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Wizards: A History (review)

William Monster

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guilty. And unless we take those standards seriously, historical understanding of the history of witchcraft will remain elusive.

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P. G. MAXWELL-STUART. *Wizards: A History.* Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing, 2004. Pp. 222.

Recently, in a brief review for another journal of another work by the same author, with the same publisher and year of publication as this book, I called it "a brief and eclectic survey of a vast subject" where "pell-mell, one finds brief descriptions [of disparate material]," and further complained that its bibliography "avoids mentioning many modern classics on the subject." This tiger has obviously not changed his stripes, and has here produced yet another farrago with similar shortcomings.

The book provides a prime example of UK insularity by devoting its longest profiles to John Dee (pp. 90–100) and Aleister Crowley (181–92) and giving more space to an obscure late sixteenth-century *magus* from Aberdeen (138–41) than to Doctor Faustus (79–81); even its fictional protagonists tend to be British males, from Merlin to Gandolf or Harry Potter. If its longest section treats Renaissance magicians, one searches in vain for any trace of their greatest scourges, Johan Weyer or even Reginald Scot—perhaps the most prominent British absentee.

Like most male experts on this subject from the UK, Maxwell-Stuart seems ill at ease with the (elsewhere) much-discussed issue of shamanism. When he cannot completely avoid the term in connection with particular hypotheses (e.g., on p. 48), he skips past it in a phrase; another time (p. 138), he devotes two sentences to the protagonist of Wolfgang Behringer's *Shaman of Oberstdorf* without introducing shamanism. Similarly, Maxwell-Stuart (like some other male UK experts) shows little awareness of gender issues. For example, while emphasizing more than once (esp. p. 70) the quasi-sacerdotal clothes of his protagonists, he never connects this feature to the almost-complete invisibility of women from his collection of ancient and modern wizards until the twentieth century (pp. 195–99); and if Harry Potter gets four mentions in three different chapters, we are never told that his creator is female.

Maxwell-Stuart has obviously read widely about this subject, and he has produced worthwhile scholarship, including a useful abridged translation of Delrio's *Disquisitions on Magic*, and a study of Scottish witch trials, *Satan's*

Conspiracy, grounded in archival research. However, he also seems committed to churning out brief synthetic works like the one under review here at a breathless pace, at least one per year. The product may be based on broad learning, but is inevitably patchy. For example, in this volume the author is aware of multiple manuscript variants of the popular medieval manual entitled *Clavicula Salomonis* (see p. 71), but avoids any detailed discussion of this problem. His footnotes are scanty and sometimes vague; his bibliography displays a perverse refusal to mention some generally acknowledged classics appropriate for his particular chapters (e.g., he omits Fritz Graf on ancient magic, Richard Kieckhefer on medieval magic, D. P. Walker on spiritual and demonic magic during the Renaissance, and even overlooks the most recent academic treatment of the Order of the Golden Dawn, Alex Owen's *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*).

In the crucial aspect of weighing the veracity of preserved evidence, Maxwell-Stuart often pays insufficient attention to the complicated contexts from which accounts of magic might arise as he hurries on in his account. For example, his detailed portrait of a Roman Empire wizard, taken from the famous satirist Lucian (pp. 41–43), describes how the "master" ended his well-paid lessons by speaking too rapidly to be understood and then spitting three times into the neophyte's face, Nevertheless, Maxwell-Stuart concludes that Lucian's tale "does not appear to be exaggerated for comic or sarcastic effect." This confuses Dr. Pangloss with Immanuel Kant.

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RANDALL STYERS. *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. vi + 290.

The title of this book is somewhat misleading, as it does not deal directly with practitioners of magic, however defined, but rather explores the variety of ways in which the category of "magic" has been constructed as an Other by Western philosophers, natural and social scientists, and theologians in the modern era, and has been used in multiple settings and contexts as the foil for various definitions of modernity. In this regard, Styers offers an ambitious and fascinating survey of European intellectual history, in which the vantage point of magic allows him to explore and shed new light on a wide range of familiar issues. In particular, Styers explores the role of magic in the thought of such