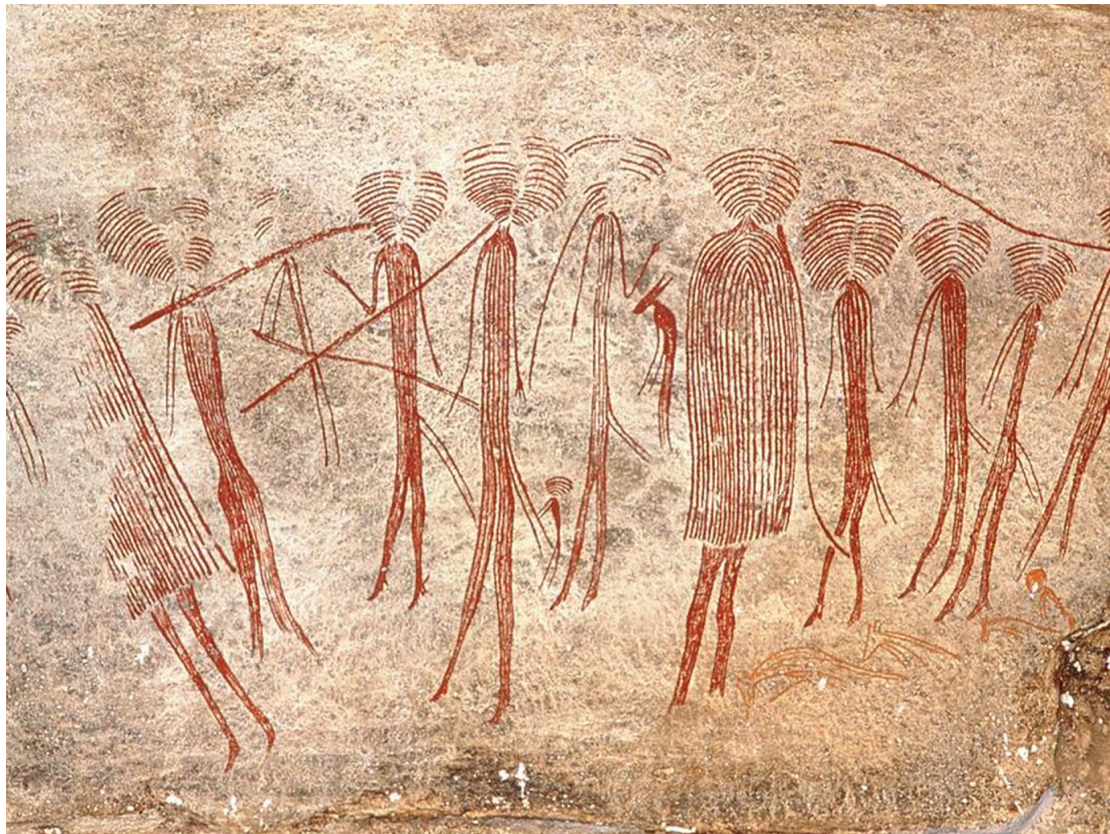


ON THE TRAIL OF THE UNKNOWN

Georgina Starr

Written and Recorded in May 2020

Duration: 17'19"



Figures, pigment on rock, Kolo, Dodoma Region, Tanzania. (2000BC)

A revenant is a spirit who comes back – a phenomenon applicable to those who for one reason or another are trapped. They did not yet succeed in crossing – be it a river, a path, a ravine or the frontier that separates our world of the living with the world of the dead. Are we in this place? This in-between. Condemned to the passing of certain tests that will allow us to leave this state, caught between two worlds.

Somnambulistic.

And what is the secret formula?

In Frank Tashlin's film *Artists & Models* (1955) the comic book fanatic Eugene found it in his dreams—it was:

X34-5R1+6—X36

In Jean Cocteau's 1950 film *Orphée* the answer was somewhere within the poetic numerical conundrums dancing on the airwaves of the mysterious Radio Rorschach:

38. 39. 40. Twice. I repeat. 38. 39. 40. Twice. Attention. Listen.

