

Glamourie

By The Unreliable Narrator

... I strolled on

*through the wood's good
offices, and duly fell
to wondering if I hadn't
simply made it all up: you,*

*I mean, everything,
my entire life. Either way,
nothing now could touch me
bar my hosts, who appeared*

*as diffuse golden light,
as tiny spiders
examining my hair . . .*

from 'Glamourie', by Kathleen Jamie

Storytelling is the oldest, truest magic, where images are conjured from words and firelight; instilling fear, evoking laughter, creating wonder. Storytellers must know the charm: they must have all the right words, and speak them in the right order - quicker here, slower there; now loud and commanding, then soft and seductive. Calling up, and putting down.

With literacy, this narrative magic becomes a thing of symbols - those strange, hieratic marks, codified with spelling and gramarye, that pour silently off the page into the reader's mind. Inked by devils, bound in codex, folio, quarto, octavo ... and these written words can sleep, shelved and silent through the centuries, waiting patient and potent for the casual touch, the unwary glance, to spark them into life again. Books are truly things of power. Frequenters of libraries know that odd things happen when books are brought together: time runs strange in that heavy hush, thick with unspoken words; annexes appear and disappear; and synchronicities flicker in the shadows of the stacks.

But what do you do with metamagic – when the application of magic is itself a feature within a story? In fiction, magic is the ultimate plot lever. What are its powers? Unlimited. How does it work? Don't ask. Raw and unworked, it's literary plutonium – misused, magic is the death of all drama, the tomb of all suspense: speak the words, wave the wand, and all shall be transformed. It's very difficult to control, and once used, it's impossible to get it back in the bottle: sorcerer's apprentices, take note.

Oh, but how it glitters! And look how it discomfits the reader, and pokes them off their comfortable world-view! Such a temptation. Why, anything could happen. Anything at all. Even in the electric light of modernity, writers can't resist the allure – and so of course there must be rules, and principles, and restrictions; boundaries for the boundless. True names have force; like calls to like; third time's the charm: these things we know. As a species, we know that this is how things work, and so fictional magic can flesh out the subtle sorceries of stories.

In this edition of *The Bottle Imp* we look to enchantment – to magic old and new, from dark diablerie to technicolour flash and dazzle. First across the threshold is Valentina Bold, bearing news of **Dreaming Bread and Skyrrie Stanes**. Close behind comes Julian Goodare, stirring the pot and looking for laughs in **Fantasy and Humour in Scottish Witchcraft Literature**, while Nancy Kilgore goes **In Search of Isobel** and finds the bitter roots of something much less merry, and all too real.

Martin Richardson tips his hat to the omphalos of this generation's magical imagination, mapping out **Places of the Mind** across the Potterverse – and here is Marina Dossena, with sage advice and a button for your lip in **Spells of Silence**. Kate Macdonald explores Sylvia Townsend Warner's **Scottish Kingdoms of Elfin**, and Ainsley McIntosh investigates **Walter Scott and the 'realms of death'**. Finally, Tim Clarkson lifts a candle to shed light upon **Wizardry, Prophecy and the Origins of Merlin** in the Scottish Borders.

And still this little porridge pot continues to produce: we are delighted to present the winning essay of the ASLS/International Scott Conference Postgraduate Essay competition – **“There is no knowing what tricks they have amongst them”**: **The Romani Heroes in the Novels of Walter Scott**, by Paul Arant. To top it all off, a garland of new book reviews is crowned with our selection of **Best Scottish Books of 2018**.

Pure magic, by the way.

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