

MARSEILLE

TAROT

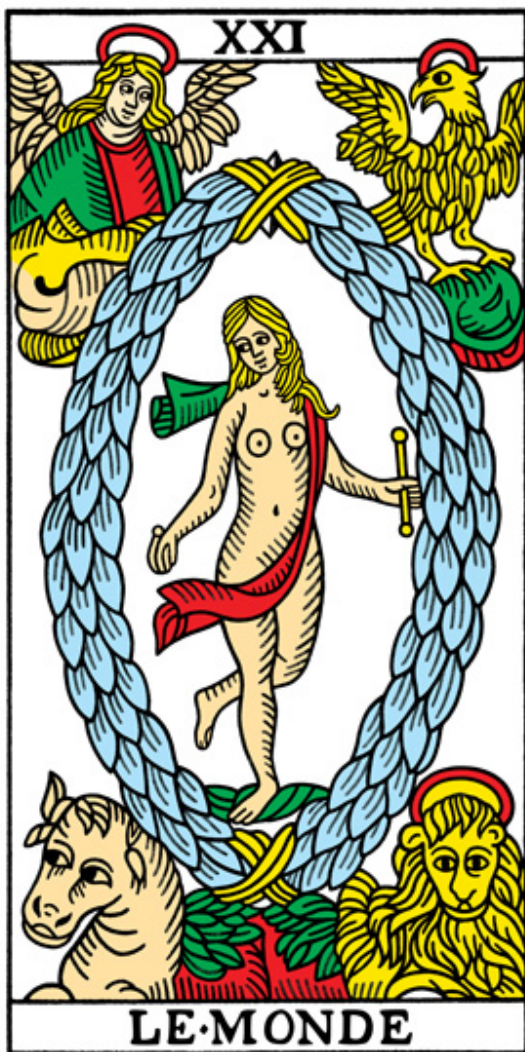


TOWARDS THE ART OF READING

CAMELIA ELIAS

MARSEILLE TAROT

Towards the art of reading



by
Camelia Elias

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EYECORNER PRESS

MARSEILLE TAROT: TOWARDS THE ART OF READING

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All the images of the Tarot cards featured in this book come from the original deck by the master card maker Carolus Zoya. Collector K. Frank Jensen has kindly given permission to reprint the images in this form.

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And last but not least, my thanks go to all the readers of *Taroflexions*, my cartomantic website. This book materialized because some of these readers have requested that I write it, putting together systematically the basic ideas behind my card readings that unavoidably end up floating in cyberspace.

I am blessed to have you all as my friends.

*In memoriam of my father,
mathematician and magician*

A QUESTION FOR A STORY

Divination forms a continuum, but we could say that at one pole there is "possession" and at the other "reading." By possession we mean that a god or some other spirit enters one's body and takes control – voice, gesture, words – all belong to the god. Reading is interpretive – that all the flowing occurrences of the world are a stream of messages. Somewhere in between, half possessed by fire, half swimming in a sea of total significance, there is inspiration.

Thus the seduction. Thus we eat. Thus we drink our mantic syrups. Nanabozho in the forest. Charlie Parker. Eric Dolphy. Tung Shan's Bird Path: extended hands that leave no trace.

– DALE PENDELL, *THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS*

Imagine this: You're sitting in a café with your cards on the table – though you may also be sitting in your parlor, your study, or in a chat room.

A curious woman approaches you – curiosity often being needed as a counter to the regular prejudice against people sitting in a café reading cards – and asks:

'Are those Tarot cards for consultation, or something else?'

You reply: 'They are for consultation and something else too.'

'Great', the woman says, and then hurriedly flings her question:

'What would the cards say that I need, if I wanted to focus on my relationship with my partner? What do I need to know where he is concerned?'

You lay down some cards and begin to tell a story. Suppose the cards are these:

Temperance, Strength, The Emperor



Your story takes shape, and the more you look at the cards, the more you find things to say, which you anchor in the context of the question. You find yourself saying the following, while urging the woman to pay attention and participate in the dialog with the cards:

'As you can clearly see, the cards indicate a shift in the power relations. Whereas in the past you and your partner were like two drops of water, flowing from two similar chalices, whatever equilibrium you have had, has now gone tilting. This is the current

situation: We go from the angel of Temperance to the woman of Force and finally to the man of action, the Emperor.'

'Something happened in the flow of your communication pattern that resulted in your overpowering your man. The woman in the middle card seizes an untamed lion. So we have here an indication of the man having been dominated with the consequence of regressing to a state that's now more animalistic and primitive. Quite literally this card shows how the woman struggles with getting the lion to receive something. She forces his mouth open. If we take Temperance with her water chalices into account, as the preceding card, we get the clear indication that the reason why the power relations have changed is because you tried to pour liquid into the lion's mouth. And he resisted.'

'Do you drink?'

'Yes, and I've said some unfortunate things to my partner which I now regret. My partner has turned his back to me, and I want to know if there's anything I can do to remedy the situation.'

'Look at the cards. If we follow the symmetry here, we have two possibilities: Either to see you give up fighting, and turn the lion into a bird on the Emperor's shield, or to see your partner as the Emperor, turning his back to you, as you said, and leaving behind any memory of his struggles with you, leaving behind only a trace as an imprint on his shield. It's your call to decide here who is who.'

'Yes, but the man is leaving, wouldn't you say?'

'It looks that way, but let's play some more. Let's look at another card from the pack, to see what the Emperor is up to, where he is headed.'

'Ay, an inflamed tower.'



'Yes, a broken Tower, XVI, featuring two people falling down from it. Clearly the two chalices in Temperance's hands, now turned into two people with broken necks, are not doing too fine. Broken vessels.'



'But let's play some more. Let's answer your question more concretely. Now we've seen what the situation is like, and we're also getting a sense of how you feel about it. Let's look also at what you need to do, and what you may want to avoid doing if we accept this situation as a possible, plausible, and probable scenario for you.'

'I can certainly relate. Why are the cards so precise?'

'Hold on to that question, but let's finish the job here first. Let's look at two cards. One on top of the string of three, indicating what to do, and one at bottom, indicating what not to do.'

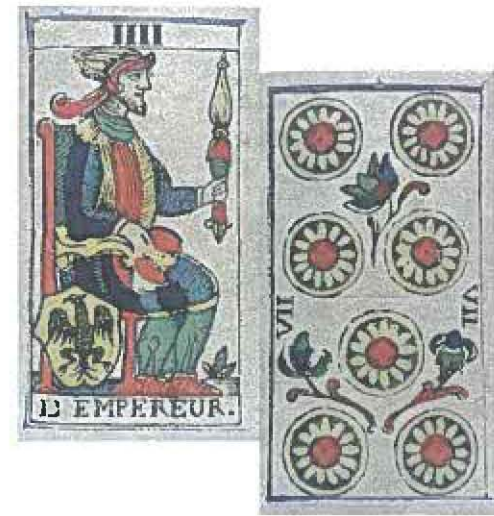
'The card on top, The Hanged Man, suggests waiting. Being suspended there by yet another unknown agency, The Hanged Man is not in the position to move, displaying impotence and immobility. The advice here is to embody what The Hanged Man does, namely, wait it out and hang in there, or dangle. This is not good news especially if you want to do something concrete. But then remember that waiting is also an act; one of the toughest acts, but often wiser than we think.



'This idea with waiting is supported by the card at bottom, on what not to do, namely, The Empress. Do not be the woman of action, the woman who is in charge, and who knows things and how to consecrate them. Do not be the professional, who seduces the man with her beauty and confidence. Do not embody the function of the Empress as the consort of the Emperor. He clearly has another agenda.'



'So far these cards do not indicate an uplifting situation. Alas. But let's play some more. Let's lay over the trump cards some of the number cards. Over the Emperor we get the 7 of Coins. This suggests that there's a material interest at stake, albeit not one that makes one too content. The card of 7 of Coins indicates a troubled purse. It looks like the Emperor is busy with developing a vision for a business plan as a strategy to remedy his tight financial situation. He is not concerned with emotional issues. Perhaps that's why we got The Hanged Man situation. You cannot ask people to assess their feelings when their focus is on money.'



'Over the Hanged Man we get the card of the 6 of Swords. This suggests a path that's not pleasant, a path that has pain in it, and one that may ask you to leave things behind.'



'Over the Empress I get the King of Coins. Supporting the position of DO NOT, this indicates a situation of avoiding dependency on powerful men with money.'



'Sometimes the Hanged Man is a good card, as it asks you to consider what regrets you may have, and whether they are of any use. It may show you a different reality, that of seeing things on their head. Ultimately this is a card of singular power and unique experience. This is not a card of sharing.'

'So, what you're saying basically is that I need to suspend all action, to detach myself, and let go of this relationship?'

'Yes, to the first, and no, not necessarily, to the latter. Hanging is hanging, and waiting to see how things develop does not necessarily imply giving up. It is true that the Emperor moving into a broken tower suggests the idea that he's actually contemplating a breaking-up of the relation, but you did not get this card to begin with.'

'The card of the Tower was not part of the main, first three cards on the table. Besides, just because he is thinking it, it does not necessarily mean that he will also go through with it. Though, indeed, by the time you're done waiting, you may think yourself that a break-up may be just what is needed. Remember that there are two people falling from the Tower. The two chalices turn into two fallen beings. Just as the Emperor may get the idea of a break-up, so may you. The lion in the middle card is a living thing. The bird on the cards of the imperial couple is an emblem. As such, the bird is a sign of relation but not one of concern, human touch, struggle with, or joy over. The bird on the shield is just symbolic capital. You may end up with exchanges of that sort, of the 7 of Coins sort, rather than anything that involves love or the well-being of your home.'

'I see, first we had balance, and now our ground is destabilized. It looks like we may both end up as each other's history'.

'Yes. That is a possibility. Therefore, then, perhaps what you want to focus on now is not what you had in the past, nor how you may be in the process of becoming history, but rather, on how you can get past what seems to be passing. You avoid feeling hurt if you let it all hang. Suspend your expectations.'

'Yes. This is all very clear. And the more I reflect on this, the more I can see that the wisest is perhaps to just monitor the situation, see it also from unconventional angles, and observe how it develops. Perhaps prepare to expiate too.'

'But back to my astonishment, before I go again, and thanks for reading the cards for me. How is it that the cards have managed to describe so accurately what I already feel I'm going through?'

'Now, that's the million dollar question, isn't it?'

There are many theories of why the Tarot cards are so apt in addressing just about any question. I don't think I have an answer to that. While I find all the theories fascinating, with claims ranging from the scientific approach to the statistical occurrence of the weird that is shown to be not so weird to the pseudo-scientific approach that sees the weird as some kind of holy woo, I prefer to adopt the position of keeping it simple and say the following: **If the cards address the querent's issues in a very direct manner, then they do so because there is a question to begin with.**

Context is everything, and just as we say about questions containing already half the answer, so we can say the same about the cards. If you have a specific question that you pose to the cards and the images that the cards present you with, whether abstract images or of a more archetypal or symbolic power, you will find the answer to your question as it unfolds from the question itself via these images. An image is a fluid thing, and so is our perception. The image can tumble a question, as it were, to use one of the popular internet metaphors for what we can do with images: tumble them in order to distill a meaning, or get an impression of the current state of the art, or whatever other theme we may be presented with.

Basically you can ask the Tarot anything: how to find your soul and purpose in life, your lost keys, or the Devil. The Marseille Tarot can show you what it takes for you to score that job interview you fear, or that significant other you have just met at the office. It can also teach you something about your blind spots. Where do you project, and is your perception of your situation 'reality'?

We can also predict events with the cards. But our predictions are always based on reading the cards rather than the future. People are divided on the question of predicting, some claiming that it is impossible, some insisting that they even have an average rate – the claim to the 90 percent accuracy always amuses me – and some avoiding the predicting idea altogether, focusing instead on the psychological game of suggestion.

As far as I am concerned, I'm for all of it, the whole shebang. If the cards indicate a future trajectory, very much like in the reading example above, then I point to it. The querent has ultimate agency, and my work is always based on fundamental trust. If a person comes to me for advice, then I trust the person to be able to reflect on what we're talking about. The cards can help people reflect on what is on their minds that, more often than not, they are either unable to fully identify, express, or articulate into words. But the cards can make it all 'real'. If you can see it, you can understand it. But what is it exactly that we're all seeing?

Instead of answering this question, some take the easy way out: 'I've been reading the Tarot for 40 years,' they'd say, and then claim reading competence in the name of longevity. And perhaps they have both, competence and experience. But how does this answer the question of seeing? What do you see, exactly? How do you put two and two together? What's your method? Some take an even easier way out: 'I'm a seventh generation psychic,' they'd say, and maybe that is also true. But, again, how does that answer the question of seeing? 'I'm seeing an angel to your left,' some would say, and it would simply be better for all the parties involved to either believe that or to split.

Without being judgmental of what people claim and what methods they employ in their readings, what I'm looking for my-

self in a Tarot reading is the ability to follow the reader's argument about how he or she got there, to the answer, or to the conclusion. My preference is for precision, and for the crisp and clear answer. I'm not fond of vague or general insights, however useful.

I want to believe in the plausibility of a situation, though 'believing' may not be the exactly right word here for my own expectations. In fact, I often tell people that the Tarot is not about believing in anything.

The Tarot is a visual and poetic language that enables us to respond to an embodied situation presented in the cards. We see what the characters are doing, and we are invited to imitate them. It's the best kind of learning. And often the wisest. The cards tell you what you already know and what you don't know. As soon as you see the relation between knowing and not knowing articulated in images, you get infinitely smarter. If I see something in the simple, but always to the point 3-card sequence, and go, 'now, why didn't I think of that one?', I'm happy. In this sense the cards are always right. If the outcome is 'wrong' it's only because I've missed something. And why are the cards right? Because they speak poetry. Because they invite me to 'look' rather than state an opinion. The cards offer magical solutions to real problems.

I like to say that fortunetelling participates in both, the creation of events and telling something about those events. As such, fortunetelling is above what we call 'accurate' or 'truthful' reading. The fortuneteller reads the cards, not the future, people, body language, and so on. And yet.

In the actual reading I began with here, I tried to demonstrate the quality of the exchange between myself and the woman I was reading the cards for, which had to do with her ability to fol-

low closely the sign posts I had for her. I tried to make it easy for her to follow the visual argument, as it was all based on making simple observations. Two chalices in the first card turned into two fallen people in the last card. The cards were symmetrical¹. They invited us to follow the rhyming scheme; the rising and falling tone in the lines, the one thing that stands out, or the fact that what is above is also below. This is a special quality that we find particularly in the Marseille Tarot². The elements in one card all seem to have a dynamic correspondence with the elements in another card.

The Marseille Tarot is very structural in this sense. Those familiar with the literary school of structuralism can see how in the visual language of the Marseille tarot, what we're dealing with is binary opposites and a relation of dependency. But here there's more to it than in a poem, or a novel that we can read from a structuralist point of view, where we observe the dominant

1 One of the best contemporary readers and conceptual philosophers on the Marseille Tarot, Enrique Enriquez, has advanced some of most convincing arguments as to when the Marseille Tarot is the most efficient, namely, precisely in the moment when we give up symbolism and esoteric knowledge in favor of what he calls the 'dumb reading'. He argues that it is observing the play of symmetry and the law of equivalence and exception in the cards that allows us to finally derive a useful understanding of what's going on. By looking at what's happening in the cards, describing the cards the dumb way, we get to stumble over the analogies that the elements in the cards invite us to consider as they relate to events in our own lives.

2 In my book here I will refer to the type of the Marseille pattern that has become the standard for divination, from the tarots of Jean Noblet (1650) and Jean Dodal (1701) to Nicolas Conver (1760). For a historical approach, and the claim that all the Marseille tarots are based on a pattern from Milan, or are variants of Florentine, Bolognese, Sicilian, and Ferrarese patterns, see Thierry Depaulis's two-part essays, 'The Tarot de Marseille: Facts and Fallacies' in *The Journal of the International Playing-Card Society*, Vol. 42, No. 1 and No.2, July-December 2013.

scheme of color, composition, and character, and how each relies on the condition for its existence on the other.

What we find in the Marseille Tarot is structure plus chance. The elements are always there, in each card, sometimes symmetrical and sometimes not, but insofar as we let the cards fall on the table at random, we find that the meaning that each pair of elements carries in every card is very much anchored in what we see happening in the card next to it. So symmetry works here because it is dependent on our recognition of similar patterns. Things are similar and equivalent until they are not anymore. Based on this fixed structure that is yet dependent on chance permutations we arrive at making perfectly commonsensical and logical inferences. When we see that the two chalices in the Temperance card turn into two fallen beings in the Tower card, we obviously don't conclude that this relation, if the question is about a relationship, is going well. Quite the contrary. And there is a certain thrill in pondering the very possibility even before a break-up has occurred, that it will occur.

What goes?

Generally, if people ask questions that have a future orientation and are pragmatic in kind, then I insist that I read what the cards say about that in the very present moment that I read them. If I say, 'the cards don't suggest that you'll be making a lot of money by selling crystals,' I urge people to heed attention, and perhaps try to change the lack of fortune by making some other concrete plans for survival in the here and now. I have as yet to hear that people have regretted that advice, though on occasion, I've had some become very upset by what they perceived was a

lack of support and compassion on my part when I suggested that they killed their darlings. But I'm not in the business of telling people, 'everything is awesome, go ahead with the hopeless plan', when that is not the case.

If people ask questions pertaining to their passions and purpose in life, in addition to what the cards concretely say about that, I may offer the type of counsel one encounters in the more academically consecrated circles, such as psychoanalysis. Usually I assess to what extent such contributions are either needed or relevant (my professional orientation here is primarily Lacanian). For a spiritual approach, I may employ core shamanism or other nature oriented solutions, from cunning-folk style to Druidism³.

A CUNNING-FOLK STORY ON POINT

The basic idea with participating in the creation of what I like to call 'useful stories' for people who need guidance rests on the premise that a pack of cards can be seen as a tool for describing that which we have no words for, but which we would like to see crystalize before our eyes. Many people walk around with vague feelings about love, money, work, and health. What the cards do, with their stylized suits representing each of these areas – cups, coins, batons, and spades respectively – is consolidate a way of articulating what needs to be questioned or addressed head on.

It has been my experience that in any reading with the Marseille Tarot – and any other pack of cards for that matter – after

3 My shamanic training and seidr practice have been consolidated through work with Annette Høst, Jonathan Horwitz, and the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies. I'm also a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids.

the job of describing what happens in the cards and how what is happening may relate to the events in people's lives for better or worse – the real work at stake is forming a synthesis. The idea is to make people process the information that the visual cues in the cards give them, so that it becomes knowledge about the situation at hand and what needs to be done.

My primary approach to reading the cards can be said to follow the cunning-folk approach, which is to say that everything I have to say about my method rests entirely on making logical inferences and keeping it close to nature. When I lay down three cards I simply like to see how we go from A to B. Why are cups associated with something good, friendship and love, and why are swords associated with the opposite? Can we trace the old and tried, basic meanings of the cards to an origin? How have the ones before us come up with the idea that we can create sentences based on the images we see? If I didn't have a question for the cards I started with above (Temperance, Force, Emperor, Tower), I'd say that if someone tried to pour too much liquid down a lion's mouth, they'd end with a drunken man who wouldn't even be able to find his own house without waking up the whole community. Four cards, one sentence.

Here my contention is that the meaning of the cards has developed in time in accordance with what we have come to observe about nature and its cycles. With a cup we celebrate and drink to our health and fortune. Water or wine makes our blood pulsate with life. With spades we dig the earth, where we can plant seeds, so tall trees can grow through the air. With the spades we can also kill. With batons we fight for our honor, or we build houses and communities. With coins we make transactions. We use our brains to devise strategies for selling and buying. I will say more about this in the chapter on the 4 suits.

WHY THIS BOOK

Up until quite recently I was still maintaining that writing a Tarot book wasn't something that interested me, given that I write extensively already on my cartomantic blog, *Taroflexions*⁴. The careful reader may indeed speculate: is there anything new here? For once, there is. This introduction is new. And so are all the individual stories of the trump cards. But I also have another answer. Firstly, I'd say, 'blame it on my students.' I have a few that I have been tutoring on a private basis, and they have been insisting that I gathered some essential ideas in a book together with a standard view of the cards the way I have come to understand them – something you won't find on *Taroflexions*.

Secondly, I've been involved in a series of teachings developed by Andrew Kyle McGregor, under the name of 'Tarot de Marseille for Modern Life: Five Modern Teachers'. Along with others, such as Enrique Enriquez, Yoav Ben-Dov, and Christophe Carrozza, I have been addressing all sorts of fascinating questions from people in an open class, questions that I found were similar to ones that I get from my private students.

Thirdly, every day I get an inquiry from someone out in the big wide world, who would like to know more about how I specifically juggle the cunning-folk meanings of the cards with the subjective kind of observation that I have developed over the years of reading the cards. So, indeed, perhaps this time is as good as any for a book that hopefully will consolidate what students want to know.

⁴ *Taroflexions* is my blog about reading cards: playing-cards, *Tarot de Marseille*, contemporary tarot, Lenormand cards, and some other oracles. I also write about magical discourses and the cross between poetry and divination. On occasion I write about horary astrology and talismanic magic.

My aim is to offer a fairly standard introduction to reading with the Marseille Tarot, going through the trump cards and the pip cards. This part will be a short intervention forming the middle part of the book, right after this introduction. The last part of the book will consist of reading samples, and will aim at demonstrating how we can get more precise in our readings. Most of what I will have to say about the cards is based on my own understanding of what I see happening in the cards. This understanding, however, has not been formed out of the blue, but is rather the result of some years of studying with both people in the public eye, and also some who prefer to remain anonymous.

Right from the outset I should mention that I combine two approaches based on my preference, on the one hand, for traditional meanings, derived from the logic of the cunning-folk methods and passed down mostly through oral transmission, and on the other hand, for following the visual argument in a card sequence. Now, some may be tempted to ask: 'If it's oral transmission that you'll be referring to, how do we know that you're not making things up? Indeed a legitimate question. To this I have this to say: there is no way of testing the veracity of whatever information gets passed down to us from the so-called 'generations of readers,' other than to point to what makes sense and what doesn't; what works and what doesn't; what's logical and what's not.

Reading cards is no different than reading the signs in the street. While we don't question the signs in the street, we are free to think about the history of the meaning of the traffic lights, where that meaning comes from, and what it is based on.

The same with the cards. It's all semiotics. All you need is a system in order to both decode and then encode what you need in order to create a story. Without a system there's no divination. At the other end, what the persons receiving your story based on 'their' cards make of it is really something beyond your control. As far as I'm concerned, I engage with the following: I observe both traditions: the one that follows the tested methods of the ones that came before me, and the one that relies entirely on my own capacity to pay attention. For instance, how can the geometrical arrangement of the coins on the 9 of Coins mean something other than the traditional 'change in the financial situation,' when, say, the card happens to be next to the Queen of Cups?

My aim here is not only to offer an idea for what each trump or group of pip cards may mean, but also to offer a reading connected with the description of the cards, so that the reader can see how the cards play in action their solutions or answers to a specific question. In fact, this approach here is motivated by what I have identified as a lack in the market for Tarot books, namely the fact that while we are not missing any introductions, some better than others, we are sorely missing books that show us how authors *actually* read the cards that they describe.

