

Jonathan Allen, ed., *Lost Envoy: The Tarot Deck of Austin Osman Spare* (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2016), 336 pp, £35 (cloth).

This beautiful volume showcases the tarot deck painted by Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956), which had lain unappreciated in The Magic Circle Museum since 1944. Editor Jonathan Allen, a curator at the Museum, and Mark Pilkington, co-founder of Strange Attractor Press, have collaborated to produce a high quality study: pages 141–321 containing a reproduction of Spare’s seventy-nine cards, including the card backs and all textual annotations; these are accompanied by nine lavishly illustrated essays (including one by Spare) and a foreword by Pilkington. Spare, an artistic prodigy and occultist who died in obscurity, has experienced a revival of interest since Southwark’s Cuming Museum mounted a retrospective of his work in 2010. As Pilkington observes, “just as his once dilapidated South London neighborhoods have been transformed...so Spare’s cultural and commercial worth has become sidereal” (10). The “Introduction” explains the context in which Spare designed his tarot deck, and the possibility that it pre-dated A. E. Waite and Pamela Colman Smith’s iconic Rider-Waite deck (1909), as Allen notes that Spare’s cards may have been executed in 1905–1906.

Helen Farley’s “Austin Spare and the Ages of the Tarot” is a historical sketch of the origins of tarot in northern Italy at the turn of the fifteenth century, and the ways in which it was appropriated into the Western esoteric tradition, from the late eighteenth century with the writings of Antoine Court de Gébelin through the nineteenth century contributions of Papus and Éliphas Lévi. Farley situates Spare in the British Occult Revival of the late nineteenth century, and makes some observations on the qualities of his deck, with special reference to the naming of the first trump as “The Juggler” rather than “The Magician” (33). The next essay, Gavin W. Semple’s “A Work for Artists,” explores Spare’s interest in cartomancy and the debt that he owed to Swiss occultist Oswald Wirth (1860–1943), and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918). The minor arcana is identified as having possible derivation from the 1896 popular fortune-telling book *What the Cards Tell* published pseudonymously by “Minetta” (49–50).

Spare's own essay, "Mind to Mind and How, by a Sorcerer," was written in 1951 but remained unpublished till now. It discusses the use of cards to tell fortunes, and cautions against reliance on education to enhance skill in such matters and recalls the illiterate woman who taught him as a superlative interpreter (p. 64). Phil Baker's "His own Arcana': Austin Osman Spare and the Borders of Tarot" points out Spare's capacity to craft his own mythos as a magical practitioner, and a range of cards, including examples from both major and minor arcana, to make the reader familiar with Spare's concerns in creating the deck. The next essay is Arthur Ivey's "Tarot Cards and a Pack in The Magic Circle Museum," is a short note on the Spare deck published in 1969, and is followed by editor Allen's "A Gift of Fortune," which examines in greater detail The Magic Circle museum and the place of Spare's tarot deck in its collection.

The last two contributions are Sally O'Reilly's short story "The Deputation," about Sylvia Pankhurst and Spare, and Alan Moore's "A Cartomantic Mirror," which details a consultation of Aleister Crowley and Frieda Harris's Thoth deck on Sunday 21 September 2014 to determine the answer to the question: "What is the significance of the Austin Osman Spare tarot?" (113). These interesting ruminations are followed by eight pages of small-print endnotes and references. It is important to note that *Lost Envoy: The Tarot Deck of Austin Osman Spare* is aimed less at scholars than practitioners, though Helen Farley (of all the authors) has published an academic work on tarot, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism* (I. B. Tauris, 2009). The main audience for the book is clearly the occult and esoteric community, and perhaps also scholars and artists who are gradually becoming more aware of Spare's artistic and magical output. The book is a major achievement for the beauty of the illustrations and the reasonableness of its price tag. I recommend this book to all interested in magic, witchcraft, the esoteric, and artistic expressions of these fields. It is especially relevant to those interested in Chaos Magick and other fields that owe a debt to Spare.

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