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Western Learned Magic as an Entangled Tradition

Introduction

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ABSTRACT The introduction to this special issue outlines the concept of Western learned magic and suggests to analyse it as an entangled tradition, thus calling for an interdisciplinary, transcultural and transreligious perspective on its history. A working heuristic of seven different types of entanglement in the history of Western learned magic is proposed, whereas special emphasis is placed on processes of ritual hybridisation. Entangled rituals are one of the most unique characteristics of Western learned magic and often mirror millenia-long processes of textual-ritual transmission across numerous cultural and religious boundaries. Inspired by this working heuristic of different types of entanglement in the history of Western learned magic, the introduction summarises the six contributions to this special issue. These contributions represent the fruits of a workshop on *Western learned magic as an entangled tradition* that was held at the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) at the University of Bochum on September 14–15, 2019.

KEYWORDS Western learned magic, History of magic, Western esotericism, Entangled history, ritual hybridity, European history of religions

Introduction

The articles assembled in this special issue of *Entangled Religion* represent the analytical fruits of a workshop on 'Western learned magic as an entangled tradition' that was held at the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) at the University of Bochum on September 14–15, 2019. The aim of the workshop was to explore the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic from an interdisciplinary, longue-durée and cross-cultural perspective. The study of Western learned magic has hitherto been scattered across many different fields of research—such as Egyptology, Classical Studies, Medieval Studies, Arabic, Jewish and Byzantine Studies, Early Modern History and the Study of Western and Contemporary Esotericism—, and the workshop therefore brought together eight acclaimed scholars who have worked on relevant source material from Antiquity to the twenty-first century. All participating scholars were asked to interpret and compare their sources from a bird's eye perspective that takes in the entire [1]

history of Western learned magic and with a particular focus on ritual dynamics. The goal was to highlight cross-cultural and inter-religious routes of transmission as well as the 'entangled rituals' that tend to manifest in scripts of Western learned magic as a consequence of their manifold transmission routes and influences (see Otto 2016, 201–2). The same research foci guided the composition and reviewing process of the articles assembled in this special issue.

[2] In what follows, I will first provide a brief outline and conceptualisation of Western learned magic for readers unfamiliar with the concept. I then go on to offer a more detailed consideration of one of the most basic yet fascinating features of this textual-ritual tradition, namely its striking hybridities and entanglements of numerous sorts. After a brief re-conceptualisation and adaptation of the concepts of entangled history, hybridity and 'entangled rituals,' a typology of different types of entanglement in the history of Western learned magic will be proposed. The articles collected here will then be summarised and analysed with a particular focus on the typology suggested.

Western Learned Magic: A Brief Outline

[3] 'Western learned magic' is a novel and still relatively unknown object of scholarly analysis and historiography. After many decades of neglect, some of its historical sources began to be studied with renewed enthusiasm from the late 1980s onwards both by scholars working in traditional subject areas, such as classical Antiquity and medieval history, and by those interested in the nascent study of Western esotericism. Yet, academic scholars have only recently begun to approach the topic from a longue-durée, cross-cultural and transdisciplinary perspective (see, as exemples, Bailey 2007; Davies 2009; Collins 2015; Copenhaver 2015; and with a narrower focus Page and Rider 2018; Frankfurter 2019). In a lengthy programmatic article published in the journal *Aries* in 2016, I took up this research perspective and suggested the use of a coherent label—'Western learned magic'—for the vast body of disparate material available to us. I also proposed eight core characteristics that scholars might usefully consider if they wish to historicise this textual-ritual tradition in a fruitful and methodologically sound manner: continuity, changeability, hybridity, deviance, morality, complexity, efficacy, and multiplicity (2016).

[4] The main goal of the workshop in Bochum was to set out to meet two pressing needs identified in that article. The first was the need to investigate Western learned magic's hybridity and entanglements from a systematic and cross-cultural perspective (2016, 199–200); the second was to do so within an interdisciplinary framework. These needs could not be met by any single scholar or even by any narrowly focused group, for "the historicisation of 'Western learned magic' challenges the idea of a historiographical 'lone-fighter.' Instead, it calls for the establishment of interdisciplinary study groups or at least the systematic collaboration of a range of scholars coming from all disciplines relevant to its history" (2016, 225). I am grateful to the Käte Hamburger Kolleg *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe* at the University of Bochum for granting me the opportunity—and generous funds—to invite such an illustrious group of scholars to take the first steps towards meeting these needs.

[5] But what is Western learned magic? Essentially, Western learned magic is an analytical construct for gathering a corpus of texts, particularly ritual texts, that "include an etymological derivate, linguistic equivalent, or culturally established synonym of 'magic' as a self-referential and thus identificatory term" (2016, 173). Its conceptualisation has been inspired by critical discourse analysis and particularly the discussion of the so-called insider/outsider

distinction in the study of religion (McCutcheon 1999). It is thus an attempt to cope with the problem that magic has always been, and continues to be, a 'floating signifier'[1] that has frequently been ascribed—usually with a pejorative or polemical impetus—to people, and their practices or texts, who would never have used the label for self-reference. However, the analytical category of 'Western learned magic' is designed to shed light in precisely the opposite direction, in that it focuses on sources that display the *insider* perspectives, performances, and theorisations of people who *themselves* claim(ed) to be practising magic(ians)—in manifold cultural and linguistic contexts. Furthermore, it strives to analyse these sources "as from inside the system" (Pike 1999, 28). At first sight, this might appear to be an odd strategy from a scholarly perspective: on the whole, the scholarly world still tends to focus on anti-magical theological, philosophical or legislative texts, on (anti-)magical stereotypes in poetry, myth or legends, or on magical motifs and topoi in novels and other literary genres, where magic is typically interpreted as narrative trope or plot device (on the latter perspective, see, e.g., Bottigheimer 2014; Zipes 2017). Nevertheless, the methodological shift towards insider, or practitioner, perspectives inherent in our new analytical category reveals an extremely large corpus of sources in a variety of linguistic, cultural and religious contexts, ranging from late Antiquity to the twenty-first century, a corpus that calls for thorough interdisciplinary and cross-cultural analyses. Since the insider perspectives, performances, and theorisations in these texts, as well as their cultural and social contexts, have changed in manifold ways over the past two millennia, the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic has no immutable essence at its core. In stark contrast, it is characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity, hybridity, and changeability. The study of Western learned magic is thus part and parcel of what I have referred to as the 'discursive turn' in the study of magic, or the 'discursive study of magic' (e.g., Otto 2017, 43n4, 2018a, 2018b, 516).

[6] The concept of 'magic' is very old, going back to the old Persian (self-) appellation of a Median tribe or priest caste (*ma-gu-š:* 𐎶𐎦𐎢𐏁 in Persian cuneiform script). This terminology was then adopted, initially as for the purposes of polemical invective, by Greek authors around the fifth century BCE (Otto 2011, 149–50, 2022). Given this early origin, it is unsurprising that the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic is quite extensive. The earliest surviving relevant texts, the corpus known as the *Greek Magical Papyri* (or *Papyri Graecae Magicae*), were written in Koine Greek and circulated in Egypt and surrounding regions between the second and fifth centuries CE (see Otto 2013, 314n29, 332–33, 2016, 173, 185–86; critical editions/translations of this corpus are Preisendanz and Henrichs 1973–1974; Betz 1996). From that moment on, we must think of a continuous stream—or rather of multiple trajectories or even intercultural networks—of texts that depicted and prescribed an arsenal of different ritual performances as well as theorisations of ritual efficacy or physical causation (for some examples of this continuity from late Antiquity to the twenty-first century, see Otto 2016, 183–89). For the past two millennia, these trajectories or networks have been transmitted in parallel to or entangled with further text-based knowledge traditions including astrology, alchemy, numerology, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and kabbalah, thereby crossing multiple language barriers as well as cultural and religious boundaries. Accordingly, Western learned magic is characterised by its ongoing and interconnected processes of textual-ritual transmission and reception from Antiquity to the present day (see especially the articles by Henrik

1 See Chandler (2007, 78): Floating signifiers have "a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified. Such signifiers may mean different things to different people: they may stand for many or even any signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean."

Bogdan and myself in this special issue, which unveil reception processes from the *Greek Magical Papyri* to present-day practitioners: Bogdan 2023; Otto 2023). At the same time, however, Western learned magic also displays a high degree of adaptability, changeability and innovation, and is hence characterised by a complex interplay of stasis and dynamis. Western learned magic "continuously adopts ritual patterns and techniques from older sources, discards unnecessary or unwanted elements, adapts to novel cultural and religious environments or practitioner milieus, and continuously invents modes of ritual performance or efficacy" (Otto 2016, 189–90). I have suggested that in order to acknowledge this ongoing and complex interplay between continuity and changeability, Western learned magic should be classified as a "coherent (even though not homogeneous) and continuous (even though repeatedly broken) textual-ritual tradition" (2016, 224).

[7] In contrast to other, more 'institutionalised' religious traditions, Western learned magic is characterised by some unusual, if not unique, features. Apart from its ongoing tendency to change and innovate, Western learned magic was, for most of its history, perceived as an extremely precarious and contested form of praxis-knowledge. As a result, reactions in powerful elite discourses tended to oscillate between outright fascination and horrified repudiation (on the issue of deviance, see Otto 2016, 203–7). At least until the repeal of laws against the "crimen magiae" from most European legal codes during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Levack 2004, esp. 181-182), we may think of Western learned magic as a shadowy, ostracised and often criminalised underground tradition which depended strongly on manuscript transmission (even in an age of print: see Bellingradt and Otto 2017; and Davies' article in this special issue for further thoughts on the relationship between manuscript and print cultures of learned magic: Davies 2023). Due to its typically being situated in hostile cultural environments (with few exceptions, such as some premodern Islamicate contexts, see Otto 2018b; and further Saif and Leoni 2020), Western learned magic rarely developed proper 'institutionalisations,' such as a recognisable architecture, a fixed canon of 'holy' scriptures, a group of authorities who determined and monitored its orthodoxy or orthopraxis, continuous lineages or teacher-pupil relationships across several generations, or an educational infrastructure (such as schools or colleges). Even processes of group formation only properly began from the nineteenth century onwards, with a few earlier exceptions (see Otto 2016, 184; and Page's article in this special issue for some thoughts and observations on medieval groups of practitioners: Page 2023).

[8] There are two further crucial features of Western learned magic that may enrich this brief outline. First, practitioners of Western learned magic often invert(ed) the polemical stereotypes conceived by the powerful anti-magical cultural and religious discourses that surround(ed) them. The three basic anti-magical stereotypes that have informed Western elite perspectives from Antiquity onwards paint magic as (1) anti-religious; (2) inefficacious; and (3) immoral (see Otto 2019, 199–200). By contrast, practitioners of Western learned magic typically perceive(d) their art as (1) spiritually valuable, even the peak of all religious aspiration; (2) absolutely powerful and efficacious; and (3) morally legitimate, even divinely ordained. This 'stereotype reversal' is one of Western learned magic's most intriguing strategies of self-legitimisation and self-justification and can be found throughout its texts and ritual scripts from Antiquity to the twenty-first century (on stereotype reversal, see also Otto 2021, 335–36). Secondly, the millenia-long multicultural transmission history of Western learned magic is striking, given that large parts of this history took place in hostile cultural, religious, and legislative environments, not seldom with life-threatening implications for its practitioners.

Even when these life-threatening circumstances gradually receded from the late seventeenth century onwards, magic remained in the firing line of Enlightenment authors and has since functioned as a popular target for rationalist and modernist anti-magical rhetorics and ideologies (see Styers 2004). Yet, despite being continuously devalued, ostracised, and criminalised throughout Western history, Western learned magic has proven to be strikingly resilient and remains so in the present day, a capacity that is still not thoroughly understood (see the conclusions in Otto 2023 for some thoughts on its recent popularity, and 2022).

[9] I have suggested that this tradition of Western magic should be referred to as 'learned' because it is, first and foremost, a textual (and not an oral) ritual tradition which was, therefore, accessible to only the small literate portion of the population for large parts of its premodern history. What is more, its texts and ritual scripts typically require(d) rather high degrees of literacy and often multiple language competencies, as well as a thorough understanding of conceptual and ritual patterns coming from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds (such as late ancient polytheisms, Judaism, Islam and Christianity). Texts of learned magic tended to accumulate over time, partly resulting in extremely lengthy ritual scripts—and procedures (that could endure months or even years: see Otto 2016, 188)—, and they sometimes delve(d) into complex theorisations of ritual efficacy (for a telling example, see Noble's article in this special issue: Noble 2023). As a consequence, practitioners often required significant commitments of time and monetary resources. Thus, at least until the eighteenth century, Western learned magic had little to offer to the masses and largely remained—early modern democratisation processes notwithstanding (see Davies 2023 for further details)—the domain of literate, educated and thus 'learned' practitioners.

[10] Why do I suggest that we use the fuzzy notion of 'Western' in demarcating this analytical category? This notion is clearly unable to provide us with a clear-cut chronological or geographical boundary line. Yet it is nonetheless useful to differentiate *this* particular textual-ritual tradition—that of Western learned magic—from other ritual traditions deemed 'magical.' For instance, European scholars from the nineteenth century onwards have studied plenty of ritual traditions situated in specific ethnographic contexts, such as those of the Australian Aranda (Durkheim 1995 [first publ. 1912]), the Polynesian Trobriand islanders (Malinowski 1965 [repr. 1935]), or the Sudanese Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1958 [repr. 1937]), which have significantly influenced the scholarly debate concerning how to define and theorise magic (for an overview of this debate, see Otto and Stausberg 2013). Yet the traditions of the Aranda, the Azande, and the Trobriand people are neither historically nor conceptually related to Western learned magic. This disconnect lies at the root of my claim that "the classical arsenal of scholarly definitions and theories of 'magic'—which had mostly been deduced from anthropological sources and theorizing—appears to be mostly useless for the study and analysis of 'Western learned magic' " (Otto 2016, 165–66). What is more, the notion of 'Western' helps to demarcate the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic from other text-based and seemingly 'similar'—but historically largely unrelated—ritual traditions in, say, East Asian contexts (for some illuminating juxtapositions of the Indian *Atharvaveda* and the second-century ritual text *Arthaśāstra* with Western notions of magic, see Frenschkowski 2016, 42–49). Even if it may be possible and reasonable to conceptualise and analyse such traditions in, say, India, Tibet, China, or Japan, it is crucial to acknowledge that these traditions are historically largely unconnected to Western learned magic, and that they may therefore encompass, despite all

seeming similarities, a large number of culture-bound differences.[2] In my eyes, a 'global' or 'universal' perspective on the history of magic is not a viable option, so the analytical label 'Western learned magic' helps to indicate both the historical and geographical situatedness of its subject matter as well as its manifold specifics. Studying 'Western learned magic as an entangled tradition' also brings home the point that the notion of 'Western' can itself be thought of as entailing, or pointing towards, a large number of historical, cultural and religious entanglements—all contributions to this special issue therefore include numerous cross-references, and are analysed on the grounds of a seven-fold typology of entanglements (see below).

[11] To conclude, 'Western learned magic' certainly has its weaknesses as a signifier (for further thoughts on its problems, see Otto 2016, 179–80), yet "I would suggest that the historiographical value and plausibility of this category should be measured against its final product, i.e., its narrated history to come, and not against hasty methodological objections" (2016, 182). That said, the articles assembled in this special issue illustrate the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary, comparative research into Western learned magic and thus point to future ways of studying this fascinating, and still in large parts unexplored, textual-ritual tradition.