My own work on *Taroflexions* has tried to bridge this gap, and I have always insisted on showing how one reads the cards, either as they are positioned in spread layouts – going from simple spreads to grand tableaux (the latter for readings with playing cards, Lenormand cards, and other oracles) – or as they avoid positionality. Reading cards that follows no spread at all has often led to confusion and the realization that it is crucial to figure out how we determine agency. For instance, one of the main things that I have been teaching is how to recognize who is who, and

who is doing what to whom in a string of cards, when the cards are not assigned positional meanings beforehand.

This approach to the cards, diving straight into the image world, can be quite challenging, as you never know what you stumble over in the woods, but it can also be rewarding, as it flexes your brain into figuring out what to make of all the permutations possible. When can a male querent, for instance, also be the Empress? Are the court cards aspects of ourselves or are they other people? Which situation is more plausible than the other?

Reading cards outside of the popular Celtic Cross spread has been promoted by a few influential people, and it is my aim here to continue their work. On this, I find Enrique Enriquez's books on the Tarot⁵ among the very best. As he uses the old-fashioned cartomantic tradition, everything he says about the Tarot can go back to being applied to reading with playing-cards and the Lenormand cards in a fresh and original way⁶.

Another one who reads cards like a true devil is the famous Italian fiction writer, Italo Calvino. His book, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1969) is the best manual in tarot readings. Along the same lines, I'd also recommend the work of Tchalai Unger⁷, especially for those interested in working with the Marseille Tarot on the suggestive level. Her idea with grouping details, becoming a voyeur – 'sizing up' the genitals in the Devil card – measuring the wall in the Sun card and then comparing it to the tall buildings in La Maison Dieu (The Tower) and La Lune (The Moon) is very useful.

5 See particularly *Tarology* (2011), and the tarot interview books, *En Terex It*, and *Ex Itent Er* (2012).

6 For a peep into Enriquez's method, you may also like to read my introduction to his first volume of interviews, 'HE RECO ME: Enrique Enriquez's Poetics of Divination', and Bent Sørensen's intro to volume 2, 'TAR O TART: The Entries and Exits of Enrique Enriquez.'

7 *El Tarot*, (1985), Editiones Obelisco.

Answering questions for yourself, such as, why the Popess is the biggest figure among all the other figures on the cards, makes one think of the value of perception. Unger's basic idea is that we must all develop a dynamic sense of looking. Here we share the notion that what makes a good reader is the ability to pay attention to details. Imposed meanings are not nearly as interesting as derived meanings. You can only derive meanings from the cards if you care to look at the cards very closely. Give yourself time, though this is exactly the hardest part.

STORY OR HISTORY

In this book I will not concern myself with the history of the Tarot, nor will I do a strictly standard introduction to the cards. What I am interested in is *reading* the cards, and perhaps in the process say something about why the Marseille Tarot gives us very direct and precise answers to whatever we want to know. However, the reason why I want to bother at all with saying something about the trumps, and then the groups of court cards and number cards, is because I want to familiarize the reader with some set traditional meanings for the cards as they also relate particularly to health issues. This is one of the areas that at least some of my students never want to approach. And why not?

For these traditional meanings I follow primarily the French authors, Colette Silvestre and Georges Muchery⁸. Although I do not use their esoteric correspondences, such as, for instance, the

8 They have both written numerous books on the Tarot (not translated into English), and they can all be used as reference books. I would, however single out here, Muchery's *Le Tarot Divinatoire: Méthode complète et Pratique* (1954), Editions du Chariot, and Silvestre's *L'essentiel du Tarot* (1998), Arkhana Vox.

story of colors as they correspond to planetary magic, I go with the way in which they have been inspired by fortunetelling with playing cards, a method that was passed down to us mostly orally, and which seems to have universal resonances. In Romania, my country of origin, I have seen people reading cards in the same way the French do or the Germans do, when they make recourse to common sense rather than the teachings of secret societies. I appreciate especially the way Silvestre delivers answers to questions without at the same time lecturing on hermetic history and its systems of correspondences.

In my reading of the number cards, I follow strictly the cunning-folk method, rather than the esoteric (which Colette Silvestre displays to a lesser extent than Muchery). One author who comes closest to what I do is here, namely, focus on the logic of the cards, is Dawn Jackson. Some time ago Jackson was writing a book on the 'hedgewytc' method for reading with the playing cards – famous for a while on fora such as Aeclectic Tarot – but unfortunately, due to a heavy plagiarizing war and illness that plagued her, she never published the material that she had made available on her website, now, unfortunately also quite defunct.

A word on why not history. As I go along, although I will make references to historical data when relevant, I want to say that I am not interested in getting caught in my own fallacies regarding the distinction between a tarot reader and a tarot historian. I do not feel the urge or the need to square off against 'historical research' on the cards, simply because some historians see it fit to call my bluff, thereby assuming the position of superiority: tarot historian above tarot reader. I see divination with the cards as quite a different discipline than the history of the cards, and I see

my job as a reader of cards as quite different than the job the historian may perform.

I have to say that I have been quite amused by the recent distinction between a 'tarotist' and a 'tarologue' that the historian Thierry Depaulis made in his essay, 'The Tarot de Marseille: Facts and Fallacies,' mentioned here already in a footnote. While Depaulis clearly keeps the different fields apart, in his definitions he lumps together the tarotist, the tarologue, and the historian, forgetting that the first two are more interested in storytelling and semiotics than 'facts' about the cards. The tarotists value what the cards whisper, the poetry of the so-called language of the birds. This is basically the visual language of the Marseille Tarot as it operates with metaphor and analogy, similitude and repetition, rhyme and reason. Depaulis fails to see the attraction here when he goes:

'Tarotists' are people who still believe the Tarot is a 'secret code', which they try to 'decipher'. They never do any historical research, they rarely visit libraries, and less so record offices. They often have read Dummett, at least through Google Books 'snippets', they however set up their own theories, unendlessly speculating on whatever new idea they might have had. (Which are not all stupid...) Contrary to 'Tarotists', who are sincere and unselfish, 'Tarologues' are those who 'know'. They have found the 'keys' to the Tarot, and they therefore feel allowed to sell them. Of course they do not care of any historical research. 'Tarotists' and 'Tarologues' share a common love of the Tarot de Marseille.⁹

I find Depaulis's distinction between a tarotist and a tarologue misplaced and misguided. As a historian he should know better

9 See *The Journal of the International Playing-Card Society*, Vol. 42, No. 1, July-Sept. 2013, p. 23.

than to generalize. What he is saying here is basically that all tarot readers are criminals. He presupposes also that a historian is superior to a tarot reader. Why? Why compare them? They are not performing the same job.

A tarot reader tells a story about the self and the self in context. A historian tells a story about what the self does with certain objects and in a certain context. The bottom line is that he fails to make the finer distinction too between the way in which a tarot reader tells stories and the way in which a historian does the same. And let's face it, just because a historian tells a story of facts, it doesn't always make the facts absolute. More often than not we find precisely in history departments historians contesting each other's facts. So much for the 'truth'. Depaulis may have a point, but the truth is that there are many out there who can do both: tell stories WITH the cards and ABOUT the cards without compromising any of the two distinct narratives.

Indeed, if I want to square off against anything here, then it would be this kind of limited vision. Some of us simply want to look at what stories emerge from putting cards together, rather than checking the factual accuracy of patterns on the back of the cards, or whether this Popess from 1767 has more folds in her dress than her earlier counterpart. While such details can disclose interesting historical times, they do not necessarily lend themselves to a poetic appreciation of the cards, their prophetic voice, and their cultural significance in the venerable business of 'know thyself'. But speaking for myself here, I could, in fact, say that pushing the narrative-of-the-self agenda in a poetic way has taught me one valuable lesson, namely, that knowing myself has consequences for the way in which I also know my place. How to know my place has now become a primary focus in my teachings.

STRUCTURING THE SET

The structure of my book after this introduction is as follows:

- Trumps and Suits (two part descriptions of the cards, followed by examples of readings.
- Readings of various spreads.
- Concluding remarks on the art of reading the cards: why we

want to do it, and what we can do to get great results in our interaction with the people we read the cards for. The idea here is also to say something about how to feel good when we create a space that we can both inhabit, the reader and the sitter.

All the examples I draw on come from real-life reading situations. I am ever thankful to all those who gave me permission to use their questions and the points I've made connected to their readings. Unless otherwise credited, all the readings of the cards presented here are based on my own personal ideas, opinions, and experience. I try also not to have any overlaps with the material on *Taroflexions*, save for the short, yet updated here description of the logic of the pip cards. The writing in general combines my competencies, both as they are consecrated in the university and as they are the result of studying with private masters.

Primarily, the impetus for my writing is the idea that allowing images to tell me a story about myself is a beautiful thing. Not only is this beautiful, but reading cards also has the function of countering our cultural predispositions. The suggestions from the cards don't always follow the rules of society, and that is a good thing. Sometimes we need a little bit of freedom, we need a break from whatever societal constraints we may come up against and which may keep us in a place that's not our own or of our own making. The cards ring the bell of poetic alternatives.

The *Tarot de Marseille* deck used here is an old, original deck in the collection of K. Frank Jensen. We don't know much about the card maker, Carolus Zoya in Turin. He may have been associated with an atelier in Montanaro, in around 1748–1749¹⁰, but the name engraved on the card of Two of Coins is hardly ever mentioned or referred to in any of the historical sources I have had access to. We know of the printing house Zoya in Milan associated with the tarot of François Carrajat (ca. 1780 or 1794), but the name Carolus, or Carlo appears on no other cards than on the ones I'm sitting with. Was Carolus the engraver of this deck, or was he working with older woodblocks? We simply don't know.



¹⁰ In his 'Cartes et cartiers dans les anciens états de Savoie (1400-1860)' Thierry Depaulis makes a short reference to one AG Zoja, active in either 1748 or 1749 in Montanaro (*Journal of the international playing-card society*, Nr. 4, April 2005, p. 47). But is this 'AG Zoja' our Carolus Zoya, or a family relation? We don't know. In a private correspondence between Jensen and Riccardo Minetti (of Lo Scarabeo), Minetti speculates that the famous printing house Zoya in Milan may have moved part of the business to Turin, though the Turin archives make no mention of Zoya at all. Stuart Kaplan's *Encyclopedia of Tarot* makes a passing reference to Zoya in connection with the Carrajat tarot (p. 326).

In my descriptions of the cards, I take a poetic approach when I try to imagine having a conversation with Carolus Zoya, assuming also that this deck here originates with him.

K. Frank Jensen estimates that the deck he has, an extremely rare one, is probably from around 1800. The deck has escaped being stamped, which is the reason why we don't know much about it, and why we now have a very odd-looking King of Batons, featuring a huge white round space over most of his belly.

The irony of virility: to have it zeroed.

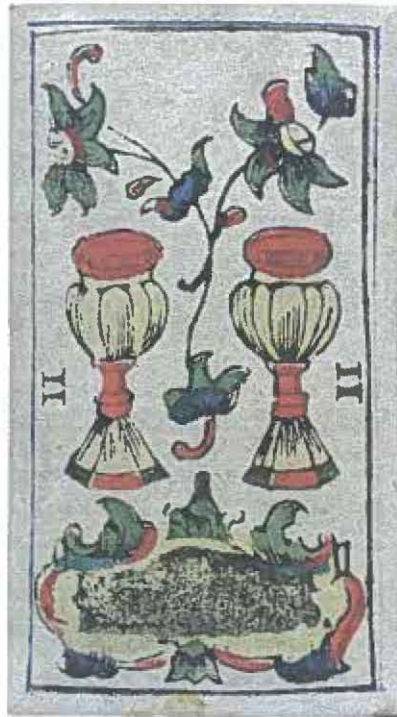


In a way, I have to admit that if it hadn't been for this deck, I would not have written a Marseille Tarot book. Why would I, when others have already done a pretty good job at it? But then it looks like Carolus Zoya had other plans for me. Frank's wife, Witta, an artist and a magical person, said to me that this deck came straight from the atelier, and that no one before me had ever laid their divinatory hands on it. I like this possibility and the sugges-

tion that what I'm writing here is perhaps also an alternative history of Carolus Zoya, prompted by the questions: What was he thinking of? What was he afraid of?

I thank Frank for lending me this deck to play with and to use here. A truly amazing treat. I'm honored to be able to share it with you all. Enjoy this deck, then, that very few have seen, and enjoy the Marseille ride with it.

But not before I express a major thank you to all who have insisted that I write this book. It actually felt quite good writing it. I can only hope that in the process I've honored people's needs as well as the knowledge that was made available to us throughout the ages, in some form or another.



THE TRUMPS

Make things as simple as possible, but not any simpler.

— ALBERT EINSTEIN —



In the following pages, I offer first an introduction to the Marseille Tarot cards combined with readings of the cards in context. For each description there's an interpretation that combines the cunning-folk method of reading the cards – based on making logical inferences about the meaning of the cards – and the visual argument method, which relies on the subjective and individual art of perceiving. The last part will feature full-length readings, based on real-life tarot consultations.

In my reading examples, both here in the descriptions of the trumps and then later in the remaining chapters, I aim to suggest four basic questions:

- Why do we read cards?
- What's so special about the Marseille Tarot?
- How can the cards uncover our blind spots?
- What does it mean to live a magical life, when we allow the stories that the cards tell us to offer solutions to our real problems?

As you will soon discover, I don't start with any symbolic meanings attributed to the cards. I may arrive at symbolic associations, but these will be clearly anchored in what we can all see at the indexical level, that is, the level associated with the first order of signification. What do we see in the card?

For instance, when we look at the card of the Emperor, we don't see 'a powerful man'. The 'powerful man' idea is a symbolic derivation of what we actually see on the card: A man wearing an official costume, sitting on a throne, with a crown on his head, and a big scepter in his hand. 'Is this man a worker in the field or a leader?' Given our cultural competence to recognize 'types,' we

will invariably answer: 'this man looks like a leader.' What do we know of leaders? They create agendas for others to follow. Can this mean that a leader is powerful? Indeed it can.

Bypassing the symbolic readings follows this pedestrian approach to the image. And why is this approach useful? Why is asking 'dumb' questions useful? Why is taking this childish approach to the cards useful?

The Zen masters have a saying about how we can arrive at understanding the world and its complex relations: 'have a beginner's mind,' they say, rightly suggesting that we can only understand things as they are if we are non-prejudiced, or if we are free of cultural pre-conceptions. Symbols are powerful tools, but how useful is it to ventriloquize the same old idea in and out of context, without having a good grasp of what underlies its content?

In my opinion, while symbolic readings of the cards may yield interesting insights, they are not as precise when we want to address an issue head-on. The symbolic readings tend to be repetitive and trite, general and vague.

In the next pages you will find stories about the images that Carolus Zoya made. These stories are all based on first hand observations of the following main categories:

- Embodiment (human, animal, celestial)
- Function (to lead, to split, to cut, to illuminate)
- Gesture (sitting, walking, pointing, howling)
- Voice (silence, loudness, beyond the verbal)

WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

After each description comes a reading of three cards. These are based on real-life readings for people who have come my way. As you will notice, there's always a question before. I like to say that I never read the cards without a question. As already stated in the introduction, the question is crucial for the level of precision that we end up delivering when we read the cards.

The type of questions that people ask displays concerns that range from the physical to the metaphysical. The only rule is specificity, and perhaps giving preference to open-endedness. An open-ended question is better than a yes/no question, as it yields more information. For instance, instead of asking: 'will I get this job?' (yes, no), I often tell people that they will get more out of the cards if they asked: 'what will it take for me to get this job?' or something similar.

Sometimes a question can disclose some anxiety in terms of people's knowing what they really want to know. Often this is the hardest aspect that most don't know how to tackle or confront head-on. For instance, when people want to know something about the way in which their extra-marital relationship is going, they have a way of formulating their question in the form of projection: 'I'm married and she is married, and this relationship isn't going anywhere, but we're very attracted to each other, and I just want to know if this is a test'. Now, such a question, while kosher enough, clearly displays several aspects at stake. The sitter's suggestion that a test may be at play is interesting to consider, granted the belief that the cards have a way of getting around such involved issues. But a good reader will instantly spot what the sitter really wants to know and will take that into account,

without, however, disregarding the other convoluted idea. For a reader it's always fascinating to see how the cards themselves rise to the challenge, so to speak, yet recognizing the different layers within a question in play may require some practice. Ultimately here, my advice is always to keep the narratives apart, and address the individual issues in the order in which they are presented in the question, even though something else may be at stake.

ETHICS

Another concern regarding posing questions has been the ethical stance. Is it all right to ask questions on behalf of a third party? Is it nice to stick your curious nose into other people's cauldrons? 'What does he think of me?' is a classic. The camps are divided on this. The ones into reviving the fortunetelling tradition – not that it needs reviving, but some are eagerly reinventing the spoon – don't give a damn. The ones into spiritual growth will instruct you that you had better stick to your own. I have no opinion about either of these positions, simply because I don't think that it's for me to judge what others find appropriate for themselves to know. I answer all the questions, and I don't even flinch when someone wants to know whether they will meet the Devil or not. From a storytelling perspective all questions are good beginnings. They are all fascinating and worth answering. The ideal is to begin in tolerance and end in balance.

In the last part of this book I will develop more the importance of a good question. Meanwhile, all the interpretations I offer here, including the suggestions for card combinations, are entirely my own. From the numerous readings I have done for people, I

have selected among the ones that feature the card in focus here, the described trump. If you've already had some practice with the cards, then you are already accustomed to seeing how often, in fact, just the card that seems to describe the sitter's exact situation, pops on the table and insists on being part of the string of cards. In the last chapters of the book I will, however, present the reader with other possibilities as well.

Let's see now how the cards speak, and what we make of it.



I · LE BATELLEUR · THE MAGICIAN

We find street jugglers in the streets. But here we notice that our young man stands by his three-legged table in an open landscape. Fire comes out of his right foot, as the color red flows out or it, while his left foot steps on green grass. The two legs anchored in two different energies are also divided by barren land. What can we make of this? And *can* we make anything out of this?

The art of paying attention begins with describing what we see in each card. The idea is not to describe everything, but rather to let our eyes wonder through the landscape of details in accordance with what we have on our minds at the time of reading with this card.

Traditionally, The Magician is just that, a magician who participates in derailing our sense of reality. We think that what we see is what we get, but not quite so. And yet, after it has been disclosed that it's all a trick, who can argue that the experience of seeing the baton turn into a coin is not real? Because it's impossible? The Magician demonstrates that it is not.

The function of the Magician is to make us question everything, including why we may feel uneasy about being conned. But we are also meant to question why we like being conned. Indeed, what if the illusion of reality is more interesting than the real? What is the real?

The Magician can give us a headache. The mind is high strung when this card is present. How about winding down the stress?

A woman asks:
'Can I trust my partner?'

Three cards fall on the table:
The Hermit, The Magician, The Fool



'You can trust your partner to make you believe things. But are your beliefs *reality*? Follow the Hermit's lead. Take a walk alone, or with a familiar, and enjoy what comes your way. Don't speculate. Just perceive freely. There will always be a divide between us. To each their own. Some walk on fire, some on grass. Reality is what we each make of it. The Magician shows us that. He is his own man. You want a relationship with him? Tough luck. Learn that seeing and thinking are two different things.'

Keywords:
Control, Vigilance, Ingenuity, Calculation, Ruthlessness

Function:
Cunning Man, Self-interest, Bluffing

Health indicators:
Stress, nervous agitation, migraines

Public life:
With the Emperor: Investor
With the Popess: Student
With the Wheel of Fortune: Professional gambler
With Judgement: Public Relations director
With the Moon: Sorcerer
With the Sun: Chef
With the Hanged Man: Spy
With the Tower: Real estate agent
With the Star: Playboy



II · LA PAPESSE · THE POPESS

Not long ago I was having a conversation with author and friend, Enrique Enriquez. He said to me the following: 'For me, reading the Tarot means giving people an idea to work with, to think about'. I think that not only is this idea beautiful, but it makes me think of the implications of what it is we're doing here, when we read the cards for other people.

The second card, the Popess, invites us to think about that. While holding her book, she looks at us, but in a way that is also past us, or through us. What is there beyond our physical presence? The Popess has done her work of reading, writing, and perhaps understanding what the whole idea with living is. Her gaze into the void suggests that she knows how to focus, go Zen if

necessary. Discern between the situations: When to speak and when to hold it. One can sense here the same type of calculation that the Magician is capable of, but we do not detect the same desire for physical action, self-expression or self-interest. Quite the opposite: this woman will not reveal anything beyond the boundaries of her veils. A kept secret is a good secret.

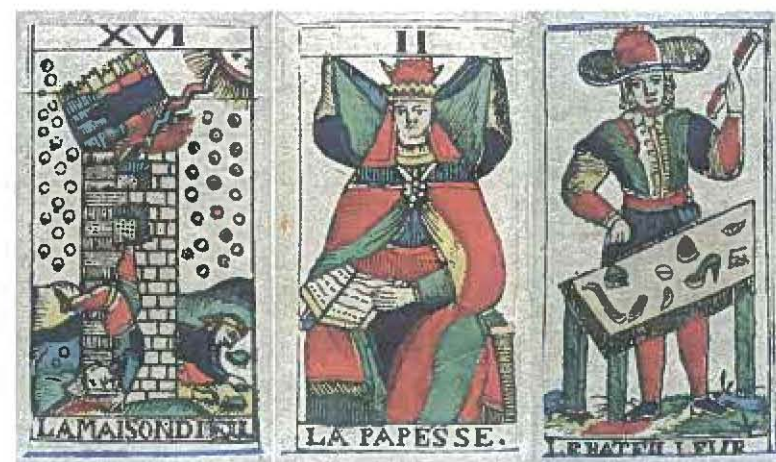
I've always wondered why traditionally we associate the Popess with afflictions of the urinary and genital type. But by looking at this card, it becomes obvious. Sitting there for hours on end, preoccupied with her book and what to make of it, she can easily forget to go to the bathroom. And who has time for sex and its natural consequence, children? Not this one.

A man wants to know:

'How can my wife and I be on the same page?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Tower, The Popess, The Magician



'It's difficult: Too much yelling and bruised egos. Rise above the idea that you absolutely must talk about common aims. You'll never agree on it. Rather, concentrate on what you can put into it the individual way. Allow yourselves to be two distinct voices and forces. Have size.'

Keywords:

Knowledge, Book-keeping, Discretion, Confirms pregnancy

Function:

Cunning Woman, Study

Health indicators:

Genital and urinary problems, Infertility

Public life:

- With the Emperor: Finance minister
- With the Moon: Psychologist
- With Death: Undertaker
- With the Devil: Witch
- With the Pope: Occultist
- With Temperance: Pharmacist
- With the Star: Shaman
- With the Tower: Clairvoyant



III · L'EMPERATRICE · THE EMPRESS

The Popess's veils have been parted. And what do we see? A red dot on the right side of the Empress's chest. Is that what I think it is? Here's a woman who wants to let us in on her secrets. Unlike the Popess, this one wants to both show and tell.

