

Michael Howard, *Children of Cain: A Study of Modern Traditional Witches* (Richmond Vista, Calif.: Three Hands Press, 2011), 320 pp., \$48.50 (hardcover)

Few esotericists alive today have done as much for the British Witchcraft movement as the Englishman Michael Howard, who has been the editor and publisher of *The Cauldron*, a quarterly journal devoted to what it describes as “Witchcraft, Paganism & Folklore,” since 1976. A prolific author, Howard has also published more than thirty books, devoted to subjects as disparate as the magical use of runes, Wiccan history, and Luciferian mythology. However, his latest, *Children of Cain*, is perhaps his most important published contribution to date.

The elegant and nicely illustrated volume is the first historical study yet published that delves into the realm of Traditional Witchcraft, an increasingly significant magico-religious movement which Howard claims encompasses “any non-Gardnerian, non-Alexandrian, non-Wiccan or pre-modern form of the Craft, especially if it has been inspired by historical forms of witchcraft and folk magic” (15). Since the release of Paul Huson’s *Mastering Witchcraft* in 1970, a multitude of works have been published advocating the practice of various forms of Traditional Witchcraft (including Howard’s own 1999 work *Light from the Shadows*), but *Children of Cain* is the first book to actually study the phenomenon from a historical viewpoint. In this way it offers a valuable contribution to this much neglected area of Pagan studies.

Children of Cain is published by Three Hands Press, one of the two publishing arms of the Cultus Sabbati, a closed Traditional Craft group founded in the early 1990s by Luciferian occultist Andrew D. Chumbley (1967-2004). A personal friend of Chumbley’s and a member of the Cultus since 1999, Howard has been involved with the Luciferian and Traditional Craft community for many years through both *The Cauldron* and his own magical practice. In this capacity he has come to know many prominent figures in its development. Given this background, Howard’s history of the movement is not that of a detached outsider, but rather than of an individual who is intricately connected with this magico-religious phenomenon. As such the reader must be aware of the intrinsically “insider” nature of this study.

Howard opens the book with a discussion of how to define “Traditional Witchcraft,” relying largely on the definitions provided by fellow Cultus Sabbati members Andrew D. Chumbley and Daniel A. Schulke. The reader is advised that various alternate definitions have been published in recent years, including those that differ quite substantially

from Howard's, and it would have strengthened the work to have provided a more even handed discussion of terminology. Howard goes on to provide a brief history of witchcraft in Europe, before listing a series of common beliefs and magical practices that can be found among contemporary Traditional Craft groups. Howard makes it clear that he sees a direct connection between modern Traditional Witchcraft and historical witch covens, for instance making comparisons between contemporary practices and those of 'the old days' (29). Unfortunately, he fails to specify in any detail quite what or who these old covens were. He rightly criticises the Witch-Cult theories of Margaret Murray as 'academically flawed' (15), but he seems to accept her premise that there was indeed a religion of witch covens across Britain from at least the Early Modern period onward, something rejected by established historical understanding of the subject.

Moving on, in the second chapter Howard looks at Robert Cochrane (1931-1966) and his Clan of Tubal Cain, a coven that operated in southern England during the 1960s and which survives under new leadership to this day. He then devotes a chapter to The Regency, a Pagan group founded by members of the Clan that emerged following Cochrane's death. More extensive information on these groups has already been published elsewhere, but Howard certainly offers a good overview, accompanied with several new insights gained from discussions with Cochrane's nephew Martin Lloyd.

Children of Cain pays little heed to chronology as the fourth chapter turns its attention back in time to the nineteenth century, and the Essex cunning man George Pickingill (c.1816-1909). Pickingill rose to notability in the 1970s when the modern occultist E.W. Liddell notoriously claimed that the old cunning man had been the grand master of nine witch covens, one of which had allegedly initiated Aleister Crowley. Liddell's claims have previously faced fierce challenges, including from academic historians like Ronald Hutton, but here Howard takes them seriously, going into a disproportionate amount of detail in describing them. Thankfully he remains cautious and refrains from accepting them outright. The fifth chapter remains in the nineteenth century to explore the Society of the Horseman's Word, a folk magical brotherhood of agricultural laborers. Howard asserts that the Society was an influence on certain contemporary Traditional Craft groups, something I believe likely, but he fails to definitively identify any clear historical links between the two.

Chapter six then leaves the shores of Britain to explore the traditions of the United States, focusing briefly on Victor Anderson's Feri tradition, Douglas McIlwain's Order of the Skull and Bones, and the Italian traditions propagated by Leo Louis Martello and Raven Grimassi, skimming

over a wealth of material that has previously been published elsewhere. The seventh chapter is devoted to the Cultus Sabbati and the wider Sabbatic Witchcraft tradition, the Luciferian current to which Howard belongs. I had high hopes that this might prove to be the most interesting chapter, offering new insights into this elusive brotherhood. Unfortunately little new information was offered, with the author instead delving into the lore regarding mandrakes, witches' salves, and the Wild Hunt.

As he moves into the eighth chapter, "The Old Craft Today," Howard deals with all manner of figures involved in twentieth-century occultism, including early Pagan Witches such as Charles Cardell and Rosaleen Norton as well as a variety of other esotericists, from Cecil Williamson, the founder of the Museum of Witchcraft, to the famed artist Austin Osman Spare. Believing that they have all influenced the Traditional Craft, Howard offers a good overview of these various individuals, but fails to tie them in with a study of the wider Traditional Craft movement developed since at least the 1990s. In particular he neglects to mention the way in which practitioners have built up an online community or how publishers like Capall Bann, Pendraig, and Mandrake of Oxford have been prolific in their production of Traditional Craft titles. A discussion of such recent developments in the Traditional Craft community would definitely have benefited this work, especially explaining its place within the wider esoteric movement in both Britain and abroad. Finally, Howard offers an extensive glossary of terms pertaining to the Traditional Craft, with the assembled words primarily having been adopted from various mythological, historical, and folkloric sources.

Children of Cain is undoubtedly a welcome addition to the growing corpus on the subject of Traditional Witchcraft, providing as it does a good concise overview of the movement in Britain from the 1960s up until the present day. Nevertheless, its overly "insider" nature and a lack of evidence to support many of the book's assertions prevent it from becoming a true scholarly work. A more objective, academic historical account of the Traditional Witchcraft movement is still something to hope for. The connections that Howard draws between contemporary Traditional Witchcraft and historical forms of folk magic and witchcraft are at times rather dubious and reflect the view of a practitioner with a keen interest in emphasising the mythic-historic pedigree of his tradition more than that of a predominantly impartial outsider. Despite its faults, *Children of Cain* does offer a history of British Traditional Witchcraft from one of its most important figures, and all in all, it is certainly a work for which Howard should be heartily congratulated.

Ethan Doyle White
University College London