Western Learned Magic as an Entangled Tradition

[12] When I suggest in this special issue that we should consider Western learned magic as an entangled tradition, my focus is not primarily on the literature and methodology surrounding *entangled history* (e.g., Haupt and Kocka 2009) or *histoire croisée* (e.g., Werner and Zimmermann 2004). To be sure, these methodologies may also be fruitfully applied to the history of Western learned magic, especially with regard to the vast quantity of transcultural trajectories and interchanges associated with its texts and practices (see, for instance, Owen Davies' telling example of the Japanese manga film *Akuma-kun* in this issue: Davies 2023). However, the notion of 'entanglement' on which I draw predominantly refers to one of the most interesting and eye-catching characteristics of Western learned magic, namely its hybridity. With a particular focus on the ritual art outlined in many of its source texts, my programmatic 2016 article suggests that hybridity is one of Western learned magic's core features and points to two different types of hybridity prevalent in the sources, which I refer to as 'ritual hybridity' and 'religious hybridity.' The former refers to the combination of a "vast array of ritual (micro-) techniques in prescriptions of 'learned magic' " (2016, 199), which is a typical feature not only of the lengthier scripts, such as those from the vast corpus of the so-called *Claviculae Salomonis*. The latter refers to the fact that texts of learned magic often display motifs and ideas taken from variegated cultural and religious backgrounds which coalesce in more or

2 As I have argued elsewhere, the Arabic-Islamic realms functioned as an important transmission bridge in the history of Western learned magic and is hence included in the notion of 'Western' employed here (see 2016, 181n89, 2018b, 527). As a consequence, Western learned magic occasionally implemented specific ritual techniques from Indian or even Chinese sources—an example being the numerological cell square—, which were part of or in contact with the medieval Arabic-Islamic world (see, for instance, some chapters in the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, which was translated into Old Castilian and Latin as *Picatrix* in the early thirteenth century: Ritter and Plessner 1962; Pingree 1986). Yet, even if such transmissions occured, there is a vast number of premodern ritual texts belonging to Chinese Daoist traditions—such as the *Wufu xu* (see Raz 2012)—or Indian Tantric traditions–such as the *Mantramahodadhi* (see Bühnemann 2000)—to name only two examples which illustrate different ritual logics and procedures, different underlying concepts of ritual efficacy, and hence largely independent historical trajectories. In my understanding, the notion of 'Western' helps to distinguish the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic from such traditions, even if the geographical, cultural and language boundaries between them were partly permeable.

less subtle ways, leading to the general impression that "sources of 'Western learned magic' often appear as inter-cultural/religious patchwork rugs, thus differing largely from most other religious text genres composed in Western history" (2016, 201). This is, of course, a direct consequence of Western learned magic's complex inter-religious and trans-cultural reception history. Examples of both types of hybridity are manifold (for a list of examples, see Otto 2016, 200–202) and also pervade the contributions to this special issue.

[13] As a culmination of these two types of hybridity, I suggest that we can speak of 'entangled rituals' as one of Western learned magic's most interesting features, drawing on Richard Burke's concept of 'hybrid practices' (Burke 2009, 21–22). While Burke points to Brazilian Umbanda and Candomblé, as well as to the Vietnamese religion Cao Dai, as telling examples of 'hybrid practices,' I believe that texts of Western learned magic are often extreme cases, or end products, of preceding processes of hybridisation. Clearly, many practitioners of Western learned magic were, and often still are, driven to combine and amalgamate diverse templates, ritual techniques and artefacts, concepts and ideas, theories of ritual efficacy, and even languages of power, instead of relying on one approach or perspective solely, presumably with the goal to heighten the presumed efficacy of their practices. Usually positioned at the margins of their respective cultural or religious environments, practitioners also tend(ed) to appropriate ideas and practices from other contested or foreign knowledge traditions or cultures. Given that Western learned magic could "well be interpreted as a neglected or marginalised side-product or 'spin-off' of the Western history of religions" at large (Otto 2016, 167n24), it might be reasonable to interpret its high degree of hybridity as the result of an inclusivist or 'ecumenical' counterstrategy pursued by practitioners in order to cope with their own perceived marginality.

[14] However, one of the principal insights of the workshop in Bochum, and thus also of the results published in this special issue, is that Western learned magic is an entangled tradition not only in the domain of texts and ritual practices, but also, or even more so, in a range of further domains. A working heuristic or typology of entanglements prevalent in Western learned magic emerged during the workshop, which helped us fine-tune our perspectives and compare the material. Notably, we did not employ the notion of 'entanglement' only as a methodological perspective within our own historical analyses. Rather, we also treated it as a *process category* that helps to indicate certain strategies or decisions of historical actors (i.e., authors and/or practitioners of Western learned magic) aimed at amalgamating, weaving together, or transcending boundaries by merging what was not meant to be merged before. Hence, our understanding of entanglement resembles features of Bhaba's concept of hybridisation (see, e.g., Bhaba 1994, 1996). To be sure, such processes of entanglement—or hybridisation—can be active or passive, conscious or unconscious, and they can also be synchronic (short-term interchanges between contemporaneous discourses) or diachronic, thus taking place over long periods of time.

[15] On these grounds, we decided to distinguish between (1) textual entanglements (texts may be transferred across time and space and translated into different linguistic, cultural, and religious frameworks, thereafter being amalgamated and interwoven with texts from the 'new' cultural environments); (2) ritual entanglements (ritual scripts may combine and encompass a vast number of ritual patterns and micro-techniques from multiple inspiring templates or frameworks); (3) conceptual and/or linguistic entanglements (terms and concepts from different linguistic backgrounds, times, spaces are interwoven, potentially leading to onomasiological shifts, odd combinations of 'languages of power', or even the creation of novel languages);

(4) theoretical entanglements (different large-scale worldviews, theories of causation, concepts of efficacy from diverse cultural or religious backgrounds may be combined, negotiated or interwoven); (5) media entanglements (encounters and interrelations between different media in the history of Western learned magic, e.g., between oral and written traditions, between manuscript and print cultures, between texts and images, etc.); (6) discursive entanglements (encounters and interrelations between anti-magical and affirmative discourses of magic, between different social strata, practitioner milieus, or further cultural discourses, and also: discourses at the crossroads of intercultural and interreligious transfer and exchange); and (7) spatio-temporal entanglements ('glocalisation', i.e., foreign ritual scripts may be translated and adapted to local lore, thus meeting the specifics and demands of local practitioners). Notably, each of these entanglements is often *directly visible* in the sources of Western learned magic, and they also tend to manifest in the constantly changing ritual art that is outlined therein ('entangled rituals').

The Contributions to this Special Issue

All these different types of entanglement in Western learned magic are reflected upon in the contributions to this special issue. Michael Noble's chapter on the works and deeds of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191/2) highlights theoretical, discursive and spatio-temporal entanglements (2023). Noble carves out sophisticated theoretical entanglements in his analysis of al-Rāzī's attempt to merge Avicennan philosophy (especially the latter's celestial kinematics and psychology) with his own vision—and practice—of talismanic, or astral, magic. Discursive entanglements are apparent in the attempts of al-Rāzī and al-Suhrawardī (through the adoption of Avicennism) to justify and legitimise astral magic in response to powerful anti-magical Islamic polemics. While al-Rāzī succeeded in gaining the political patronage and protection of the Khwārazm-Shāhs (who were eager to employ the talismanic sciences for political purposes), al-Suhrawardī was less fortunate in that his occult political doctrine, as well as his closeness with Saladdin's son, stoked the suspicion of powerful antagonists, leading to his execution in 1191 or 1192. Most striking, however, is the spatio-temporal entanglement that becomes apparent when connections are drawn between Noble's article and other contributions in this special issue, in particular to my own article on the planetary conjurations of the contemporary practitioner Frater Acher (2023). The similarities, and also the differences, between al-Rāzī's year-long ritual (outlined in his *al-Sirr al-maktūm / The Hidden Secret*, written no later than 1179) to invoke each of the celestial spheres in order to ultimately become 'self-talismanised,' on the one hand, and Frater Acher's twenty-first-century conjurations of planetary spirits, with the goal of 'theurgic' communion and the achievement of psycho-spiritual maturation by rising up the 'hermetic ladder,' on the other, are nothing short of striking. [16]

Sophie Page's contribution (2023) is not only a fine introduction to medieval European learned magic at large, but it also sheds light on the textual, ritual, conceptual and theoretical (especially cosmological) entanglements that underlie medieval learned magic. After all, the medieval Latin corpus of learned magic was, from the eleventh century onwards, in large parts the result of a trans-cultural textual-ritual exchange and translation movement based on earlier Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew traditions of learned magic, and accompanied by ongoing processes of 'Christianate' adaptation, negotiation and innovation. Beyond these rather typical types of entanglement, however, Page sheds new light on discursive entanglements of a [17]

particular kind, namely between medieval sympathisers and critics of magic. Page succinctly outlines the extent to which these sympathisers and critics engaged in a continuous process of response to each other's perspectives. She also shows how the surviving Latin texts of learned magic, as well as their underlying cosmologies, themselves changed significantly over the centuries, as a direct consequence of the dynamic entanglement between positive and negative medieval perceptions of magic. In addition, Page demonstrates that medieval learned magic was, even though continously ostracised and criminalised, embedded within a vibrant culture of textual exchange between different social and discursive stratas, e.g. between actors coming from monastic, clerical, university, or lay milieus.

[18] In his discussion of Reginald Scot's work *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (first publ. 1584), Owen Davies provides another fine analysis of the discursive—now early modern European—entanglements between polemical and identificatory perspectives on magic (2023). These coalesce in peculiar ways within Scot's text itself, in that the *Discoverie of Witchcraft* encompasses both lenghty ritual prescriptions as well as anti-magical polemics. Davies also sheds light on media entanglements while pondering the relationship and reciprocal influences between early modern manuscript and print cultures of learned magic. The spread of literacy and, therefore, the ongoing 'democratisation' of learned magic in early modern Europe (with new practitioner milieus emerging among groups such as merchants, soldiers, and peasants) can also be interpreted from the perspective of discursive entanglements which, in turn, affected the contents of circulating texts of learned magic – through dynamics of ritual complexity-reduction, for example (see also Otto 2016, 212–17). Davies' last example is particularly striking in that it reveals textual, conceptual and spatio-temporal entanglements all the way from the early modern French text *Poule Noir through* to the Japanese manga artist Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015) and his *Akuma-kun* films and television series.

[19] Dirk Johannsen's chapter on William Butler Yeats sheds particular light on ritual, conceptual and theoretical entanglements (2023). Yeats' highly innovative 'dual theory of magic and poetry,' outlined in Johannsen's article, is, first of all, a fine example of ritual entanglements, in that Yeats systematically bridged or merged two forms of practices that had previously only been associated rather loosely: ritual practice, on the one hand, and poetic writing, on the other. He also engaged in conceptual and theoretical entanglements in his attempt to merge metaphysical and naturalist understandings of human moods, and of the imagination in particular, in order to ultimately formulate a novel and, as it were, 'entangled' theory of magic that does justice to the cultural domains of both magic and poetry (thus framed as "talismanic poetry": see Johannsen 2021). Yeats was also an innovator in his amalgamation of literary and folkloristic perspectives within his theory of magic, thus paving the way for what has become known as the 'psychologisation of magic' in the twenty-first century.

[20] Aleister Crowley is certainly one of the most pivotal figures in the history of Western learned magic, and it is unsurprising that a wide variety of textual, ritual, conceptual, and theoretical entanglements can be detected in his works and deeds. Henrik Bogdan's contribution reflects on the telling example of the practices, ideas and texts surrounding Crowley's ongoing attempts to contact and converse with his 'Holy Guardian Angel' (2023). The example is particularly noteworthy, as, over the years, Crowley amalgamated a vast range of texts stemming from diverse traditions and origins. These included the late ancient (Egyptian) *Greek London Papyrus 46* (*PGM V*); early modern grimoires such as the *Abramelin* and the *Goetia*; John Dee's system of Enochian conjurations of 'aethyrs'; and nineteenth-century initiatory and masonic rites, based on the kabbalistic tree of life, which had manifested in the Her-

metic Order of the Golden Dawn. The manifold textual and ritual entanglements, but also the on-going conceptual and theoretical re-interpretations that underlie Crowley's life-long quest for his 'Holy Guardian Angel', are all valuable examples that illustrate the agenda of this special issue. Crowley's last prescriptive manual for achieving his goal—his *Liber Samekh* (composed ca. 1920)—includes a modified version of a late ancient Egyptian conjuration formula, in which we can again also observe longue-durée spatio-temporal entanglements that still inform present-day Thelemites, such as members of the Ordo Templi Orientis.

[21] Finally, my own chapter on Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience*—a series of conjurations of planetary spirits performed in a Bavarian barn by a (in the scene) well-known contemporary practitioner between 2010 and 2013—can be read along similar lines (2023). Acher, in his year-long ritual endeavour to encounter planetary spirits (just like al-Rāzī 800 years before), combined and amalgamated texts and techniques from multiple contexts, among them late ancient Egypt (again *PGM V*), early modern grimoires (*Arbatel*, *Clavicula Salomonis*), Paracelsian, Hermetic and masonic traditions, as well as modern imagination and 'Chaos magick' techniques. The outcome was a strikingly 'entangled ritual' that, in stark contrast to Acher's 'traditionalist' self-understanding, was highly innovative, creative, adaptive and, even within the ritual series itself, in constant flux. As with Crowley's *Liber Samekh*, Acher's *Arbatel experience* implies not only a large number of textual, ritual and conceptual entanglements, but also various spatio-temporal entanglements, especially through his systematic adoption of textual-ritual patterns from the *Greek Magical Papyri* and the early modern ritual script *Arbatel*. Consequently, I make a passionate plea in the article to take experience reports of contemporary practitioners of magic(k) more seriously, to make use of such reports in the analysis and interpretation of premodern texts of learned magic, and thus to systematically compare practitioner strategies, practices, and mindsets from different centuries and sociocultural frameworks.

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The Entanglement of Philosophy, Politics and the Occult

The Hidden Secret of early Post-Avicennan Thought in the Islamic East

MICHAEL NOBLE

ABSTRACT By the thirteenth century, philosophy, politics and occult science had become deeply entangled in the Persianate Islamic world. Two of the greatest luminaries in this intellectual milieu were Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1210) and Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Ibn Ḥabash Ibn Amīrak al-Suhrawardī (d.1191/2), who at one point were fellow students of philosophy under a certain Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī in Marāgha in northeastern Iran. Both subsequently sought royal patronage, the former travelling eastwards to Transoxania to secure the generosity of the Khwārazm-Shāhs, the latter travelling eastwards to the Levant to gain the intimate trust of Malik al-Ẓāhir, the son of the Ayyūbid sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn—known in the West as Saladdin. Both composed works devoted to talismanic astral ritual. And crucially, both developed philosophical soteriologies coloured by their meditations on the "craft"—soteriologies with profound implications for the nature of political authority.

KEYWORDS Rāzī, Suhrawardī, Sakkākī, Talisman, Daimon, Occult, Perfect Nature

Introduction: Philosophy and the Occult

[1] In the eastern half of the Islamic world, the period that spanned the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was witness to a deep entanglement between learned magic and philosophy. Its context was that efflorescence of intellectual activity that variously critiqued, defended and developed the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), who became known in the West as Avicenna when his works became an object of focus for the Arabic-Latin transmission of knowledge. During this period, two of his most influential intellectual heirs were Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1210) and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d.1191/2), who, at one point in their careers, were fellow students of philosophy under a certain Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī in Marāgha in northeastern Iran. Both subsequently sought patronage with the great powers that ruled in the Islamic world. Rāzī travelled eastwards to establish himself in the courts of the two rival regional powers, the Ghūrids and the Khwārazm-Shāhs. Suhrawardī travelled westwards to win the

confidence of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir, the governor of Aleppo and son of the Ayyūbid sultan Salāḥ al-Dīn— known in the West as Saladdin (Griffel 2007; Street 1997; Walbridge 1999, 13–17 and 201–210). The two philosophers also shared a deep interest in the occult, on which they both wrote dedicated works.