She is an empress. We know this by looking at the imperial signs symbolized by the emblem of the bird on her crest. We make the following inferences based on our cultural competence: reputation, established, sits on throne, confident, issues orders and is not afraid of delegating tasks, dresses well and to the point. She is a woman of social functions, and plays them well within her context. She knows context and what to do with it. It's her specialty.

This woman has accomplished things. But is it enough? Why is she displaying a red nipple through her dress? Traditionally, this is the mother. But I don't see any children around nagging her. I get the point about her being the consort of the Emperor, and as a good girl, she must have said 'yes' unhesitatingly when he popped the question. I get the point about *status quo*, getting the moon and having it all: a man, a house, children, and a satisfying job. But here she is depicted more as a woman of her own. She decides what's what. She holds the scepter. The Empress is a woman who can also say 'no'. Or she can say 'yes' to things that may be more than conventional. I like her for her ideas.

A woman wants to know:
'I'm not sure I have clarity on what to do next. Is there something that needs resolving before I get on with the program?'

Three cards fall on the table:
The Devil, The Empress, The Lovers



'Inactive imps turn into active women. It looks like the strong leader that you are will listen today, though the question remains: is it a good idea to give up your throne? I guess it depends on how obsessed you are about getting things done. Listen first, and then make a decision.'

Keywords:

Consecrated knowledge, Communication, Care, Travel, Art

Function:

Woman of action, Seducer, Mother

Health indicators:

Emotional, physical, and mental stress, ovarian issues

Public life:

- With the Magician: Syndicalist
- With the Hermit: Mentor
- With the Moon: Housewife
- With Strength: Celebrity
- With the Devil: Prostitute
- With Temperance: Medical doctor
- With Tower: Prison guard
- With Justice: Judge
- With the Sun: Travel agent
- With the World: Ambassador



IIII · L'EMPEREUR · THE EMPEROR

Another figure sitting, suggesting stability and accomplishment. Though here, unlike in the card of the Empress, we get a sense of movement. The scepter going forward makes us think of the Emperor's attitude. He may not have his index finger pointed at us, but the idea is the same: 'Now listen.' This presupposes that the Emperor has an audience. The scepter is quite big, suggesting that if the audience is unruly, there'll be consequences. You don't want to cross the Emperor, unless you yourself hold a bigger stick in your hand, or a sword.

The Emperor is a man of action. Traditionally, he is also the father. He maintains law and order on the domestic front. He always has a plan and realizes it. He doesn't dillydally and hardly

hesitates, though he has a conservative bent. He is not keen on changes to the *status quo*, rather, he will do anything to keep it. He likes his image, and probably also thinks that form is everything. His wife and children are 'realizations'.

He gets easily irritated, and is often afflicted with high blood pressure. Anyone suggesting ideas that he does not want to endorse will make him use his dominant power. He is not very flexible, though he may be relaxed, simply because his high position in society – being above having to prove himself all the time – allows him to appear cool. Hence, he may actually want to listen to others, and not just have others listen to him. He values competence and serious work. He is the patriarch, for better or worse.

A man asks:

'I'm planning a major pagan festival.

What are the challenges I will be up against?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Empress, The Popess, The Emperor



'The potential danger is to be found with the women involved. They may get into a fight, with deadly consequences. They are competing for who is to be the boss, who is to be more controlling and full of ideas or more spiritual. The Empress wants to rule over the Popess with her big scepter, but the Popess knows what she knows. She won't budge. Her knowledge is higher than that of the woman who is good at organizing and communicating and who sits on a throne that's been consecrated by the public. They don't seem to communicate. They don't face each other, so neither is interested in any compromise. Thus, the tension is created by the opposition between the spiritual women and the pragmatic ones. Your task is to distribute the work clearly and set some boundaries.'

Keywords:

Rulership, Dominance

Function:

Man of action, Executive, Father

Health indicators:

High blood pressure

Public life:

- With Justice: Executor
- With the Popess: Assessor
- With the Tower: Constructions engineer
- With Strength: Hunter
- With Judgement: Music manager or producer
- With the Pope: School inspector



V · LE PAPE · THE POPE

A man stands in front of a kneeling crowd. Behind him there are two tall columns, suggestive of old temples. A triple crown sits on his head. With one hand he holds an embellished staff, while with the other he makes a sign of blessing.

What you notice here is hands, including the invisible ones, the ones of the disciples, and what we can only imagine are hands held in a reverential, praying position, or a position of reception.

People in a religious congregation often offer their hands to Spirit. They want to receive blessings, or else they pray for blessings. The Pope here ensures that every person gets comforted in his or her hopes and beliefs. Society has consecrated the Pope as a spiritual leader, and that is the primary role he fulfills.

The Pope is a calm man. The only affliction he might suffer from is loss of temper. Good mental balance is maintained if you're able to display patience. The Pope is a man of the church, who is paid for his patience and for his ability to mediate between the heavens and the earth. What he says rings true for many.

The Pope is the subtle diplomat and teacher. He is a great counselor. Dogmatic in his views, he makes sure that people understand why society places certain demands on them, and that they must take it all with good humor and in good stride. The idea is to rise above mundane issues and get more spiritual than material. A tall order, if you don't agree with societal and dogmatic rules.

A woman wants to know:
 'I've met this man I'm having doubts about, particularly his character. Can the cards indicate something about his virtues?

Three cards fall on the table:
The Pope, The Magician, Death



'Your man likes to preach. But his taking the high road is informed by double standards. He is quite deadly in defending his ideas, which are morally corrupt. But to answer the question more concretely: what virtue is there in this man, a hypocrite? That would be for you to decide, given these cards. Suffice it to say, however, that perhaps sometimes we need to sell bullshit, while also cutting it to the bones. It's not sure we can survive in the long run, but at least there's an incentive, and the aptitude to make it appear as if everything is under control. The blessing hand that turns into a sleight of hand can undercut our perception of what's real. There can be virtue in the ideal that gets us through, or in the end that justifies the means.'

Keywords:
 Spirituality, Gatekeeper

Function:
 Man of ritual, Mediator

Health indicators:
 Mental imbalance, Insomnia

Public life:
 With the Moon: Psychoanalyst
 With the Hanged Man: Mystic
 With the Devil: Occultist
 With the Hermit: Retreat organizer
 With the Empress: Cultural attaché
 With the World: Pilgrimage agent
 With the Star: A poet



VI · LESAMOREUX · THE LOVERS

A man stands between two women. Cupid shoots for the woman on the left, wearing a crown. The man clearly indicates that he favors the woman on the right, what with his hand over her crotch. What's going on here? Is he going against fate? Is he trying to argue, why this one and why not the other one? Can he even make up his mind about it?

The woman on the left has a rather large split in her dress, and at the top of its triangle we find the same intriguing red dot that we find on the bare breasts of almost all the female figures in this deck. Whatever the deck's maker was thinking, it's clear that Carolus Zoya didn't follow any conventions. This is the only Marseille type deck I know of that features, for instance, eight cards with

figures revealing their naked breasts in plain view, including Justice, the Queen of Batons, and the Devil.

But the sexual connotation here is subtler. Perhaps this is not even about sex at all. If we look closer, we can clearly see that the Lover feels ambushed and powerless. The women grab him by his shoulders, allowing him little movement. Before you know it, he's going to faint, like an anemic teenager. What force does he have, unless there's virtue in hesitating, in not knowing? Other readers want to see in this card the advice to follow your heart. But how can you, when you are not in control over your heart? It's not logically possible. A nasty card, I always thought.

A man wants to know:

'I'm torn between doing the right thing for my family and following my heart. I'm lying all the time. What is real?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Popess, The Moon, The Lovers



'What family? It's clear that you are fascinated with the woman with the book. She has her hand close to your ear, to your head. She entered your head during nighttime, the time of magic and silence. She has a crown on her head for a reason. Cupid knows what that reason is, that's why he picked her. You choose the woman on the right, but she is not the one. She claims your heart, but it is given already. You will continue lying. A pity. Lord have mercy on your soul.'

Keywords:

Choice, Hesitation, Ambivalence, Not-knowing
Love? In your dreams.

Function:

Partnership, Dividing

Health indicators:

Anemia, Fatigue

Public life:

With Judgement: Celebrities
With the Empress: Restaurant staff
With the Devil: Prostitutes
With the Pope: Students
With the Moon: New Age hippies
With the World: A band
With the Tower: Terrorists



VII · LE CHARIOT · THE CHARIOTEER

A man is mounted on top of a horse-drawn wagon. Embellishments galore. The scepter in his hand mirrors the poles that hold the top of the wagon. He is crowned and wears a military uniform featuring the same face on each shoulder. Is this the moon or the sun? These faces look more like those of an old general. Some other Marseille decks insist on making the esoteric association to our celestial luminaries, thus suggesting that our Charioteer here is plugged into the sky. But not Carolus Zoya. His Charioteer is plugged into his warrior ancestors. It makes more sense to me.

The horses seem joined at the hip. I'm getting a strange feeling here of the horses being Siamese. Not normal. They have human faces too, and they seem to be in agreement, though they

pull in different directions. Not that this bothers the Charioteer. He's in control. Or so he seems. What lies behind his armor, Lord only knows. Some may suggest that he has internal conflicts. Maybe. And then again, maybe not. We can't know. I don't see the Charioteer willingly submit to my psychoanalytical chair. Fair enough. He holds his scepter in his right hand. His left hand rests on his belly, grabbing his belt.

Just below the dividing line of the wagon separating his torso from his nether regions we find an emblematic spot. Other card makers would put their initials on it. But not Carolus Zoya. He doesn't have to say it, that his Charioteer is sexually powerful. We can all see that. A beautiful man, afflicted only by bouts of loss of vitality.

A woman wants to know:

'What is my strength?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Popess, Justice, The Charioteer



'You have a cool head that you put in the service of 'showing off'. Why do you do that? You don't have to. Your book is the sword, and your balance can keep your driving force in check. But are you really in control? You can sit and inform yourself on anything, you can stand tall and issue laws, and you can find a cause worthy to fight for. This is great strength to have. But make sure your truth won't run amok. Don't stumble over props.'

Keywords:

Driving force, Courage, Confidence, Control, Vehicles

Function:

Man of success, Coming or going, Parading, Advancing

Health indicators:

Loss of energy and vitality, Low confidence

Public life:

With the Magician: Salesman

With the Tower: Accident prone tourist

With Death: Harvester

With the Devil: Criminal

With Judgment: Demonstration leader

With the Moon: Astronaut

With Temperance: Paramedic



VIII · LA IUSTICE · JUSTICE

A winged woman stands with a sword and a balance in her hands. Her breasts are visible through her transparent dress. Why a naked bosom in the courthouse? Her feet are also naked. Why no shoes in the courthouse? She wears a crown and there's a hint of a smile on her face. This Justice is not unmoved.

Most other Marseille Tarot cards suggest serious business. You don't joke with Justice. What does this one know? And what's up with the wings? Are we here with cosmic justice, or poetic justice? Perhaps justice is more than what we find in court. Justice makes us hold our breath. Maybe she holds hers too, while deliberating, while figuring out what the right method is for passing sentences.

I think there's a reason why she's barefoot here. She wants to be grounded, to feel the coldness of the earth. She aligns her breath with this coldness. The result is vigilance, acuity. Nothing escapes her calculating head, her reasoning. Cold thinking is condensed thinking. Her sword suggests an ability to cut to the bone, to essentialize, but not before some measuring is done. Or rather, perhaps it's actually the other way around. First you make your cuts in accordance, and then you weigh each part. See what's worth it. What if what you've cut is worth gold? And are you going to tell others about it? Be honest about it? I hear Justice breathing. Perhaps that's her only ailment, how to regulate her breath so it's perfect and resonating with the earth, with the universe.

A man wants to know:

'What does my lover want?'

Three cards fall on the table:

Justice, The Popess, The World



'Your woman wants to know what you are made of. What kind of spine do you have? Are you logical enough? Can you think in a detached way? Can you reflect? She is watching you. She reads you like she already read your book. A world awaits her. But she won't enter it until she knows for sure. Do you give her your truth and honesty? Or are you thinking about it? There's a reason why she's watching you, why she's suspicious. The sword turns into a scepter in the World; the balance into guardians. The book becomes alive: SHE of the living word. Your woman wants everything.'

Keywords:

Fairness, Neutrality, Rationality, Discernment, Truth

Function:

Deliberate, Analyze, Essentialize, Formalize, Measure, Impart

Health indicators:

Respiratory problems

Public life:

With the Empress: Lawyer

With the Emperor: Prosecutor

With the Charioteer: Policeman

With the Hermit: Moral philosopher

With the Devil: Embezzler

With the Star: Astronomer

With the Tower: Detective inspector



VIII · L'EREMITE · THE HERMIT

An old man with a staff in his hand holds a lamp upright. A red dot, similar to the red flicker in his lamp, crowns him. Fire above, fire within. But this is not a bonfire. It's more subdued. What is he trying to illuminate with his lamp? What illuminates him? A wanderer in the night.

The Hermit says 'no'. If he doesn't always know what he wants, he definitely knows what he doesn't want. He says 'no' to any superficial relations or situations. His clothes are not those of a leader. He has done his part. Now he retreats his steps back from whatever is in vogue. He is the embodiment of Oscar Wilde's witticism: 'Everything popular is wrong.' The Hermit values time not clichés. He wants to know what to fill his remaining time

with. Perhaps he can feel his joints aching. He uses his staff as a third leg. Between his feet there's a splash of red in the form of a heart. Is his heart sunk? What is his passion? Does he have any left? A purpose cannot be fulfilled without passion. When all is said and done, is detachment the answer? Can he say, 'I have no purpose, and therefore I'm free?' Perhaps not yet.

He is clearly seeking something, speculating, but what is that? What's the use of philosophy? The Hermit asks questions whose answers elude him. The anguish in his mind enhances the pain in his body. He keeps his inner crisis a secret. He divulges nothing. Does he know that after understanding and acceptance comes release?

A man asks:

'My parents divorced when I was little. I felt abandoned by both. Which of the two must I make peace with first?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Devil, The Wheel of Fortune, The Hermit



'You must settle your score with your father first. The relationship with your mother he left behind was an abusive one. Neither of them was thinking straight. The three of you got caught in the wheel of no change, repeating the same pattern. What went up came down and it went up again, without anyone understanding how to move forward. Unconscious forces kept you all in the dark. Your father gave up his patriarchal crown and responsibility and left. But he is still seeking understanding of what happened, and why. Talk to him. Or just sit with him in silence, staring at a candle and each other.'

Keywords:

Detachment, Patience, Discretion, Austerity

Function:

Seeking, Pondering, Philosophizing, Old father, Grandfather

Health indicators:

Arthritis, Musculature pain

Public life:

With the Moon: Counselor

With Death: Meditation coach

With the Devil: Voyeur

With the Pope: Spiritual mentor

With Temperance: Bartender

With the Star: A night watchman

With the Fool: Sherlock Holmes



X · ROUE DE FORTUNE · WHEEL OF FORTUNE

We have gone through nine cards all depicting people of various stature and status. Some active, some passive, some sitting, some standing, and some walking. Have they all come to a cross-road? A wheel has a cross in it, a hub and a handle turning it, suggesting the passing of time, movement, and continuity. With every turn there's change. In our wheel here we see three animal-like figures caught in movement. One on top, with a face like the sun, holding a pointy sword. Carolus Zoya has made this image very ambiguous. One senses the poetic spirit at work here. Is this a former king, now dehumanized and on the verge of going down? The figure on the left is almost squashed under the wheel, while a big torch prevails. Is this our handle here? In most of the other

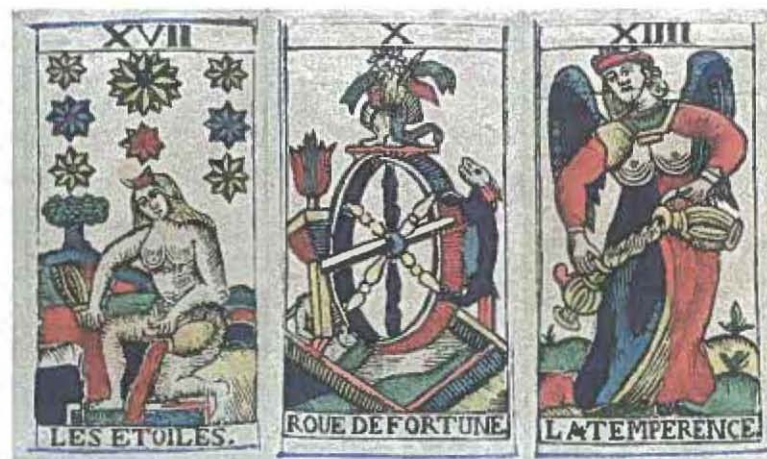
Marseille Tarots we see the wheel having a handle. This invites us to peep into the card next to it to see who turns it. Here the torch is on the left – the fire is still on but is on its way out. On the right side we have a rabbit figure with the belly of a crocodile. The wheel turns counter-clock wise, judging by the movement in the scarf worn by the 'king' and the rabbit's flattened ears. Does the wheel ever get 'tired,' or out of order? Those caught in the wheel often have two options: to go with it, or resist it. If the first, it may go well for a while, until the repetitious movement loses its initial excitement. If the latter, suffer the consequences. Some changes bring luck, some don't. Either way, there's change here, and the clear realization that what goes up also comes down.

A woman wants to know:

'My dog won't eat anything. I've checked with the vet, and there's no illness. Is there anything I can do about it?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Star, The Wheel of Fortune, Temperance



'Indeed it looks like you've given your dog abundantly of the nourishment that the dog also likes. But you need to change tactics. Perhaps the problem is the abundance. How about trying to ration the food, and instead of going for variety, go for one kind only for a while? See how this works out. The Star pouring out the content of her two chalices into the ground needs to turn into Temperance who measures her portions. The Wheel announces here the necessity of a routine that will be more healing and appropriate for your dog.'

Keywords:

Change, Sameness, Constance, Permanence

Function:

Understand – Accept – Let Go (as a trio)

Think of this example: A woman is at a crisis center. 'Is this the first time your husband beat you?' 'No'. 'Then why...' Well, I tried to understand his motives, accept that he's the father of my children. I'm not ready to let go, but I'm afraid that he's gonna kill me.'

Health indicators:

Fatigue

Public life:

With the Magician: A mentalist

With the Moon: Instability

With Death: Funeral

With the Devil: Casino

With the Pope: Sacred circle

With the Hanged Man: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*



XI · LA FORCE · STRENGTH

Another woman with no bra is trying to open a lion's mouth. Why? When this card pops up, people love to jump at the symbolic associations of this card with courage, overcoming a difficult situation, mastery, and superiority. But how do we know all this? One thing is certain: we are here with the animal kingdom and that of the humans. For ages now people have seen it as a virtue to not only domesticate the animals but also rise above them. Culture is more important than nature, people say, but what are we experiencing now? Our anthropocentrism didn't get us very far when you think of how we stand to lose our planet. For once I like the esoteric associations of this card with a magnetic force. Here the animal is given some credit. By extension, the as-

sumption is that we, humans, are capable of attraction. The French* like to say that this card is even stronger than the Devil, who is also known for his magnetic pull. But why? This card stresses force. The Lion has its natural force, while the woman forcing its mouth open exhibits another. She knows tactics. She follows the tamers' methods. She has the knowhow. In a way she is also a magician. She does the same in a circus arena as a magician in the streets. She seduces the masses. Perhaps this is where the idea of magnetism comes from. Imagine a magnet lose its power. Is it even possible? A battery can go flat, but here we are not with the world of technology. We are with the world of human cunningness against that of the animal.

A man wants to know:

'I'm invited to a job interview for a teaching position.
Is there anything I should emphasize as my strength?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Lovers, Death, Strength



'You can say that you are good at making quick decisions. You don't hesitate, and you don't compromise. You prefer to cut the potential conflict than to dodge it. You can take the bull by its horns and impose your dominant power on what needs domesticating. Having these skills in a classroom full of unruly children may be just the thing that the school is after. Good luck.'

Keywords:

Mental and physical force, Mastery, Magnetism, Determination

Function:

Overpowering, Dominating, Enduring

Health indicators:

Exhaustion, Blood illnesses, Loss of voice

Public life:

- With the Magician: Circus artist
- With Temperance: Nurse
- With the Moon: Dream therapist
- With the Emperor: Dictator
- With the Empress: Playboy
- With the Charioteer: Formula One driver
- With the Tower: *Coup d'état*
- With the World: Wild life explorer

* See the works of Tchalai Unger and Colette Silvestre, referred to earlier in the introduction.



XII · LE PENDU · THE HANGED MAN

You go into the wild to commune with the animals, good for you, but it's not sure that this will fall into everybody else's tastes. Perhaps you have a reason to venture into the woods, but by leaving society behind you render yourself vulnerable. Unless, of course, the pact you make with nature is solid enough. If you don't know what you're doing, you may well end up hanging by some tree, yelling to the unknown who put you there: 'whatever you think I've done, I regret it, just put me down again.'

Traditionally the card of The Hanged Man conjured treason. In the old days many would end up 'drawn and quartered' in the town's square for whatever reason. But we are not with the town here. Here we are clearly with the trees. Two tall branches hold

our Hanged Man by his foot. Towards the right of the card we see an odd-looking white ribbon as if holding the top of the branch. What is that? A mistake in the woodcut? The card makers of old had primitive tools they worked with, so hardly all the lines and dots out of proportion and frame have an esoteric meaning. Was there another hanging? Maybe that's why the Hanged Man here has a serene face. Maybe he thinks that he'll be off the hook soon, like the other one hanging there with him, before him. Whatever the case, while hanging there, one thing is certain: all vision of the world will be upside down. You may even learn something when you're done. When you're saved from immobility and impotence. Provided that death doesn't get there first.

A man wants to know:

'I keep procrastinating in my writing projects.

What can motivate me?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Hanged Man, the Magician, the Pope



'You need new initiatives to get you going. But it's not sure you can see them right away. Play with the things you have on your desk first. Stuff that's right under your nose. Try your hand at permuting with your variables. Once an idea emerges, don't wait for it to crystallize. Start writing the ritualistic way. Tell yourself the following: 'Today is the writing mass. Today I write my sermon.' Mind you, if you need concrete inspiration, start divining with the Bible. It's full of stories. Some would say, 'it's full of wind and rubbish.' But who cares? Bibliomancy has a long tradition. It worked for many. Don't just hang there waiting for someone to cut you loose. Invent something. Wiggle your foot and let go of the bond. Pray.'

