

ANATOMIES OF SHADOW

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Atavism, as it is conceived by the sorcerer, may be described as the ancient and engorged mass of sentiences prefiguring one's present incarnation, yet comprising an essential portion of Self. All that one has been, and the accumulated Knowledge of Being gained from the transcarnative process, comprises its horde. The term is often used by non-practitioners to indicate a state of extreme biological or psychological retrogression, usually with negative connotations. In this view, the vestigial, the degenerate, the latent, and the Primal Monstrous all co-mingle as a mass of slumbering selves in the long shadows cast by Ego, ever repressed by a 'more evolved' form. To extend this model, within the atavistic realm lie the seeds of teratology and criminality, together with every 'base impulse' which would blur the sacrosanct division between human and beast. This is but one view held by the common, and though it is clearly driven by denial, it is useful to remember because of its unexamined relational dynamic of fear—in itself an instinctual response to the disturbing.

Contextualised in the Circle of Midnight—the primal rites of the Witches' Sabbat—the intrusive upwelling of atavism can indeed be attended by dangerous and horrifying manifestations, of which the very least is the loss of identity. However, in the best of such situations, what is lost may be found again—augmented by power and wisdom long dormant. Perhaps more importantly, atavism is a series of pervasive powers which pulsate as the bones, viscera and connective tissue of the witch's power, and in the extended magical connectivity between initiates that comprises the covine.

Critical to this reality is the principle that one may 'become again' what one once was, a present projection of the Future Flesh of the Past, or an 'ancestral hylomorphism'. A simpler way of putting this is that the Adept-Self, as presently conceived, is the temporal form of a chain of ancestral power stretching backward into elder time, back beyond first humanity, but importantly also containing nascent forms-to-be.¹ This reality, which some would call a belief, is strongly animistic and arguably one of the oldest components of the rural English sorcery which found its confluence in the Cultus Sabbati, an magical order comprised of several traditional witchcraft lineages. An essential distinction between the founding lineages of the Cultus and other Craft bodies is its atavistic basis, both in terms of its ongoing historical presence and the unique interaction between its initiates and the entities brought forth by rites of this type. It may be said that the Sabbatic Current, as it proceeds from the Cultus, is cohered by these enduring strata of atavistic power, and the magical congress with it.

In contemporary Western magic, atavism as a force of sorcerous power was advanced in a multitude of original ways by the work Austin Osman Spare, and later by Kenneth Grant, who extrapolated many personal magical insights from it.² Spare's work functions on multiple magical

¹ This concept has also been discussed in the context of traditional witchcraft initiation. See Chumbley, Andrew D. 'What is Traditional Craft?' *The Cauldron* 81, August 1996.

² Where the rites of the Witches' Sabbat are concerned, it is clear Grant has a conflicted relationship with its essence; on the one hand he portrays the Sabbat as a degradation of the ancient mysteries, but on the other sees fit to devote a considerable amount of writing to it. In addition it has been noted

levels, including the intellectual and the immediated visceral, with a particular purity of embodiment that demarcates it as a cohesive 'Deed of Art' unto itself. His use of grotesquerie (in both word and image) conveys liminal states of Being, and the inclusions of protypal and elemental forms of life, each with its source in the primeval flesh. The Artist remarked that '...all of our inventions and discoveries, etc. come from atavistic urges - the old instincts - by profound nostalgias becoming our source of inspiration.'³

In exoteric writings of the Sabbatic Current, the atavistic arcana of witchcraft have been reified as distinct zones of power which may be cognised as aetheric strata both *within* and *beyond* the witch. For example, in the Azoëtic sphere of these mysteries, the atavistic current pervades the entire procession of the sacred alphabet, but especially the radiances of the First and Fifteenth Holy Letters. The centrality of this concept to Sabbatic Witchcraft is herein exemplified in The Formula of Primal Atavism, wherein this aspect of magical consciousness was called *Millions-of-forms-of-Being*.⁴ As a sovereign magical force, atavistic *numen* and sorcery dwell within the dominion of the Devil or the Black Man of the Sabbat, known by such deific names as Apethiui, Janicot or 'The Black Woodsman' as he is called in old American witch lore. The intersection of the mysteries of Death, totemism, the symbol of the skull, the wilderness, and the Devil's guise as 'Lord of Animals' all feed this ancient stream. Alternatively, my own magical work in this arena has likened these liminal corporeal states of being as 'Grottoes of the Flesh' —the hidden *templi* of the *physium* - and the deed of conjuring their powers into the magical *sensorium* *Remembrance*.⁵

However these cartographies are but the shifting guises of the apparent, framed in the vehicula of magical ciphers. The inner actuality of atavistic knowledge, as it is known within the Sabbatic Tradition, evades easy categorisation, and participates in a tradition of transmission which is almost entirely corporeal, rather than written. Dwelling amid the relics of confounding lore and arcane custom, it is in fact earthed in a deeper, visceral reality. This is because at its core, the tradition is a distinctly melothetic one, drawing upon similar systems of correspondences as the late medieval Doctrine of Signatures.