[2] No mere compendium of talismanic operations, Rāzī's *The Hidden Secret* (*al-Sirr al-maktūm*) was a profound philosophical meditation on the efficacy of the "the craft" (*al-ṣināʿa*). An early work of Rāzī, written no later than 1179, it modified Avicennan celestial kinematics and psychology to construct a scientific account of talismanry that enabled a human agent to harness the powers of the soul to channel celestial influence into a talisman—be it a metal idol or a ring—to bring about change in the terrestrial world that breached the empirical norm, in accordance with the will. The work includes instructions for numerous such talismans. These operations, however, are merely a propaedeutic for what is in fact the real "hidden secret" of the work: an astral ritual, lasting many years, during which the aspirant, guided by his own personal celestial guardian spirit (*al-ṭibāʿ al-tāmm*) and wearing ritual clothing, observing ritual fasting and diet, performing prescribed gestures, and maintaining certain conscious attitudes, addresses orisons to the planets. From each, the aspirant gains specific knowledge and powers. On successful completion, the theoretical and practical capacities of the aspirant's soul reach perfection. Thus transformed, it ascends to the ontological rank of the celestial spirits and the heavenly spheres yield to the will. The aspirant becomes 'self-talismanised.'[1]

[3] Of central importance to Suhrawardī's occult work *Spiritual Influxes and Sanctifications* (*al-Wāridāt wa'l-taqdīsāt*)—addressed to "the human talisman" (*al-ṭilasm al-basharī*)—are orisons with which, beginning with God, the Necessarily Existent, the aspirant then sanctifies the intellects and souls of each sphere of the cosmic pleroma, descending from "Bahman" the First Intellect through the heavens and ending with the terrestrial elements (Walbridge 2011, 80–97). The terminology of Suhrawardī's philosophical "wisdom of illumination" (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*) that he inaugurated suffuses the language of these orisons (2011, 85). Although they evince no explicit objective of gaining occult power, the manifestation of thaumaturgy, visions and veridical dreams nevertheless constitutes evidence, in Suhrawardī's philosophical system, that the aspirant has indeed perfected the wisdom of illumination (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*). As a Platonising critique of Avicenna's Peripateticism, Suhrawardī's wisdom of illumination integrated the epistemology of an immediate intuitive knowledge of spiritual and intelligible realities with the direct realism of "knowledge by presence" (*ʿilm ḥuḍūrī*) through which both universals and particulars were cognised. It was in the performance of his orisons that his philosophy found its most lyrical expression. And it was in occult knowledge and power that his philosophy was most fully embodied.

[4] In engaging with the talismanic craft, our authors were drawing on a body of occult thought that in the Islamic world had become closely associated with the Sabians—a historical community that, well into Abbasid times, sustained the last vestige of Near Eastern astrolatry (Roberts 2017, 253–77). By the twelfth century, Islamic theologians applied the term "Sabian" to any non-Abrahamic religious culture—be it Greek, Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, or Mesopotamian—that they understood as being steeped in astrolatry. For these theologians, the Ancient Mesopotamian variety of Sabianism claimed as its own the antediluvian reve-

1 For a study of the philosophical theory of *The Hidden Secret*, see Noble (2021). A full translation of the long ritual appears in Noble (2021, 269–82). For the text of *The Hidden Secret*, I am relying on the undated Cairo lithograph of Mirza Muḥammad Shīrāzī. Liana Saif identifies one source for the concept of the Perfect Nature in the Pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica, in connection with Apollonius (see Saif 2021, 38).

lation of Hermes, who taught the principles of astrology and the celestial-terrestrial matrix of occult correspondences that informed the craft of the talisman master (Van Bladel 2009, 234–39). Observing spiritual austerities and astral rituals, their souls could receive from the celestial spirits (*rūḥāniyyāt*) knowledge of the heavens that lay beyond the reach of empirical inquiry; and they could perform, with their talismanic idols, prodigies that breached the empirical norm. It is the Sabianism of this twelfth-century philosophical construct—which had become synonymous with learned magic—that is the object of our present inquiry. Rejecting prophethood, the Sabians of our twelfth-century philosopher-theologians pursued an occult philosophical soteriology in which the celestial spirits played the pivotal salvific role. In *The Hidden Secret*, the masters of the talismanic science were identified as the Sabians, whose sage Dawānay was the second of the three Hermai identified by the early Islamic astrologer Abū Maʿshar al-Balkhī.[2] And it was Hermes— "the father of philosophers"—that Suhrawardī identified as the primordial source of his wisdom of illumination (Walbridge 2001, 17).

[5] If accepted as real—which our authors did—the Sabian science directly challenged Islamic theology that aspired to a sound rational basis for the declaration of faith that there is no god but God, and Muḥammad is His final messenger. For if human agency can affect the terrestrial world with talismanic technology, then the confidence that it is God's power that is the fundamental cause of all change and thus the only real cause, *sensu stricto*, in existence is shaken. This adamantine theological principle is yet further jeopardised by the recognition that such celestial principles can be persuaded, through prayer and sacrifice, to bring about events that violate the empirical norm. Moreover, if any human agent can, by mastering natural philosophy, astrology, and by taming his baser soul with spiritual austerities, establish a noetic connection with these celestial principles, and thereby attain revelation and thaumaturgical power, the institution of prophethood, and the belief that Muḥammad's represented its final and ultimate iteration in human history, was threatened.

[6] Avicennism provided the initial theoretical lens through which both Rāzī and Suhrawardī viewed the talismanic craft. Both saw in the craft a certain value in formulating an intellectually elitist soteriology that could also serve as state ideology. In this article, we shall explore the Avicennan framework by consulting his two most influential works *Philosophical Pointers and Reminders* (*al-Ishārāt waʾl-tanbīhāt*) and *The Healing* (*al-Shifāʾ*). This will lay the necessary conceptual foundation to understand Rāzī's scientific account of talismanry, and how it subsequently influenced the political theory and elite soteriology that he developed in his final theological summa *The Sublime Theses of Divine Science* (*al-Māṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*). We shall then touch briefly on the career of Razī's contemporary Suhrawardī and the parallel occult themes of his political theory. We shall conclude by observing an important textual entanglement between *The Hidden Secret* and the occult works of their junior contemporary Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī—the personal magician of both the last Khwārazm-Shāh and Chagadai, the son of Chinggis Khān. Such an overview will bring into focus the nexus between philosophy, politics and the occult that marked the beginning of the Mongol period in the Islamic east.

2 The second Hermes is known as Hermes of Babylon, where he lived when it was the home of the sages. He was skilled in medicine, philosophy, and mathematics. He revived the sciences that had been lost in the Flood and was the Hermes who had been the teacher of Pythagoras. This Hermes represented both the Babylonian and Zoroastrian traditions of wisdom. A reference to this second Hermes, who is said to have been called "Dawanay" in Chaldaean, is found in the introduction to an astrological manuscript attributed to Hermes entitled *Risala fi Dala'il al-Iqtiranat* [Essay on the significance of conjunctions] (see Walbridge 2001, 21).

The Avicennan Lens

[7] As one of the chief contenders in the field of theological and philosophical debate, the Neoplatonising Peripatetic philosophy of Avicenna advanced such a systematic and comprehensive scientific worldview that it demanded deep engagement from the thinkers of the period. During the period in question, the Avicennan cosmological framework of our authors' theorising on the occult accounted for how the multiplicity of contingent reality ultimately derives from the eternal simplex that is God—the Necessarily Existent—by adopting a Neoplatonic model of emanation (*fayḍ*).

[8] In reasoning about the divine principle, Avicenna maintained that just as Its unqualified necessity implies Its unqualified simplicity, so does the latter imply the former. And just as necessity implies that It cannot be subject to any external cause, so Its simplicity implies that It cannot have any internal intention—namely to create. Thus, no multiplicity can issue directly from It. Applying the *ex uno* metaphysical principle that "from one only one proceeds" (*lā yaṣdur ʿan al-wāḥid illā al-wāḥid*), Avicenna asserted the atemporal emergence of the immaterial First Intellect as consequent to the beginningless and eternal act of divine self-contemplation (Amin 2020, 125–26). A second immaterial intellect followed from the First's contemplation of the Necessarily Existent; the cosmically englobing outermost sphere was the result of the First Intellect's contemplation of its relationship of contingency on the Necessarily Existent; and the outermost sphere's animating soul was the result of the First Intellect's self-contemplation as a being necessarily existent by virtue of its own necessary cause (Davidson 1992, 75). The objects of contemplation of this second intellect, again, are three: the Necessarily Existent; its own self as necessarily existent by virtue of its own cause; and itself as a possible existent. From such contemplation issue three entities: a third immaterial intellect; the sphere of the fixed stars; and the soul that moves this sphere. It was the continuation of this process, and the emanation of the immaterial supracelestial intellects, the celestial souls and spheres, from Saturn down to the Moon, and finally the sublunary sphere of this world, that generated the Ptolemaic cosmos that Avicenna inherited.

[9] Associated with the lunar sphere, the Active Intellect—the last of the immaterial supracelestial intellects of this emanative cosmogony—was the metaphysical cause of prime matter and of the myriad forms that made up earthly natural kinds. Celestial motion was the auxiliary cause that turned the cycle of generation and corruption and primed the receptivity of terrestrial matter for the instantiation of these forms. Terrestrial change, however, was not the primary motivation of this celestial motion. For, whilst they were cognisant of their effects, the celestial souls were primarily driven by their desire to imitate, and thus to realise, the motionless perfection of their metaphysical causes—those supracelestial intellects that transcended space and time; those immaterial products of the initial act of divine self-contemplation.

[10] The Avicennan cosmogony conceived of humanity as a unity in species, and of the Active Intellect as its metaphysical cause and origin. Since the Active Intellect was the cause of the human rational soul's process of perfection, it played a central role in Avicenna's epistemology and prophetology (Davidson 1992, 76). In its theoretical aspect, the immaterial human intellect was oriented towards its metaphysical origin, from which it received the primary and secondary intelligibilia that constituted philosophical knowledge. In its practical aspect, it was oriented to towards the human soul's internal senses—seated in the physical substrate of the brain—that delivered to it the particulars of sense perception. The intellect's abstrac-

tion of, and cogitation on, such particulars prepared it for receptivity to the disclosure of universals by the Active intellect.

[11] It was the principles of sound syllogism construction that safeguarded against the errors of reason that thwarted the construction of sound demonstrations establishing philosophical truth. The crucial middle terms of such syllogisms were acquired either through the labour of cogitation that is trained in the science of Aristotelian logic; or more rarely through spontaneous intuition (*ḥads*). The prodigious capacity for such rare philosophical intuition in the acquisition of universals was one of the three Avicennan categories of prophethood (Gutas 2014, 179–203; al-Akiti 2004, 189–212).

[12] Mirroring this cogitation-intuition binary, the acquisition of particulars proceeded either by means of the senses; or by means of dreams and visions through the human soul's noetic connection to the celestial realm. Both empirical observation and sound reason confirmed for Avicenna the human soul's ability to acquire knowledge of the unseen world—knowledge that comprised data relating to future events and other matters hidden to external sense perception. Indeed, Avicenna was so convinced of the empirical evidence for this that he averred: "except for him whose temperament is corrupted, and whose powers of imagination and recollection are torpid, there is no-one whose own soul has not had such experiences so as to inspire in him assent to this." Reason made an even bigger assertion: the possibility that such knowledge data can also be encoded in waking visions. It was the extreme of such ability that constituted imaginational prophethood (Avicenna 2002, 374–75).

[13] The third category—thaumaturgical prophethood—was the means by which the soul can bring about extraordinary change in the material world. Avicenna reasoned that, just as the soul's emotive states could affect the subject's own body, so the subject's soul had the potential to affect external bodies—even at a distance. Indeed, Avicenna reasoned that some souls could be so powerful as to cause geological and climactic effects. The furthermost extremity of this power constituted thaumaturgical prophethood.

[14] Philosophical and imaginational prophethood represented the perfection of human theoretical capacity (*al-quwwa al-naẓariyya*); thaumaturgical prophethood represented the perfection of human practical capacity (*al-quwwa al-ʿamaliyya*). Since, as we discussed earlier, humanity constituted a single species, no one member thereof was distinguishable by any essential difference. So, the capacity for all three categories of prophethood lay in potential, both jointly and severally, in every human soul.

[15] The explanatory power of Avicenna's philosophical account of prophethood derived from its innovative development of the Aristotelian imagination (*phantasia*) to assert a complex of five distinct internal senses. To argue for this multiplication of internal senses, he applied the principle that to be perceived, different kinds of percept required distinct faculties. Now, in addition to the standard Aristotelian forms of sensibilia (*ṣuwar al-maḥsūsāt*), Avicenna asserted a further category of percept: intentions (*maʿānī*). Intentions were essentially non-material properties that could inhere in sensible forms. His favourite illustrations for intention include the wolf's predatory intention towards a sheep or the ram's concupiscent intention towards a ewe. Therefore, to perceive intentions, animals—both rational and non-rational—required a faculty of perception distinct from that which perceived sensibilia (Avicenna 2002, 240).

[16] A hylomorphic intromission model of perception determined that the forms of sensibilia such as shape, colour, position, sound, magnitude and motion were conveyed to the external senses; the latter then transmitted their cognitive data to the common sense (*al-ḥiss al-mushtarak*) that integrated them to produce a unified experience of extra-mental sensible re-

ality. Intentions, however, being percepts that were fundamentally different from sensibilia, were cognised by a separate internal sense—the estimative faculty (*al-wahm*). And just as Avicenna's principle of faculty differentiation demanded separate faculties to facilitate the cognition of different categories of percept, so did he posit different faculties of memory for their retention: "form memory" (*al-khayāl*, or alternatively *al-muṣawwira*) and "intention memory" (*al-dhākira*). A fifth internal sense—described as "operative" (*mutaṣarrifa*)—facilitated the soul's ability to perform cognitive operations on the contents of the two respective memory stores. Such operations were either cogitative—in which case this operative faculty was referred to as the cogitative faculty (*al-mufakkira*); or imaginative—in which case it was referred to as the imaginative faculty (*al-mutakhayyila*). It is ceaseless in its activity (Avicenna 2002, 239–41).[3]

Unlike the immaterial human intellect, the five internal senses functioned through the pneuma. This was contained in the three cerebral cavities that were arranged along the length of the brain. Since it received data from the external senses, the common sense was located in the front portion of the anterior cavity, its memory store in the rear portion. The intention memory was located in the posterior cavity. The two distinct memory stores were thus separated by the middle cavity. Occupying it were the estimative and the operative faculties. From this commanding position, the estimative faculty—as the governing faculty of the animal soul—could direct the operative faculty *qua* imagination to act on stored forms and intentions to combine them and generate cognitive objects that had no direct correspondence with the extra-mental reality that the soul perceived by means of the external senses (Avicenna 2002, 239–41). [17]

The estimative faculty presided over the synergy of the internal senses that facilitated the human soul's ability to know the unseen. Change in the sublunary world was determined by heavenly motion; the celestial souls were cognisant of the terrestrial effects of their configurations; such cognisance was disclosed in their intentions, which could be received by the human soul's estimative faculty. This faculty could then direct the imagination to exercise its combinatorial power to draw on the two memory stores and imprint on the common sense what the human soul experienced as a vision or a veridical dream. To varying degrees of accuracy, this experience corresponded to the original celestial intention that had been received (Avicenna 2002, 375–76).[4] [18]

Throughout his hylomorphic account of perception, Avicenna described receptive faculties as undergoing a process of "imprinting" (*inṭibāʿ*), "inscription" (*irtisām*) or "engraving" (*intiqāsh*) by the forms of perceptual objects. The soul experienced sensory "witnessing" (*mushāhada*) when the tablet (*lawḥ*) of the common sense was inscribed by forms. We have already discussed how witnessing took place during the waking state, when forms from the extra-mental world were conveyed to the common sense by the external senses. But even during the waking state, there were mundane—even quotidian—occasions when what comes to be witnessed in the common sense routinely had only indirect and proximal correspondence with extra-mental reality. The two examples on which Avicenna relied to illustrate this were the raindrop that is perceived as a straight line, and the dot painted on a spinning disc that is perceived as a circle. When the raindrop, for instance, is seen at $point_1$, a form is inscribed in the common sense; but before this form vanishes from the common sense, the raindrop [19]

3 Note that in this passage, Avicenna identifies the Aristotelian *phantasia* (transmitted into the Arabic philosophical tradition as *banṭāsiyā*) with the common sense.