Keywords:

Treason, Regret, Impotence, Renunciation, Sacrifice

Function:

Suspending

Health indicators:

Impotence, Loss of moral and physical power

Public life:

With the Pope: A mystic
With the Popess: A deconstructivist
With the Star: A herbalist
With Temperance: Yoga instructor
With the Devil: Underground spy
With the Tower: Bureaucrat



XIII DEATH

When death comes, little remains to be negotiated. Death is the greatest essentializer. What we have depicted on this card is a skeleton, interestingly sporting an X on the head, harvesting a head, now also a skeleton with an X on it. Clearly life was X'ed out here. Was this card inspired by some pirate flags? Could be. The Italians have a long history of piracy, with some tracing the origins of the Visconti-Sforza Tarot, the earliest we know of, to the Saracens.* Compared to other Marseille type tarots, this particular card is a strange one. Here Death uses her scythe in a movement that resembles sweeping bones under the rug. The decapitated bonehead is between her legs. In most of the other standard Marseille patterns we usually have the crowned heads of the king

and the queen down, often bloody and with a smile on their faces. This card messes with the regular symmetry. Who is the dead one here? I like the suggestion that, in the final analysis, when we're all reduced to bones, we can't even tell what gender we are, or what functions we used to fulfill in life. This card doesn't pass encouragement or moral judgment on us poor mortals who didn't happen to get born privileged, as if saying: 'see, the powerful ones can also lose their heads.' In the face of death, whatever will make us feel better is beside the point. Carolus Zoya got this one just right. His card without a name, the standard *L'arcane sans nom*, lives up to its essential function, and it doesn't fiddle with cultural virtues or the lack thereof.

A man wants to know:

'I suffer from bouts of migraines, and I'd like to know what to do to prevent them.'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Lovers, Death, Temperance



'Are you often ambivalent? Do you have difficulty in making decisions? Are you hesitant about which way to go? It looks like the migraines hit you when you find yourself in these stressful moments of not knowing what to do. Next time you need to make a decision, while weighing the pros and cons, try drinking some water. Then let your head become a clean cutter. Cut through the problems that flank you in a calm, steady, and firm way. Put an end to agonizing over things, as it will only make you lose your own head, if you don't.'

Keywords:

Death, Separation, Transformation

Function:

Cutting, Dividing, Harvesting

Health indicators:

Bone and marrow problems, Fractures

Public life:

With Justice: Forensics analyst
 With Temperance: Acupuncturist
 With the Wheel of Fortune: Farmer
 With the Fool: Street cleaner
 With the Moon: Dam engineer
 With the Popess: Surgeon

* See Jean-Claude Flornoy's *Le pèlerinage des bateleurs* (Editions letarot.com, 2007)



XIII · LA TEMPERANCE · TEMPERANCE

Another woman whose breasts are visible acts here as the angel of Temperance. We assume this is an angel because we read it in a book that beings with wings are called angels. In this deck, unlike other Marseille decks, Justice is also an angel.

This transformation of a woman into an angel started with the Popess. Her veils flowing behind her back clearly turned into wings on the Empress's back, which then acquired sharp feathers on Justice's back.

One writes with a quill that one dips into ink. I like Carolus Zoya. I don't know exactly why, yet, but I like him. Or perhaps I like him because he seems to assign all his women a role that cuts across the learned woman and the seducer. Not that these are

mutually exclusive, but we do have a history of mutilating women, and reducing them always to one function only: either the mother, or the whore. Not very nice.

Temperance is a master of measuring. Not a drop of water flowing between her two chalices spills on the floor. She is a master at mixing ingredients. She can administer the contents of her chalices in equal parts: neither too much, nor too little, making the idea of 'exactly as much as it's necessary' an art. Her water here resembles the rope that holds the Hanged Man's foot. Is she the one who releases him? Who washes his body? Temperance can anoint. She can make things smooth. She knows how far she can stretch her elastic. This is the true gambler. The real thing.

A woman wants to know:

'My colleagues are not happy for my achievements.

What attitude should I adopt towards them?'

Three cards fall on the table:

Temperance, The Lovers, The Tower



'Quit. You tried to be flexible, tolerant, and moderate in your dealings with them. But they waffle, and give you no recognition. They are smaller in size and are unable to see past their own ambivalence and mediocrity. If you must stay, then make sure you let no one trample on your head, with the risk of bringing down the house. Let your frustrations thunder. If you go, they go. There's fairness in the broken tower, when it becomes a prison. Destabilize the ground at your working place. Being nice here is not appreciated. You do not put Temperance in a straightjacket. Fly or wring some necks.'

Keywords:

Flow, Harmony, Adaptability, Sociability, Patience, Modesty

Function:

Measuring, Moderating, Regulating

Health indicators:

Hyper mobility, Dislocated joints

Public life:

With the Empress: Diplomat

With the Star: Wine expert

With the Devil: Alchemist, or Poisoner

With Justice: Diamond cutter

With Charioteer: Car mechanic

With the Hanged Man: Tightrope walker



XV · LE DIABLE · THE DEVIL

What the Devil? Did Carolus Zoya make a pact with the Devil? There are many who would hold it as their highest truth that anything dealing with the Tarot cards is the Devil's work. In my opinion, what all these fundamentalist, ignorant people prove is that the Devil exists. They are IT.

We are here with a card that depicts a figure, half human, half something else, hairy, with claws, and the wings of a bat. Is the Popess's child trying on a new costume? The same torch, as the one we find in the card of the Wheel of Fortune is held in the Devil's hand. It looks unmistakably like a tulip. The French always had a thing for tulips, suggesting that it is a devilish flower. Just think of the movie *La Tulipe Noir* with Alain Delon. Swoon. I grew

up with that sort of literature and film, devouring passionately all the cloak and dagger fictional worlds. To get lost in the mastery that attracts, the sword that cuts through it, and the cunningness of the clever, noble man, or woman, against the corrupt cardinals! Yes, there's nothing really like the work of the Devil.

Here he has two helpers, and again, Carolus Zoya makes us wonder: what pacts did he make? His tarot is so unusual. The Devil's helpers do not have the proverbial rope that ties them to their master around their necks. We see that in all the other Marseille Tarots. Here they hold the rope with their hands. They control it. They are so excited too: 'Oh, who are we going to trick today? Who will get drunk? Who will commit a *crime passionnel*!'

A woman wants to know:

'I'm in a relationship with a dishonest man. My husband goes to church, but his business is a fraud. How can I live with that?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Devil, The World, Judgment



'You are trapped. The rope the devils hold goes around you like a wreath, creating a world of delusion. You may think that you can handle this world, which appears safe and abundant, but it looks like you are moving towards experiencing an awakening. If you have children, take them and run. Life with a deceiving and morally corrupt man leads to nothing but constraint. The Devil may provide for you materially, but he will also make you a slave to him. It's up to you how you want to see it. If you want to hear it, there's another call you can answer that's of a higher and liberating order.'

Keywords:

Passion, Unconscious drives, Materialism, Pride, Obsessions

Function:

Binding, Enslaving, Manipulating

Health indicators:

Contagious sexual diseases, Alcoholism, Drugs, Compulsions

Public life:

With the Moon: Dracula

With Temperance: Al Capone

With the Emperor: Nero

With the Popess: Marie Laveau

With the Pope: Richelieu

With Justice: Marquis de Sade

With the Fool: Casanova



XVI · LA MAISON DIEU · THE TOWER

The card of the tower, with its ambiguous name, The House of God, features a tall, narrow building made of bricks, whose top is blown away by what seems to be a sunray descending unto it like lightning. Two people are falling from it. One lands on his head, the other on her belly. Although the person in the background may look like she is collecting the round bubbles surrounding the tower, there is one thing we can conclude for certain: a fall is a fall. Traditionally the House of God signified, for the French, a hospital. Put the Hanged Man together with the Tower, and you will know where to find next the person you read the cards for. Some may argue that this card signifies a fall from the grace of God. I don't see that. Others will have this card associated with

great joy, or sexual bliss.* That I see even less. Where do people get such ideas? They are fascinating but make no sense.

The broken tower is not a nice place to be in. When the accidental or providential lightening hits with mighty force, bringing your house down, you will find yourself disoriented and your ground destabilized. If you are still alive, you may find your bones broken, or even worse, your neck twisted, with the consequence of paralysis or other such dreadful disability. The only happy situation with the broken tower is when you realize that you actually welcome the brutal yet liberating shock, if you find yourself in an unhappy straightjacket at home or at work, but unable to change that yourself.

A woman wants to know:

'My relationship with my daughter is tensioned. Is there anything I can do to ease the communication between us?'

Three cards fall on the table:

Strength, The Tower, The Sun



'It looks like you're trying to impose your values on her. You force her to receive what you think is right for her. This creates tension that builds up towards some explosion. It may well be necessary to first let it all burst. Let all your frustrations come out. Use your voice. Don't be afraid to shout and yell, and shock each other verbally. Let your balloons out. It will release the tension in the body. Perhaps the idea is not to be nice or diplomatic, but brutal and loud. Then you can give each other a warm hug under the sun.'

Keywords:

Destruction, Disputes, Loss, Divorce, Hospital, Prison

Function:

Demolishing, Destructing
Liberating (from incarceration or illness through death)

Health indicators:

Illness due to accidents, Throat infections

Public life:

- With Temperance: Hospital, or hospice nurse
- With Justice: Supreme court judge
- With the Popess: Undercover agent
- With the Charioteer: Implosive engineer
- With the Hanged Man: Patient in hospital
- With Judgement: Air traffic controller
- With the Hermit: Retired person in old folks home

* See Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Way of Tarot* (2004), Destiny Books



XVII · LES ETOILES · THE STARS

The card of the Stars is one of the nicest in the Tarot pack. With card XVII we are finally over the 'suits', the people holding office and performing public functions, sometimes corrupting society or demolishing outdated moral norms – the latter a very good thing indeed. Under the naked sky a naked woman enjoys herself. Seven stars attend to her ritual, while the moon herself crowns her head. We are not here with the injunction: 'When in Rome, do as the Romans.' Here the idea is to simply be, as you are, without clothes marking your social status or taking care of your fears of what the neighbor might think of you if he saw you.

The woman kneels by a fountain, pouring freely the content of her chalices into the ground. No measuring is necessary here.

Just sheer flow. One of the stars right above her head shines the brightest, suggesting guidance on our woman's path. In a way this woman has opted out of society. She needs no rules or constraints dictating her actions. She prefers to navigate through life by trusting nature and the universe. Such faith she must have! Believing anything is a tall order for most of us who have become weary of religions and dominating ideologies. This woman invites us to think of what surrendering means, what valuing the natural, rather than societal laws means, and how we can think of ourselves as being part of an order that's not anthropocentric. The realization that we are not the center of the world is the beginning of generosity.

A woman asks:

'What am I missing? Although I do my job at work, people don't seem to listen to me.'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Stars, Justice, The Fool



'Stop giving. Stand up, put your formal suit on, and replace your two chalices with a sword and a balance. Cut the flow that depletes you of your energy. You don't want to give more than you're asked to give. Know your place. Not everywhere is it appropriate to be open and giving. Don't waste your resources. Don't feed the pigs your pearls. Structure what you have to say, and formalize your points. You can then walk free again. You don't even need to turn around to pay attention to the clinging ones, or the ones nagging you. You will have done your job.'

Keywords:

Openness, Naturalness, Guidance, Generosity, Flow, Trust

Function:

Surrendering, Giving, Harmonizing, Enchanting

Health indicators:

Circulatory problems, Skin diseases

Public life:

- With the Popess: Tarot reader
- With the Magician: Muse
- With the Devil: Burlesque dancer
- With the Empress: Beautician
- With the Moon: A Spa
- With the Charioteer: Navigator
- With the Wheel of Fortune: Lotto winner



XVIII · LA LVNE · THE MOON

The card of the Moon is associated with intuition. I'm not sure we can see why, but we can make some inferences. We are here with the nighttime. A glowing full moon illuminates the darkened city. Two dogs do their thing, howling at the moon and playing dominating games. In most of the other Marseille Tarots we have this image depicting a more sinister scene. The dogs are never this close to each other, and the crayfish crawling out of its pond suggests effort.

Here, Carolus Zoya decided that while the dogs emblematically represent each its city, blue and red, they also have an understanding exceeding that of the humans. In fact, this is the first card so far that does not have any humans on it. We are with the

animal kingdom here, during the hour when the soul wanders. Language and culture are not dominant. If anything, there's the idea that no matter how hard we try, we will never conquer that which exceeds our rational grasp. A good thing to remember too, lest we all get too arrogant.

During nighttime we dream, we commune with the dream world and its fascinating images. Some would call them symbols. But of what? I prefer to stick with the idea of a visual language. The Moon calls to our senses. In the dark we are vigilant in a different way than during daytime. We are also done talking. Here we listen, and perceive. The magic is real.

A man wants to know:

'I would like to buy a new house for my family.

Is this a good time?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Moon, The Pope, The Emperor



'I would say that your emotions run deep with you at this time. You don't really know why you want to change houses. You sense that the time has come for a transition. Perhaps you are right. Who is to say that what our unconscious drives demand is not the right thing? But are the actions stemming from the unconscious always rational? Indeed they are not. Or, it is not always so that what we feel in the gut is right, also sits well with the bank. Make sure you talk to a financial advisor before you make any decisions. You have the means, economically speaking, but make sure that this is indeed what you want. You don't want the madness of a moment to end up controlling what you really need.'

Keywords:

Sensibility, Dreams, Imagination, Darkness, The Unconscious

Function:

Intuiting, Fearing, Deceiving, Fluctuating

Health indicators:

Depression, Speech impediments, Retardation (Alzheimer's)

Public life:

With Temperance: Psychiatrist

With the Hermit: A melancholic

With the Hanged Man: A depressive

With the Empress: Singer

With Death: Necromancer

With the Charioteer: Long distance truck-driver

With the Wheel of Fortune: Fortuneteller



XVIII · LE SOLEIL · THE SUN

I like the progression from the Moon to the Sun. First you stare into the dark night of your soul, and then you're ready to talk about it; share your experience with others. In most contemporary Tarot decks and books about the Tarot you will find the card of the Lovers associated with love. I always thought this to be nonsense. What love? Having the hots for somebody is hardly 'love.' Love is concern for another being and the willingness to share things on an equal basis. Love is mutual respect and the recognition of one's being as is. Love is not possessive, speculative, or judgmental. Love never asks: 'Who should I pick? The one on the left or the one on the right?' Love makes clear statements. Love is the desire to be on the same page. The happy face of the

sun in this card, spreading happy rays, mirrors the happy faces of the two people depicted here. We get the idea. *This* is the card of love, not the other one. In reading situations, I often have to temper the sitters' enthusiasm when they get the card of the Lovers. 'I knew it,' they want to say. 'I knew he loved me.' And I go: 'Really? Are you sure about that? Then what's the other woman doing there, if your man is so sure about you?' There is never any answer. The wall behind the two people in this card tells me this: This is private. Sharing is focused and the world outside doesn't matter. Only the two matter. Does this remind us of people in love, forgetting all about other existences?

A man asks:

'You think your cards can answer anything? Why should I believe this? Here: I'm 50 now, what will I have for breakfast when I turn 70?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Hermit, Justice, The Sun



'You will have toast for breakfast, nicely burnt. You will get up in the morning, an old man, thinking: 'What's the point?' But then you realize: 'Fuck, it's my birthday. I have a responsibility. If only I didn't, as I'm too tired for this. But here comes my wife to congratulate me. How she shines! Ah, that feels rather good!'

The man I read these cards for turned to me and asked – his skepticism now vanished: 'Does this mean that I won't be alone?' I said, 'Yes.' He went home happy.

Keywords:

Warmth, Radiance, Clarity, Brilliance, Community, Love

Function:

Illuminating, Sharing, Enjoying

Health indicators:

Eye problems, Loss of energy, Cardio complications

Public life:

With the Emperor: Absolute sovereign

With the Hermit: Logician

With Judgement: Communists

With the Hanged Man: Druid

With the Empress: Housewife

With the Devil: Pride

With the Charioteer: Athletes

With the Magician: Baker

With the Fool: Idiot savant



XX · LEIUGEMENT · THE JUDGMENT

After the luminaries, the Moon and the Sun, have shown us their power, perhaps teaching us how to capitalize on our fears and thus maximize our potentials, we are ready for the community. The card of Judgment suggests that engaging with the community is only possible if we have tried dying. What needs to die? Some suggest that the Tower is all about our egos, built the fancy way, but also prone to destruction. Perhaps what is man-made is never good enough in the face of what else is there. The card of Judgment represents a call. Literally, an angel coming out of the Sun blows his trumpet. Three people come out of graves, rising to the sound. Behind them, trees we associate with the cemetery bounce off the loud sound, so we can almost hear it. A loud card.

There is some ambiguity as to what the people on this card are doing, and it's clear that we have departed here from the standard symbolism of Judgment Day described in the Bible. Here everyone rises and no one seems to go to hell. What's more, the two people facing us seem to beg the person facing them for something. What is that? Surely this person has also heard the call. What is suggested here is that, sometimes, when we are called to something, while we clearly hear the call, we don't always heed attention. Perhaps we don't like major changes that exceed our agency and control. But when these come, what's the point in resisting? Others can help us respond to what's important.

A man wants to know:

'At my working place people are being laid off. Budgetary problems are invoked but a few of us believe that there's another agenda. What is my role in this development?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Devil, The Tower, Judgment



'You need to participate in demolishing the intrigues and the bad organization. Although you may think that there's no solution to the calumnious dealings at work, your task is to denounce the corruption. Your working place needs some shaking up. Blow your trumpet or whistle. Let people know what the organization has been up to. Offer any information you have that may reveal the truth. No one should fear for their jobs, especially when they are 'secured' by lies. Speak up and let the new times roll.'

Keywords:

Sudden change, The unexpected, New life, Public relations

Function:

Calling, Sounding, Hearing

Health indicators:

Hearing problems, Unheard of diseases

Public life:

With the Emperor: Party leaders

With the Hermit: Gurus

With the Pope: New spiritual communities

With the World: Stage actors

With Justice: Examiners

With the Lovers: Politicians

With the Hanged Man: Hearing impaired community

With the Charioteer: Travellers

With the Star: Scientists

With the Popess: Writers



XXI · LE MONDE · THE WORLD

The World card is the last station, if we assume that we have been on a journey. Some like to think of the 22 Tarot trumps as different stations on our path. First we learn the social ways, then the personal ways, and then the ways that make us aware of our mortality. Fair enough. We are all going to die, all things come to completion, and every sentence ends with a full stop. The World card is a full stop, saying: 'I made it. I'm here now.' How do we process this information?

We can follow the Magician's baton, as it passes through other hands, as it transforms into scepters and staffs, and as it ends in the hands of the woman. Every time the baton turns into something else, it tells us a new story.

Tracing how elements in the cards turn into something else is not only a good method of reading the cards, but also the safest. At least you can be certain that no querent will start asking, 'where did you get that from?' – whatever it is that you've been saying. You will always be able to point to it. Perhaps the World card tells us this: there's a world of information out there, but the art is in knowing what to do with it. How do you process it all, so you won't just stop at disclosing the obvious: the Magician's wand has turned into the World's wand. So? Can you say something more? And what will it be? The art is to make the impenetrable in the obvious transparent: to create a whole world anew.

A woman wants to know:

'People don't always understand where I'm coming from when it comes to sharing, and it's as if we're always speaking two different languages. What is my true path?'

Three cards fall on the table:

The Moon, The Judgment, The World



'Indeed, there seems to be misunderstanding between you and the others. Who is saying what to whom? You are like the crayfish who knows water and stones and who is trying to get the dogs on the ground to see, or hear something of water and stones. But they have their own agenda. They have their own voices and opinions of the world. They don't even look at you. You aim towards them to no avail. But change is coming. Night turns into Judgment day, and it looks like what is heralded is a world of integrations. Perhaps you can forget for a while about what others understand or don't. As you said, you're not speaking the same language. But as the Moon turns into redemptive news, you will end up in a league all your own. You will simply be above everything. Within everything. One with everything.'

Keywords:

Elevation, Completion, Integration, Success, Cosmopolitanism

Function:

Encompassing, Realizing, Being independent

Health indicators:

Viruses

Public life:

With the Emperor: Imperialism

With Justice: Marxism

With the Hermit: Solipsism

With the Empress: Feminism

With the Devil: Occulturism

With the Star: Idealism



LE FOL · THE FOOL

The card of the Fool is a wild card. It is not numbered, so we can assume that its function is equal to that of zero. We are with the idea of nothingness. Traditionally the Fool has been associated with the idiot, the poor vagrant, walking around aimlessly, ruining everything that he touches. He has a companion, some sort of a cat, but he doesn't seem to mind it very much.

Esoterically speaking, this card has been associated with absolute freedom, and vast cosmic orders. But this would presuppose that the Fool is a man with an evolved consciousness. The trouble is that he is neither evolved, nor conscious; at least not in any cultural sense. What goes beyond the cultural constraint is not for me to judge. I can say this, however: Every time I get the

Fool in a reading situation, when a woman wants to know about her future prospects with a man, I end up saying: 'Lady, ditch him. You can't ever have a relationship with the Fool.' I have as yet to hear from any of these women who got this piece of advice and followed it that they regretted it. Never. Some came back to thank me profusely.

So what is the Fool good for? Why, nothing, of course. That's the whole point. The Fool tells us that nothing matters.

This is the subtlest wisdom that the Tarot teaches. With the Fool we are reminded of the necessity to stop taking our lives too seriously. It is the Fool who says, *Memento mori*, not Death. We are all just passing through, breathing and loving what *is*.

A man wants to know:

I've been thinking of settling down, but I'm not sure I'm ready. What do the cards say?

Three cards fall on the table:

The Fool, The Stars, The Empress



'You will meet a beautiful and generous woman on your path. You will have good sex with her and you will marry her. Now, while this prediction here may seem foolish, there's one thing you can actually take with you, namely, that if you look at the cards, you will notice that in the card of the Empress you kind of vanish. Only your furry friend is in the picture, as a nice emblem on the Empress' shield. The woman, now fully dressed, seems to indicate that she's had enough of you. You are welcome to use this information in whichever way you like. Happy vagabonding.'

Keywords:

Indifference, Freedom, Inconstancy, Madness, Extravagance

Function:

Walking, Floating, Non-responding

Health indicators:

Psychic disturbance, Loss of balance

Public life:

With the Magician: Illusionist

With the Popess: Independent scholar

With Justice: Jester

With the Moon: Medium

With the Charioteer: Adventurer

With the Pope: Pilgrim

With Judgment: Hero

With the Star: Bohemian

THE COURT CARDS AND THE SUITS

If I were asked which of all the mysteries will remain forever impenetrable, I would not hesitate to answer: the obvious.

— EDMOND JABÈS —



As you have seen already, most of my method in reading three cards consists of noticing what turns into what, what is at stake in this transformation, and where this transformation leaves us. Often the interpretation does not fill more than a few lines. The idea is to be incisive and to the point. The idea is also to shoot for the synthesis of the three cards, rather than give interpretations of each individual card.

For instance, my example of the reading in the section for The Pope (p. 55) was blunt and quite merciless. The woman consulting me didn't go home with any desire to explore further the relationship she inquired about. She saw herself why. Her reading had a negative tone overall because of how I saw the cards entering into play with one another. She saw it too. She got the point and felt that she had clarity on what to do next. That is always the ideal, namely, to make the sitter realize what power of action she is capable of, and then use it. In this sense the cards are never deterministic, as some fear, insofar as the sitter always retains ultimate agency.

If some don't like what the cards suggest, they go home and change their situation. Some never want to heed attention and can feel downright insulted by the cards. To each their own. But the reader is not responsible for people's feelings, for what people make of the reading, or for what they get out of it. The reader is responsible for delivering a useful statement, and for staying on track and true to the cards. If clarifications are asked for, the reader is also responsible for trying to make things clear. Is there one precise sentence that gathers the essence of the cards on the table? Then fling it. Demonstrate how what you say is useful.

