

J. Finley Hurley. *Sorcery*. Boston, London, Melbourne, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Introduction

A sorcerer mumbles a spell over a photograph of a seriously ill little girl, and she is cured. Another sorcerer sticks pins in a wax doll, and his distant victim screams. Preposterous balderdash? Certainly that's what we were taught, but a mass of evidence has accumulated suggesting that we were wrong, that these things may occur, and occur in accordance with scientifically determined principles.

We must now seriously consider the possibility that old-fashioned, strike-dead-and-blind sorcery is a reality.

A growing number of scientists working in certain specialized fields are doing exactly that, and they have occasionally admitted as much. Ronald Rose, an anthropologist, is one of these: He wrote that "magic has its reality, for E.S.P. is real, the powers of suggestion and hypnotism are real. . ." Jule Eisenbud, a psychiatrist at the University of Colorado, is another. He wrote that the ability of some people to influence the thoughts, dreams, and actions of others at great distances "must be one of the oldest 'facts of nature' known to man." Indeed it is. But the scientists who know it to be a fact have never divulged the details of the information and reasoning that led to its recognition. On the contrary, they have observed an implicit conspiracy of silence on the subject no less thoroughly than Victorians observed the one on sex. Why? Because sorcery has been regarded, at least until recent times, as the paragon of superstition and the antithesis of science -- a reputation it once shared with flying machines. In the view of many nineteenth-century scientists it could be nothing else. After all, popular opinion then held that their age had discovered all the laws of the universe, and in 1887 one of its distinguished spokesmen, Pierre Berthelot, smugly declared, "From now on there is no mystery about the universe." And no sorcery either.

Times have changed, but even the scientists who now admit sorcery is possible say little about it. They vaguely refer to a large body of knowledge, as Rose did, and assume that we can bridge the gaps and make the necessary inferences. Like the playwrights of another day, they suppose we know all the wanton gambols that will take place when the light goes out, the door closes. But few of them are likely to have any details to give. Preoccupied as they are with a particular set of facts in their special fields, they seldom view, except in hazy outline, the ensemble of facts constituting sorcery. Besides, it's not their job, and perhaps a survival instinct tells them to let sleeping dogs lie -- for they are very large dogs.

I have attempted in this book to bridge the gaps [between science and magic] and rouse sleeping dogs by reconstructing the thinking of scientists such as [Ronald] Rose that led them to admit that "magic has its reality." In reconstructing their reasoning and the evidence that left them little choice, we shall not only see that sorcery is a legitimate dimension of the Western worldview, but also discover how a spell is cast and why it works. Still, we must begin where they did, at the beginning, and follow the evidence, case histories and experiments, like patient detectives. And, as in a mystery, the pattern will not emerge at once. The first five chapters consequently say little about sorcery directly, but they nevertheless provide information essential to understanding it when it does appear, full-fledged and undisguised, in later pages.

The first chapter in particular may seem remote from sorcery owing to its concern with the world of everyday life: how we perceive it, experiment with it, and explain it. This concern is necessary because an outmoded materialism -- a philosophical legacy of the [nineteenth] century that assumed the universe to be a kind of clockwork -- still colors our thinking even today. And since it's an anachronism wholly at odds with sorcery (as well as modern physics), it is desirable at the outset to examine briefly the current scientific conclusions about the nature of reality.

Chapter 2 begins in earnest an exploration of the unconscious mind, which appears to harbor an intelligence of its own, one able to plan and carry out complex tasks, and one that often seems indifferent or even hostile to the conscious mind and the body they share. The significance of its independence will become apparent when we witness its ability to shape what we consciously see, feel, remember, think, and believe. The powers of the unconscious, moreover, are not limited to the mental sphere. Chapter 3 reviews evidence that they may also affect the body for good or ill -- to heal or kill. These unconscious processes are central to an understanding of sorcery and what it can accomplish. The world of the unconscious is the world in which the sorcerer moves, and its powers are the ones he seeks to manipulate. To ask what sorcery can do is to ask what the unconscious can do. And that, as we shall see, is a very great deal.

Yet the unconscious does not always act on its own. Fortunately for sorcerers, it will sometimes hear and obey orders from other minds. That compliance, regularly occurring in hypnosis and other trance states, is the subject of Chapter 4. Any of the mental and physical effects described in the previous two chapters can, in principle, be brought under hypnotic control. Nor is that all. The evidence argues that a person can be hypnotized without his knowledge and against his will, and that he can then be made to do things contrary to his conscious wishes . . . and the smell of brimstone grows stronger.

"For E.S.P. is real . . ." Chapter 5, which discusses telepathy -- extrasensory contact between minds -- adds the final element needed to complete an understanding of sorcery. Here we shall find that telepathy, too, is essentially a process of the unconscious and subject to its laws. And with the discovery that a person's unconscious can receive and act on a telepathic message that never penetrates conscious awareness, we are well on the way to rediscovering the sorcery that so bemused our seventeenth-century ancestors.