4 In my reading, it is the estimative faculty—not the imagination or the practical intellect—that receives the celestial intention. See my discussion in Noble (2021, 186n38).

reaches point$_2$, and a second form is inscribed in the common sense; the common sense integrates these forms into the perception of a line—which has no direct correspondence with the external world (Avicenna 2002, 377–78).

[20] Be that as it may, even when observing the descent of a raindrop, the common sense in a healthy soul is nevertheless inscribed with forms from the external world, as conveyed by the external senses. In contrast, those suffering from fevers and bilious imbalances can have sensory experiences which have absolutely no correspondence with the extra-mental world: their cause is internal. Such hallucinations occur when the soul's powers are diverted in the fight against illness, leaving the imagination—incessant in its activity—unchecked. It then proceeds to draw on percepts stored in the two memory stores and constructs sensory experiences that it then imprints on the common sense. Similarly, during sleep, with the external senses inactive and with the soul's powers diverted to digestion, the imagination is unfettered to imprint on the common sense what is experienced as a dream (Avicenna 2002, 378–81).

[21] In contrast to such autogenetic experiences, the veridical dream has its cause in the celestial realm. During sleep, the estimative faculty can receive from the celestial souls an intention that carries knowledge data about the unseen world. The estimative faculty then commands the imagination to draw on the two memory stores to construct and then imprint on the dormant common sense what is experienced as a dream that corresponds to the intention received from the celestial realm. This can also occur during certain kinds of illness, or as a result of vigorous physical activity. In both cases, the pneuma through which the imagination operates undergoes dissolution (*taḥallul*) and the faculty becomes inert, relieving the soul from directing power to hold it in check and allowing the estimative faculty to connect with the celestial realm. Once the pneuma of the imagination has recovered, it is able to resume its combinatorial activity and imprint the common sense with simulacra that resemble the data received by the estimative faculty. The furthest extreme of this ability allows the prophetic soul to connect with the celestial realm even during the waking state, the resulting imaginal simulacra being so powerful as to dominate the common sense and override sensory input conveyed by the external senses (Avicenna 2002, 379–82).

[22] Avicenna maintained that in lesser souls, noetic connection with the celestial realm can be achieved by physical procedures. Thus, when a Turkic tribe needed to divine the future, they consulted the shaman (*kāhin*) on their matter of concern. Having been thus apprised, he launched into an intense sprint. Hyperventilating, he almost lost consciousness and uttered what his imagination disclosed to him. Listening attentively, the tribe decided on a course of action accordingly. Similarly, a scryer's focus on a transparent or glittering object bewildered the common sense, allowing the soul to connect with the celestial realm (Avicenna 2002, 384–85).

[23] Whatever the means by which a celestial intention was received, the extent to which its initial effect on the human soul could remain therein undistorted depended on the degree to which the imagination could subsequently be brought under control. As previously mentioned, the imagination was ceaseless in its activity. Unchecked, it would habitually respond to any stimulus—whether its origin was extra-mental or internal, arising from a humoral imbalance—by producing a series of inexact simulacra thereof. Avicenna called this imaginative association (*muḥākaya*). From the original cognitive object, it mimetically produced a second, then a third, then a fourth, and so on, for however long the process would last. The relation of each object to its predecessor was one of similarity or antithesis. It was the pneumatic substrate

of the imagination, affected as it was by the body's temperamental balance, that would determine the direction in which the process of imaginative association proceeded. Sometimes, the original object could be so powerful as to arrest the imagination. At other times, the imagination would set to work on it to such an extent as to make the original object irrecoverable. At yet other times, it was possible to reconstruct the original cognitive object through careful hermeneutical analysis (*al-taḥallul wa'l-ta'wīl*) (Avicenna 2002, 382–84).

[24] The estimative faculty was as crucial to Avicenna's account of thaumaturgy and magic as it was for his explanation of divination and imaginal prophethood. When unfettered by the intellect, the estimative faculty could exert a powerful effect on the body. Thus, when someone walks along a plank of wood suspended over a great height, the vertiginous feeling that the estimative faculty produces can send the body plummeting to its destruction. And since, in reaction to intentional stimuli, it could affect the subject's body, Avicenna reasoned that the estimative faculty could also affect bodies at a distance. In this way, individuals could heal the sick, summon rains, avert plagues, and cause earthquakes. The estimative faculty also lay behind the power of the envious evil eye to cause harm. This was an entirely naturalistic account of thaumaturgy. The only distinction between the saint and the sorcerer was moral. Moreover, it made no accommodation for the efficacy of magic ritual itself except insofar as it could focus the power of the practitioner's estimative faculty (Avicenna 2002, 387–90).

[25] In the same way that there was a spectrum of human psychic receptivity to celestial knowledge of the unseen, so too was humanity characterised by such a diversity of thaumaturgical power as to include the possibility of a soul so powerful that it could affect other souls—and even act "as a soul for the world." Such power could arise in a soul either by virtue of its innate temperament or through its purification (Avicenna 2002, 388).

[26] Human perfection was realised in the complete actualisation of all three prophetic categories. Legitimate political authority only truly resided in the one who had attained such perfection—who, in doing so, "becomes almost a human god." Indeed, Avicenna maintained, "worship of him, after the worship of God, exalted be He, becomes almost allowed. He is indeed the world's earthly king and God's deputy in it" (Avicenna 2005, 378).[5]

[27] Avicenna's general scientific theory of prophethood, divination, thaumaturgy and magic was the denouement of his metaphysics, which began with his analysis of the unchanging divine simplex that exerted no direct influence in the sublunary world. His account simultaneously explained how the prophet, saint, sorcerer—even the common man—might receive knowledge of the unseen by connecting with the celestial realm through the estimative faculty; and how the same faculty could enable them to intervene in the terrestrial world in ways that contravened the empirical norm. Moreover, his theory of veridical dreams and visions explained the subjective nature of the form in which they were internally experienced and the objective origin of their extra-mental, celestial efficient cause. The potential of the prophet, saint, sorcerer, and common man to perform thaumaturgy and to experience visions, however, existed on a continuum undifferentiated by any essential difference. For a thinker like Rāzī, this constituted a challenge to the unique nature of prophethood. It provided, however, the ideal conceptual foundation to explain the efficacy of the Sabian craft.

5 On Aleister Crowley's somewhat similar idea that the magician functions as the "co-heir of gods, a Lord of Light," see Henrik Bogdan's chapter in this volume (2023).

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *The Hidden Secret*

During the historical period under discussion, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was the pre-eminent exponent of "*kalam*"—an Islamic theological methodology that applied reason to scripture to defend the fundamental verities of the faith. So intellectually seductive was the appeal of Avicennism that it demanded from *kalām* a robust response. It was in defending the edifice erected by his theological school from the Avicennan threat that Rāzī devoted much of his career. Ultimately, his strategy was to attempt a systematic harmonisation of the two approaches.[6] [28]

Born in the Persian city of Rayy in 544/1149, Rāzī received his formative instruction in *kalām* from his father. But it was in Marāgha, under Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī—whose students, as we have mentioned, included a young Suhrawardī—that he dedicated his attention to Avicennan philosophy. Subsequently, his need to establish his name in the world of philosophical debate and to secure stable patronage took him east, to Khurāsān and Transoxania. The fierce reputation that he won as a debater eventually secured for him the generous favour of the two rival regional powers, the Ghūrids and the Khwārazm-Shāhs (Shihadeh 2017, 297). [29]

Considering his life-long engagement with his philosophy, it should come as no surprise that Rāzī availed himself of Avicenna's prophetology to construct the theory behind Sabian talismanry that he recorded in *The Hidden Secret*. It extolled knowledge of the Sabian craft as the acme of human intellectual endeavour—a craft that promised to disclose to its student the mysteries of causality in the cosmos, command of which empowered the individual to act in the sublunary world in ways that circumvented the seeming habitual pattern of cause and effect. For Rāzī the theologian, such patterns were merely the divinely mandated norms by which events unfolded—there were no real causes as such that operated independently of the divine fiat. The theological error of the Sabians is only given cursory treatment—a brief but necessary excursus. The agenda of *The Hidden Secret* is neither polemical nor heresiological. [30]

The absence of any such destructive agenda evidently baffled subsequent readers who failed to agree on the work's authorial intent. Some were persuaded that Rāzī was a crypto-astrolater who defended Sabian magical practice. Others, perplexed, denied that a theologian of Rāzī's stature would have written it. Yet others, who celebrated the occult sciences and viewed Rāzī as a disputatious theological pedant, simply denied his authorship of the work, so penetrating were its insights into the world of spiritual beings. However, situating the work within the broader context of Rāzī's philosophical-theological grand project would have allowed *The Hidden Secret*'s confounded readers to distinguish appropriately between the its subject matter and its author's purpose, preventing such overhasty judgments (Noble 2021, 18 and 33–34). [31]

Two issues must be clearly distinguished here: the reality of the Sabian craft as a technology that could produce real effects in the world and the compatibility of the Sabian craft with Islamic sacred law. Addressing the first, Rāzī's view was that Sabian talismanry was indeed a real technology with a sound empirical basis. Why he believed this can only be a matter of speculation. Holding such a view, it was imperative for Rāzī, whose ambition it was to construct a philosophical theology as systematic as its Avicennan predecessor, to provide a scientific account of the technology that could harmonise with his overarching metaphysics. The second issue divides into two further subsidiary issues—the compatibility with Islamic sacred law of certain ritual acts described in *The Hidden Secret*; and addressing the planets. [32]

6 Strictly, *kalām* is a methodology rather than a domain of inquiry. Both *kalām* and philosophy applied their own respective methodologies to the same domains of inquiry, such as metaphysics, physics, and ethics (Treiger 2017, 5–6).

In his introduction to the work, Rāzī was careful to repudiate "all that is opposed to the religion (*al-dīn*) and the peace of certainty" (Al-Rāzī n.d., 2). Obvious examples of acts opposed to the sacred law are the Venusian orgy and the Martian cannibalism that feature in the aforementioned long planetary ritual. There is no evidence in his oeuvre that Rāzī, as a jurist, ever argued that the sacred law provided dispensations for such activities. As for addressing the planets, Rāzī describes in his early encyclopaedic work—*The Compendium of the Sciences* (*Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm*)—an ancient Persian royal ritual that addressed the sun for the fulfilment of a certain need. This he described as forbidden in the sacred law (*ḥarām*), an act which would render the performer an infidel—even if through it a worldly objective might be attained (Noble 2021, 255). Why the sacred law would deem permissible the act of petitioning a king for patronage whilst proscribing the same act when performed to the sun is left unexplained. One possible solution is that one of the key objectives of the sacred law was to preclude the seduction of astrolatry through its allure of worldly gain. The development of Islamic legal positions on the occult sciences remains an unexplored field and lies beyond the scope of this article. [33]

If *The Hidden Secret* is considered in the context of his grand intellectual project, we need not resort to a Straussian argument that Rāzī publicly declared his commitment to Islamic law whilst privately advocating the Sabian craft. For Rāzī, the error of Sabian metaphysics did not imply that Sabian technology produced no real effects in the world. And since Rāzī was indeed convinced that the technology was real, any sound metaphysics would have to account for its efficacy. This was the challenge—albeit implicit—that he laid out in *The Hidden Secret*. We should be mindful that a Persian philosopher's deep intellectual engagement with learned magic no more implies his practice of it than a modern-day physicist's interest in uranium implies his intent to make a nuclear bomb. [34]

The Hidden Secret begins with an encomium to occult knowledge and presents the talismanic science as the culmination of practical philosophy, in pursuit of which man finds liberation from the mortality of his terrestrial existence, experiences an angelomorphic transformation, and is admitted to the rank of the celestial spirits, who become his hierophantic guides to the arcana of the spiritual and corporeal worlds. The first treatise (*maqāla*) prefaces the subsequent numerous descriptions of talismanic operations with a theoretical discussion of "talisman" as a process: "[…] the blending (*tamzīj*) of heavenly active forces with elemental passive forces, for the sake of being empowered (*li-ajl al-tamakkun min*) to make manifest that which runs contrary to the norm (*al-ʿāda*) or to prevent from occurring that which is consonant with it" (Al-Rāzī n.d., 7; as translated in Noble 2021, 1). Such was the primary sense in which Rāzī understood the concept of "talisman." [35]

To command this process as a practical technology, the practitioner must engage in rigorous ascesis to sever the "corporeal bonds" (*ʿalāʾiq jismāniyya*) that fetter the soul to the terrestrial plane, to connect with the "active heavenly forces" of the celestial spirits and to "blend" them into a talismanic idol (*ṣanam*)—the secondary sense of "talisman." Thus blended, they are then directed, in accordance with the practitioner's intention, to cause an effect that contravenes the empirical norm. The nature of the magical objective determined the selection of the planet used. The operation was a two-stage process. At the prescribed katarchic moment, the appropriate planetary metal is poured into a mould to cast the talismanic idol. Ritualised gesture, mimetic of the magical goal, hones the meditative focus of the practitioner who directs the celestial forces that had been blended into the idol to bring about his intended effect. [36]

Of course, astrological competency was a prerequisite for identifying the correct katarchic moment for casting the talismanic idol. But it was the matrix of occult celestial-terrestrial correspondences that determined the appropriate mental world of ritual preparation and act, which included specific diet, suffumigations, sacrifices, clothing, incantations, and visualization. The stronger the talisman master's command of occult celestial-terrestrial correspondences, the more effective was ritual in establishing human connection with the supernal realm. A complete cognitive internalization of this matrix ensured that the sensory input of ritual would guide the practitioner's imagination to align with the operative talismanic planet and establish therewith a noetic connection.[7] The talismanic process involved the entirety of the soul's cognitive apparatus. In Avicennan terms, the practitioner's theoretical intellect acquired the necessary command of astrology; the practical intellect ensured the care and attention to ritual performance; the common sense received the sensory data arising from ritual; and the mimetic association of an astrologically primed imagination facilitated the estimative faculty in connecting with the supernal realm. [37]

Rāzī's philosophical account of Sabian talismanry coordinated the two theoretical levels of the human and the celestial. As for the human, Rāzī assigned the estimative faculty—the governing faculty of both imaginational and thaumaturgical prophethood—the crucial role in the talismanic process. The one who did not possess an innately powerful estimative faculty could train it through ascesis and meditative training. He reasoned that if, in the Avicennan account of imaginational prophethood, the estimative faculty's connection with the celestial realm could facilitate the transmission of knowledge, then so too could it direct celestial forces to affect terrestrial reality in accordance with the will. The same psychological principles that allowed the Turkic shaman, or the scryer, to use a physical procedure to induce a human-celestial noetic connection also allowed the talisman master to employ spiritual discipline and astral ritual to achieve the same end. The practitioner's bonds to corporeal reality were severed by traumatising the body, through extreme daily fasting, until the point of sustenance on the barest minimum of food required to draw breath. During this period, any consequent humoral imbalances could be addressed by the use of fragrances, music and visuals. [38]

As for the celestial level, Rāzī adapted Avicennan proofs to substantiate the Sabian belief in the ensoulment of the celestial realm; celestial knowledge of the terrestrial effects of heavenly motion; and celestial receptivity to human communication through the media of orisons and sacrifice. But, in accounting for the Sabian belief system, he departed from Avicennan cosmology in one crucial aspect: He identified the metaphysical cause of terrestrial natural kinds as the spirit that governs the outermost sphere—not the Avicennan Active Intellect that was co-ordinate with the lunar sphere. This removal of the Active Intellect allowed to Rāzī to replace it with a quintessentially Sabian doctrine: the Perfect Nature. [39]

According to Sabian anthropology, humanity was not a unity in species, originating in the single metaphysical source that was the Avicennan Active intellect—rather it was an aggregate of essentially different soul groups. Each derived from a distinct astral spirit which was the "heavenly father" of each individual group member. This, as reported by Rāzī, was known to the Sabians as the Perfect Nature (*al-ṭibāʿ al-tāmm*). Functionally, it was the Arabic counterpart of the Greek Neoplatonic personal daimon. In the Avicennan system, it was the Active Intellect that was the efficient cause of the human soul's perfection. In the system of Razī's Sabians, however, it was an individual's perfect nature that, through dreams and [40]

7 For a somewhat similar practice of connecting with planetary spirits, see Otto's chapter on Frater Acher's "Arbatel experiences" in this volume (2023).

hypnagogic epiphanies, inspired the individual with occult knowledge and guided the soul to its theoretical and practical perfection. Moreover, once stabilised, this connection allowed the perfect nature to act as a personal guide and hierophant in the long ritual of planetary ascent, upon completion of which the aspirant becomes 'self-talismanised' with power over the sublunary realm—the Sabian equivalent of the Avicennan perfected man.[8] It seems that for Rāzī, this doctrine was the key wisdom of the Sabian occult philosophy. So important was it that in the parting counsel that he offered the anonymous king, whom he addressed when concluding *The Hidden Secret*, he advised: "As for him who seeks knowledge and the perfect philosophy, he should invoke his perfect nature" (Al-Rāzī n.d., 164; as translated in Noble 2021, 27).[9]

[41] Rāzī composed *The Hidden Secret* at the beginning of his writing career, no later than 1179. Thereafter, he remained largely silent about the Sabian occult philosophy until he neared his final year, when he completed the last volume of his (unfinished) philosophical-theological summa *The Sublime Theses*, in 1209. Entitled *On Prophethood and related matters* (*Fī al-nubuwwāt wa-mā yataʿallaq bihā*), the last volume concludes with a detailed presentation—albeit in a far more systematised form—of the material he presented in *The Hidden Secret*. His deep engagement with the occult science of the Sabians and his conviction in the efficacy of their talismanic technology provided him with powerful arguments with which to challenge Avicennism. Moreover, he fully embraced the Perfect Nature doctrine, adopting it as the cornerstone of his alternative philosophical soteriology.