In the example above, had I gone through the cards individually, I may have had more positive things to say, the Pope being a

good card, the Magician even better, and Death yielding some transformative power for some. But that would not have been reading for the plot, for the story, for the three individual ideas merging together, or reading for the useful advice. In reading the cards the challenge always remains in how to be constructive without compromising the reading.

Reading the cards one by one also defies the purpose of seeing the cards together, of seeing how they form a random pattern every time they fall on the table, and thus tell a new story. What would be the point of telling the same story about the Pope over and over again, and then when I'm done with that, go over the story of the Magician? I would quickly get very bored and my practice would reach stale levels. It's time to bring in the court cards and the numbered suits. I think of these cards as the variations on a theme, the theme of spinning the cards, weaving them together. The pip cards allow us even more to stretch the elastic of precision.

In the end, however, it all comes down to what we each prioritize. I like to play with the way in which the cards appeal to our ludic sense, as we engage in seeing how the cards permute their essential meaning all according to what other cards they happen to enter into equation with. What makes reading cards fascinating is precisely the play of chance and randomness against the background of the fixity of the essential features that determine the function of each card. The Emperor is not likely to perform the Fool, but if he happens to be near the Moon, then he might. These are the type of stories that we are looking for.

Let us now turn to the court cards and the numbered cards, and have a look at what is happening here.



Probably the oldest cartomantic oral transmission that has survived quite intact is the idea that colors signify quality and character, and that numbers signify quantity and direction, or length. As with all oral traditions, however, people have developed variations on these essential aspects of life we live by, colors and numbers; some, for instance, offering their understanding of the color red as good and the black as bad, at least as these relate to a playing-card deck.

By 'essential' I don't mean 'original', as I don't believe in any point of origin for the cultural way in which have come to understand our world as it is characterized by our different perceptions in different contexts. What I do believe in is natural laws and the way in which these have come to color our passion for stylizing relations, the four suits in a playing-card deck being a case in point.

Cartomancy is a system that's developed from making logical inferences, so we can account for all the meanings of the cards this way the longer back in history we go. Of course, what we now call 'assigned meanings' refers to most people's amnesia, and the fact that once upon a time all this made sense the logical way, or the natural way, now forgotten. But the closer we keep to nature, the more we're going to see how the cards mirror cycles, seasons, our own bodies, relations with others, and so forth.

But let's keep it simple here and start by looking at the logic of the Marseille Tarot against the background of the logic of playing cards where the color progression and the number progression goes. In my own practice, when I read the pip cards I don't distinguish at all between the Tarot and how I read the playing-cards.

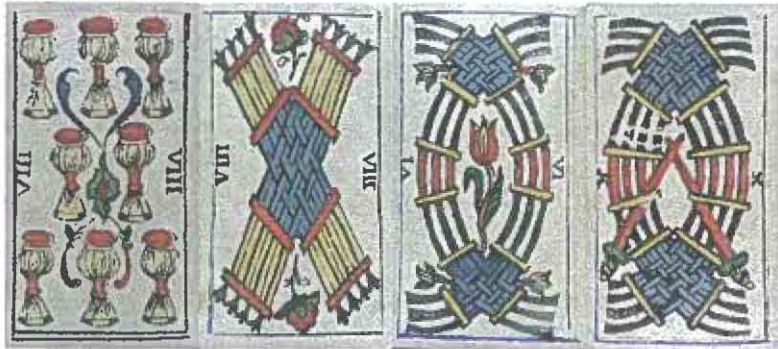
COLORS

PLAYING CARDS LOGIC:

- From red to black: bad; from black to red: good.
- With the hearts we drink with friends and family.
- With the diamonds we cut deals.
- With the clubs we build.
- With the spades we stab.

MARSEILLE CARDS LOGIC:

- Cups filled with red wine and copper coins make our hearts beat faster. We exchange them to feast or to buy things we need.
- Brown batons and black swords bring on fear. We fight with them to death or to win a competition.



How many 'reds', how many breathing points? In a string of cards note the preponderance of 'black' over 'red' and assess to what extent the reading is fair or not.

Note the flowers contra blades, and what each is doing.

As in the case with the trumps, the same goes here: think function. What is the function of flowers or leaves in the midst of a lot of blades? What is the function of the cups as they are constrained or tied by potentially poisonous leaves?

NUMBERS

1

One is a little; ten is a lot.

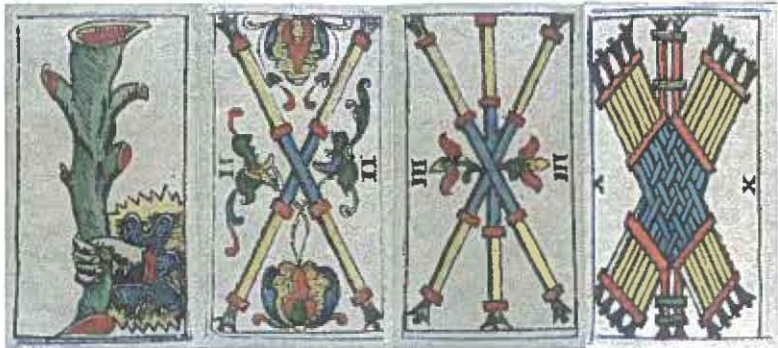
We go between unity and division, contraction and expansion, and far and near optical observations.

Hearts and coins are close to us; we hold them in our hand. Swords and batons create distance.

If we have a string that involves several pip cards, by looking at the number progression we can determine timing: are things developing fast with this project? Yes, if we find these cards in the string: 3 of Batons next to 9 of Batons.

Are things going slow? Yes, if we find the 3 of Batons next to the 5 of Cups.

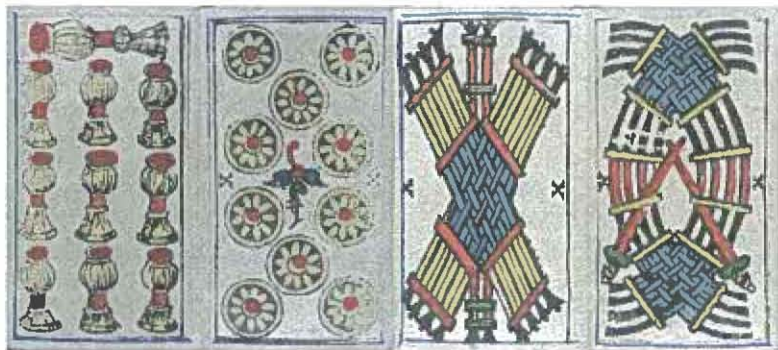
Cups and coins are slower than the batons and swords. They are for pondering. The others are for action.



2-9

- 2 Cooperation or splits: 'Shake hands, or...'
- 3 Increments or scattering: 'Dissemination can increase knowledge, but you can also end up unfocussed.'
- 4 Stability or constraint: 'Being hemmed in at all 4 corners is not very nice.'
- 5 Health and the body: 'You have 5 limbs, no?'
- 6 Paths and choices: 'Two parallel roads, which to take?'
- 7 Challenges: 'I made my choice of a path, but was it the right one?'
- 8 Wishes and fears: 'I'm really not sure about this, but how I hope for flow.'
- 9 Changes: 'That's it, I'm out of here' – to find a new job, or if you're a fetus, to come out of gestation.

10

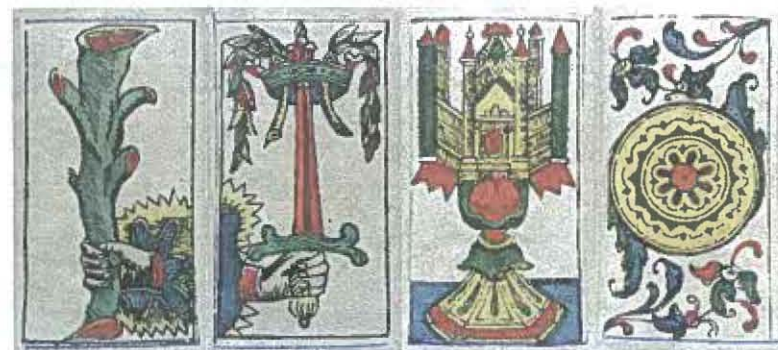


The 10 is the last number in the 1-10 string. As such the tens indicate both a lot, and a spilling over into a new beginning (if you start with 1 again). It is also for this reason that we associate the

tens with a transition as well. The 10, especially if you have two of them in a string or a spread, is a clear indication of travel. The suit decides whether by water (cups) for emotional reasons, by air (batons) for work, by land or foot (swords) for a funeral, or by car (coins) for financial transactions.

- 10 of Cups often simply means 'enough.' Next to the Ace of Diamonds, 10 of Cups can also indicate marriage.
- 10 of Swords indicates worries, before it emphasizes some form of disaster.
- 10 of Coins is the most unproblematic. I like this 10 the best. You can never have enough money, unless, if you do, you may be prone to passivity and indulgence. But as the coins are associated with high energy and mental activity, I don't see why we should worry about complacency too much. The one that has 10 coins in her hand will know exactly how to use them.
- 10 of Batons indicates a lot of work. Pressure. Blocked ways. Not good.

Aces



Aces are beginnings – or more specifically:

- Ace of Cups: The house
- Ace of Batons: An opportunity
- Ace of Coins: Wealthy means
- Ace of Swords: Death, or a decision

The Ace of Swords can indicate death, physical death or the death of something, such as a relation, the termination of a contract, or the death of a system of beliefs (logically speaking, a quick decision can also be seen as the death of hesitation).

The Ace of Coins used to indicate the receiving of news, perhaps due to the shape of the diamond on playing-cards which looks like an envelope. Traditionally the Ace of Coins can also foretell of an engagement. With the 10 of Coins, a wedding is coming.

Some cartomancers, such as Dawn R. Jackson, have been distinguishing between the functions that the court cards fulfill, seeing men as symbols of power and women as emblems of truth¹ (and I have added to this taxonomy labels of my own for the Page and the Knight). Although Jackson did not say anything about the premise for this distinction, other than perhaps to suggest that we take it at face value since it's obvious, I agree with it simply because while symbols have the power to represent, emblems consolidate the representation. At least that is what I have in mind whenever I see one of the higher court cards, that is, the King or the Queen. But let's summarize:

1 See Dawn Jackson's typology in her unpublished material, *The Wise and Subtle Arte of Reading Cards*, once available on her now defunct website: <http://www.hedgewytchery.com/> (via wayback machine).

MEN AND THE HIGHER COURT



KINGS: SYMBOLS OF POWER

- King of Cups: Man of Love
- King of Coins: Man of Money
- King of Batons: Man of Action
- King of Swords: Man of War

Depending on the context of your question, the kings can tell you something about power relations. They can inform on dominance: weak or strong? The answer to this depends on the surrounding cards.

WOMEN AND THE HIGHER COURT



QUEENS: EMBLEMS OF TRUTH

- Queen of Cups: Woman of Love
- Queen of Coins: Woman of Money
- Queen of Batons: Woman of Action
- Queen of Swords: Woman of War

Depending on the context of your question, the Queens can tell you something about the truthfulness of a situation. They can validate an answer: true or false? The answer to this depends on the surrounding cards.

CULTURAL DISCREPANCY

When we follow traditional methods, we often forget that we can be reflective and critical of what people before us were saying. Not only is it a good idea, but it is also illuminating to sometimes ask: 'where did they get that from? What's the premise for their formulation?' Take this example below, and try to see how you feel about the traditional meanings we have been assigning to the King and Queen of Swords for quite some time now.

- **King of Swords:** Noble man, strategist, cuts right through it, cold head.
- **Queen of Swords:** Sorrowful widow, spreads calumnious gossip, resentful, calculating, yet hot-headed.

What's happening here? Why this distinction between a man and a woman belonging to the same suit? Ought they not display similar character traits? Some would perhaps argue: 'well, the King of Swords can also be a mean bastard, when the card is in reverse'. But as I don't see the point of reading reversed cards I

cannot use this argument. In fact this 'argument' will not account for how we may otherwise find anything nice to say about the Queen. Some other traditions have tried to remedy this misfortune, and have started assigning the Queen of Swords the role of the grand witch. Fair enough. We *can* use the cards in extended contexts, where we see the particularity of the Swords to mirror all things occult. In more mundane matters we can now find this pair as referring to all things official: police, judges, landlords.

Whichever school of thought we may follow or combine across disciplines and methods, my advice has always been the following: go with tradition, but think before you buy the whole package. You don't want to perpetuate patriarchal slogans that are useless and damaging to women and other marginalized groups.

THE LESSER COURT



PAGES: SYMBOLS OF INITIATION

KNIGHTS: EMBLEMS OF DEVELOPMENT

- **Significators:** All the court cards can represent the querent, a spouse, a friend, a boss, siblings.
- **Family:** The court cards in the same suit indicate a familial relation (of matters domestic, work, business, law).

EXCEPTIONS

The Page found in the same spread as one of the other courts in the same suit can indicate the thoughts of the main character.

For example, in this string –

Queen of Cups, Page of Cups, 9 of Batons

– we can say the following:

‘The Queen is thinking of changing her work plans.’

If we follow the visual argument for these images, we may arrive at a similar conclusion, but by taking a different route. The Page is offering his mother his cup, as if saying: ‘Mother, won’t you let your big cup turn into the stick that separates the wood?’ As she doesn’t face him, we may infer that she’s thinking about it.



Depending on the nature of the question, the Queen of Cups can, of course, also just be the mother of her son, the Page of Cups.

In the previous example we can also say that together they are involved in making some changes to the work plan (with 9 of Batons), or go on a trip (with 6 of Cups), or refine their garments (with 9 of Coins).

ELEMENTALS

The traditional Marseille Tarot, steeped in the stylizations that we find in the playing cards, associates the cards with color and number progression, and with the natural elements and the seasonal cycles in the following way – this is my own rendition, and based on my own understanding of how the card readers of old, the cunning-folk, must have thought of it when they passed down the essential idea:

Coins/Diamonds are for spring and fire. A fresh idea is a hot idea. Coins are chiseled for exchange and culture. We hold coins in our hands. They denote working with the head. Coins represent the nervous system. All things on fire. Travel vehicles that use an engine. Expensive computers. A cooking range. The kitchen. The dinning room. The ceiling, and the roof of a house. East.

Cups/Hearts are for summer and water. An idea needs to feel good, to flow, and be shared. Hearts are inside the body and enable the blood to circulate. With the heart we live and feel. It makes us take a chalice and drink to our health. Cups represent the circulatory system. Boats on water. A spa. Sex. The bedroom. The heart of the house. South.

Batons/Clubs are for autumn and air. An idea needs to be harvested. Trees grow in the air. Tall trees turned into batons to fight with are at arm’s length. We exercise with a stick. Make fences.

Clubs represent the muscular system. We run. We use our legs, or take an airplane to whiz through the air faster. West. The floors of a house.

Swords/Spades are for winter and earth. An idea needs to die to make room for a new one. Swords are forged for protection and conquering. You kill someone, you bury them in the ground. Only bones remain. Swords represent the skeletal system. North. The basement of a house.

The **court cards** will take on these attributes. We will thus say, for instance, about the Queen of Coins that she works with her brain, is cultured, good with money, and can cook or teach.

ANALOGY

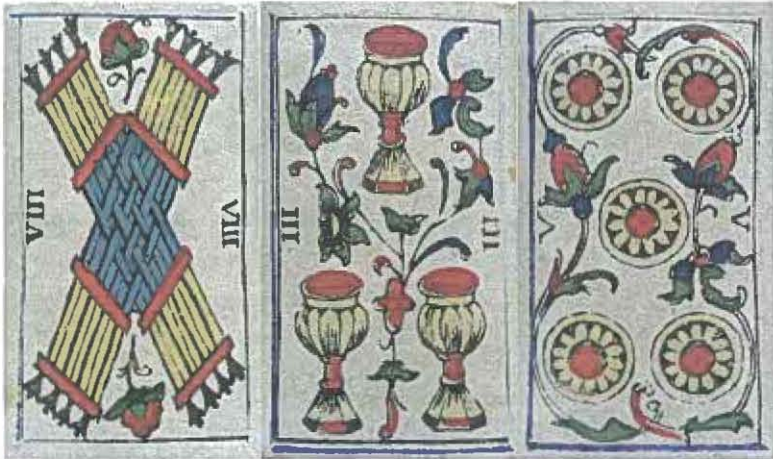
On the simplicity of the pip cards and their 'meaning' I particularly like Enrique Enriquez's *Tarology*, where he makes similar observations as above, which he then also places in relation to the way in which the card lends itself to 'punning' through an homonymic play on the number, name, or striking element on a card. For instance, in the card of The World, LE MONDE, we find both a pun on the word 'lemon' and a similarity between the mandorla surrounding the figure in the middle of the card and the fruit, lemon. Next to a pip card, Enrique would probably be interested in how fast we can squeeze this world, woman, or lemon.

In my own readings of the poetical analogies that we can trace in the images of the cards, I would, however, be very happy if I could also think of the number card as carrying a so-called 'transcendent' meaning, in this case here, the idea of 'change'.

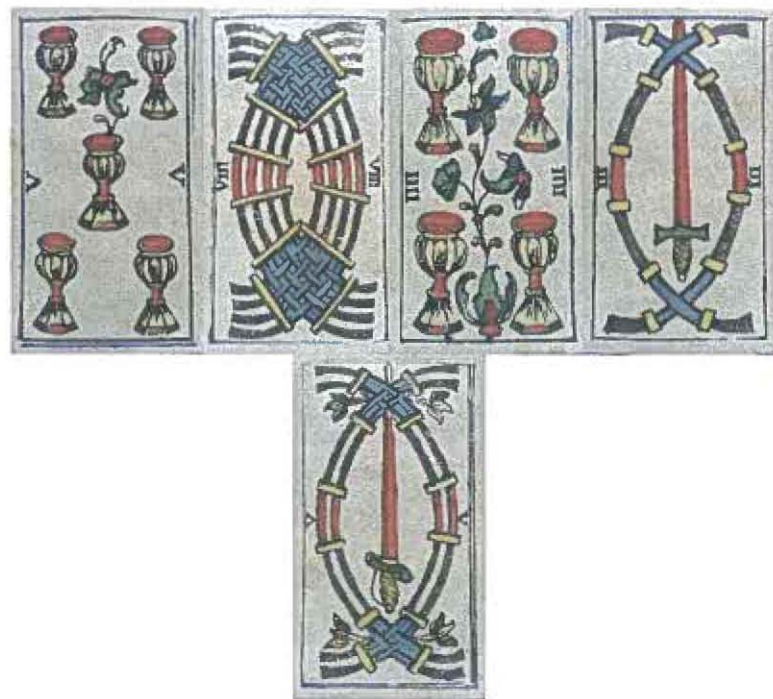
THE LOGIC OF NUMBERS

In classical cartomancy we don't read the cards according to esoteric principles. We read the cards according to common sense. The above is a pretty simple system and has existed for ages in our consciousness. It's something we can follow and explain.

In terms of offering more specialized readings that can go into a number of details that, for instance, household issues may bring up in questions such as these: 'Will I redecorate my house, and if yes, where will I start?', my answer would be derived entirely from logical inferences. If I have a method here, then, again, it's the cunning-folk method plus processing the image. To the question above, if I got these cards, **8 of Batons, 3 of Cups, 5 of Coins**, I would say: 'The kitchen': You plan (8 of Batons) to beautify (3 of Hearts) the place where you cook by the fire for your body to be nourished (5 of Coins).



For **health** questions, many systems can be covered by making the same type of logical inferences. For instance, the immune system is represented by the Swords. Why? Simply because swords are for protection and conquering. If your system fights back, then it's the swords we need to look at. If you suffer from an infection (8 of Swords) in the blood (5 of Cups) you may need to take antibiotics (4 of Hearts + 3 of Swords) to decrease (3 of Swords again) the poison (8 of Swords) or else call a doctor (5 of Swords). Now, this string, **5 of Cups, 8 of Swords, 4 of Cups, and 3 or 5 of Swords**, presupposes that we already have a diagnosis and that the reading is done with view to better the situation. Otherwise, the line ending with swords would simply indicate that there's illness.



Now let's have a look at some examples that demonstrate what this common sense is all about, and how I substantiate my claim that the pip and court card essentials are commonsensical essentials, insofar as we can easily construe a story about such dichotomies as the ones mentioned above: contraction – expansion; equivalence – exception; far – near; above – below, seasons – cardinal points.

It's my belief that the logic of the progression from one state to another goes back to assessing a binary movement, present in all the cards, trumps included. Essentially, we always go from tension to release. And that's basically all.

STRINGING THE STORY

I find the narrative of the numbers fairly unambiguous. You can start on a new thing, love, work, strategy (Aces). You can share your idea (the twos), either the focused way (3 of Swords) or the scattered way (3 of Coins). You consolidate it (the fours) or get bored or exhausted already, not knowing what to do next (4 of Swords or 4 of Batons). You can then ask yourself whether you even like all this, and why you're doing all this and for whose benefit (the fives). If it's not for your own pleasure, then you're going to be in trouble finding a reason why you should stretch it even further (the sixes). Which way to go, what path will you take? This can give you some heartache, or a headache (the sevens). But after the tension, you take a breath. You have 'many things' represented in the eights. What would that be? How would a single breath manifest in 8 of Coins, or 8 of Swords? As wishes, as imagination, as thoughts. 'I wish I could have a drink', you say when you're with the 8 of Cups, 'and maybe someone can join me as

well', you might also say, especially if you've been through some hassle. So in the eights, in this 'release' from the sevens – but as we also increase in movement towards the nines – you entertain the 'many', rather than the 'one'.



Again, we go from contraction to expansion and back again. It's the same essential idea. After you're done thinking or wishing or imagining or relaxing, you are ready for some action. Graphically even in the 8 of Coins, where you sense some density and perhaps imagine yourself sitting at a business table with the official suits, you are not the one in charge. Two factions, equally balanced, decide the financial situation. 'Everyone' sits and waits for their turn. Ergo, everyone can be said to be in their own thoughts, or plans, while also waiting for the nines to appear and say, 'we're done talking, here's what we do now, here's how we change things.'

The idea of 'wishes and fears' in the eights comes from the fact that the 8 is associated with what's in the mind (if batons, ideas about work, planning, desires for engaging with practical things). If we take the card next in line, the 9 of Cups particularly, as it has special status in classical cartomancy, namely, to indi-

cate the heart's desire, we can see how it's different from the wishes that the eights also stand for.

Whereas the eights representing wishes and fears relate to what we imagine, our thoughts in the head, the heart's desire is related to the heart not the head. Therefore the 9 of Cups has a special status as a wish. Now, how do we see the nines as change? Well, think about it. More often than not, we want to see our wishes realized. If we stick with the numerical progression from 8 to 9, the nines indicate a logical development towards this realization. In other words, something must change if we are to connect what we imagine (the 8) with how we go about realizing what we imagine (the 9). Therefore the 9 indicates change.

Now, some would ask: how do you know when the eights are 'thoughts' and when they are 'people'? First of all, I always say, remember the question. The question will tell you. But we can also see it this way: the 8 as thoughts, just thoughts, can spell out the following: speculations, gossip, rumors, if swords; plans, if batons; electronic media for communication, if coins – copper is a good conductor, right?; a party, if cups.

