

THE MYSTERY OF THE TAROT

In Umbria, where Corrado Cagli worked as a director in the potteries, he often watched the peasants playing their tarot cards. The strange archaic figures exercised an extraordinary fascination on the young artist. Now, after five years in the U. S. Army and a visit home to his native Italy, Cagli has begun to paint his own interpretations of the mysterious symbols. His *Il Bagatto*, on the opposite page, is “The Magician” symbol of moral rectitude, a figure with several faces and four hands, traditionally represented before a table covered with the wonderful tools of his trade. In the gypsy tradition, the tarot deck stands as the seventy-eight a symbol of the universe; cards are the loose leaves of magic book, forever being shuffled in order to regain their rightful sequence. The hierarchy of the tarot divides the symbols into three groups – Major Arcana, Minor Arcana and Arcana, as different in meaning and power as gods, demiurges and men. The tarots are divided into four suits and, like an ordinary deck of cards, have Kings, Queens, Knaves, et cetera. But it is the nomenclature of the twenty-two cards of the, Major Arcana which reveals language of allusion and poetry: the Juggler and the Empress, the Pope and the Wheel of Fortune, the Hanged Man and the Lightning-struck Tower, or the House of God. No one knows just when these symbols first came into being. The eighteenth-century occultist, Court de Gébelin ascribes an Egyptian origin to the cards; others have cited Chinese and Hindu sources. No scholars agree. The tarot remains a mystery. For those under its spell, it is an eye opening on the future, a rite of demoniac science, a thin bundle of pasteboard strips possessed of some inexplicable power irresistible to sensitive minds. In our day, artists of such divergent back-grounds as the Italian Cagli, the Chilean Matta and the Swiss Seligmann have felt strongly the fascination of the deck. The French poets Pierre Mabilie and André Breton have played on the tarot theme. “Everything that has mattered and everything that still matters”, says Breton, “is tied up with the mysterious tradition of the knowledge of magic”. And who can forget the curious passage in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* about Madame Sosostris, the clairvoyant and the Phoenician Sailor and The Hanged Man in her “wicked pack of cards?”

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• Right: Julian Levy, a student of Tarot, builds a pyramid for Paul Douglas, star of *Born Yesterday*. It reveals a trip within twelve months which will nurture a seed of change, shows a high peak in 1948-49, then an entirely new phase of creative effort. He will always be master of his destiny.

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