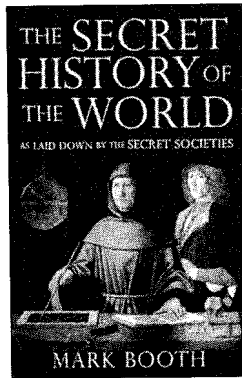


# Secrets, Secrets, Secrets

*The Secret History of the World: As Laid Down by the Secret Societies* by Mark Booth. London: Overlook, 2008. 512 pp., \$29.95. ISBN: 1590200314

B A R R E T T   B R O W N



THE YEAR'S MOST POPULAR treatise on magic-minded pseudohistory begins: "*The Secret History of the World* is a rude gesture in the face of the know-it-alls who make up our

intellectual elite, the control freaks who would decide what is acceptable for us all to think and believe." Thus far, the intellectual elite seems to have taken all of this in stride, but I thought

I'd take a closer read just in case they'd missed some particularly well-honed insult.

*The Secret History of the World* purports to serve as a sympathetic record

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of the esoteric beliefs that are allegedly common to Sufi mystics, Vatican insiders, Rosicrucian holdovers, and, of course, the Nine Unknown Men who secretly intervene in human affairs from their mountain hideout in Tibet or some such place, having been installed for the purpose by the Indian statesman Asoka.

Much of the information found therein, we are told by author and Random House imprint editor Mark Booth, was provided by an unexpected visitor to the lucky fellow's London office, "a man who was clearly of a different order of being" and who, in the tradition of such men, promptly began instructing Booth on those mystical secrets which have so long been hidden in plain view from humanity at large. The reader may suspect that we are being treated to the first of many cute metaphors. In fact, I know that the man in question does exist, as he recently paid me a visit in order to tell me a funny story about how he had recently shown up drunk at some London publishing house and convinced a resident editor that men used to be trees, and now the editor in question has an international bestseller under his belt. Then the mysterious man turned me into a dragon and I ate a bunch of people. All in all, it was a mysterious evening. Perhaps I shall write a book about it.

The first chapter of *Secret History* is entitled "In the Beginning" and subtitled "God Peers at His Reflection—The Looking-Glass Universe." It turns out that, in the beginning, God peered at his own reflection, this being a sort of looking-glass universe. By page 36, Booth is quoting Bob Dylan on the subject of how the hit-or-miss folk singer once obtained "power and dominion over spirits" and was thus able to effect some great and significant change in something that is here left unspecified.

By page 45, Booth has already resorted to pointing out that, every once in a while, "someone decides against boarding a plane, which then crashes," holding this up as further evidence of a magical universe, as if Bob Dylan's testimony had not already

convinced us. In much the same spirit, Booth asserts that it is "no accident that individuals like Pythagoras, Newton and Leibniz, those who have done most to help humanity get to grips with the reality of the physical universe, have also been deeply immersed in esoteric thought."

Whether or not it is an accident that hundreds of millions of other individuals who have done nothing at all for humanity have also been deeply immersed in esoteric thought is not addressed, no doubt due to space constraints.

Much of the book concerns itself with an account of how life once consisted of a sort of immaterial vegetable consciousness which existed as a neural web until such time as matter began to emerge from a universe which had previously consisted only of mind—vegetable mind, I suppose—at which point thought itself began to harden into what we now know as "reality" and humanity began the transition from a plant-like existence of unitary consciousness to some considerably more solid animal state in which the bones themselves, and the skull in particular, came about in order that they might contain our individual consciousnesses, separating them from the whole and making possible the distinct life and experience of the individual soul, which is itself intended to approach all other souls with a love that knows no boundaries, material or otherwise. But all of this is explained in an unnecessarily long and irritating way (like that previous sentence) that has the chief effect of prompting the reader to want to kill himself and everyone around him.

At some point, the pineal gland is identified as the Lantern of Osiris, a holdover from the plant era, which allows the individual to connect to the whole and that is known in other mystical traditions as the third eye. Snake-like protrusions extending from the headdress of Egyptian nobles in old wall paintings are identified with this Lantern of Osiris. Then the staff of Moses is identified with the Lantern of Osiris. Then a lamp mentioned by Job

is identified with the Lantern of Osiris, and then so is pretty much everything else that could possibly be compared to a lamp or a stick along with several things that one would ordinarily not go so far as to compare to a lamp or a stick or even a lamp-stick or stick-lamp.

After some hundred additional pages of unsummarizable something-or-other having to do with the birth of the universe and Saturn and the feminine attribute and evil, Booth begins his assault on recorded history. It is mentioned that Alexander the Great was told by the priests of Babylon that he would be cursed if he were to enter the city gates, that he did so anyway, and that he died two weeks later of a fever. It is not mentioned that Alexander's fever was preceded by a drinking bout prompted by the death of his boyfriend, which is odd, as this would have provided Booth with the chance to identify the young fellow with the Lamp of Osiris.

Midway through the book, it becomes evident that Booth is as confused about what he is writing as we are. He claims that, before Jesus, love only existed between members of families and tribes, with the aspect of "love as choice" not being available until such time as Jesus introduced it by way of, say, magic. But not 20 pages before, Booth himself had described Gilgamesh and Enkidu as "two fiercely loving friends." Elsewhere, Caesar is alleged to have "eradicated the Druids" due to their alleged belief in a returning sun god, though Booth does not explain how it is that the Druids managed to get themselves "eradicated" in the time of Caesar seeing as how they were clearly in existence for at least 100 years after his death, nor how Caesar would have found the time to eradicate them in order to suppress their beliefs when he was already so busy recording these very same beliefs in a typically respectful manner for publication in his *Commentaries*.

Towards the end of the book, Mother Goose is revealed to be Isis. I know of nothing to contradict this. ▼