If this reasoning or the context of the question may still not make the distinction clear, then I'd suggest the following: Divine for the specific meaning when in doubt. Draw another card for a 'yes' or 'no.' Say, you have an 8 and you're not sure. Here's my rule: I ask: 'People or thoughts?' I draw one card. Red for people (warm), black for thoughts (cold).

If we take a step further back, we could say that the sixes are more about vectors, going with or against the flow. When we say, 'we go with the flow,' we don't think, 'discernment', or 'I've got to get over this roadblock,' in anticipation of the sevens. Related also to the eights, I think that discernment is of primary concern

here, as it's part of a conceptual plane, not always fleshed out, but in the making. Whatever you're thinking about, is an 8 of something situation.

In health readings, the 6 of Swords often indicates the renal ways, blocks, and the like, so here it's clear that whatever needs to be eliminated will be so without your being conscious of it, or discerning. When in doubt, I find that thinking about a health analogy helps to determine where we're at in the number scale, 6 or 8, or some other numbers.

And how do we get to the nines and the idea that the nines indicate change? Well, what change requires is an active plan, and not just merely thinking about it. That's what the 8 of Batons tells us, anyway. So you can see how, logically, we can string it all together. In the nines you feel the force of change. Whatever change. In this sense the 9 is not just a final stop before we start over. We still need to get to the tens.

Again, in the nines we talk about actual changes: change of heart, if cups; method, if batons; change of financial situation, if coins; change for the worse in general, if swords. Although the nines await the completion that comes with the tens, and can therefore be seen as passive, I see the nines as fairly dynamic: 9 moves towards something, and it has an impact on agency – unlike the sixes that also move towards something, but more as vehicles, rather than as agents. Some like to associate the 9 with a period of gestation. It takes 9 months to give birth to a child, but



we can basically invent any narrative that has a similar progression: one can give birth to child, a dress, or a book.

Finally with the tens we can say the following: 'I've had it (Cups); 'Oh dear, I'm done' (Swords); 'I can't see the wood for the trees' (Batons); 'Give me more' (Coins).

OWNING THE IMAGE

As a general rule, I always go with the above system: cunning folk method + processing the image, because I want to find a way to own the image that I read. If I see a clear clash between the 'imposed' meaning on the card and what the image shows in actuality, then I disregard the method and take more into account the image and what's happening on it. Anything else would amount to stubbornness and sheer dogmatism.

Now, when all this is said and done, I'd like to bring the reader's attention to the fact that we can easily find others claiming some other ideas related to how we reason. Some other cartomancers would swear that the batons are the most fortunate, and they would be ready to produce an argument. It's easy to produce arguments, especially when people think that invoking 'tradition' is enough. But invoking an idea is not the same as demonstrating its premise and what the idea does on such a premise. As storytelling goes, whatever story about the numbers we come up with is as legitimate as any. Here, the only thing that saves us from muddling the discourse is if we are consistent. I know successful readers who have a completely different system of reading the pip cards than I do. Within their own chosen system they are God.

The point is that whichever system we adopt, we will realize that the greatest value of the cards consists in allowing us to participate in storytelling. We can follow both traditional meanings *and* observe for ourselves what's going on. All we need to do is 'paint a picture' that has a beginning, middle, and an end. What I'm giving here is my understanding of the story of the cards. If the reader of this book will find another line of arguing, I think it's great. We can all invent a system that's all our own. We can all engage in testing what we come up with. That's what method theorists do: test. It is through testing that a method is consolidated and then passed on to whomever is willing to listen. That includes ideas about 'what' we can look for in a card vis-à-vis the received understanding passed on to us in the form of 'established meanings'.

The cunning-folk method as it combines with what I observe the optical way allows me to come up with formulations that are not only very direct, but also highly poetical, such as, for instance, this line here based on the King of Batons, 4 of Cups, and 8 of Coins: 'To have the gods seated in you means to stay in vibration.'



SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED

Long before cartomancy as a 'science' got popularized with the writings of French occultist Etteilla², the binaries above (contraction-expansion, etc.) had already been explored in astronomy and astrology. The language of the Marseille tarot, although associated with the language of the transcended image, or the so-called mystical, green knowledge of the language of the birds, can also be said to follow a more mundane line of structuring, going back to the Greeks rather than the beginning of times. What we now call 'spreads' actually comes from the nature philosophers, such as Empedocles (b. 490 BC) and Iamblichus (b. 245 AD), the latter having inspired a host of Neoplatonists such as Giordano Bruno (b. 1548) and Marsilio Ficino (b. 1433), both quite proficient in the magical and divinatory arts for which they have devised concrete methods of 'crossing the hedge.' Some of these methods have inspired cartomancers in their crafting of positional meanings.

Basically the cards describe three classical aspects in relation:

- THESIS – the individual you, or what's up with you
- ANTITHESIS – what is against you, or what helps you
- SYNTHESIS – all of you, or how all the others factors together describe you in context

As we have already seen, the idea is to formulate a sentence that's crisp and clear, and which offers the sitter a notion or an alternative thought about a situation to work with.

² See *Manière de se récréer avec le jeu de cartes nommées Tarots*, 1785.

Lecturing on esoteric correspondences can be mighty entertaining and fascinating, but it's not always useful vis-à-vis what people want to know. In this sense, what we call the language of the birds, or what I like to call, 'delivering one-liners,' is an old, tested practice, worth remembering and returning to.

As modern card readers are rediscovering old traditions, some get quite excited at the idea that one can actually read the Tarot without always having to lecture on each individual card and how it might relate to the tree of life, ceremonial magic, or astrology. This is a good development, to see that contemporary card readers familiarize themselves with the old notion that the cards are like a language, rather than like a symbol.

Some of us have been fortunate enough to have come across various reading traditions, ranging from reading with playing cards and 'historical' tarot decks, featuring 'types,' to reading with esoteric Tarot cards, featuring dream landscapes and diverse individual artists' fantasies. Yet, for instance, it has always been easier for me to follow the '3 cards: 1 sentence' notion than to follow the '3 cards: 30 minutes speech' idea.

There is a lively debate these days in the cartomantic community as to what is new and what is old, and how we can benefit from reading for the sentence rather than reading for the symbol. Where I grew up in Romania, most card readers I've seen have been versed in delivering the one sentence without ever needing 30 minutes for a Tarot session. These readers are all schooled in the art of observation, and their 'elaborate spreads' often consist of no more than three to five cards that they read 'in line'; the classical French *tirage-en-ligne* has similar roots in this cunning-folk method. They are also not very familiar with what is happening in the Anglo-American world, with many Tarot readers

now transitioning from the esoteric Tarot of Waite/Smith (1909) and Crowley/Harris (1943), the so-called Rider-Waite Tarot and the Thoth Tarot, to more traditionally oriented schools, such as the one proposed by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Philippe Camoin.³

While the Romanian readers would easily follow what Enrique Enriquez teaches, as his method stresses the importance of 'looking,' they would probably wonder what it is that Jodorowsky and Camoin are 'inventing' anew, when they claim originality for the method of following the gaze in the trumps and the court cards in order to figure out what is happening next. I have already used an example of this practice in the very first pages of this book, when I pulled another card from the pack to see what the Emperor was looking at – the presupposition here being that as the three-card string ended with a card looking beyond its frame, it is thus open to more cards.

While Jodorowsky has been instrumental in reviving the method of reading the Marseille Tarot, much of his psychomagic contribution is anchored in cunning-folk magic and ideas. Moreover, although he claims to free himself from the symbol, much of his reading style is completely Freudian, with reducing everything to the pairs Emperor-Empress, male-female, father-mother relations. But what if not everything reduces to our relationship with our parents? And even if it does? What if we just want to laugh at it? While I can appreciate the thinking that draws on the importance of the unconscious, I don't find it conducive to

3 Camoin and Jodorowsky have reconstructed a popular Marseille type tarot, or rather, as they put it, they have 'rebuilt' it. Their reconstruction is based on finding hidden elements in the cards, which now forms the basis of their method of reading. [<https://en.camoin.com/tarot/-Home-en-.html>] But, of course, the idea of hiding secrets in plain view is not so new, and it flourished particularly in the Renaissance, in alchemical and illuminated manuscripts.

my own reading style, one that relies more on assessing the usefulness of ambiguity in a card, and its potential to get us places we never thought existed.

Consequently, what I am interested in here is simply to look at the cards beyond 'schools', and thus urge the readers of this book to follow their own common sense, especially since it is a fact that we are naturally endowed with the capacity to perceive an image from different angles and to follow the play of embodiment, gesture, gazing, and functionality of what we see depicted in the cards.

AGENCY

Every reading should be guided by the idea that it is quite fun for the brain to recognize an emerging pattern. While describing each card individually has its benefits, the idea is to see how that description fits – or doesn't – what you can say about the card next to the one you start out with. Who is the subject? What does the subject do? How is this action received, if another character enters the picture? How does it all end? What is the function of the pip card next to a trump, and can it be used for something other than clarification? Let's start with three axioms:

- Agency equals embodiment.
- Gesture describes functionality.
- The gaze directs the intention.

Now, let us look at a quick example, starting with what we can identify is a primary function in a trump, and what it 'says' next to a pip or a court card:

THE EMPEROR: Visible force.
Next to the Ace of Swords: 'I'll do it.'
Next to the 4 of Cups: 'Not today.'

THE HANGED MAN: Invisible force.
Next to the Page of Swords: 'I didn't do it.'
Next to the 3 of Swords: 'So it goes.'

THE TOWER: Unexpected natural force.
Next to the 7 of Swords: 'What was that?'
Next to the Queen of Cups: 'I'm bursting for you.'

THE WHEEL: Changing force.
Next to the 9 of Coins: 'Who turned that wheel?'
Next to the 6 of Cups: 'I'm on vacation.'

STRENGTH: Imposing force.
Next to the 8 of Batons: 'I'll show you all.'
Next to the Ace of Cups: 'I'm binging.'

THE DEVIL: Subtle force.
Next to the 6 of Swords: 'Come to papa.'
Next to the 10 of Cups: 'Get a life.'

Some forces strike the blatant way, some the soft way.

THE EMPEROR has agency. He creates rules, and even if you don't see what he rules over, he's good at maintaining the illusion that he has power. He finds a way to demonstrate power over

others. The pip cards will describe the way in which he uses that power.

THE HANGED MAN has little to no agency. Unless we assume that he did it to himself. The pip cards next to him will tell us to what extent he will be saved. A court card will tell us by whom.

THE TOWER has natural agency, and we can do nothing about it. The pip cards next to it tell us something about the nature of the catastrophe.

THE WHEEL makes us wonder: Who's the agent here? None or many. Who's turning that wheel? Do we see a hand at work? If it's that of the Hanged Man, then good luck to us where flow is concerned. We are so stuck that we'll think it's forever. A pip card next to it will tell us something about the time it will take us to get to wherever we are going (to a party, to work, to sell, to wreak havoc).

STRENGTH also makes us wonder: Who is the agent here? Perhaps the woman, as she has the upper hand. She may not be convincing, though, since the Lion may also have something to say. A pip card will determine the ultimate agency, but judging from the image alone and what it embodies, we assume already that the woman has agency to begin with. But that can change.

THE DEVIL also poses ambiguity: There are three figures on this card, each with their function. Who is the primary agent here? The Devil? How do we know the Devil? Can we see him, feel him? What about the other two? In an extended reading we may say, metaphorically, that we may be the slaves of some addiction, oppression, or depression. Does that mean that wine is the agent? Is a brain low on nutrients the agent? Unless we're dealing with a wife-beater, we can't always determine the nature of the agents in this card, who are external to our powers. Nor can we

determine how exactly they may impact on our lives. That's the subtle nature of agency here.



The Devil above, while putting a bond on his interest, also submits to the Queen's bidding. All the hands are extended here, to offer or to grab, but there is also a certain tenderness in these gestures. I see it mirrored in the emblematic ribbon going around the two coins like an infinite string. Who holds it, who controls it? Him or her? He'll probably get there first. She's still preoccupied with her cup and her scepter, sitting, and waiting. What will happen to the coins, if they get released? Who gets them, and in exchange for what? I think the Devil wants to kiss the Queen, and he's ready to pay for it. But the Queen can see that he doesn't quite have the nerve for it. He's hiding behind all those coins and white ribbon tricks. 'Here's a drink,' she says. 'Stop looking at yourself in the golden mirror. And don't let those two imitate you all the time.'

We could go on.

As a general rule, agency can be determined by signifiers leading the action, the context of the question, external factors determined by the preponderance of a certain suit over another (too many wands tend to take the action into their own twigs, natural catastrophes also fall here), and internal factors pertaining to character and type attributes (if the Devil is above me and the Magician below me, then maybe Vodou has agency, or a new passion, etc). Posing the question: 'Who do I identify with here?' may not always be enough when several cards come together in a line.

In determining agency the idea is to establish a dialogue with the cards, talk to the cards, and imagine them talk back. Reading the Tarot is like having constant conversations with the images. Once we figure out what the Tarot says to us, we will be able to do what is useful and necessary, either for ourselves or for the ones seeking our advice. We can never presume anything, but we can emphasize. We can say, 'here' and 'there', 'take this', and 'make your cuts in accordance'. There is a world of stories we can tell. Stories that save us from ourselves. Stories that can inspire others.

There is an old debate regarding the history of the Tarot, with historians and philosophers insisting that the Tarot was primarily a game before it became a tool for divination. Michael Dummett and Thierry Depaulis made a real effort to unmask the 'frauds' in their book, *A Wicked Pack of Cards* (1996). All fine. And then what? Divination as an art has an even older history than a wicked pack of cards, so what purpose exactly does the chicken and the egg debate have? I value the Tarot for the stories that it tells, whether they be of history or personal history. I want my cards to spell ABRACADABRA for me. The rest is just endless talk, devoid of wisdom and its soul. Let me share some magic now.

THE READING

Why did nature give me over to this creature
— don't call it my choice,
I was *ventured*.

— ANNE CARSON,
THE BEAUTY OF THE HUSBAND —



We are finally approaching seeing how the cards can be read more extensively, or rather, how we can exhaust a string. Call it tarot hermeneutics or the art of reading. But before I get to the individual readings that demonstrate what we can say in a session, I want to begin with where we left off, namely, with a quick example of why agency is so important, especially when reading the cards 'in-line,' and as it compares to a 'positional' reading, or the reading that follows the cards set in positions whose meanings are determined beforehand. With this example I want to suggest the value of this classical draw, the *tirage-en-ligne*, or the *tirage-rapide*, over the French Cross 5-card spread. I also want to demonstrate how we can use the pip cards not only for clarification, but also to show why a pip card in-line is more interesting than when we lay it over a trump. I will start with the cards in the French Cross layout, and then place them 'in-line' in the same order in which they come. The layout for the French Cross is as follows:

3
1 5 2
4

Horizontal line

- 1. The sitter, or her situation
- 2. Pro or against the sitter

Vertical line:

- 3. Top card: advice
- 4. Bottom card: outcome

Card in the middle:

- 5. The synthesis, arrived at through the numerical addition of the other 4 cards, summing up the relations

A woman wants to know:

'I wonder how my former lover is doing.

We didn't part on good terms.'

Five cards fall on the table:

Justice, Charioteer, The World, The Stars, (7 of Cups)



As the cards are in position, and we don't have to guess who is who, we get this straightforward narrative:

'You want to know the truth (Justice), about why your lover left you (Charioteer leaving). You're up against your lover's decision to move on (Charioteer). He hit the road, and on his international travels (The World), he found another woman to entertain him (The Star).'

But there's also the possibility here that the outcome card, The Star, doesn't refer to the 'other woman,' but simply passes judgment on our sitter's situation, rather than on that of her former love interest. In this case we would have to conclude that her very question about how her lover is doing, not only allows her, but also leads her to being inspired in some way or another.

Justice at the center of this layout too, as the synthesis card gathering all the threads, may further strengthen the possibility that although the man she inquires about seems content with his life, whether he is in a new relationship or just well guided, he is still thinking about our woman. The Star card as the outcome here is to be read as saying something about his situation and not hers, since this was a question about a third party.

Let us place here a pip card over Justice at the center. We get the 7 of Cups. Traditionally this means 'heart trouble.' The inference that we can now make is that while the Charioteer has been looking around, his heart is still with Justice. As is hers with him. But they are not together.



Now, this reading is clearly guided by the positional meanings of the cards. We know who is who, and who does what to whom, and we don't give it much more thought. Each card is in its 'house' (an idea from astrology), and we don't concern ourselves much more with what else we can see beyond these houses (me, you – with me or against me – what to do, and where it gets me).

But if we place the cards in-line, we then see a more nuanced reading emerging, also with the possibility of fewer agents. While this reading doesn't contradict the first, it appears much stronger because we have only two actors. Here's what we observe:



The balance in Justice's hands rhymes with the two horses. Has Justice herself sent off the Charioteer? Indeed, she has, the sitter confirms. Now she looks at the Charioteer with some regret in her gaze, her sword becoming his scepter, a sign of empowerment. Not hers, but his. So it is Justice who has contributed to the empowerment of the Charioteer, who has now moved full-throttle straight into the World. And who is the Star now? Is she the new woman in the life of the Charioteer, as hypothesized before, or is this Justice herself? Or is she his guide through the world?

If we follow the visual argument here, we will quickly discover that we have grounds to believe that the Star *is* Justice. Two balancing cups turn into two horses that then turn into two chalices.

What's this? And is this good or bad? Is Justice still carrying a torch for the Charioteer? Watching his world from the outside, still wanting to give, now even more than before, when she was perhaps cold and impassive, and trying to do the right thing? I wouldn't want to be this woman, if that is the case, tending to a world that's not mine. The reading can only get complicated if we don't stay on track as to who we read for – always a challenge when reading about a third party. The 7 of Cups situation is also clear and sad here, though a different focus is in play. This time we can clearly see how it's the woman in the World card who rhymes with the single cup in the 7 of Cups card. However, as the trump sequence is not open here, what with the last card facing inward, we would not need the pip card at all to follow what the Star may be looking at, if turned to the right.

As you can see, the same reading having a different focus can put us on a track where we arrive at a much more nuanced understanding of what is going on, if we follow the cards, rather than the positions the cards fall within. The cards 'in-line' clearly exhibit a more heart-wrenching feeling about the situation, while the French Cross, although clear and clean, is quite devoid of the subtler dynamics between the characters here that embody different states and actions: our woman sends her man into the world, which leaves her pouring out her heart into a void. For her, the World means having her heart spilled all over the place. Thus the cards 'in-line' leave us with a sense of 'unfinished business'. As there's more to this story, this kind of reading invites me to consider the exact opposite of what I get out of positional readings.

The art of reading the cards consists of keeping turning the pages, turning the cards, and letting the cards turn their visual elements into songs and poetry and mystery and fascination.

If the question is good the answer will kill us.

Some would argue that if it weren't for love, there'd be no fortune telling. Indeed, there's a dynamics to love questions that questions about work don't have. The card of the Lovers in the tarot pack displays a tensioned anxiety about the ways of the heart. Unlike most of the contemporary tarot productions – often veritable clones of the most popular tarot in the Anglo-American world, the Waite/Smith tarot (1909) – which presents us with the iconic Biblical tale of Adam and Eve on the Lovers card, the Marseille Tarot insists on telling us that love is never as clear as we think. What is more, the Marseille Tarot suggests that before love begins, it belongs in a triangle. One man, two women. Good luck to them all.

In the following example I want to present the reader with a reading of a three-card sequence in two parts, especially as the question – one about love – addresses two hypothetical situations. Here is the context of a woman-in-love situation, as reported on by herself:

'I'm seeing a married man. He wants to be with me, but he also wants to be with his wife. The world of our love triangle is getting smaller and more uncomfortable, and I'm thinking of escaping. I simply want to move to another town. I would like some clarity as to whether this would be a good idea.'

For this reading I've elected to read a three-card sequence for each of the two possibilities: to leave the relationship or to stay in it. The idea was to get a sense of how things would pan out for the woman if she picked what we would both assess looked like the better option, obviously based on the visual narrative in the cards.

For the situation of staying, three cards fell on the table:

Stars, Lovers, Wheel of Fortune



The answer here was pretty clear. If she stayed, she would find herself caught in the love triangle. The man she hoped for would be forever caught between two women. The consequence of this would be with our woman going round in the same cycle, being in a rut. Her fortune would literally be up and down without anything conclusive or decisive. She was inclined to stay, the Star in her wanted to give and make sacrifices, but only the past was there to receive what she had to give. In other words, if she had continued hoping, she would not have achieved anything other than going around in the same circle and cycle. Her pattern – one that she was not happy with – would repeat itself. The man would not make a move, as he was too hesitant, thus ending delivering the same old story of indecision that would get our woman nowhere.

If we follow the visual elements in the cards here and the way in which they represent movement and size, we note the following:

In the first card we have one figure kneeling towards the left. The woman is naked and occupies most of the frame of the card. The Stars above her seem very close to her in perspective, suggesting a symbiotic relation with nature. A certain sense of calmness and serenity informs the atmosphere of this card. The next card features three people, all having the same size. Already here we begin to see that things are not going so well, clearly getting the sense that the personal power and resources in the first card are here divided. So the movement is one of loss of power, and diminished agency. The last card features a further degradation, with the three figures in the Lovers card losing all sense of purpose and humanity. Being caught in a wheel that no one knows who turns is an indication of an unpleasant situation that perpetuates itself beyond anyone's control. Here one would rightly like to know what happens to love, and what chances of manifestation it stands to have under the circumstance.

For the situation of leaving, three cards fell on the table:

The Moon, Strength, The Tower



Here the cards indicated that the woman really struggled with the idea of leaving. She struggled with the realization that she and her lover were beyond verbally articulating what their hearts were telling them.

The Moon card suggests a state of confusion and fear of the unknown. The woman in the Strength card displays power and a willingness to overcome the situation. We can see how this is developed at the visual level: The two dogs in the Moon card become a woman and her dog in the Strength card. From this we made the inference that the woman could leave the muddled relationship if she took the upper hand, or if she positioned herself above her problem.

The third card, the Tower, indicated, however, that the consequence of such a decision would have blasting proportions, both for herself and her lover. Whatever it was that they have built together would come down, and be demolished to the ground. The Tower is not a card that affects people in a gentle way, but it can often have the function of releasing the tension and the pressure that love triangles build up to.

In this case here, we can see the magnitude of the impact of the card of the Lovers on us. While we may be able to make a choice without hesitating too much, in hindsight we can also experience doubts, or nostalgia, manifesting in questioning our own judgment: 'Did I make the right choice,' or, 'what would the path not taken have been like?'

Often the cards next to the Lovers can give us a sense of how we position ourselves in these questions, yet it is not always that we get the answers that we want to hear or that will make us happy.