In Jacques Rivette's 1976 film *Duelle - Une quarantaine* there is a secret code to banish the evil Moon Goddess from the Earth and save all mortals:

*Deux et deux ne font pas quatre. Tous les murs à buf s'abattre.
Sept, huit, **neuf**, cinq, trois, six, deux.*

I was always curious to know what those special numbers added up to.

$7+8+9+5+3+6+2 = 40 = \text{un quarantaine (quarantine)}$

Jacques Rivette had borrowed this formula from the pages of Jean Cocteau's 1937 play *Les Chavalier de la Table Ronde* which Cocteau wrote as he emerged from a delirious illness —opium addiction. In his version of the play Merlin, on the quest of the Holy Grail, is able to magically transport himself from place to place triggered by the words and numbers of the secret formula. I always imagine this being sung.

*Minus times minus is equal to plus
Denominate zero and all things bear us
Not over nor under not round but straight through
7. 8. **9**. 5. 3. 6. 2.
For up shall be down and left shall be right
As we gallop – pell-mell - down the sorcerer's road*

Everyone wants the Holy Grail to fix their damaged lives. But can this 'Grail' cure everything or is it just another illusion? Cocteau once wrote that he preferred a true death to a false life, and that's the conclusion that King Arthur comes to at the end of the play.

For some reason number **9** appears in all these magic formulas.

NEUF. NINE. NEUN.

For the artist and writer Unica Zurn the number **9** held the secret to everything.

Numbers were saviours.

She used anagrams to conjure her mystical hero 'The Man of Jasmin'.

The dictum of your day is: HARD
Of your eyes: BEING
Your skin is song – your advice: UNDERSTAND
Your house is masked. Your victories: CLOSE.

Of this 'Man of Jasmin' she said—*Someone travelled inside me, crossing from one side to the other. I have become its home. Outside in the black landscape someone is claiming that they exist. From his gaze the circle closes around me. Traversed by him inwardly—encircled by him from without—this is my new situation and I like it.*

Unica Zurn's mystery 'Man of Jasmin' was who she conjured in dark times. His initials

were HM.

I was happy to discover that HM was also a hero of mine, and someone whose poems and stories I turn to whenever nighttime terrors take me. INSOMNIA. Another liminal country.

HM is Henri Michaux.

Michaux famously took the cactus hallucinogenic mescaline to aid his own cerebral vacations. In this he found Maledictions - Exorcisms - Chants - Aphorisms - Hex Poems.

His words soothe me as they once soothed Unica Zurn.

Could a curse be the formula we need? Let's try it—here—NOW.

*i have cursed your forehead, your belly, your life
i have cursed the streets your steps plod through
the things your hands touch
i have cursed the inside of your dreams*

*i have placed a puddle in your eye so that you can't see anymore
an insect in your ear so that you can't hear anymore
a sponge in your brain so that you can't understand anymore*

*i have frozen you in the soul of your body
iced you in the depths of your life
the air you breathe suffocates you
the air you breathe has the air of a cellar
is an air that has already been exhaled
been puffed out by hyenas*

*the dung of this air is something no one can breathe
your skin is damp all over
your skin sweats out waters of great fear
your armpits reek far and wide of the crypt*

*animals drop dead as you pass
dogs howl at night their heads raised toward your house
you can't run away
you can't muster the strength of an ant to the tip of your feet*

*your fatigue makes a lead stump in your body
your fatigue is a long caravan
your fatigue stretches out to the country of nan
your fatigue is inexpressible*

*your mouth bites you
your nails scratch you*

*no longer yours, your wife
no longer yours, your brother
the sole of his foot bitten by an angry snake*

*someone has slobbered on your descendants
someone has drooled in the mouth of your laughing little girl
someone has walked by slobbering all over the face of your domain
the world moves away from you*

*i am rowing
i am rowing*

I am rowing against your life

I am rowing

*I split into countless rowers
to row more strongly against you*

*you fall into blurriness
you are out of breath
you get tired before the slightest effort*

I row

I row

I row

*you go off drunk tied to the tail of a mule
drunkenness like a huge umbrella that darkens the sky
and assembles the flies*

*dizzy drunkenness of the semi-circular canals
unnoticed beginnings of hemiplegia*

*drunkenness no longer leaves you
lays you out to the left
lays you out to the right
lays you out on the stony ground of the path*

I row

I row

I am rowing against your days

you enter the house of suffering

I row

I row

*on a black blindfold your life is unfolding
on the great white eye of a one eyed horse
your future is unrolling*

I AM ROWING

Surely that is a curse to end all curses.