[42] To recapitulate the Avicennan perspective, the Active Intellect—the last of supracelestial intellects that was coordinate with the lunar sphere—played a central cosmological role: It was the metaphysical cause of natural kinds in the sublunary world, including the individual souls that comprised the single human species; and it was the efficient cause of the individual human soul's actualisation and perfection. Rāzī not only launched a sustained offensive against the doctrine of the Active Intellect, but also drew out the implications of the internal sense psychology that accounted for how an individual's theoretical and practical capacities might be perfected. He argued that Avicenna relativised prophethood and failed to demonstrate how the effects of prophetic thaumaturgy might be distinguished from the results of employing talismanic technology—which Rāzī maintained was real science. Instead, he argued that the "greatest spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-aʿẓam*) that governs the outermost sphere was the metaphysical cause of sublunary natural kinds; and that humanity was a genus comprising numerous species, the metaphysical cause of each being a distinct astral spirit—the perfect nature. It was the perfect nature that inspired the individual with philosophical insights, veridical dreams, waking visions, ethical guidance, and spiritual tutelage. He rescued prophethood from the equalising impact of Avicennism by asserting that the prophet, deriving from the greatest spirit, was essentially different from the rest of humanity, his revelations unique. Nevertheless, the philosophical-spiritual elite of the rest of humanity might themselves establish connection with their own astral perfect natures to embark on the spiritual ascent to perfection (Noble 2021, 229–49).

[43] As the earthly counterpart of the greatest spirit, the perfected man stood at the apex of a hierarchy of souls that he brought to perfection; he implemented the sacred law; and his prac-

8 For similar ideas surrounding the acquisition of the 'Holy guardian angel' in Aleister Crowley's work, see Bogdan's chapter in this volume (2023).

9 For an overview in the Chaldean, Zoroastrian and Hellenistic historical contexts of rituals to connect with the personal daimon, as well as insights into this praxis from a contemporary practitioner, see Frater Acher (2018).

tical power extended throughout the corporeal world. Developing the idea of humanity as a genus comprising different species, he advanced an ethnology that claimed that the inhabitants of the Irānshahr region—the Persianate world, which at that time included the Central Asian region—were the closest to perfection. And of humanity, the greatest in perfection was counted amongst their number. What Rāzī had identified as a quintessentially Sabian doctrine had now been pressed into the service of an Iranocentric political ideology. The theory had profound political implications which surely would not have been overlooked by his royal Persianate benefactors (Noble 2021, 262–64).

Suhrawardi

It would seem not unreasonable to infer that, in advising the royal addressee, at the end of *The Hidden Secret*, to invoke his perfect nature to attain the "perfect philosophy," thereby bringing into full realization of his theoretical and practical capacities, Rāzī was harbouring the ambition to establish himself as a philosopher-vizier in the old Iranian tradition. Nor does it seem unreasonable to infer that, given his biography, Rāzī's one-time fellow student of philosophy Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī also nurtured the same ambition. [44]

Born in 1154, Suhrawardī did not remain long in his native village of Suhraward in northwest Iran before his pursuit of philosophy took him to Marāgha to study with Rāzī under Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī (Pourjavady and Pourjavady 2002, iii). His subsequent travels in pursuit of knowledge took him to Isfahan, Anatolia and Syria. He also spent considerable time with Sufis, gaining a strong reputation for spiritual austerity, voluntary poverty, miracles—and even magic (Walbridge 1999, 14–15). [45]

A fortuitous display of his spiritual attainment soon won him access to the governor of Aleppo, al-Malik al-Ẓāhir (r. 1186–1216), the son of the Ayyūbid sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. When, in 1183, a few years after Rāzī had written *The Hidden Secret*, Suhrawardī arrived in the city, he took up residence in the Ḥallāwiyya, one of the leading schools of Islamic jurisprudence at the time. Impressed by his fierce acumen in legal debate, which belied his shabby appearance, the rector of the establishment sent his son to deliver a more suitable set of clothes. In the spirit of voluntary poverty, he declined the offer and instead gave the messenger a valuable gem to auction in the bazaar. When the boy reported that the gem had attracted a bid of thirty thousand dirhams from no less a figure than the governor of Aleppo, Suhrawardī, in a dramatic display of his asceticism, smashed the stone. No action could have proved more effective in winning the ear of the young local ruler. The close confidence he gained, however, was to end in tragedy. The suspicion and jealousy of the religious scholars whom he routinely defeated in debate prevailed over Salāḥ al-Dīn to command his son to execute the hapless philosopher (Walbridge 1999, 201–2). [46]

The historical sources are vague on the charge that was brought against him. He was accused of undermining the sacred law, a necessary concomitant of which was to question the legitimacy of the state. His infamy was exacerbated by his reputation for wielding "magical powers," which he discussed in context of his theories on royal authority (Ziai 1992, 339). His association with the occult would have been strengthened by his composition of *Spiritual Influxes and Sanctifications* (*al-Wāridāt wa-l-taqdīsāt*). Conspicuous amongst the orisons he composed to the heavenly bodies was the prayer to the Sun (*Hūrakhsh*), which was the celestial counterpart of the earthly king (Ziai 1992, 320; Walbridge 2011, 80–97; Piątak 2018, [47]

401–3). Similarly worthy of note, in light of our discussion of Rāzī's occult oeuvre, is another prayer evoking the epiphany of the Perfect Nature (Walbridge 2011, 88).

[48] In his pioneering study of *Spiritual Influxes and Sanctifications*, Łukasz Piątak notes that, in his philosophical magnum opus *The Wisdom of Illumination* (*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*), Suhrawardī makes but one mention of the necessity of venerating the planets. This exhortation is in connection with *Hūrakhsh*, the "talisman" of Shahrīr—"the archetype of kingship" that rules over the other planets. Piątak notes that elsewhere, in *Spiritual Influxes*, the "Greatest Luminary" is singled out from all the heavenly bodies for sanctification alongside God, since it is the "visible image of God's majesty" and "the role that sun performs in the planetary system is the counterpart to the role that Light of Lights plays in entire universe" (Piątak 2018, 402).

[49] Piątak presents *Spiritual Influxes* as a vindication of the primordial astral cult—as transmitted by all true prophets and sages—that integrates the veneration of the seven heavenly bodies. Its central litany to the plenitude of metacosmic intellects and encosmic souls that constitute the hierarchy of being has a strophic structure, suggestive of group worship—presumably the community of Illuminationist philosophers for whom such liturgical veneration represented the culmination of the spiritual austerities and the philosophical practice enjoined by Suhrawardī. Beginning with God—the Light of Lights—the Illuminationist litany descends the ontological hierarchy, addressing with adoration each level of the pleroma, including the planets, the elements, the rational souls of the prophets and sages, and finally the souls of those aspiring to illumination. Each object of adoration confers blessings on the one who declares its sanctification. On the sublunary level, observes Piątak, the litany's purpose "is the purification (*taqdīs* or *taṭhīr*) of all living creatures including mankind, as well as four elements and all the bodies that are amalgamates of those elements." As "an obligation imposed by God on the virtuous nations," the overarching purpose of the practice for the Illuminationist is in Piątak's evaluation to "stimulate his growth in virtues (*al-faḍā'il*) and flashes of light (*al-lawāmiʿ*) and lead him to happiness on the day of bodily departure (*yawm al-khurūj*)." Without a doubt, this was an occult soteriology—but more than that, was it a soteriology with political ramifications? (Piątak 2018, 58–62).

[50] Considering the reasons for his execution, Hossein Ziai persuasively argues that Suhrawardī was believed to be involved "in a political conspiracy aimed at establishing the young Ayyūbid prince as ruler of the age, divinely aided and guided by the divine philosopher—namely, al-Suhrawardī—who possessed manifest signs of divine inspiration" (Ziai 1992, 343). His political thought on the perfected man drew on precisely the same Avicennan discourse that influenced Rāzī's formulation of the perfected man (1992, 317–18). Ziai observes that Suhrawardī conflated the miraculous prophetic powers as discussed in the Avicennan theory with the Iranian tradition of "royal light" (*kharra-yi kīyānī*)[10] that is bestowed on just kings who have reached philosophical perfection, thus developing occult power.

[51] In his Persian work *The Book of Radiance* (*Partow-Nameh*), Suhrawardī avers:

> [52] Whoever knows philosophy, and perseveres in thanking and sanctifying the Light of Lights, will be endowed with royal *Kharreh* and with luminous *Farreh,*[11] and—as we have said elsewhere—divine light will further bestow upon him the cloak of royal power and value. Such a person shall then become the natural Ruler of the Universe. He shall be given aid from the Highest Heavens, and whatever

10 In contemporary western scholarship, the Persian word *kharra* can also be transliterated as *kharrah* and *kharreh*.

11 The Persian *farreh* can also be transliterated as *farra* and *farrah*.

> he commands shall be obeyed; and his dreams and inspirations will reach their uppermost, perfect pinnacle. (Suhrawārdī 1998, 84—85)

For a philosopher like Suhrawardī who was attempting to revive ancient Persian wisdom, the terms *kharreh* and *farreh* had particular resonance. Whilst, with the two terms, Suhrawardī appears to be accenting distinct aspects of the philosopher king's divinely mandated power, they are in fact different forms of the same word. [53]

Diachronically reconstructing its occurrence in the Iranian languages, Gherardo Gnoli explains that the most likely etymology and semantic function of the term *kharreh/farreh* encapsulated the concept "glory." He cites 'traditional interpretations' that considered its primary range of meaning to include "glory," "splendour," "luminosity" and "shine" specifically associated with fire and the sun. In the *Avesta*, he observes, *kharreh/farreh* represented a luminous 'magic force'—a power that drove every being toward the completion of its duty. In Sogdian Buddhist texts, the term was deployed to signify the "position of a Buddha." In the period of New Persian—the native tongue of Suhrawardī— *farr*was a "royal and divine attribute" (Gnoli 1999). [54]

That similar power, in Suhrawardī's theory, was conferred on wise philosopher viziers could only have stoked the suspicion caused by his closeness with Salāḥ al-Dīn's son (Ziai 1992, 307–8). For Suhrawardī, truly legitimate sovereignty belongs to the man who is "divinised" (*muta'allih*) (Walbridge 1999, 209). Walbridge writes of the deep suspicion that the Sunnī Salāḥ al-Dīn harboured of such divinised philosopher kings. He had once been the loyal servant of al-ʿAḍīd li-Dīn Allāh—a divinised philosopher-king that ruled the Shīʿī Fātimid state in Egypt. The Shīʿī "Old Man of the Mountain"—the leader of the Shīʿī "Assassins," who had been a constant thorn in his side—was also an advocate of the suspect political doctrine (Walbridge 1999, 207–8). Suhrawardī could hardly have selected an environment more hostile to his occult political doctrine. His execution, dated sometime between 1191 and 1192, seemed inevitable.[12] [55]

It would appear that Rāzī was far more prudent in his choice of patron when he expounded on his own theory of the perfected man in *The Sublime Theses*. The Khwārazm-Shāh ʿAlā' al-Dīn Tekish seems the most likely candidate to have been the unnamed "king" to whom he addressed his parting counsel in *The Hidden Secret* (Noble 2021, 29–30). For the Khwārazm-Shāhs, the talismanic science was no mere object of intellectual curiosity: They aggressively employed it for political ends, as can been seen from the career of Rāzī's contemporary, Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī. [56]

Sakkākī

Sirāj al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Abī Bakr al-Sakkākī (1160—1229) is more well-known for his study on the philosophy, grammar and rhetoric of the Arabic language *Keys to the Sciences* (*Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm*), which, through an abridgement by a subsequent grammarian Khaṭīb Dimashq al-Qazwīnī, achieved status as the standard text for instruction in Islamic seminaries throughout the east (Smyth 1993, 100).[13] Born in Khwārazm, he initially trained as a metal-worker. His initial attempt to secure patronage was to make an exquisite inkwell which he hoped would curry the favour of the Khwārazm-Shāh. When it was received with indifference, he [57]

12 For this death date, see Walbridge (1999, 14).
13 For alternative birth and death dates for al-Sakkākī, see Maṭlūb (1964, 46 and 52).

observed the contrasting generosity with which scholars were welcomed in the royal court and so resolved to train as an Arabic grammarian (Maṭlūb 1964, 46). His efforts finally bore fruit when he secured the favour of the last two Khwārazm-Shāhs ʿAlā' al-Dīn Muḥammad (r. 1200—1220) and Jalāl al-Dīn Mingbarnī (r. 1220—1231). They seemed, however, more interested in his expertise as a magician whose skill in metal work qualified him amply for the casting of talismanic idols (Miller 2001, 249–56).

[58] Threatened by newly reassertive ʿAbbāsid caliphal power, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad availed himself of Sakkākī's occult knowledge and skill at metal work to cast a talismanic idol. With the purpose of bringing the Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (r. 1180–1225) misfortune and curtailing his ambitions, it was interred in Baghdad. But by the time ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad was succeeded by his son Jalāl al-Dīn, Sakkākī had become convinced that the talismanic influence had become reversed against the Khwārazm-Shāh. When a trusted servant was sent to retrieve the object, the burial site of the idol could no longer be reached (Miller 2001, 249).

