

Folk Magic as Insurrection

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*“For me, wherever I go, I know my natural and eternal environment, and I know it as part of me and me of it. Beyond whatever we think, there is a darkly glimmering mystery far beyond reason and sanity, but full of the wholeness of beauty. It perpetually sustains and bestows all things with their own nature and being- perfectly, fully and without need for further elaboration or rectification. This is the sorcerous conception of deity.”— Robin Artisson, *The Toadbone Treatise**

It's December and the air is warm here.

I peer out my window with drink in hand, watching the blood-splashed sun collapse beyond the horizon and into the highway. For a moment I relish being in a State where drinking a lime-juice cocktail isn't a desperate plea for warmer days. Here winter never comes, and as such, we never need to change our tastes to heartier or heavier food and drink.

The Southeast is the only home I've known: a land of sweltering heat, mosquitoes the size of your arm, and uninterrupted madness via Florida Man. Where I dwell is nothing special: an average middle class town, the wonder and mystery of the city far away and only faintly sensed. The hustle and bustle of modern living remains only a faint rumor on the wind. Life moves along uninterrupted, save for twinges of change here and there. I can imagine such a life would not be enough for some, and truthfully it's not enough for me. But in the meantime, there's no rush; I drink deeply from the land and Spirits around me.

I think about Gordon's piece on Natural Magic, the equation of Self+Spirit World+Place. It rings true to me. I think about the natural world around me, my own slice of it. Underneath the regular suburban dregs still beats the heart of that wild Florida, in every thicket and every wood. In them I've rattled open doorways between realms in areas smaller than some public parks, I've spoken with Swamp Spirits and learned the unspoken keys to plant identification, and I've traded payment and favors with the local Dead and seen them manifest right before my eyes. All these things happened in my hometown not *in spite of it*, but *through it*.

The great lesson of Folk Magick has always been that magick was right at hand, that you didn't need a library of books or special clothes and wands to do it. In Hoodoo a quick trip to the grocery store and some significant places around town will allow you to hurl just about anything at people. When I'm particularly stuck for an ingredient I always go Journeying into the Spirit World and ask my friends there what might do the trick. And often the most powerful gifts are the simplest.

I came to read playing cards, to cast my eyes into the twisting nether realm of probability and possibility not through some online course nor through paid lessons from a teacher. I went down to the crossroads for nine nights around 11:45pm and called out to the One Who Dwells There to teach me, the only sacrifice being the time I spent there. And teach me He did. I found whole new ways of looking at the cards, as books and ideas seemed to drop into my view from all over; I read what I could, but the biggest advances seemed to come from just being out there, alone and in the dark, hearing whispers in my head and seeing symbols dance before my eyes. I read the cards now with great accuracy, with my window into the shifting seas of potentiality amounting to an admission fee of one dollar.

Often in life our own worlds can seem disenchanting, our existences too far away from any of “the action” to feel meaningful. As in spirituality so too in politics: the same way my heart longs to stir up the dead in St. Augustine it flutters at thoughts of joining in armed resistance somewhere in the streets of Rojava; as I ponder the possibilities of protective mojos made and blessed with the dirt from *Castillo de San Marcos*, I wonder what revolutionary potential I could add to the people’s struggles in Baltimore, Oakland, Chiapas, and Greece. Economics and familial ties, at least for the moment, always get the upper hand.

But I do not rest on my laurels. I read, I study, I speak with those around me. I consider myself the advance guard, the agent behind enemy lines. I gather folks of like mind around me and we plan, we plot, we create pockets of resistance and freedom. We are the first cells of the revolution you see, mitochondria that will one day evolve into a greater being. We put pamphlets, we put up posters, we engage in Direct Action. Rather than wait for “THE Revolution” I’ll do what I can here and now, building “the new world in the shell of the old.”