DO AND DON'T

When in doubt, do or don't. Make sure you know what the plan is, follow it, and stay away from engaging with irrelevant things. Another popular and classic variation on the three-card sequence is the five-card layout. Two significant cards are added to the three cards that describe a situation, which are placed strategically: one on top of the three, in the position of what 'to do', and one below the vertical string, advising on what definitely 'not to do.' I find that people appreciate the added information and the clear sense of purpose. Especially the card in the position of what not to do proves to be of immense help, as it often discloses some nasty blind spot. While most of us are accustomed to coping with some issue by thinking in terms of how we can solve it – hence we think in terms of what to do about it – we are not always as quick at recognizing what we must steer away from. So here's an example of such a reading, which demonstrates the value of telling people what the cards suggest is *not* a very good idea.

The following reading was done for a woman who had just gotten through a divorce and was at a crossroad regarding her graduate studies. She was not sure about what to do next.

Questions about one's path can be tricky as they disclose all sorts of anxieties about the future that do not necessarily factor in all the alternatives one has at hand. Often it's not even sure that the person knows it herself. Consequently, answering such questions presupposes a lot of footwork that is contingent on the person's level of self-knowledge and her ability to differentiate between her projections, self-doubts, and actual, available choices. Here, in spite of knowing better, I sometimes go ahead with consulting the cards for such questions, even though I realize that I

set myself up for some ambiguous answers. But I have to admit that I like being surprised. I like the idea of challenging the cards to see how they answer.

In our example here, the woman got the following cards:

SITUATION: **The Devil, The World, The Wheel of Fortune**

DO: **The Tower** – DON'T DO: **The Empress**



First off, the cards resisted giving a straightforward answer as to what this woman's path was. But we got a very good description of her situation. She had left behind an oppressive, abusive and blinding situation characterized by the function of the Devil, namely, to make one believe that there are no alternatives to the bondage. Although she had re-established her World after her divorce, she was still left with the feeling that her world was one of restrictions and constraints. Her world was now a safe environment, but at the same time it was also prone to changes – not all of them of the exciting type.

At this point in the reading the woman told me that she was forced into some agreement with her former husband, which gave her the feeling of 'free at last,' but also 'more of the same.' The World – emphasizing a standstill moment – followed by the Wheel – suggesting movement – is not always a world of full realizations and accomplishments.

Noticing how the Wheel here downright takes over the tulip torch that the Devil holds in his hand, as it passes through the woman's hand, is not entirely reassuring, as it suggests that some significant remnant from the past still has the power to control the new situation.

Looking at the gestures here, we can see that while the Devil has his left arm in the air, actively still calling, the woman in the World card, while having her arm going down, is also still in a receptive mode. In her other hand she holds a baton. Perhaps this is a truncated version of the one the Devil holds, which has fire in it. Yet, as this very stick gets stuck in the wheel, it makes us wonder: how do we feel about this transition, and is it free of past relations? A big torch with a flaming tulip crowning it in the last card suggests that some fire is still going on.

As we can see then, the Wheel of Fortune here, coming after the World, is not a sure sign of either fortune or new changes. The order in which the cards fell suggests this much: some change has occurred and is ongoing, but the World has carried into the new situation some inevitable fire.

Now, if we look at the card on top, identifying what TO DO concretely, and then contrast it with the card at the bottom indicating what NOT TO DO, we see that we're here with some challenge. The card of the Tower is generally not a good card, as it presupposes the shaking up of one's house. Not even at a party, when people are having a good time, do we appreciate it when things get smashed. It may be fun for a while, but then standing on the debris the day after will hardly give anybody a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

But perhaps there's a reason why our woman was called to embody the Tower, and smash her house once more. Given the above concern, with the cards describing a situation that was not free of the grip of the Devil, going gently about it and trying to negotiate, was obviously not the way forward. I simply advised the woman to let all her frustrations out, stomp and yell and shout, if necessary, and to stop being nice, eloquent, and well-mannered.

The card indicating what not to do suggested that much. Communicating her intelligent messages to the world like an Empress was not what would get her out of her predicament.

In terms of her question about which path to take, professionally, the card of the Tower as it contrasts with the card of the Empress told us the following: building up a strong ego based on the image of the woman in control suggests a kind of brutal vulnerability. Here, in fact, our woman was advised to not rely on man-

made constructions, but rather to try to bust out of straightjackets and incarcerating constraints. If one doesn't pay attention to how one builds a career and what resources one puts into it, one can easily end up finding oneself a prisoner to one's own image. The cards clearly suggested that the tall towers in this woman's life must be demolished first, if she was to get anything out of it.

Again, the cards did not say anything about what this something 'other' or what this other path would be, so at that point in the reading we could not play the classical fortuneteller who predicts the arrival of a tall dark stranger whom this woman must go with. But they did do something clever and more useful instead: they suggested that, insofar as this woman had some unfinished business, or that she had been carrying the torch for some someone for too long, a drastic approach to her life was needed before her path was clear.

As for closure, the cards showed that there would be little purpose in maintaining a façade, or investing energy in piling up on things that would give her worldly recognition. What she needed was not the composure an Empress is capable of, but rather to go wild and shake up her house. What she needed was also not to concern herself with the others in her house, and how they might perceive what was seemingly in this situation a destructive force. Rather, what she needed was to get closure on how she could vanquish the oppressive by destroying the very ground and premise that the oppressive operates with and within. What she needed was to practice saying 'no' in an electrifying way and bursting, rather than saying 'yes' in a civilized, yet unhelpful, compromising way. What she needed to practice was how to say 'enough, this house will go down now,' and then allow herself to register what change such radical attitude brings with it.

In this reading then, you can see how both approaches to the cards were adopted, and how each contributed to deriving meaning. I have relied on what has been orally transmitted regarding the primary meaning of the cards as well as my own competence in reading the visual cues that the cards have presented us with. The idea is always to get a sense of the nuances that underlie the structure of the reading situation as it is by anchored within and guided by the context of the question.

In the next example, we will look at how meaning emerges from the cards and what quality it acquires when the pip cards are in play as well. This reading will follow the same layout: SITUATION, DO AND DON'T.

VIRTUAL MATTER

Dating people on the Internet is becoming increasingly popular. But it can also bring with it a certain anxiety, especially when the virtual meeting translates into a physical meeting.

A woman in Europe was about to meet with a man from the US she had corresponded with via chat rooms. She was apprehensive as to what to expect, as she felt she didn't really know anything about this man's situation. She was also surprised at the man's willingness to just fly over and see her, given what he had been telling her about his line of business that didn't give her the impression of good financial income and resources. So she wanted to know what the cards might indicate about the extent to which it was worth pursuing the proposition to spend a whole vacation together.

She got the following cards:

SITUATION: **The Moon, Death, The Devil**

DO: **The Fool** – DON'T DO: **The Hanged Man**



Looking at the horizontal sequence of three cards, I told her straightforwardly that I didn't think I had good news for her. The cards indicated a trajectory of going from the context of muddy waters and hidden things to an attempt to end that, but without too much success. Following the visual clues, we can clearly see how two dogs in the Moon card turned into two bones in the Death card, and then into two enslaved imps in the Devil card, roaming in the underworld, the world of the dead. Not a good progression or good omen for this relationship.

The Moon and the Devil together also indicated that there were many hidden factors that would not come out, even if an attempt at cutting through it was made. So the Death card here, instead of being of some help, announced that some head would fall due to hidden agendas and misunderstandings. What is more, it also looked like another, and greater force than the two involved was going to keep them in a state of puppetry.

The Fool on top suggests a flight from the situation. And the Hanged Man at the bottom clearly says: 'don't get trapped. Don't let anyone hang you upside down. Walk away if you can.'

At this point some may want to ask me: 'why are you imposing a fairly negative outlook on cards of the Fool and the Hanged Man? Can't the Fool also be read as a sign of relaxing about the situation and enticing the woman to just walk straight into this relationship without thinking too much about it? And wouldn't the Hanged Man support that, even as he's suspended there between the worlds, suggesting going with the flow, rather than getting stuck with your head between your legs?' Fair enough. But as I read the cards together, I cannot disregard the fact that the string describing the situation is not positive, and that the cards advising what to do and what not must 'consider' that.

But this is where the pip cards come to our rescue, as they help us determine precisely how we must take the cards that do not appear 'in-line' and thus in close proximity to the other cards that would allow us to follow the visual symmetry, and the play of equivalences and exceptions in the cards.

As the trumps here were also rather hard cards the woman got, looking at some pip cards over them opened up for a more nuanced reading. I thus shuffled the remaining cards in the deck, the court cards and the pip cards together, and then pulled cards at random to see what the trumps in juxtaposition with these new cards could tell us.

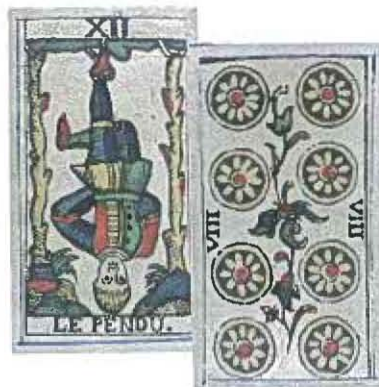
The Fool next to the 9 of Swords told me that although fleeing the scene and liberating herself through walking away was, indeed, what was indicated, the woman would not be able to avoid the feeling of disappointment.

She would walk away, but would feel very hurt at the same time. Her walking stick would have turned into a sharp blade, trying to clear her way through density.

In this sense the cards said something more about the general situation, and advised the woman to prepare herself for an emotional let down. Given the situation, however, the cards also suggested that it's better to go through a break-up before things would get more difficult. The trajectory for this relationship did not bode well at all. The Devil may have stirred her passions, but these passions were not of the good kind.



The 8 of Coins next to the Hanged Man told me that in the process of not letting herself be bound, she had to consider that even though the situation may present itself as full of ideas, and ripe with material interest for some good working plan, this was definitely not what the woman wanted: to sit with more people at the table and negotiate about it. 'Do not negotiate,' the cards said, as the 8 coins accompanied the Hanged Man in the position of what not to do.



Visually here, we can see how the two poles holding the Hanged Man turn into two rows of 4 coins each, suggesting an encounter that would transform life-force into material interest.

The Ace of Swords is also a death card in the sense that it calls for a final and important decision to be made; one that calls for a cut that's clean and free of emotional content. We are not with the drinking cups here, but with the swords. This one clearly said that if the woman had any plans for a vacation with this man, she had better cut it out: 'Get rid of the idea, before you lose your head.'



After a reading such as this, when the cards seem to give a non-negotiable answer, I sometimes turn the cut deck to look at the bottom card. Traditionally this is called the surprise card. We got the Empress here.



A good card in this case, as it allowed the woman to breathe after the tension she had been feeling when seeing all the cards that warned her against doing what she would have liked to do, namely meet a mysterious man. The Empress was mirroring an aspect of this woman as young and beautiful, and someone who was also capable of realizing her dreams through her intelligent manner and apt communication. I suggested to her that she could draw on the power of this Empress. Make it manifest, and allow for the qualities of this power to emerge in her life, so that she would not drown in any kind of mysterious fascination with the unknown. So here the cards clearly had a preventive function, with the pip cards enforcing the narrative that the trumps were telling. The woman dropped her plans, and felt quite relieved.

It is often the case that students of cartomancy feel intimidated by the larger sets into which we throw the whole pack of cards, or for which we read with the whole deck. In the following I want to demonstrate how we can arrive very quickly at a very commonsensical answer by going step by step through 13 cards, and with each step by delivering a one-line message. A consistent story will emerge against whose background we can then extract the essence of what we need to know. This is a classic layout, Eteilla's *Grande Etoile*, which I like to refer to as the 'Council of 13.' The cards are laid in the following manner:

		8		
	10	4	12	
6	2	1	3	7
	13	5	11	
		9		

Read the cards in this order: First the inner cross, the horizontal line first, with focus on pairing 2+3 and then 4+5. Then the outer cross, the horizontal line first, also with focus on pairing 6+7 and then 8+9. Then the X, with the left diagonal line first 10+11 and then 12+13. The center card must be taken into consideration, all according to how the reading advances and dances. Variations upon the crosses can be made afterwards by looking at how the cards modify the neighboring cards, or how they enter in relation around the edges, or the curbs. For instance we can look at the clusters 10+6+13 and its mirroring partner 12+7+11, or go all around. At last, we can peep at the bottom card of the cut deck for a final word, or a surprise.

For any larger set, I always advise to pick a significator in advance. If you don't, you'll quickly find that you'll have no idea as to who is who and who is doing what to whom.

Significators are assigned according to physical traits not professions: Blond men and women go with the cups; brunettes go with the batons, dark ones go with the spades, and white haired or red heads go with the coins.

Also as a general rule, the court cards indicate other people, and not 'aspects' of the querent.

Depending on the surrounding cards, sometimes the Page in a suit can indicate the thoughts of one of the higher courts, the King's or the Queen's. For an example of this, revisit the chapter on the suits (p. 109).

The suit of cups indicates blood relations, the batons work relations, the swords official bodies external to one's work and family, and the coins business relations.

THE QUESTION

A woman posed the following question, related to her work. The Queen of Batons was picked as her significator: 'What conditions must be fulfilled in order for me to be free of official work, but still have my hand in a sack of money?'

Basically, what she wanted to know was whether she could become financially independent. As the Council of 13 shows relations around such questions, it proves quite prompt in answering.



Now, the idea is to begin formulating some sentences according to the formula for the reading above. It is actually very important that the structure is followed closely. The reason for this has to do with timing and the chronology of events.

We begin with the inner cross and work our way out towards the margins. The diagonal lines can be seen as outcomes, while the 'curbs', or the 'rosetta petals' can be seen as factors that underlie the overall reading.

Here we also note what is above and what is below, and look at the preponderance of some suits over the others, and active trumps over the passive ones. The idea is to develop a sense of seeing what balances the whole reading against the backdrop of the natural dance of symmetries that the cards perform.

First enter a dialogue with the cards and then with the person in front of you. Most of all, keep it simple. Here is what we might say to our querent:

'Leave the world of constraint behind galloping, and turn towards managing your resources that you can and will spend on yourself (XXI, VII, QB).

A change in your finances will lead you to a practical woman who will act on your behalf (9C, VII as vehicle, QC).

Dealing with a fast runner will not open the sack of money for you. You'll have enough for yourself, but not enough to share (2B, VII, 5C).

A great call will lead you to the dark side (XX, VII, XVIII).

With the Devil above you and the Magician below you, you're set to work some magic, or engage in clandestine activities (XV, QB, I).

A hidden passion for, or dependency on the King of Wands (XV, KB) will inspire to new working plans (8B, I).'

Now let us unpack these main sentences.

Although the Queen of Batons remained in the deck at the time of shuffling, she insisted on popping in our Council. We take this as a sign that she wants to play an active role in her own story. As the Queen is also oriented towards the future, having turned her back to the World, we are meant to speculate to what extent her dealings in the past were successful. The crossed 2 batons here indicate that our Queen must have run into a barred access to the World, which made her hop on another wagon and drive away to greener pastures, or pastures of her own, if you remember that the 5 of Coins is traditionally associated with the body and what you put into it, or as with coins, with spending money for your own pleasure.

Yet a world which the significator turns her back on is not a strong world, or one of consequence. We therefore read this card here as a card of constraint, rather than as a card of any use or other grand accomplishments that the World is otherwise associated with. It thus makes a difference seeing not only what other card falls next to the 'good' card, but also seeing where the 'good' card is placed in a sequence.

The vertical line of the inner cross introduces another actor into the picture, the Queen of Coins. As the diviner often has no clue about the life of the one she reads the cards for, she must make the inference that this other person is either someone the woman she reads the cards for knows, or someone who will come into her life. Nice predictive style. Since we are with the coins here, we conclude that this has to do with money. A woman of wealthy means will have something to say about our Queen of Baton's desire.

The way in which we also develop an argument must be aligned constantly with the subject, that is, the person the diviner reads the cards for. So it's very important that all the sentences that we end up formulating pertain to the individual sequences of cards, as they have a bearing on the subject we read the cards for. We begin with the subject and we end with the subject. So here when we say, 'a change in your finances will lead you to a business woman,' we have our client in focus, not the others that might populate her cards in layout. We won't shift our focus and start developing a narrative about this other woman. Although we may identify other persons in a spread, we must construe a narrative that is plausible and very likely consistent with the context of the circumstance of our clients. Often the client will say, 'I know such a person.' If they don't know such a person, they can start enjoying the possibility of an encounter.

At this point we can also swerve from the reading that follows our formula in a pedestrian style, and simply look at what is happening with the Queen of Coins. We hold this information to ourselves, however, and only fling it across the table to our client when the time is right – we don't want to hand over her narrative to some random character in her spread. Here, my first observation after I had delivered the second line was very much marked by the impression I got from the visual elements on the cards. As the Queen of Coins faces directly the King of Batons, I could not help noticing how she is almost ready to stuff her assets into the King's belly.

Proverbially speaking, the way to happiness passes through our stomachs. This made me think of what bearing such observation might have on the Queen of Batons, our significator, as she also faces the 5 of Coins, a card associated with food, the hearth

in general, or the kitchen and cooking in particular (not so much with eating, as we would need to see another card here suggesting the dining-room). As the King of Batons is receptive to the gift of the Queen of Coins – her coin almost fits entirely the ‘coin’ on his belly (a fortuitous taxing image here) – we literally want to know: ‘what’s cooking?’

We have already made the point that a world is left behind here, and that, what could have been a helping and collaborative hand (2B), may have turned into blocking the entrance to a world of full realizations. Consequently, the card of the World here was seen as functioning more like a full stop than an elevation.

But if we continue, we note that the top of the layout announces great changes beyond anyone’s control. When the Angel of Judgment blows his trumpet, everyone rises whether they like it or not. As this card, however, mirrors the card of the Moon, we are led to think that there may be a problem with how this calling is heard. Water can drown any sound, and the dawn of day falling straight into the night before it’s over may bring its own complications with it. It is as if before newness can be explored, it will dissipate into the darkness. Now, this can be either good or bad, depending on what the aim is. As our woman wanted to know something about how she may achieve economical independence, and thus free herself from working for the government, we may see these two cards emphasizing a movement from a public life to a more private one. So, all good.

Traditionally the Moon card has not always been all about madness, but also about family. The same with the Judgment card. But whereas in the latter we have an outer, or external expression of familial relations – ‘here is my family for all to see’ – the Moon card leads us to a life behind the scenes – a family that’s

not talked about in public. The Moon card taken together with the Queen of Coins above it, allows us make the inference that perhaps what would render our Queen of Batons free of her current ‘working for the system’ situation is to set up a private business that has other women in sight. That is, work independently with and for women.

There is also the idea of a cycle here, what with the Moon’s cycles, which makes us think of work that is intermittent, rather than continuous. So we see a reduction in the work load, which may well explain the 5 of Coins that the Queen of Batons is looking at: neither too much nor too little, but exactly as much as it’s necessary.

The Devil entering a diagonal relation with the King of Batons, our Queen’s consort, suggests a relation of dependency. The driving force at the center of this Council is here felt in the form of dominance. The King of Batons, as informed by the Devil’s materialism, and facing the Queen of Coins too, has a World in his head, and this World must be functional – or so he thinks, while weaving some 8 sticks together.

But our Queen is not really interested in what the King is thinking about. The Devil is also above her, informing her thinking, yet below her she has the Magician, the man of ideas and actions that are of a different manifestation than those of the King’s. The Magician translates the Queen of Batons’ power and influence over to the King, whose own encounter with the Magician is yet mediated by the Queen of Coins. With the Magician at her back and facing the King, she seems to make a case for the acceptance of new approaches to work into this couple’s life.

The Magician himself is not a man of wealthy means, but when the Devil mirrors his actions we can expect some ingenious

strategies that would solve the scarcity of money or the economic hassle. As the Queen of Batons has all these other courtly characters behind her, not to mention her driving force and a whole other world, we can speculate on what it is exactly that this woman wants. She speaks of a desire for economic independence, but seems to be caught in a world of trickery.

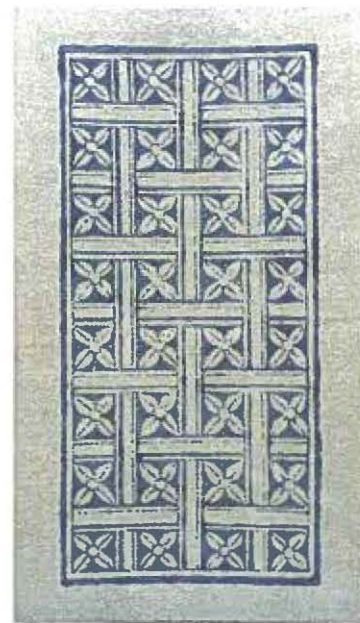
Is there a sack of money for our Queen, then? Not in these cards. But there is a clear indication that although our Queen will not be able to wiggle her way out of working for the system – when the King of Batons is not the consort, he is the boss – she may find a way to work with women, rather than other larger groups – something that her own boss will either facilitate, or downright suggest to her that she could develop.

We could continue, but suffice it to say that it also helps to simply look at why we get the overall impression here as one of ties. Note the batons: we have the baton cards, number 2 and 8, and then the batons in the hands of the other people depicted here, starting with the Charioteer. Even the Angel's trumpet, a wooden windpipe, can also easily pass for a baton. A total of 10 batons. That's a whole lot of them in a layout of 13 cards. This tells us that, indeed, there's still work here to be done, or that there's more work is the works.

So what is our Queen to do about her disappointing predicament? Beat a horse to death? Or simply rely on the distribution of money that will come to her the non-traditional way? Two coins from the Devil, two from the Magician, and one from herself. Perhaps the coin in the middle of the 5 of Coins is her lucky coin; one that she has been carrying with her from her past glory.

Yet again, more could be said. But it is clear how a basic formula for divination can yield a lot of information. The idea is to

follow the steps, gather all the clues that the images hold for you, and then process the information. Always think about what is plausible and probable. Allow yourself also to think the impossible, though, don't go over board with the speculations. You must find evidence in the cards for whatever you promulgate. The intuitive impulse without your ability to recognize an emerging pattern is quite useless. Intuition is good to have if your experience is of the personal gnosis kind, and if it manifests as sheer clarity. If you want to share with others what you see and how you feel about what you see, you need to use your common sense first. Follow all the lines you can, straight lines, lines in a cross, or in a zigzag pattern. Get a sense of what dance your cards perform. Can you hear the music? The poetry?



The historians are right when they want to emphasize the ludic aspect of the Tarot cards, though they do that as a way of debunking divination. I wonder what they are afraid of. The only reason why we want to read cards is because they appeal to our sense of gambling. Imagine gambling with the possibility of changing your future, or just knowing it. *Can* you even know it? And if you were to know it, would you be able to change it? Look at what happened to Oedipus. He went to see a diviner, she told him bad news, and then off he went committing one mistake after the other. He also wanted to change his future. Well, as they say, the questions are always much more important and fascinating than the answers, and they are right. So we keep asking these questions that don't necessarily lead to the so-called 'rational' solutions.