[59] Sakkākī's suspicion concerning the talisman's malfunction was not unfounded. Soon afterwards, the Khwārazm-Shāh dynasty was smashed by the Mongol onslaught. But this seems to have occasioned Sakkākī's career no harm. His reputation as a consummate occultist reached the ear of Chagadai, the son of Chinggis Khan, whose close confidence he swiftly gained (Al-Laknawī 1906, 232). As was the case with Suhrawardī, Sakkākī inevitably attracted the envy of dangerous court rivals. And he could find no rival more dangerous an enemy than Chagadai's vizier, Ḥabash ʿAmīd, who orchestrated against him a campaign of personal slander. The biographer ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī reports that Sakkākī learnt of the vizier's plotting by performing a ritual to Mars, in the process causing a fire in Chagadai's camp. With such a display of occult power, ʿĀmīd saw his opportunity to sow mistrust and suspicion in Chagadai's mind: "So he [i.e., Ḥabash] said to Chagadai: 'If Sakkākī is capable of such feats, be not surprised if he tries to wrest from you your throne.' Thus was [suspicion] seeded in Chagadai's imagination, so he threw Sakkākī into prison where he languished for three years before he died" (Al-Laknawī 1906, 232).[14]

[60] The anecdotal evidence of biographers is not the only evidence we have of the Arabic grammarian's involvement in the occult sciences. He left to posterity a large compendium in Arabic of occult ritual, entitled *The Complete Compendium on the Principles of Spirit Subjugation and Astral Magic (Kitāb al-shāmil wa-baḥr al-kāmil fī uṣūl al-taʿzīm wa'l-qawāʿid al-tanjīm).*[15] Further tribute to his accomplishment as a practitioner is the Persian *Compendium of Texts of Sakkākī on the Science of Astral Invocation* (*Majmūʿa-yi nuskha-yi Sakkākī dar ʿilm-i daʿvat*).[16] The section entitled "On the Subjugation of the Planets" (*dar ʿilm-i daʿvat*) contains a full Persian version of the long ritual of planetary ascent that was the central operation of Rāzī's *The Hidden Secret*. Whilst it is possible that Sakkākī may have consulted a common source attributed to Abu Maʿshar, to which Rāzī had access, it is indeed equally possible that he had consulted Rāzī's own work.

[61] One manuscript witness of *The Hidden Secret*, Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library Carullah MS 1482, at f. 164a, contains an intriguing marginal gloss to the colophon. The scribe notes that in reproducing the text of the work, he relied not only on a holograph manuscript witness, but also a copy penned "in the hand of Sirāj[?]al-Khwārazmī, known as al-Ṣakkākī (*min khaṭṭ*

14 As quoted in Maṭlūb (1964, 51–52), as translated in Noble (2021, 33). See also Zadeh (2014, 133–34).
15 London, British Library, Delhi Arabic MS 1915(b) and London, School of Oriental and African Studies, MS 46347.
16 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Walker, MS 91.

sirāj [?] *al-khwārazmī al-maʿrūf bi'l-ṣakkākī*)" (Noble 2021, 31).[17] Though far from certain, it is at least not unlikely that this is the same Sakkākī who served as the magician of the two last Khwārazm-Shāhs and the son of Chinggis Khan.

[62] Like Rāzī and Suhrawardī, Sakkākī was another intellectual operating in the Islamicate east who pressed the exoteric sciences into the service of the esoteric. Unlike them, however, Sakkākī placed his practical knowledge of the occult sciences into the hands of the political powers he served. Considering his work on the philosophy of language in light of his occult works, Emily Selove argues that "his theory of simile and metaphor take on a more occult appearance, and we see how he charts the currents of power and influence that lie hidden between things" (Selove 2020, 44). She moreover infers an implicit suggestion by Sakkākī "that masters of language are able to perceive the unknown, the hidden connections between things, and the hidden order of the macrocosm reflected in the microcosm of man" (Selove 2020, 44). Elsewhere, Emily Selove and Mohammed Sanad persuasively argue that Sakkākī's work on the philosophy of language is "redolent with magic" and that, in the politically volatile world in which he lived, he projected his authority as a consummate scholar of the Arabic language, and in doing so, claimed elite access to the word of God and perilous knowledge of the occult sciences (Selove and Sanad, Forthcoming 2023).[18]

Conclusion

[63] Towards the end of his reign in 1213, al-Malik al-Ẓāhir, Suhrawardī's erstwhile patron, completed the erection of the new entrance complex to the Aleppo citadel. Its first entrance—known as the Gate of the Serpents—is "surmounted by a relief of two knotted serpent dragons with forked tongues." This relief, Persis Berlekamp contends, was carved as a talisman depicting apotropaic eclipse dragons. If we accept Ziai's reading of why he was executed, then it is worthy of note that it was Suhrawardī's philosophical-political project that provoked the suspicion of the religious scholars—not his engagement in astral magic *per se*. The intellectual culture in the Aleppo of his time did not appear to foster an environment hostile to the use of astral talismanic technology—its attitude towards an unauthorised soterio-political philosophy was perhaps another matter (Berlekamp 2016, 72).

[64] As she observes in her survey of architectural talismanic iconography of the early thirteenth century in the heartlands of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate, Berlekamp points out that in Anatolia, Syria and Iraq, walls and gates provided cities protection not only as physical barriers but also as talismans imbued with apotropaic power by virtue of their specific iconography. The Aleppo citadel was just one case in point. Another, even more striking example was the Talisman Gate in Baghdad. Completed in 1221, and commissioned by the Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh, its arch was "framed by two enormous soaring dragons flanking a much smaller but central princely figure." The latter was depicted as having subjugated the dragons, his hands grasping their tongues—a powerful symbol of royal charisma. Providing an overview of the modern scholarship on the gate's iconography, Berlekamp observes that early scholars advanced the view, which still holds currency, that the central figure represented the Caliph al-Nāṣir, the two dragons his political enemies: one, the leader of the Assassins; the other, the Khwārazm-Shāh ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad—a patron of both Rāzī and Sakkākī. It would

17 His name is usually spelt with a *sīn*, not a *ṣād*.

18 I am grateful to both Emily Selove and Mohammed Sanad for providing me with a draft copy of the latter article.

seem that political powers in the Islamicate world were less interested in suppressing magic than controlling its use. This was, as we have seen, even more the case with the non-Muslim Chagadai, whose fear that he would be unable to control Sakkākī's magic precipitated the latter's execution (Berlekamp 2016, 59, 77–78).

[65] As a consummate theoretician on the occult sciences, Rāzī exerted a profound influence on their reception and development in the post-Mongol Islamic world. Soon after Rāzī's death in 1210, Shams al-Dīn Iltutmish, the sultan of Delhi (r. 1211–1236), commissioned a Persian translation of his Arabic *The Hidden Secret*. It was the only eastern Islamic occult text of which the famous anti-occultist Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406)—who was based in the Islamic west—was aware. Just as significant, Rāzī's hugely influential Persian encyclopedia, *The Compendium of the Sciences* (*Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm*) reclassified the occult sciences as mathematical—initiating, as Melvin-Koushki argues, the "neopythagorean turn," launching them in their "ascent to philosophically mainstream status," and laying the foundation for "the massive increase in patronage of professional occultists at the Safavid, Mughal and Ottoman courts in the run up to the Islamic millennium" in 1592. Melvin-Koushki further argues that the "neopythagorean-mathematical turn was intimately connected with, even partially driven by, the occultist renaissance of the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries." In this latter period, the occultist, mathematician and chronicler of the Timurids, Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī (d. 1454), presented the eponymous founder of the dynasty as "Lord of Conjunction," invoking Zoroastrian astrological notions regarding the sun and moon—notions which, as Azfar Moin observes, "had entered Islam in various philosophical and occult forms, most importantly via the Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) metaphysics of the famous twelfth-century thinker Suhrawardī […] who had even composed prayers in Arabic to ask the sun for knowledge and salvation" (Noble 2021, 30; Melvin-Koushki 2017, 127; Moin 2012, 35–36).

[66] The foregoing sketch of Islamic intellectual history illustrates just how entangled the domains of philosophy, politics and the occult were in the twilight of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate. Learned magic attracted learned minds, and the ruling elites sought to wield it—or, at least, try and monopolise its use in the political domain. Given its deep concern with the nature of prophethood, Islamicate intellectual culture provided particularly fertile soil for theorising on its efficacy. Though Avicenna's theory of occult power was entirely psychologising, it provided the conceptual tools for those convinced of the efficacy of learned magic to construct a scientific account that could explain its practices, such as the notion of a celestial ascent; and the metaphysical assumptions of its doctrines, such as the Perfect Nature. For both Rāzī and Suhrawardī, who predeceased the Mongol conquest, learned magic was synonymous with the highest philosophy. But whilst they both gained access to power by presenting themselves as philosopher-viziers, their younger contemporary Sakkākī achieved the same goal through his actual practice of learned magic. In doing so, Sakkākī managed to flourish in spite of the tribulations of the Mongol invasion which, as Melvin-Kouhski observes, "wrought a rupture of pandoric consequence for Islamicate religiopolitical culture." The old ʿAbbāsid order was smashed, creating a vacuum of political legitimacy over which the claims of new ruling elites competed (Melvin-Koushki 2018, 353–54). Mastery of occult science was one means by which such new claims were advanced by early modern Islamicate powers. For their ability to do this, they owed a not insignificant debt to our three main protagonists.

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Entangled Magic in the Medieval Latin West

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ABSTRACT This article focusses on the history of learned magic in late medieval Europe, breaking a period of about 500 years into chronological stages to explore how medieval supporters and critics of magic represented the art and responded to each other's arguments, then reframed their own in a continuous dynamic entanglement. In this period learned magic texts from diverse religious and cosmological traditions (primarily Christian, Jewish, Arabic and Greco-Roman) circulated among people familiar with, and emotionally invested in, a great variety of institutional and informal rituals. Sources reveal a vibrant culture of exchanges of texts between members of religious orders, physicians and lay men, clerics and lay women—a culture of entanglement: discussion, borrowing, critique and adaptation alongside practitioner-client relationships and necessary secrecy and concealment.

KEYWORDS magic, necromancy, cosmology, superstition, astrology

Introduction: Magic at the Crossroads of Ritual and Cosmology

[1] This article focusses on the history of learned magic in late medieval Europe, breaking a period of about 500 years into chronological stages to explore how medieval supporters and critics of magic represented the art and responded to each other's arguments, then reframed their own in a continuous dynamic entanglement. The engagement with the ideas and practices of learned magic on both sides of the argument can be understood as a conversation between members of a single social and administrative order (notably clerics, monks and physicians) who were reading the same books and pondering the same problems (Fanger 2019). The particular problems that I focus on here are cosmology, the meaning of rituals, and what was acceptable for a good Christian to do. In late medieval Europe, learned magic texts from diverse and syncretic cosmological traditions (primarily Christian, Jewish, Arabic and Greco-Roman) circulated among people familiar with, and emotionally invested in, a great variety of institutional and informal rituals. Learned magic was closely related to more mainstream rituals and cosmologies but also deviated from them. Like other medieval rituals, those of learned magic consisted of ordered and repeatable actions that reflected pre-existing beliefs

about the nature of the cosmos and expressed a desire to order people's relations with the sacred, most importantly with God, angels and demons. Unlike institutional rituals, however, learned magic rituals were not underpinned by any requirements to communicate correct doctrine. This meant that their cosmological frameworks could be syncretic, allusive and pragmatic rather than didactic. In late medieval Europe, learned magic texts possessed a further important quality: in the fluid, creative and unstable context of manuscript culture, occult items acquired the qualities of playfulness and a continuously reworked craftsmanship. Every time a scribe copied a recipe, experiment or complex ritual into a manuscript they had the opportunity to alter, adapt or add to it according to their personal interests, cosmological certainties, access to materials or anxieties about orthodoxy.[1] This means, as we shall see, that scribes as well as authors and practitioners were engaged in the dynamic entanglement of pro- and anti-magic conversations.

The Reception of Learned Magic in the Age of Translation

[2] From the late eleventh century, scholars from across Europe travelled to Spain, Sicily and the Middle East to translate works of science, philosophy and the occult arts into Latin. The ensuing extraordinary influx into Europe of magic texts from the Greek, Arabic and Jewish traditions transformed the status of magic, as enthusiastic translators made the first serious attempts in the Latin West to classify magic as a branch of knowledge within mainstream philosophy and science. Translators like Dominicus Gundisalvi, Daniel of Morley and Michael Scot engaged sympathetically with Arabic texts that presented magic as the culmination of human knowledge, the magus as a perfect philosopher and astrology as a framework for talisman-making (Burnett 2019). More than seventy learned magic texts of Arabic origin (that is, translated or adapted from Arabic magic texts) have been identified as circulating in late Medieval Western Europe, primarily falling into the category of astral magic rituals that included invocations to the celestial spirits or the inscriptions of their names on talismans and other objects. This genre had significant influence on the contours of medieval learned magic (Boudet 2020). Another influential category of magic, Solomonic magic (referring to magic texts and experiments attributed to the biblical King Solomon) had its origins in Jewish, Arabic and Greek magical traditions but was adapted to Christian sensibilities. Circulating from the twelfth century alongside astral magic, this loose grouping of texts and experiments had characteristic visual instruments, including pentagons, rings and seals (*sigillae*) (Véronèse 2019).

[3] Some of the cosmological ideas and ritual actions that were characteristic of learned magic texts with Greco-Roman, Arabic and Jewish origins aligned with mainstream science and theology: notions of celestial influences on the Earth, occult properties in natural objects and the power of God's name were generally not controversial. Others, such as invocations to planetary spirits, animal sacrifices, experiments to generate new life forms and rituals to draw down spirits into talismans (a continuation of the late antique art of vivifying statues) were more discordant with Christian sensibilities and thus provoked scrutiny and suspicion. In light of the Christian translators' exposure to this cosmological and ritual diversity, it is unsurprising that a distinction between magic that drew on natural powers and magic that required the invocation of evil spirits is apparent from the earliest period of translations (Burnett 2019; Weill-Parot 2002a). The processes of acculturation to a Christian audience

1 For examples of variation within a particular genre see Page (2019c).

involved omissions and adaptations, personal predilections and habits. Translators focussed on learned magic texts with few signs of Islamification and sometimes omitted details of myth and cosmology, retaining only the practical instructions.[2] A well-known example of ritual omission is the translation of an image magic text, Thabit's *De imaginibus* (On images), by John of Seville and Limia (fl. 1133–53) without the prayers to spirits. A more gradual process of acculturation is witnessed in different versions of the Solomonic magic text, the *Liber Almandal*, in which the *jinns* and *shayāṭīn* of the Islamic tradition gradually become more and more like Christian angels (Véronèse 2012, 5–66). Christian sexual morality could also influence translating practice. Experiments promoting same-sex love were dropped when the Arabic compendium of magic, the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (955–59), was translated into Castilian in 1256 and thence into Latin under the title *Picatrix* (Boudet 2011). Although the translator of the *Picatrix* worked in an intelligent and conscientious manner to make sense of the Arabic text, they also consistently cut or adapted Islamic religious references to the Qurʾān and the ḥadīth (Burnett 2017; Boudet and Coulon 2017).

[4] As learned magic texts disseminated outwards from the communities of translators, resistance to the idea of magic as a true branch of science was expressed by writers from religious orders, who were used to thinking of knowledge as having a spiritual source as well as being found in books. Herrad of Landsberg (1130–95), Abbess of the Hohenburg Abbey in Alsace, included magic in a diagram of philosophy and the seven Liberal Arts in her illustrated encyclopedia, the *Hortus deliciarum* (Garden of Delights). But she excluded magicians (and poets) from the true philosophy that comes from God. Magicians are depicted being guided by evil spirits who perch behind their heads and whisper in mockery of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the Abbess, visionary and author Hildegard of Bingen acknowledged that magic was a kind of philosophy but argued that it engendered sin, hatred and tyranny. In her *Liber vitae meritorum* of 1158 she personified Magic (*maleficium*) as a monstrous hybrid creature with the body of a dog, the head of a wolf and the tail of a lion (Carlevaris 1995, 222-3). For Hildegard, the disciples of Magic, Hermes and other philosophers, were wise men (*sapientes*) who through their investigations of the cosmos had learned how to harness the elements, but she thought that they had acquired their knowledge from evil spirits. This twelfth-century critique of magic prefigures the later trope of demonic teachers of witches in fifteenth-century witchcraft mythologies.