Those that simply wait for monumental change, or worse *vote* in the hopes it will come, display a distinctly unmagical air about them: they don’t believe anything can change unless everything does, they can’t imagine that their actions could move even the tiniest mole hill, they huff that the time is never quite ripe, that until some Unknown Messiah arrives we’d best simply hope for change.

Surely we, through direct experience, know better than this?

Can’t a hidden gesture or half-mumbled phrase move someone’s mind? Won’t a fervent prayer, a simple oil, and an intensity of Will attract unseen hands to guide you? Doesn’t the simplest mix of red pepper, black pepper, and sulphur cause the flames of hell to leap up at our command? You can’t have it both ways: either you and your allies can literally shift the movin’ and shakin’s of the luck plane as well as this artifice we call physical reality, or it’s all a sham.

I don’t know about you but I’ve got notebooks filled with proof that what we deem “inevitable” or “unmalleable” is plainly not so.

Magic presupposes we can change the foundations of the world around us. Why do our political beliefs so often not follow this maxim? Why are we waiting for some Vanguard, some Party, some Candidate, to rip up the noxious weeds of Capitalism and The State? Did we come by any of our magical knowledge by waiting or did we simply *go out and start doing what we could*? Wasn’t every bump in the road a lesson, every victory a confirmation that even against the odds *we can win*?

My tradition courses through the land and was born in struggle: against the State, against the Boss, against the Police. Under candle light and shroud of burning herbs I can feel the air thick with those that whispered or sang prayers in other times; they know, they understand: the battles may be different, the symbols may have changed, but the struggle has not. Candle flames burst

with the same heat and energy raging away in my heart, teeth gritting in Nietzschean Will to change the world and break anything that stands in my way. Road Opener work or Revolution, what's the difference?

My tradition is not alone: anyone laying hands on the practical magic of the past is touching a People's History. You did what you could with what you had on hand, including whatever ghosts and goblins happened to be around. These people were in the same boat we are: under the heel of an oppressive state apparatus, one that could kill them at any time, all for the service of an economic elite. They too watched an increasing portion of all the value they created get siphoned away, hunger pangs and anxiety the mother of many a prosperity spell. Any good witchcraft carries with it the sublime scent of necessity; by the time you're in the woods at midnight making pacts with unseen things it's safe to say the usual channels of change have been blocked.

What else is magic but the metaphysical embodiment of Anarchism, of politics on a spiritual plane? That YOU could defy the laws of the "Lord" and make new arrangements for yourself, that YOU could gain insights and knowledge beyond your "station" in life, that YOU needn't wait for someone to save you because you were going to save YOURSELF? Isn't that what Sorcery is all about? Wasn't it a battle against the dragon Zarathustra spoke about, the one that must be defeated, that must be slain?

"Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? 'Thou shalt' is the name of the great dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, 'I will.' 'Thou shalt' lies in his way.."

The day is dead now, street lights and shabby store signs acting as artificial suns. The lights manage to keep the hum-drum thoughts of day still near, a collective religious belief in the firm and unvarying nature of reality, that nothing has nor will it ever change. The lights bring stability and safety. In this warm paradise where winter never comes it's easy to believe the lie that most things are unwavering, that some things just stay the same.

For instance, global capitalism or a client's bad luck?

But I have neither the time nor the inclination for such adult bed-time stories. I close the blinds and set about the work of changing the world around me. To succumb to the thoughts of static existence, of even settled accounts is preposterous. I call out to the Unseen with techniques and tricks propelled into the future by the most disadvantaged in this region while the plantations of the past have gone from places of frightening power to mere relics. While others buy and sell my soul flies right down to the primal, throbbing tap-root of the land around me; what was once an altar in any other townhouse becomes the Crossroads of All Existence; my voice no longer my own, my body wracked with spasms, I become a conduit for things that others claim can't or shouldn't exist.

Impossible? Can't? Won't? Shouldn't? All these words are nothing to me!
There is only The Will.
And if you Will it, it is no dream.

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