One aspect of atavistic knowledge within this form of Craft is the linkage to animal spirits. Here, the linkage is both evolutionary (of or pertaining to the composition of Self) and totemic (appertaining Other, or the relational)⁶. However this facet of magical knowledge, informed by both historical teaching and the experience of the individual initiate, has unique forms of understanding which resist commonplace categorisation. For example, animals depicted as 'familiars' in the iconology of witchcraft —the hare, the cat and the toad being representative— have been explained in differing ways by scholars. Some see these beasts as purely symbolic,

by other authors the particular role Grant played in advancing the Sabbatic Mysteries in the work of Austin Osman Spare.

³ *The Living Word of Zos*. A portion of Spare's written and artistic work specifically concerned the Sabbat of the Witches.

⁴ Chumbley, Andrew D. *Azoëtia: A Grimoire of the Sabbatic Craft*, 1992, p. 99. In the dual-ouroboric sphere of the Draconic mysteries, the atavistic falls especially within the dominion of SA; see Chumbley, *The Dragon-Book of Essex*.

⁵ Schulke, *Lux Haeresis*, 2011. See also *Veneficium* (2012), "The Edenic Body".

⁶ This magical model has been advanced as the *zoosphere* by Robert Fitzgerald, an initiate of the Cultus Sabbati. See *Arcanum Bestiarum*, passim (2012).

relating to diabolical imagery; others have proposed an ontology of transgression or deviance, suggesting that the practices of the witch, whose powers transgress religious and social orthodoxy, is resonant with a kind of bestiality, whether literal or figurative. Still others have put forward a propagandistic interpretation, citing the tendency toward revulsion that creatures such as snakes, spiders and toads evoke in some persons. In this theory, repulsive creatures and their fraternity reinforce the idea of the abhorrent nature of the witch. There are many other hypotheses, each with its body of evidence and passions to advance it. Within the Sabbatic Tradition of witchcraft, all of these interpretations are known and accepted idiopathic zones of perception concerning the 'animal companion'. Each, in addition to being constrained by the limitations of a non-magical datum, also has its kernel of truth. However there are other modes of understanding which bear direct relevance to atavistic magic that arise solely from the interiority of initiatic consciousness.

For example, it is understood by the adept that when an animal is depicted in the company of a witch, it is in one instance a hallowed vessel of unique witching-power, as much as it is a distinct zoötype. Whilst it is true that in the context of magical operations a toad may be a servitor, an omen of power or an emissary of the Devil these functions overlay a deeper, older magical stratum which springs from the bestial-monadic. This ancient forebear is the first catalysis of new knowledge gained in the procession of carnal forms: a magical Protoplast, or divine ancestor of the species, but also a spirit-form possessing all keys to the kingdom of its progeny. Accordingly, depiction of the animal's presence in a witchcraft rite may also signify the atavistic resonance of the practitioner with the toad, its dark and ancient forms excavated from the primordial layers of the flesh itself. In this instance its visible form is the exteriorization of the Protoplast, divided from the adept for the purpose of congress. Through this magical action, which is not exclusively understood as 'witch-familiar intercourse', all manner of functions typically assigned to the familiar may be carried out. Other layers of magic are present as well, such as the Apotheosis of Self, wherein relict identities are roused within the flesh of the adept, bringing with them previously unknown knowledge, altered or expanded sensation, and ecstatic vision, eclipsing temporal consciousness.

This intersection of ancient animal forms with the Rite of the Sabbat has also been graphically demonstrated in medieval and early modern depictions of the witches' midnight revels, through inclusion of therianthropic revelers. The portrayal of men and women as half human, half beast, is suggestive, to some, of the embodiment of animal attributes lacking 'human virtue'. However the metamorphosed state of the adept serves, in the Sabbatic Current, as a cipher for the primal bestial gods, magically exhumed from the living flesh, conjured to full possession. The arts of guising and mumming find an important role here, especially in their more potent forms where the regalia so donned is the actual spirit-fetish. Archaic embodiments of flesh-wisdom may also manifest as unintended consequences of spirit evocation, or in moments of extreme vulnerability during an operation of the Art Magical. As atavistic embodiments constitute some of the most severe ordeals of the magical art, even when intentionally undertaken, an episode of unintended intrusion is doubly so, producing disquieting effects which may persist for years. Many years ago, prior to my own involvement in the Craft, I witnessed an incident wherein an innocent stranger, uninvolved with magical practice, nevertheless passed in near proximity to a concealed atavistic operation, and was violently overshadowed to the point of physical calamity, requiring many hours of medical attention. Such events are damning, both for the magical lodge responsible and the individual initiates within it, for they indicate a fundamental lack of foresight and containment of power. Yet, embedded within such accidents is the demonstration of the unearthly powers that may be unleashed by such work.