[5] A final strand of the twelfth-century reception of magic is the knowledge and influence of classical literature. It is important because it introduced the idea of extraordinary natural skill in performing magic, evidenced in classical workers of magic such as Circe, Medea and Erichtho. Twelfth-century romances influenced by classical sources (*romans d'antiquité*) described female practitioners of magic (*malefica*) who drew on natural sources of power, producing extraordinary effects in nature and specialising in disturbing the minds of men. For example, Medea from Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Le Roman de Troie* (c. 1155-60) can perform weather magic, transform into a bird and subvert the flow of water. The sorceress (*sorciere*) who advises Dido in the *Roman d'Enéas*, composed in Normandy c. 1160, can revive the dead, predict the future, cause celestial spectacles, and make birds speak, trees walk and water flow uphill. In this period, classical literature evoked the wonders of magical powers, but by the fourteenth century ancient narratives of witches' activities were used to support theories about the power of the devil and his female co-workers (Montesano 2018).

2 See, for example, the *Liber antimaquis* and the *De amicitia vel inimicitia planetarum* (in Bos et al. 2001).

Critics Respond: Addressative Magic, Idolatry and Delusion

[6] A final flourishing of the translation of occult texts from Arabic and Hebrew into Latin and Castilian took place at the court of King Alfonso X of Castile (r.1252-84). Five learned magic texts translated or composed under Alfonso's patronage—the *Lapidario*, the *Picatrix*, the *Libro de las formas et las ymagenes*, the *Libro de astromagia* and the *Liber Razielis*—reveal this ruler's interest in angelology, astral magic and occult forces in nature. The translating activity at Alfonso's court also testifies to the attraction learned magic held for those interested in using the occult arts to increase their power, gain political favour or annihilate their enemies, goals richly manifested in the *Picatrix*. Powerful secular rulers did not usually need to conceal their occult interests—texts to summon demons have been found in royal and aristocratic inventories such as that of Francesco Gonzaga, the Marquis of Mantua—but when magical activities flourished in medieval courts they were invariably accompanied by serious hazards for those from lesser ranks who found themselves caught up in accusations of magical practice (Boudet 2019; Boudet, Ostorero, and Bagliani 2017).

[7] In the second half of the thirteenth century, learned magic came under new scrutiny in the writings of the Bishop of Paris, William of Auvergne, the theologian Thomas Aquinas and the author of the *Speculum astronomiae*, usually assumed to be Albertus Magnus. Three critical approaches to learned magic dominate this period. The first was that ritual instruments, in particular the prayers, invocations, inscriptions and graphic motifs that were distant from the Christian liturgy and iconography, were assumed to be addressed by the human practitioner to another Intelligence (namely demons) (Weill-Parot 2002a). Secondly, the graphic motifs and talismans of learned magic were condemned as objects of idolatrous worship (William of Auvergne [1674] 1963, bk. 2, pt 3, ch 22; Zambelli 1992, 240–7; García Avilés 2019).[3] The accusation of idolatry was a recognition of the rich visual nature of learned magic, an expression of unease with the claims of some texts to teach how to vivify images or trap demons inside them, and a defensive response in an age that generally lacked the language or will to censor images (Schmitt 2010). It was also an inevitable critique, given the predominantly pagan origins of Arabic astral magic (Pingree 1980, 1992).

[8] The third approach was the sensitivity of some critics to the similarity between the powers that Biblical and hagiographical texts claimed for Christ and Christian saints and the powers that learned magic asserted would be achieved through correct ritual performance; for example to walk on water, to acquire celestial knowledge or to ascend into the company of angels.[4] Critics rejected the idea that individual practitioners were worthy of such feats on the grounds that these were only given to holy saints by the grace of God. According to this line of thinking, practitioners of magic were therefore either self-deceiving about its efficacy or cynically using their knowledge of natural properties, illusionist magic and rhetorical misdirection to deceive others. Self-delusion is discussed below, and scepticism about the powers of magical practitioners had a continuous if marginal place in medieval thought. The most extensive critique along these lines was by the fourteenth-century French bishop and philosopher Nicole Oresme in his *Tractatus de configurationibus qualitatibus et motuum* (Treatise on the Configurations of Qualities and Motions) of ca. 1350. This treatise describes how magicians used psychoactive substances, powerful odours, music, dramatic shifts in light and darkness,

3 On the magic of images and idolatry, especially sculpted clay and wax figures, see García Avilés (2019).
4 See, for example, scholastic critique of the *Liber vaccae* (Van der Lugt 2009).

and tricks with mirrors to create terrifying and discombobulating illusions that their audience mistakenly interpreted as supernatural manifestations (Oresme 1968, 337–61).

[9] Nevertheless, some scholars' classification of learned magic as beneficial knowledge continued to be influential throughout the late Middle Ages. Often when medieval critics categorised learned magic texts as licit or illicit (or some variations thereof), they identified within those texts useful and acceptable practices in contrast to those that were more transgressive. A well-known example is the construction, by the author of the *Speculum astronomiae* (ca. 1260) and others, of the licit category of 'astronomical images,' talismans made with an infusion of natural celestial powers rather than with the aid of spirits (Zambelli 1992, 240–47; Weill-Parot 2002b). Practitioners of magic condemned some practices in order to assert the orthodoxy of others, even if they themselves built on the condemned rituals to create new texts. For example, the Benedictine John of Morigny admitted to experimenting with necromantic rituals and the *Ars notoria*, though ultimately he rejected their techniques and, in the *Liber florum celestis doctrine* (ca. 1301–10), presented new ritual approaches to acquiring knowledge and salvation (John of Morigny 2015; Fanger 2015, 116).

The Acculturation of Magic to Christian Ritual Forms and Sensibilities

[10] In the twelfth century, texts of Solomonic magic in circulation included works of Arabic, Jewish and Christian origin in which the liturgical or paraliturgical element dominated. That is, their rituals used the language (sometimes directly borrowed from the official liturgy) of praise, supplication and devotion to God. This was never a clearly defined corpus, however, and it evolved considerably between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries to influence and overlap with other categories of learned magic. Solomonic magic was attractive to readers curious about spiritual experiences and interested in transgressive risk taking (and it still is, as Otto's chapter on the contemporary practitioner Frater Acher demonstrates, 2023). It focussed, above all, on the 'domestication of spirits,' compelling demons with adaptations of mainstream exorcism rituals and language or conversing with angels, with the practitioner even assuming the role of a saint or prophet (Véronèse 2019; Véronèse and Chave-Mahir 2015; Page 2011).

[11] The Christian authors, compilers and translators of learned magic texts constructed ritual sequences that had plausible efficacy within the medieval worldview and enough markers of orthodoxy to persuade the reader that a 'good Christian' could perform them. Genres that modern scholars now categorise as 'angel magic' and 'necromancy' took different routes to these goals. Angel magic involved practitioners undergoing ablutions and performing rituals to persuade angels to help them achieve various pious goals, notably the acquisition of knowledge, an increased likelihood of salvation or a vision of God (Fanger 2015). Necromancy was the practice of safely conjuring and gaining control over demons to compel them to perform tasks, such as revealing buried treasure or bringing a desired partner into the practitioner's presence (Kieckhefer 1998; Boudet 2007). Texts belonging to both these genres involved wholesale adaptation of mainstream Christian practices (such as fasting, meditation and prayer), texts (liturgical prayers, exorcism rituals and sacramental language) and goals (salvation, the beatific vision and exercising control over demons). There were also more subtle Christian sensibilities embedded in the texts: respect for the efficacy of ritual actions and objects, awe of God's power and the purity of angels, a longing for spiritual experience and

fear of the malignity of demons. Many of the authors, compilers and practitioners of angel magic and necromancy were priests and monks with good command of the liturgy, experience of performing the sacraments and knowledge of exorcism rituals. The texts thus related closely to their lived experience and spiritual aspirations.

[12] The appeal of Christian authored angelic magic texts like the *Ars notoria* was that they promised the soul's salvation as well as comprehensive knowledge, desirable attributes (memory, eloquence and understanding) and ritual shortcuts to the University Arts curriculum and the vision of God, achieved by ascending to the level of the angels. The varied practitioners of this genre—students, physicians and monks—were probably attracted by different goals within it. For practitioners dissatisfied with mainstream routes to the numinous, angelic magic offered a relationship with angels that went beyond simply requesting their aid (like the popular genre of prayers to guardian angels), to friendship, companionship and even a joining of their blessed ranks. A good example is the *Liber Razielis*, a compilation of seven texts and nine appendices of ritual magic collected and translated under the patronage of Alfonso X, which circulated in different Latin and vernacular versions (García Avilés 1997; Page 2012). Each new owner of the *Liber Razielis* performed a ritual to acquire an angelic instructor, re-enacting the original mythic encounter between Adam and the angel Razielis, who gave him a book of magic and taught him how to use it. As the practitioner operated with the book he became like one of the prophets or angels of heaven and gained knowledge and understanding of all things.[5] Unusually for a medieval learned magic text, this prophetic status was supposed to entail a permanent rather than temporary transformation, and it came with responsibilities to disseminate the message of God on earth.

[13] Aspiring to be like the angels or to participate in the divine was part of medieval monastic ideology and was reflected in visionary literature and narratives of saints conversing with angels. It meant acting out in this life the pure qualities that demonstrated that your soul would be saved. Angelic magic texts usually offered not only temporary conversations with spirits, ascents to the angelic orders, or divinity on a par with God, but also more permanent transformations of the soul to increase the likelihood of the practitioner's salvation (Page 2012; Gehr 2019, 243). The routes to salvation in learned magic had various levels of difficulty: the full complement of ascetic preparations and rituals required of the practitioner of the *Ars notoria* took at least three years to perform, but on a more modest scale, the *Almandel* claimed that angels of the first altitude will render a man perfect after he has spoken with them only once, so that 'he will not need to fear eternal damnation.'[6] And if you wanted to save the soul of a loved one, you could turn to the version of the *Liber iuratus* in the Catalan philosopher Beringarius Ganellus' compendium of magical texts (ca. 1346). Its Seal of God (*Sigillum Dei*) is said to redeem a soul from purgatory (*Summa sacre magice* IV.1.5 and IV.I.6, Gehr 2019, 237–53). Finally, and most efficiently, the *Liber vaccae*, a ninth-century Arabic learned magic text translated into Latin in the twelfth century, includes a suffumigation with the power to make a soul good.[7] Not all scribes were comfortable with this goal, however; surviving versions of the *Liber iuratus* limit the theurgical goals of the seal to a vision of God, and one of the copies of the *Liber vaccae* omits this suffumigation.[8]

5 MS Paris 3666, f.44v: "in quibus homo operatur pro bono vel meliori… ut homo quilibet possit esse sicut unus prophetarum in terra vel de Angelis celorum aut ad demonstrandum et faciendum scire omnibus creaturis et ad ducendum salvationes damnorum ut sit custoditus a malis factis et scire et intelligere in omnibus."

6 Halle, MS 14. B. 36, f. 239v.

7 *Liber vaccae*, book 1, experiment 38: 'Fumigatio bonam efficiens animam.'

8 Oxford, Bodleian. Library, MS Digby 71, f. 36r.

Christian authors composed new learned magic texts throughout this period, acculturating it to Christian sensibilities. But this acculturation did not always imply increased orthodoxy; some scribes rewrote their own versions of learned magic texts that incorporated more, not less, occult material. For example, the insertion of material from the *Ars notoria*, *Liber almandal* and *Kyranides* into a lapidary compilation dating to the second half of the thirteenth century may have 'disguised' ritual magic within a more licit genre, but it also gave a work focussed on natural occult powers a richer and more complex set of rituals to achieve its goals (Regan 2018). Similarly, one of the surviving fifteenth-century versions of the *Almandal* includes insertions from other learned magic texts as well as mainstream Christian liturgy, the result of a scribe adapting the ritual to his own interests and cultural context (Véronèse 2012). [14]

Christian necromantic experiments could be very transgressive in their cosmological outlook, ritual instructions and liturgical language. For example, an experiment to catch a thief in a fifteenth-century necromantic manual uses a wax lamina with the name 'Satan' in the central part of the figure, a place usually reserved for the name of God or the practitioner.[9] The practitioner is told that the best time to summon demons is after he has been to Church and heard mass, but that he must act quickly because the ritual will fail if the thief confesses his crime, gives the proceeds of his crime to the poor or priests, or acts in any way for the love of God and the health of his soul. In this experiment, therefore, the performative piety of hearing mass increases the success of a ritual but the sincere piety of the target of the experiment can sabotage it. [15]

Arabic astral magic influenced the timing of Christian necromantic operations, the variety of powers the practitioner called upon and techniques of image-making. We can see their influence particularly vividly in rituals for love. The Latin *Picatrix* has twenty-nine different rituals for love (*amor*), which emphasise the role of the planet and spirits of Venus. In addition to love between friends and the love of powerful lords, these rituals variously address the desire for long lasting, peaceful, affectionate, robust, marital, virtuous, benevolent, united, faithful and happy love. The type of experiment for love that was particularly influential on Christian necromancy involved making an image of the object of desire, inscribing it with spirit names and manipulating it, for example by inserting needles into it.[10] Spirits were invoked and commanded to infuse the image with life to create a sympathetic connection between it and the real object of desire. The inscribing, piercing, igniting or burying of the image that followed was intended to cause restlessness and suffering in the human target, followed by burning love and desire for the operator. [16]

Christian authors of necromantic experiments had to adapt astral magic rituals to a world view in which the spirits they invoked were powerful and malefic demons. They reinforced the practitioner's control by adding commanding language, sacrifices as negotiating actions and protective rituals such as drawing magic circles. Moreover, perhaps because of the greater agency and materiality assigned to demons within the Christian cosmos, rather than spirits being asked to compel a woman to come to the practitioner, the demons were instructed to physically transport her to him. Christian necromantic experiments for love were also influenced by the medical tradition of pathologizing love sickness as a violent and intense illness and by conventions of courtly love, which held that deep and noble love was accompanied by suffering. Influenced by courtly love, Christian experiments for love magic often assume a particular beloved rather than claiming to work for all or any man or woman. The ritual may [17]

9 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D. 252, f. 104v.
10 See *Picatrix*, book 1, ch. 5 and book 3, ch. 10.

even fail if the wrong woman is accidentally targeted or if the woman's emotion is inflamed but the relationship not consummated. For example, the user of a figure for love that should be inscribed on parchment with bat's blood on the first, fifth or fifteenth day of the Moon is warned that if a woman who is not the one his desire cleaves to (*ei quam haere cupis*) touches the magical figure she will die or become insane.[11]

[18] An experiment for love sickness (*amor hereos*), that was copied, censored, and reconcealed in a fifteenth-century Latin and Middle Dutch miscellany of occult and practical items (Wellcome MS 517) requests the help of Venus, God and the demon Astaroth (Page 2019b). The operator draws on a tile a picture of the woman he wants to attract, burns it to inflame her with love and then invokes God. In a formulation that would be morally complex in any context outside magic—where the point is to call as forcefully as possible on all the powers that might help you—the operator invokes God 'to bind the demons who bind lovers.'[12] The operator then commands Astaroth and other demons specifically focussed on love to deliver the desired man or woman afflicted by an ardour so intense as to allow no rest, whether asleep or awake, standing or sitting, drinking or eating. Medieval love magic rituals were intended to provoke the physical symptoms of love sickness—dizziness, sighing, insomnia—and use powerful, sometimes grim similes: you should love me, one ritual commands, as a deer yearns for a fountain of water, as the raven desires corpses and as the candle melts.[13] Another provocative fifteenth-century experiment commands the devil to infuse a mirror with his power and to seduce the woman who looks into it so that she burns with love for the operator like the Blessed Virgin burns with love for God.[14] It was common in medieval witchcraft literature to explain such transgressive language and ritual actions by arguing that men and women suffering from extremes of emotion were particularly vulnerable to temptation. Demons took advantage of their desperate passion and promised to help in their pursuits of love or lust in return for the surrender of the lover's soul.[15]

Critical Responses to Angel Magic and Necromancy

[19] The addressative critique of learned magic—the idea that under the guise of images and figures, spoken and inscribed names and invocations to spirits or angels lay a true language of communication with demons—was used against astral magic and angel magic throughout the late Middle Ages. But it was not a particularly persuasive attack against the authors, readers and practitioners who followed their own judgment as to what was acceptable for a good Christian to practice. Some early critics of magic tried to tackle this problem. William of Auvergne argued that the author of the *Liber de essentia spirituum*, an anonymous revelatory discourse that gave cosmological justifications for magic, was not a true Christian because he lived and recruited followers in the desert, the abode of demons (William of Auvergne [1674] 1963, 1024–09). But the most intensive attempt to undermine the idea that learned magic rituals could be undertaken by a pious Christian was the 1398 condemnations by the faculty

11 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D. 252, ff. 23v-24r.