The beauty of dealing the cards, and dealing with the cards consists of the fact that with the cards we are free. We are free to think whatever we damn please. We are free to think in alternative ways. Not everybody likes that. Not everybody wants people to get ideas of freedom. We must all do what the neighbor does, because the neighbor is a good citizen of the state. Of course, the Popes of the world knew just how to exploit people's need to gamble with their lives, and invent stakes that were all more outrageous than the best fiction we can read. It's quite fascinating to read the old reports on tax evasion going all the way back to medieval times, when the card makers, forming guilds, were trying to buy themselves privileges from the higher powers in exchange for selling freedom. So people would die indebted from having too much fun with the cards, but any surviving epitaph of a gambler will show that the life of that person surpassed the life of any

other righteous one who dutifully followed the rules. What playing with cards teaches us is that we must never forget our nature. And what exactly is this nature of ours? Well, it's simple really. I think that what we all want is to fly, get a sense of achieving the impossible without having to scalp a lot of people of their money on Wall Street. What we all want is to breathe freedom, live it, and live up to it. A tall order if you're under the orders from the Pope. One of the lessons I've learnt from reading the cards is how to differentiate precisely between what's essential for me to know or to do, and what is not. However, as we are not free of cultural pre-conditioning, it is not sure that what we think we know is also aligned with objective knowledge. Who's to say that what I think I know is not already part of a dictation?

For me, it's not nearly as essential to know how the cards 'work', and why they're so precise, as my experience of the cards is very simple. Every time I lay down three cards, off I go telling a story. This story is always mine, and chances are that there's less of an inauthentic import into it – as no one can escape the symbolic order – when I use the game of chance to tell my story. I can frame the story with a specific question in mind, or I can downright imagine that I'm a poet who looks at the cards as if for the first time: 'Look, the old man is worried that his work will not cover the bills for his new love.'



Many diviners *in spe* who come my way are worried about the question of authenticity, performing, staging a reading, theatricality, and 'cold' readings, or the readings that make recourse to tapping into the cultural consciousness of the audience, people's body language and their clothes, rather than the cards themselves. To all of these concerns I have this to say: all the setting of the stage pertaining to the act of divination is part of the method. In this sense setting neither adds to it, nor lessens the process of reading. Any good cartomancer with respect for herself will go to a 'cold' place before any reading. Even when we're talking about reading at parties. There are two senses of 'cold readings' that put people off. One is associated with the 'fake' and the other is associated with 'logic'. But insofar as all readings rest on method, they are *all* cold – even the intuitive people have a method, which often surprises. You read the cards according to the system you've made a choice for, and not according to what you 'receive' from a place you cannot account for. In this sense, the fact that in a classic reading, say, following Etteilla, the reading of only the third or the ninth card in a string is invested with meaning, is as much part of the set up as anything to begin with.

This is the point when the historians go ballistic in their rage against the Tarotists, for they would like to know what legitimizes their systems or their choice for one. But why should we care about their concerns? They can stick to their own business. We say it again: we read cards because we like freedom; because we like alternative windows into our possibilities, and because we like gambling. So people have been burnt for less.

All serious cartomantic methods rest on a premise of setting up the stage. The story that emerges out of it is quite another matter. And the reader can also impose a magical application of

cards, such as, for instance, the situation when we see the 7 of Swords as related to occult knowledge, rather than tears caused by having to see another doctor because the first one can't figure out what's wrong with you.

In my own writings about reading with playing cards I sometimes talk about being 'seized' by the cards, which may seem contradictory to what I'm saying about being cautious about 'receiving' messages, but the truth of the matter is that if I didn't have the alternative magical reading with the cards as a method, I would never refer to what else we can say that might bridge between the world of *logos* and the world of *mythos*.

All divination rests on method. And method is always cold. People often forget the distinction between a method and an approach to the method. The method never has any agency. We do. Instead of being anguished about it, what we can do is go to the method thinking that the method is part of our enthusiasm invested with feelings and emotions. Or else we can see the method as a tool. We can, of course, develop a very strong relation to our method, and we can raise it to the status of magic, but the method will always remain impartial to our own desire and perspective as to what we want from it or with it.

Read the cards and think 'life'. A life that's not rigid or informed by rules – as no permutation of the cards would permit us to think otherwise – but a life that 'thinks' in the best possible way, which is the way of observing what's happening and then acting accordingly, yet always already in accordance with one's own nature and desires. Read the cards and marvel. There will always be something in them that you didn't think about before. Claim their fictional truth and make it your own. Surprise yourself. After all, you've only got this life to gamble with.

THE DIVINER

Make your own nature, not the advice of others,
your guide in life.

— THE DELPHIC PHYTHIA
ADVISING CICERO IN 83 BC —



Who are we to decide what others should do? How can we tell people that they will not get that job, or that their lovers will not come back to them? Even if that were to be the case, who are we to presume that we 'know' better?

These are some of the questions that diviners are confronted with. And indeed, I'm not so sure that I have an answer. But what I like to say, *in lieu* of an answer, is that card readers are good at participating in the creation of 'fictional truth.' It is always the story that saves us. How many of us have not read books whose fictional truth has saved us? But unlike with novels, where we get to identify with the protagonist, and follow that protagonist's life and adventure according to a set up that a writer has invented, with the cards you participate in your own story as the real protagonist that you are.

You create the setting through posing your question. In this sense, it's hardly ever about whether the lover comes back or not, but rather, about what we do with either possibility. Reading cards is about instigating to action, not to fate. Fate may be there, doing its thing, and often guiding us through, but it will not do its thing in a way that is conscious to us. If that were so we would need no personal gnosis, or the cards.

It is my contention that one of the primary functions of reading cards is to uncover blind spots. My claim is also that we can read with every type of cards, not just the Marseille Tarot. All we need is a method. I have a preference for the Marseille Tarot because, as suggested throughout this book so far, the Marseille Tarot is formally well put together. There are clear rhymes that you can follow, and unambiguous characters whose actions we

can imitate. 'How about intuition?,' most of my cartomantic students ask me. 'And is knowledge about esoteric systems important?' To this I often say the following: 'yes, it's fascinating to know what people were thinking throughout the ages and where they came from to the cards. But is this necessary to one's ability to read the cards? Here I would say, 'no. It's not.'

What's important is that one goes with a few solid and down to earth 'meanings' of the cards, which one has arrived at not by way of 'intuition' alone, but rather by way of observing how nature plays a part in the suits, or how the trumps embody situations. Again, answering simple fundamental questions: why are hearts or cups associated with water, family, friendship, and healing? Well, simply because hearts and cups relate to the blood, the circulatory system, hence blood relations, or good flow, as the flow between friends. Why are spades related to the earth? Well, what do you do with a spade? You dig the earth with it. When the Hermit retreats his steps, does that mean that he disengages from ordinary life? Indeed it does. Do we need to embody that movement sometimes? Indeed we do. If I get a person coming to see me, who is stressed, I simply point out that perhaps what she needs is go home and snuggle with a book, if the Popess is on the table.

In the following pages I want to present the reader with my understanding of what happens when we read the cards. The aim here is to simply point out some of the challenges we may come up against in a reading session and what we can do about it. A few of these ideas have been explored in *Taroflexions*, so some of it may ring a familiar bell already. But here it comes in a newly processed way, and according to the relevant context that has been devised as the main frame for this book, namely to say

something about the interplay between the cards and the reader of the cards.

THE PEDAGOGICS OF READING CARDS

Here is an opening you can think of, and whose aim is to say something about creating space. Without making any assumptions about what you, readers, may have encountered in the form of claims about what's best to do in a reading situation, here's a few I've heard:

- 'Kill your ego.'
- 'Get out of the way.'
- 'The cards don't have to make sense to you. They have to make sense to the sitter.'

To me all this is utter nonsense. When I say this, I don't mean to adopt either the patronizing tone, or the intimidating attitude, but rather, I want to suggest that I would like to see readers of cards allowing themselves more liberty in being more reflective and critical of what happens in the cartomantic community than what I have been able to observe. We are not here to please either the ones who seek our advice or the ones who seek validation for their claims, however true or unsubstantiated they may be.

My claim is that if you don't engage your ego, your capacity to be present and listen, form an informed opinion on what you see, and make an effort to make a point, then your reading flounders. In the name of being modest you end up being all over the place and not saying anything of consequence. Do I have a solution, or an alternative to the view that insists on some form of strange objectivity? Yes. I always ask myself: can I make a point? Showing

compassion does not mean having to kill the boldness of a reading (though as a bold messenger, be ready to get shot more than once).

The real empowering aspect of reading the cards consists in being fearless. The idea is not to be 'nice', but useful. When people deal with real problems they come to you for an empowering solution, oftentimes for inspiration on how to make cuts.

Most people that come to us are not interested in hearing what the universe can do for them. They are interested in seeing what you see in the cards, and how you make what you see in the cards apparent to them as well.

For myself, I have set up a few basic questions and guiding lines as the main frame for my setting for reading the cards:

- On opinion and argument: 'Is there evidence for my talk?'
- On formulating a hypothesis and solution: 'When is what I think also what works?'
- On performance and usefulness: 'Are clichés a good idea when the other 'can't handle the truth?''
- On speaking and the art of listening: 'When is my body language more powerful than my verbal skills?'

Let us give an example by differentiating between the main groups of people who are most likely to consult us.

First we will look at challenges and then the rewards from working with these groups. Group 1 consists of people who don't have a clue about divination with cards. Group 2 consists of people who read the cards themselves, or are engaged in what is commonly known as 'the magical arts'.

The first group is easy. People come in, pop the question, say thank you, and leave. When the first group gets difficult is when the people decide that because of the one reading that you performed for them once upon a time, they own you. When it gets potentially disruptive is when this 'ownership' extends beyond your own good self, with people translating your services into the demand that you accept them and incorporate them into your own family and blood relations. All very good, if you, as the reader, actually do extend your services to acknowledging the other in the name of the other's invoking 'connection', 'familiarity', 'heroism,' and 'role modeling.' As it happens, however, I don't know of many professional readers who are so ready to pay with their privacy for having been elevated to the sky. I don't know of many professional readers who say to their clients, 'yes, you're right to demand *all* of me, since you hold me in such high esteem'. Insofar as not all of us see ourselves as saviors or heroes – and even if we did – we are not bound to letting ourselves being manipulated into what the psychoanalysts have nicely framed as 'vampirism'.

The second group is more demanding from the outset. I thoroughly enjoy reading for other readers, as we share the premise for knowing already what the cards can do for us. Yet, on occasion, I have also experienced unreasonable demands from this group. As the people falling into this category are more familiar with forms of divination or the interpretative arts of symbolic language, they are often prone to adding to your reading what they think. This is all fine and a learning experience for me as well, for indeed, the act that has the making of the soul in focus is a kind of highly individualized poetry that ultimately decrees that

what you see and create for your own soul *is* and should be of your own making. So, if they insist, 'this is what I think,' they are probably right. That is, they are right in having that experience, but it's not sure that they're also right in calling the shots on their own blind spots. Why come to you in the first place, if they already know everything?

Consequently, here is where I draw the line. While, ideally, a reading with the cards should enable the subject to see what stares the subject in her face, it is often that the reason why people come to you is because they need more than 'what I think it means is probably also what it means'.

I often say that I'm not an 'intuitive reader' – whatever that means – but rather a reader who has trained herself in the art of 1) distilling the primary meanings of the cards according to a specific system, 2) essentializing these meanings to a core understanding, and ultimately, 3) synthesizing these primary meanings into one relevant shot. I always say, 'please, let us now stick to your question,' whenever I see the subject going astray, well, often because the subject doesn't like what she sees in the cards. But is this why people want a reading? To *like* what they see? That's not how I see my role, namely, to give them what they want to see. 'Go to a museum, if you're in need of an aesthetic appreciation of the cards, rather than assessing the extent to which what you see can help you with your issue.' That's what I say.

I often also say that reading the cards is not difficult, but it requires immense self-discipline and powerful discernment. Say, when experienced readers themselves come to you with their questions, supposedly because they like your style of reading, you don't give in when they enter a negotiating process. You

don't say things like: 'yes, you're right, this can also mean that. It looks like we've been reading the same books on the meaning of cards. How wonderful.' This happens mostly when the subject is in a state of confusion and delusion, and is desperately looking for the answer that she desires to hear.

But I'm not in the business of saying: 'Everything is awesome, go ahead with the hopeless plan', if I have no incentive to do so judging by what the cards themselves say beyond any settled negotiation. I often say: 'no, the Hermit and the Hanged Man in conjunction do not – and I repeat, they do not – indicate that you are going to make money on this job. Quite the contrary, if you linger on, it will be more and more baffling to you, and ultimately it will constitute not only a waste of time, but also a waste of money. It is not for nothing that the Hanged Man is sometimes depicted hanging on his head and with his empty pockets hanging out.' So I never agree to nod and say to the sitter, just to be reassuring and empathizing: 'yes, you're right. You're on such a spiritual path, and how delightful that you're not like many others. You are a pattern breaker, and you have the ability to see things from another perspective.' Err, no.



The line of such clichés can get very long, and the more I'd continue the more I'd find myself departing from the very focus of the question. Deep spiritual seeking and insight, along with a sense of sacrifice can be all very good, but how is this going to help the person increase her finances? Yet some querents who are in deep denial of what *is* will do anything to dodge what *is*. They will even trash you. They will even think that you're some piece of work. The work of the Devil himself – poor devil.



But here's where you come in. Here's precisely where you can shine. You stick to your guns, and stay brutally honest. That's all it takes. You won't make friends, but then, who said that reading cards is about making friends? As the business of fortunetelling, or reading cards with a view to offering counseling is not a culturally consecrated business, the only way in which you can participate in making it a respected business is if you show discernment.

By analogy, in the more academically consecrated circles, such as psychoanalysis, the analyst hardly ever makes friends with the ones she's offering her services to help. Why should the

card-reading business be any different, when in effect Tarot readers render the same service – and are even faster at ‘fixing it’. A quick answer to that would be to follow the money. The more the psychoanalyst charges, the more serious his advise is. It’s a shame that the card-reading business doesn’t enjoy the same privilege, and I say this from the perspective of someone who is in both camps. While working currently as a professor at the university, I also read cards professionally – though you don’t want to ask about the difference in wages here. In my own way, however, I try to bridge the gap between these worlds, and consequently devise strategies for changing the bad reputation diviners have. But the work of consecrating a profession follows cultural precepts that are not always under our individual control.

HOW TO DO IT

Meanwhile, here’s some advice to readers who have to deal with both group 1 and group 2, when these groups enter in the ‘being difficult’ mode.

1. It is never about the people themselves. It is about the way in which you are called to the task of answering a question, and how well you can address the question from a completely disinterested angle. It’s about staying close to the question and the cards, not the people who come to you. After all, you can’t befriend them all in that rare and genuine way. It’s about making the distinction between you as the reader and the other who has a question for you. You offer advice, not your life. The other offers her trust on a specific matter, not her entire laundry. Hence, you don’t invent things on their behalf because you can see that they are having a hard time – not even when they entice you to take

their side, by often suggesting: ‘can’t you see I’m having a hard time? Say something encouraging’ – and by ‘encouraging’ they often mean, ‘don’t tell me the truth’. Your task is to say: ‘yes, I can see that you’re having a hard time, but this is not about me, and how I can sympathize with you. This is about how I can help you from a neutral, rather than involved position. You get the best of me if I don’t take sides, for how useful is it to say to you, yes dear, your husband is a moron. How sad for you. Maybe you can stick it out?’ For me, telling the truth is the highest form of respect and love that I can offer the other.

2. It is never about falling for praise – only so that you can then be ready to hand over your soul on a plate to whoever will claim it. It is about staying honest in the face of dealing with self-deprecating subjects for whom it is often all about control. If they can’t control their lives or the ones close to them, they will find a way to control you, because, hey, that’ll make them feel better about themselves. Some subjects are also very good at projecting all sorts of fantasy scenarios that often include establishing a ‘cosmic’ connection with you only so that they can take power over you. Or else they are very good at projecting all that is wrong with them unto their ex-lovers, ex-readers, ex-children, etc.

3. It’s never about other people’s anger and their acts towards you or others. You are not called to be impressed with their swinging moods – now they love you, now they hate you. If subjects decide that you have done them a disservice by not siding with them, by not being ‘supportive’, it is best for all parties to part ways. The greatest wisdom is in knowing one’s place. Being in the business of reading cards should not be about losing your own sense of balance, or about participating in what irritates the

others. It's not about channeling their anger. That's not what empathy is.

4. It's never about saying: 'yes, it can also mean that,' when it's clear to everyone involved – if honesty is present – that that's just not it, but hey, let us serve ourselves the 'staying positive' attitude as that will solve all our problems on earth. It's not about being positive. It's about being truthful. And how can we be truthful? Look at the cards. What do they say? Don't look at what they 'mean'. Look at what they say. Look at embodiment. You got the Popess, the High Priestess? Well, good. Take a seat. Take a book and start reading. Leave it be. It's all right to know more than the others and not always have to say so. Take a breath and stare into the void. You got the Emperor? Excellent. See that scepter? That's power. Grab it woman – or man. Make a plan and realize it. Don't 'think'.



5. It's never about negotiating 'meaning'. Everything means something. And everything that means something already can also mean something else at the same time. All experiences of one thing can mean something else than what the general public takes that thing to mean. Don't negotiate and don't bend the 'meaning' of what stares you in the face. Tell your sitters: 'See that Hermit taking steps back from the world, work, and all public engagement? Well, how about you do the same? How useful is it to be spiritual about a plan that doesn't pay for your bills? Take a step back, and get a sense of what you really need. Don't insult your own soul by pretending that you're not good at surviving unless you get to sell crystals, the only thing you're good at, but which unfortunately interests no one.'

6. It's never about second-guessing the other. The role of the reader is to constantly assess where her position is vis-à-vis her task, namely that of reading the cards. Not the future. Not the other. Not the other's troubled issues. It's never about sympathizing and doing nothing about it. It's about offering real help. Sympathizing is also an act of 'doing', but as far as I can tell, empathy has gone inflated these days. A lot of people *hold* opinions, while only a few are ready to *do* something. What's an opinion good for, if you can't back it up with evidence from the cards?

People are never as predictable as it may appear, even though they may share predictable, classic problems with others, issues such as the ones related to work, money, love, and health. Allow for what is there to emerge, to surface on its own premise. You might even be surprised at the level of interestingness that a mundane question can disclose. I like to think of replacing second-guessing with breathing. Listening to my own, and the other's.

7. Whatever you do, don't lie. Stay honest. Demand honesty. Read some cards. And if hell breaks loose, just say the following: 'I did my best. I did not get involved where it's not my place to get involved. I resisted being manipulated and drained of energy. I resisted losing my balance simply because others have a problem with their own mental balance. I know exactly what my job is, and I perform it exquisitely. I'm good at reading the goddamn cards.'

THE REWARD

While all of the above may sound harsh, and even callous, as it seemingly allows little space to think of people as falling in more categories than two, one thing that I have learned from reading cards is that true professionalism is about distinguishing the magic in every person from the problems that people face. Usually these problems come in the way of the uniqueness that everyone possesses and is capable of demonstrating.

When I read the cards the highest task for me is to get to that core, and help people rise above the 'impossible'. In this sense, I never start on a premise of making assumptions about the ones coming to see me, even before they get a chance to sit down and look at the cards. And this is where the highest reward lies. It is a mighty feeling to be able to enter other people's lives and participate in what they are going through. Everyone has a fascinating story to tell. I always want to hear that.

The rest is simple mechanics that we try to raise at the level of art. The art of reading the other must leave us with a sense of wonder and accomplishment. We have done something. We have seen the world through another person's eyes, and through the eyes of the characters depicted in the cards.

The cards allow us to keep it simple. I listen to the question, and look at the cards. That's all. I never deviate from that. For me the art of reading cards is not to ventriloquize 'meanings', but to see embodiment in the context of the question. I have sharp ears, sharp eyes, and a sharp tongue. I stab. But as they say about cuts, sometimes that's exactly what it takes to get things moving. If that's courageous, then sure. Most people enjoy my cutting through it, cutting through them, and I often witness some beautiful work of transformation.

But some are also too ensconced in their own self-deprecation which they, however, put forth as self-importance. Unfortunately for them I have a way of seeing right through it. I call people's bluff. I help them to see what they're doing to themselves. I suggest gently why I don't fall for it. Why others don't fall for it. I say, 'no,' and 'no,' and 'no' again. I say, 'no, that's not it. Take it or leave it.' There is a lot of reward in this type of asserting what we're doing with the cards, and for what purpose.

When some decide that I've ruined their lives, and then they do something drastic, I just make a note of it. A note that confirms why I'm right. Why I'm right in insisting. Drastic measures don't impress me. They merely disclose how deeply disturbed some people are. I'm a tower of condensed coolness when I read the cards. I'm like death that doesn't warm. I'm your worst nightmare. But guess what. It's precisely in this coldness that I get to see clearly. I don't get hot tempered. I'm not interested in winning anything. I'm interested in seeing clearly. And that's about it. That's what I get my money for: seeing things clearly, not standing in people's corners, making decisions and plans on their behalf that they end up neither following nor honoring. I hold the business of reading cards in the highest regard. This practice of

old is not a frilly thing made of elastic. I'm not politically correct. I'm not 'nice.' I read cards. Like the Devil.

American novelist and great, wise woman, Gertrude Stein, once said about her writing: 'I write for myself and strangers.' I often think the same about the cards: 'I read for myself and strangers.' Reading cards is like walking through doors. Behind each there's a world. I don't want to say: 'Let's go out there and conquer these worlds, as that would sound imperialistic, but I do want to say: 'let's be curious. Let's step inside humbly, and if permission is granted, let's do some discovery.' We don't want to meet the other preaching, like I've been doing here – even though teaching has its own values and its place. Most of all, what we want to do is pay our respect to the cards and to those who trust them. With a pack of cards in our hands, we can say thank you to the flow of stories streaming from it, and through the art of reading we can learn to listen to the language of the birds. Perhaps it sounds like water under a wheel, finding its way in a book.

§



CAROLUS ZOYA'S TIME

A House, a Name, a Scepter, and a Crown.
It's all there, lost somewhere in the folds of my dress.
But I still have my wings for all to see.
I think I'm going to use them,
Let them take me into the garden,
Where I can meet you under the sun.

Whatever I say, you like it.
Whatever you say, I like it.
Perfect symmetry.
Let me kneel here and be grateful.
The Stars whisper real numbers into my ears,
And I bet you know how to solve a math problem.

I like civilization.
It can turn an iron emblem into a silver moon.
Imagine our coat of arms vanish into the waves.
Red water pours out of my vessels.
'It's blood', you say,
And I remember a distant aunt called Zoïa,
Who called on the Vikings to save you.

But I'm here now,
Doing your bidding,
Looking up at the red star above me, thinking:
'There is passion in the bond.'



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In this book **Camelia Elias** offers an introduction to the Marseille Tarot cards combined with readings of the cards in context. For each description there's an interpretation that combines the **cunning-folk method** of reading the cards – based on making logical inferences about the meaning of the cards – and the **visual argument method**, which relies on the subjective and individual art of perceiving. The book also features full-length readings, based on real-life tarot consultations.

The book aims to cover four basic questions:

- Why do we read cards?
- What's so special about the Marseille Tarot?
- How can the cards uncover our blind spots?
- What does it mean to live a magical life, when we allow the stories that the cards tell us to offer solutions to our real problems?

This book is also the first to introduce the readers to the wonderful and strange cards of Carolus Zoya, a most rare and unseen **Tarot de Marseille** deck made in Turin at the end of 1700.



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