impression on her.

In a sense there are no last words. The grope for Gnosis continues. To quote 666: "I have made matter and motion for my mirror. I have decreed for my delight that Nothingness shall figure itself as twain, that I might dream a dance of names and enjoy the substance of simplicity to watch the wanderings of my shadows."

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And above all, thanks to Cathy, my wife and companion for over thirty years.

Paul A. Green

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