The Ego, Identity and the figurative mind are, for almost all moderns, cherished and firmly entrenched, to the point that these may present formidable obstacles to the magical upwelling of what lies beneath. Yet certain traditional magical formulae provide for the temporary suspension of these dominant portions of Self, which grant the expansion of the magical field of operation. When such power is sought, it may well come forth with a force that was unexpected, but even so must be embraced not only on the terms of the adept, but equally on those of the descending shade.

Amongst those who practice this art, a story is told which brings this issue to the fore. A young aspirant sought the Way of the Craft, ready to pledge all Honour, and desiring that the Power of Spirit be revealed unto him in an unequivocal manner. Having made the appropriate sacrifices, and fulfilled the requisite ordeals, in time he was accepted into the Body of the Wise. At his first Convocation, a forceful descent of the Spirits ensued, and he witnessed the sudden transformation of his fellow adepts into protean forms: amalgams of human, beast, smoke, and visages wholly *Other*. Further, at the moment of his most crucial testing, his identity was excruciated by the appearance of an atavistic Emissary. His fear of ego-loss and alienation of form was greater than the embrace of the shade's manifestation within the rite, and the result was a permanent distortion. The experience so completely challenged his assumptions about magic and the nature of spirit that from that moment on, he sought to explain his experience in the most mundane of terms, for the sake of preserving his previously conceived identity. As a result the very underpinnings of his path were compromised, and in short measure, the Gods of his Clan deserted him, and likewise too the Body of Adepts.

The Atavistic is, if nothing else, a Sexual Primordium of Flesh. From it arises all creativity, strength of kinship, and magical *dynamis*. Whilst sexual rites of the Sabbatic Current are often distinct from those of the atavistic spheres, there is an important bridge of *carnality*, which exhorts the vehicle of the flesh as the primary arena of the witch's Art and Wisdom. The present body of the Sorcerer may trace the backward chain of its Being, at the very least, to the union of sexual fluids of male and female, the *sacramenta nuptiis* revered by the witch as the supreme philter and poured forth as the cup-libation of the High Goddess. Similarly, the present body may trace its being in a forward chain unto the corpse, wise in repose; and ultimately the skull and bones, venerated as the emblems of the God. Each link in this chain of present incarnation is in fact a head of prophecy, which the wise may beseech for the Augury of Self. By sorcerous extension of the catena beyond, we gather up the many possibilities and actualities of Being. Specific sex-magical techniques for accessing atavistic strata are also known.

As with sexual magic, the results of atavistic ravishment are often so profound that their manifestations are quite literally 'beyond words'. This is because their origin, and means of transmission is through the body, and thus, at least at the incepting layers, non-verbal. Thus, the distinct organs of the *sensorium*, and of the emotional Self, may experience many cascades of revelation and reconfiguration before the *logos* may re-orientate and impress itself with any relevance. The fields of sensation, originating as distinct bodily dominions, when magically empowered, may each serve as a receiver for the force of atavistic knowledge, and to allow for the specialised refraction. The most basic of these are 'pleasure', active in part during sex magical operations, and 'pain', or rather discomfort, another potent by-way of magical knowledge.⁷