Through Chapter 5 we shall be considering data that will, when assembled, make sorcery a comprehensible and reasonable aspect of reality. These data are assembled in Chapter 6, but the chapter goes beyond showing that spells are theoretically possible and reports instances in which undoubted sorcery has been performed, and not only by rattle-shaking shamans but by scientists -- including a Nobel Laureate.

The remaining chapters will attempt to answer some of the many questions that naturally tickle one's curiosity after learning that sorcery exists -- such as the obvious one: How to do it? Chapter 7 outlines the principles of sorcery and their application in the light of the scientific findings previously examined. No "secrets" are withheld. It also contains sufficient nuts-and-bolts instruction to enable the adventurous to begin experimenting with simple spells: healing, charming a lover, making life unpleasant for enemies . . .

Admittedly, only a small part of sorcery is touched on in these pages. The specialists (and sorcerers of course) will also recognize even that part has been somewhat over-simplified. But it is a beginning, and the principles derived in Chapter 7 are valid, though some of them will require future modification. Sorcery is entirely too large a subject to be exhausted by a single book.

Sorcerers, of course, have not idly waited for their art to be understood by Western science, and medicine men, pow-wow-ers, cunning men, clever men, shamans, power doctors, and witches have been casting spells for millennia. Chapter 8 looks at the techniques, paraphernalia, and theories of traditional sorcerers to see whether they parallel those derived from scientific sources and, more important, whether we have anything to learn from them.

The final chapter is frankly and perhaps outrageously speculative. Given that sorcery is possible, what are the ramifications? Certainly sorcery could be used for more than curing diseases, arousing passions, and the other concerns of the village sorcerer. Has it been? Could it perhaps be an unsuspected force in history, a spectral hand behind world affairs? A number of strange clues suggest it, and as an imaginative exercise, we shall follow them.

The argument advanced here is scientific in that it's based on the experiments and observations of scientists, many of whom are leaders in their fields, and not on the rickety suppositions of cranks. But I hardly need to point out that some of these experiments and observations have not gone unchallenged by one group or another. Because science no longer pretends to arrive at absolute truth, probably nothing in science is or can be final, and no doubt most of what passes as scientific fact finds its critics, with the vigor of their criticism proportional to the emotion aroused. Proof that is lucid, even overwhelming, to one scientist may not be convincing to another. Nonetheless, more often than not we benefit from the ensuing controversy -- for without those who refuse to believe what others believe, we might still be tossing babies to Moloch.

The role of genetics in determining behavior, for example, is one of the many issues currently at the center of heated, often vitriolic debates. And even today, more than a century after Darwin, some scientifically trained people continue to deny evolution, though they are familiar with the evidence supporting it. Finally, that some stout-hearted souls are not to be cowed by any evidence whatever is illustrated by the International Flat Earth Research Society, which maintains -- what else? -- that the earth is flat. Charles Johnson, its president, said that membership is growing because "people are coming out of the closet on this."

Sorcerers, on the other hand, have preferred to remain in the closet. Magic can and has gone its own occult way, but it also passed beyond the pale of Western understanding. The aim of this book is to coax sorcery back within the pale by showing that civilized people can understand it without abandoning their worldview or sacrificing their scientific attitudes.

If people understand sorcery, however, many will try it. Of those who try it, some will get results, and a few may have the talent and persistence to become stars. If genuine sorcery thus ceases to be genuinely occult and is practiced widely, we shall soon have ample confirmation that we have been looking at only one half of existence and had better busy ourselves with the other half. Quite apart from its practical aspects, sorcery teaches that human beings are more than the chemicals that compose them or the bodies that confine them -- a lesson needing emphasis at a time when computers are shrinking us to ciphers.

I offer no apologies if this book encourages the practice of sorcery. Sorcery in itself is as morally neutral as a syringe -- which may be charged with heroin as easily as penicillin. Obviously a few will use it for illicit purposes, some already do, but most will not. It's a poor argument that sorcery should

be suppressed because scoundrels will abuse it Anything of value may be misused, including medical science. Several hundred thousand people in advanced Western nations prove it by dying each year because they were given the wrong medicine, and a like number perish from needless surgery, which seems to indicate that we are far more likely to be killed in a medical accident than in a traffic accident. Despite that, it doesn't occur to us to suppress medicine. We clearly cannot afford to. Neither can we afford to suppress sorcery. It is the medicine our world needs.

Michael Edwardes, a historian, acknowledged that need when he recently wrote: "At the beginning of the scientific revolution, magic and the new science were allies . . . It is time for magic and science to be allies again, before science and the technocratic society destroys us all."

The day has arrived to try Edwardes's prescription.

References

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