During one of my nights of insomnia I wrote this in my diary:

On the trail of the unknown.

*You feel only the darkness. Sooner or later you arrive at the other side.
The blindfold falls to loud applause and laughter.*

“Don’t turn back! Don’t turn back!” A chorus cries.

But you are Orpheus ascending from Hades and you need to see your Eurydice.

You turn.

Orpheus broke the spell by turning and seeing Eurydice and he ruined his chances of being together with his love. But wouldn’t we always turn to catch the face of a lover? Is this the true death Cocteau talks about?

To LOVE equals DEATH.

In *The Invention of Morel* written in 1940 by Adolfo Buoy Casares, a fugitive is quarantined on a remote island.

He was a visitor. He was a visitor. He was a visitor.

He is alone, yet sometimes he sees a beautiful woman, she does not see him. The woman is caught, trapped, not between worlds but inside a projection—inside morel’s machine.

Many years before the fugitive’s arrival on the ghost island, Morel had recorded a group of friends on his machine—a perfect week—a holiday—now locked into an endlessly repeating memory that the fugitive is seeing on a constant loop like an unfolding television drama. To meet the women in reality he would have to enter the machine’s projection and therefore surrender his life. The machine is the key and DEATH is the key.

Considering this could be better than his own miserable isolation on the island the fugitive read’s Morel’s secret ‘yellow papers’, notes about his time machine:

Methods to Achieve Sensory Perceptions, and Methods to Achieve and Retain such Perceptions.

Radio, televisions and the telephone are exclusively methods of achievement: motion pictures, photography, the phonograph and authentic archives—are all methods of achievement and retention. So then, all the machines that supply certain sensory needs are methods of achievement. It is possible that every need is basically spatial, that somewhere the image, the touch and the voice of those who are no longer alive must still exist.

NOTHING IS LOST

The television screen, the computer screen, the telephone screen—they are the mirrors. Le Mirroire....The entrance to another world.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* Luce Irigaray talks about the idea of a ‘concave mirror’—a mirror with a curved surface, which unlike the flat mirror of Lacanian ideology reflecting the male, would represent the inner specificity of the female body.

She says: “*In the specular surface will be found not the void of nothingness but the dazzle of multifaceted speleology. A scintillating and incandescent concavity.*”

A CAVE. I CAVE. SHE CAVES. WE CAVE.

30 years ago, I journeyed 7000 miles to the Tanzanian plains to find a cave and to record what mysteries were painted upon on its walls.

Stood alone inside the cave I wrote this in my notebook:

Entering you find the walls are filled with erotic drawings where the mouths and genitals of women have been replaced by orbs. In the pictures the women bend into awkward positions while staring in wonder as the spherical membranes appear and disappear. A small chorus stands by to scream and make feral vocal noises. These sculpted bubble visions fix their eyes, bow their backs, split their legs and fill their lungs. They speak of virgin birth, resistance, revolution, loss and death. Some have fine lines of invisible thread attached to other spheres that hover like silent UFOs bringing messages from other worlds.

Were these just Plato’s shadows I saw? Or Morel’s actors caught in their endless dance? I had come a long way to find them and I longed to enter their world—to be magically transported across millennia. To crack the code.

Time has brushed it wings.

We have just more formula left—a spell from a favourite travelling book: *Elementary Treatise on Practical Magic* written in 1893 by Papus—a book I often use for metaphysical journeys.

So here is a gift from me to you, a magic spell to conjure a wish. For this you will need to hold a stick or wand in your right hand, a twig, a paintbrush or even chopstick will do. I’ll leave the choreography up to you.

Good luck.

I conjure you, by the sacred names of

ya ya

he he he he

Va

Hyyyyyyyyyy

Ha Ha Va Va Va

An An An

Aie Aie Aie

El

Ay

Elibra

Eloim

We must, in this place, ask what we want

We must, in this place, ask what we want

We must, in this place, ask what we want