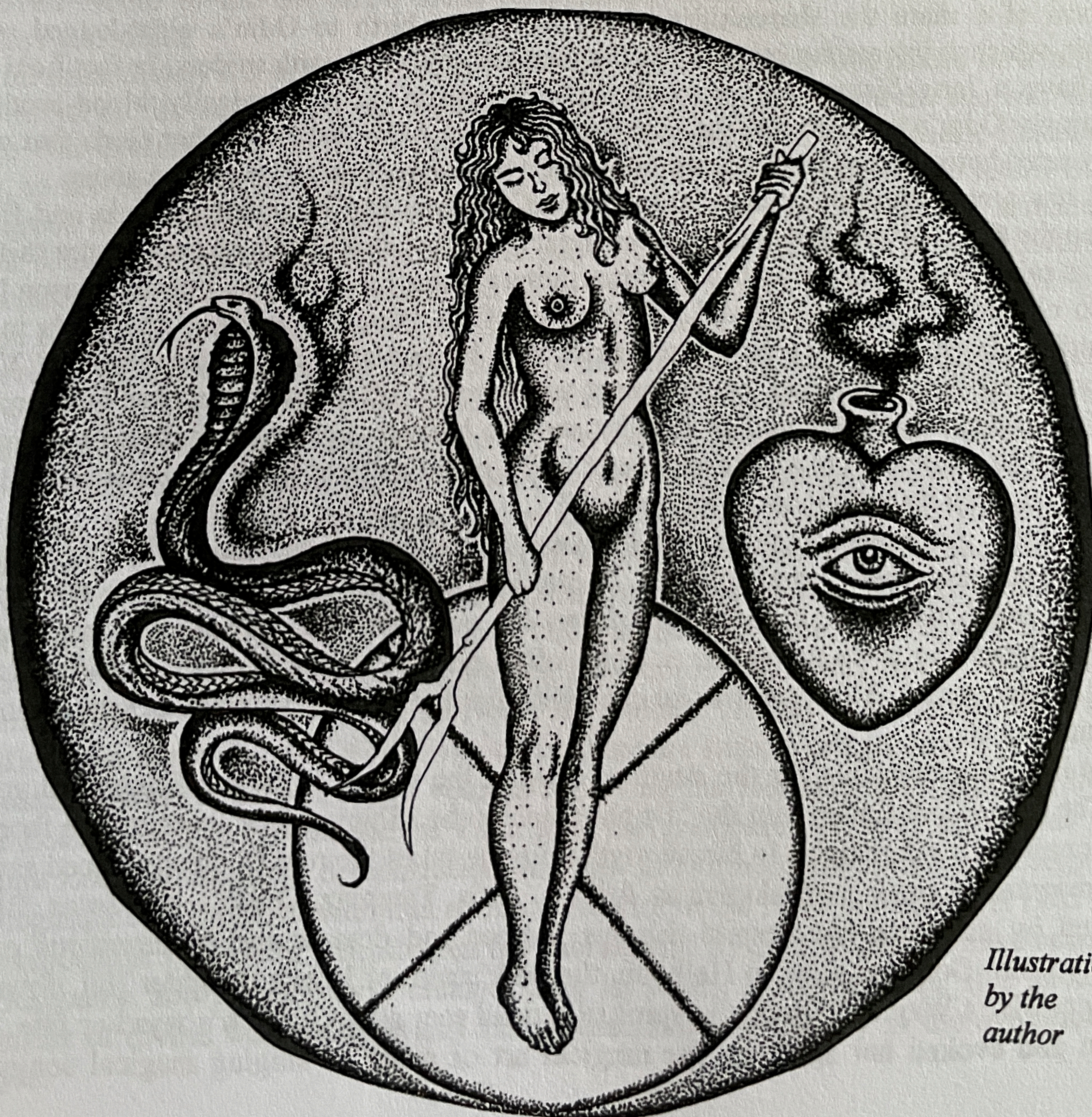
One example of this is a ritual technique passed down to us, allegedly having its origins in a form of medieval torture. The torment in question was of a type used specifically for those

⁷ Physical exertion, being a distinct arena of power liminally situated between pain and pleasure, is also efficacious as an adjunctive magical technique.

accused of witchcraft; and yet, having passed through the potent alembic of magical praxis (as well as various eras of magical approach), became in its magical usage a means for attaining visionary states. That a horrific, punitive technique was adopted as a high sacrament and evolved to a transcendental form is not only a testament to the transgressive nature of the cult, but indicative on a broader scale of its power to adapt itself to various guises through time, as well as its strong linkages to a magic whose powers originates in the flesh. Also preserved are certain praxes using psychoactive sacraments for the access of these elemental forms of being, although most of them, as one might predict, can be strongly dissociative, to the point of disabling the ability to retrieve what is taught.

In all such magical discourse with these Elder Forms, new meanings —and new means of relation— emerge for the corporeal rudiments of hide, bone, flesh, and blood. The Graveyard, beyond its station as the crossroads of Living and Dead, stands as the Witch-Temple, the Vault of Mumia ever ready to receive the Three Drops to awaken its secrets to life. Such are the aetheric graves of wise-blood, bound in earth, but also in the living flesh, blood and bone of the Adepti. The entreaty of the Wise unto their sanctuaries is no mere necromancy but the Self-liberation of All, within and without, moving ever toward the Perfection of the Magical Body, and the attainment of its Hidden Knowledge.

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*Illustration
by the
author*