12 London, Wellcome MS 517, f. 79v: "Pater inuoco deprecans quatinus me querentem me pulsantem per tuam magnum potenciam ut constringere possim illos malignos spiritus angelos qui potestatem habent constringere uirum in mulierem et conuersio id est mulier in uirum."

13 Munich, Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 849, experiment 12 (Kieckhefer 1998, 228).

14 Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Plut. 89 sup. 38, f. 289: 'seducas illam . N . cum hoc speculum intuita fuerit, ut ita in amore meo ardeat, sicut beata uirgo in amore dei.'

15 See for example, Anonymous of Arras, *A History of the Case, State and Condition of the Waldensian Heretics (Witches)* (1460) (Gow, Desjardins, and Pageau 2017, secs. 2, 35).

of theology at Paris, one of the most important medieval statements of the position of the Church authorities against magic (Boudet 2001).

[20] The twenty-eight articles of the 1398 condemnation target the following defences of magic that were especially pertinent to angel magic: that holy prophets used magic arts, that the magic arts could be performed licitly or for a good end; that magic rituals honoured God; that devout prayers and fasts in the magic ritual made it licit, and that magic arts were revealed by God or could be used to achieve a vision of God. Condemnations like this never prevented angel magic texts from circulating widely in secret, but they seem to have discouraged contemporary authors from claiming revelatory origins for their works of magic, especially after the burning of John of Morigny's *Liber florum celestis doctrine* at the University of Paris in 1323. The failure of the 'angelic turn' in medieval learned magic to convince critics that invoking angels was an acceptable, even pious, Christian practice may also reflect changes in Christian thinking about the roles of angels and demons. In late medieval theology and didactic literature, narratives of angelic encounters became less important, but human-demon interactions took new and prominent forms, ultimately arriving at the pact with the devil so often cited by witchcraft theorists (Mayr-Harting 1998; Boureau 2006). Necromancy plays an interesting role in this shift.

[21] Some Christians justified performing rituals to summon demons as a desire for spiritual experiences or for goals they viewed as morally good, or as an extension of their duties as exorcists (Kieckhefer 1994; Véronèse and Chave-Mahir 2015). Critics of magic were, therefore, understandably keen to control narratives of the experience of demons (Herzig 2011). The idea that the necromancer could perceive himself acting as an agent of God when he subjected evil forces to his will is presented mockingly in the English poet John Lydgate's popular allegory of Christian life, the *Pylgremage of the Sowle* (1426) as a delusion full of "ffalsehod and ffantesye / and cursyd ymagynacyoun."[16] The 1398 condemnations rejected the idea that demons could be good or morally neutral and denied that they were truly compelled to obey necromancer or that attempting to command them through learned magic rituals could be pleasing to God. Moreover, the condemnations reiterated that rituals that encouraged relationships of *any* kind with demons were idolatry because they involved the worship of demons in place of God.

[22] Few books that can be characterised as wholly or largely 'necromantic' survive, presumably due to the repression of this particularly transgressive kind of magic, although single, or small groups of necromantic experiments survive in larger numbers.[17] But the image of the necromancer holding a book and summoning demons from the safety of a magic circle is the archetypal medieval representation of the art of magic. A particular point in the ritual is usually depicted for dramatic effect: after the necromancer has successfully summoned demons but before they have enacted his commands; sometimes his control over them deliberately appears fragile.[18] A rare example of a representation of a demon carrying out a task for a necromancer is depicted in a copy of Lydgate's *Pylgremage of the Sowle*, which shows a small horned demon bringing his master treasure.[19] By contrast, the image accompanying one of the

16 The Booke of the Pylgremage of the Sowle, lines 18471-924. Lydgate's work is a translation (with some significant changes) of Guillaume de Deguilleville's fourteenth-century Old French *La Pélerinage de l'Âme*.

17 For the former group see: Munich, Clm MS 849; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D. 252; Florence, Biblioteca Medici Laurenziana, MS Plut. 89 sup. 38; Paris, BnF ital. MS 1524 and Vatican, Barb. Lat. MS 3589.

18 For an example of intimidating demons see the representation of Zoroaster as the founder of magic in London, British Library, Royal MS 20 B XX, f. 7r.

19 London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A VII, f. 44r.

thirteenth-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Canticles of Holy Mary) represents the moment when a necromancer's hold over demons weakens, thanks to the intervention of the Virgin Mary who has broken the spell of love magic they cast over a young woman. The necromancer is depicted raising his hands in anxiety as the demons swarm menacingly at the edges of his protective magic circle.[20]

[23] The image of the necromancer was popular not only because many critics argued that all magic was implicitly or explicitly based on demonic aid but also because representations of necromancy were thought to be useful instruments to demonstrate the reality of demons. Monastic, pastoral and scholastic texts showed interest in demon-human interactions and a belief in greater demonic intervention in the world from the early thirteenth century. When the Abbot Caesarius of Heisterbach wrote his work of instruction for novice monks, the *Dialogus miraculorum* (1220–35), he devoted an entire book to demons and included prominent stories in which hapless laypeople and clerics dabbled in necromancy. The idea that possession and necromancy demonstrated the reality of demons was argued even more forcefully by Thomas Aquinas in the *De malo* (1269–72) and other works, as if these vivid and extreme experiences of demons expressed the constant presence and malign activity of demons best and would worry at the imagination of those tempted to sin (Aquinas 2001, 16:1).

[24] While there was a long medieval history of legends in which characters like Theophilus of Adana made written pacts with the devil in order to further their worldly ambitions, it is only after 1320 that the idea of the pact entered mainstream governmental and legal thinking about malign magic. In 1320 Pope John XXII consulted ten theologians and canonists on whether to categorise of magical practices as heretical. A consequence of this meeting was the promotion of the idea of a strong and heretical pact with the devil, that joined possession and necromancy as particularly malign expressions of human-demon relationships. The pact was a logical end point to the idea that learned magic rituals involved willing practitioners and implicit demonic worship. Moreover, the idea of a formal written contract that involved the complete and explicit submission of the witch to demons resolved the difficulty of how men and women who lacked clerical training and literacy could control powerful, threatening demons. In exchange for surrendering their souls, witches could call on the assistance of demons using only simple gestures or spells.

Demons, Astrology and the Rise of Theoretical Treatises

[25] Sympathetic theorists of magic emerged from the thirteenth century writing under their own names rather than assigning a mythical authorship to their texts, which has led some theorists to be categorised as 'author magicians' by modern scholars (Weill-Parot 2019a; Boudet 2007; Véronèse 2006). These learned men—physicians, astrologers and monks—were keenly aware of the critiques of angelic magic and necromancy and experimented with alternative approaches to the rituals and philosophy of learned magic. The urgent separation of learned magic from witchcraft by its sympathisers involved giving it an ever more complicated theoretical framework. Some authors turned to new sources of power and authority, as John of Morigny did by selecting the Virgin Mary as his revelatory intercessor. Others integrated their study of magic with more respectable topics to increase its status (if not always its orthodoxy). The self-styled *magister philosophus* Berengarius Ganellus emphasised that magic was a science

20 Cantiga 125: Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial, Madrid, MS T. I. 1 (ca. 1260), f. 177v.

of words, while the physician Jerome Torella wrote his *Opus praeclarum de imaginibus astrologicis* (1496) to promote the category of natural astral magic (Gehr 2019; Weill-Parot 2019b). In the monastery to which he retired in 1490, the physician Peter of Zealand composed his eclectic and candid *Lucidarius de rebus mirabilibus*, a synthesis of magical theory that draws on multiple references from theories of human physiology and imagination to al-Kindi's cosmology of celestial rays that permeated human bodies (Mandosio 2019). The works of medieval author-magicians and other synthesisers of magical knowledge demonstrate the positive interest that learned magic attracted among learned readers and the diversity of cosmological frameworks that could be invented to support learned magic in the medieval Latin West.

[26] The increasing prominence of demons in medieval Christian thinking, from theology to pastoral literature, and the popular use of images and narratives of necromancy to demonstrate the reality of demons, also encouraged new ways of thinking about the role of demons in learned magic. As I have elsewhere discussed in more detail, four authors of works on magic—Michael Scot (1175–ca.1232), Cecco d'Ascoli (1257–1327), Antonio da Montolmo (fl. 1360–93) and Georgio Anselmi (ca. 1386–ca. 1449)—combined their astrological expertise with an interest in demonic agency to create new cosmological frameworks for magical practice (Page 2019a). These theorists subscribed to the theological understanding of demons as an imminent and powerful threat but thought that their powers could be harnessed by practitioners of learned magic drawing on knowledge from the (relatively) respectable and systematising art of astrology. In particular, astrological techniques enabled practitioners to calculate the locations and times in which demons would appear, understand the tasks they were assigned and invoke their ruling planetary spirits to gain control over them.

[27] The approach of these writers was somewhat similar to that of Arabic astral magic and was clearly influenced by its techniques. But the significance of these writers and practitioners for the Christian art of necromancy was that instead of depending upon invocations to God and the saints they were using scientific—that is cosmological—knowledge to anticipate and command demons. The new prominence of astrology from the thirteenth century onwards enabled these writers to rethink the idea of the perfect magus along astrological and physiological lines. In most medieval learned magic texts, the ideal practitioner was usually presented as a virtuous Christian and exorcist acting in the name of God. But Antonio da Montolmo, writing about the occult powers of physicians and magicians, thought that there were men and women whose strong wills, complexions or powerful natal horoscopes meant that they could act on another body, healing or harming by their gaze, voice or touch alone (Antonio da Montulmo 2012, 252–53, 268–71). He further suggested that the powerful confidence (*confidentia fortis*) of some women led them to command demons with such a strong desire that the women were moved to tears. This entanglement of scholastic medicine, learned magic and folk beliefs, especially the idea of the 'evil eye,' was also expressed by writers critical of learned magic (Salmón and Cabré 1998; Delaurenti 2007). For example, Antonio's contemporary Nicole Oresme thought that some old women were able to inflict harm on others with their gaze because of the complexion of their brains (Oresme 1968, 381–87). In the fifteenth century this entanglement became characteristic of witchcraft literature.

Witchcraft and Humanism

[28] Influenced by earlier rhetoric, both critical of magic or supportive (or defensive) of it, the fifteenth-century authors of witchcraft and humanist texts explored the powers and limits of

the natural human capacity to do magic in ways that downplayed the significance of ritual but elaborated magic's cosmological framework. The authors of witchcraft literature had to balance scholastic scepticism about the capacity of humans to perform magical feats against their desire to nurture belief in the reality of witchcraft. Witches were not usually thought able to follow the instructions of complex learned magic texts or to conjure spirits to do their bidding. Their harmful magic was efficacious either because demons (with God's permission) were the true agents behind it or because demons had taught witches how to do magic, or pretended to do so, in order to give witches an illusory sense of their own agency.

Persecutions of witches might be influenced by local beliefs that granted them extraordinary powers, however. In lay writings and accounts of the early witchcraft trials conducted by secular authorities in the Alpine region, for example, witches are often said to transform into wolves, a motif that probably originated in local folklore (Ostorero 2008, 6). Hans Fründ, a scribe in the chancellery of Lucerne and an imperial notary, reported the discovery of male and female witches (*hexsen*), in 1428–30 in the diocese of Valais, who had confessed that the evil spirit taught them how to turn into wolves. He states that they ran after sheep, lambs and goats in their wolf forms and ate them raw before turning back into men and women when they wanted to (Fründ 1999, 36). In this ambiguous account it is not clear how far the reader should believe that an actual metamorposis has taken place, but the transformation is said to seem real to the witches and those who observe them in wolf shape. [29]

A few decades after Fründ's chronicle, the Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer explained in the *Malleus maleficarum* how demons took on the appearance of cats with the help of three witches and attacked a labourer in the diocese of Strasbourg (Kramer 2006, 323). Kramer explained that the 'bodily presence' of the women was first changed into the forms of beasts by the art of sorcery.[21] Then demons in the effigies of the cats (*daemones in effigiis cattorum*) attacked the labourer while the female witches remained at home. When the labourer struck back at the cats, however, it was the women, not the demons, who sustained injuries. This sympathetic link between the witches' bodies and the animal effigies inhabited by demons had its roots in demonic possession and an interpretation of demonic inspiration or instruction in which the demon entered the body of a human and dwelt there (Kieckhefer 2013). In these cases the blurring of the boundaries of human, animal and demon by fifteenth-century witchcraft theorists endowed the magical practitioner with new powers. [30]

In fifteenth-century Italy a new intellectual climate allowed the syncretic and positive attitudes toward magic discussed in the previous section to be underpinned by neoplatonic, Hermetic, and humanist currents of thought that offered philosophical justifications for the human capacity to manipulate the forces of the universe. There was, however, a large degree of continuity between medieval and renaissance magic. The rituals and cosmology of learned magic were not changed fundamentally by the *Corpus hermeticum*, Neoplatonism or the Kabbalah, by the printing press or new networks, or by a supposedly new 'subjectivity' or 'imagination' at the centre of writings on magic (Kieckhefer 2006). Medieval theorists both critical or supportive of magic also saw a continuity between the classical past and contemporary magic. Their interpretation focussed on the deceit of demons, a view influenced by Augustine's emphatic argument that the *daimones* of Antiquity were evil rather than morally neutral beings. [31]

The critic of magic, William of Auvergne, thought that demons cunningly adapted their [32]

21 *Malleus maleficarum*, II, q. 1, ch. 9: "earum corporalis presentia prestigioso artificio in bestiales illas formas transmutata fuerit" (Kramer 2006).

strategies of war on mankind to suit different religious and cultural contexts. In the ancient world they had taken the names of the planets in order to be thought to be celestial gods and trick men into idolatry; in the present, demons tried to deceive magical practitioners into believing that they had descended from heaven. Antonio da Montulmo, a theorist sympathetic to magic, also placed magic within a historical tradition linked to demonic agency. He thought that the ancients had worshipped both good and evil Intelligences as their gods, a practice he said was reflected in the invocations and prayers recorded in astral magic texts.

[33] However, in their speculations about the relationship that learned magic had with its past and future, renaissance theorists offered two striking innovations. They were more interested than their medieval predecessors in reconstructing the real cultural world of the classical magi, and they placed more emphasis on the positive role that magic might play in shaping humanity's future. This marked a shift away from the primary emphasis in medieval learned magic on the problems and pleasures of earthly life and the fate of souls in the afterlife. In this article I have space for only one example to illustrate these new directions, a historiated initial depicting of three kinds of magic in the deluxe manuscript copy of Pliny's *Natural History* owned by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), a humanist famous for promoting (certain kinds of) magic (see figure 1).[22] Pico della Mirandola supervised the iconographic cycle of this manuscript, which is based on a careful reading of Pliny's discussion of ancient beliefs and practices and anecdotes about Greek and Roman historical figures (McHam 2016). The historiated initial accompanying book 30 on magic provides insights into Pico's interpretation of Pliny's idea of magic and his own views on the role it could play in society.[23]

[34] In fifteenth-century Italy, Pliny's *Natural History* was part of the literary canon, influential, sought after and widely disseminated (McHam 2013). Pliny's intention was to show that the bounty of the natural world was what made man's achievement possible, whether in agriculture, healing or art. His descriptions of the appearance and properties of natural materials and his celebration of the high level of civilisation that Rome derived from these appealed to medieval encyclopaedists, for whom God had placed uses in all parts of his creation, and to renaissance humanists engaged in an idealising reconstruction of Antiquity. Magic was, of course, a much more challenging craft to 'recover' or 'revive' than classical medicine or art, because Pliny viewed it as fraudulent, corrupt and dangerously seductive—an analysis many fifteenth-century readers would have agreed with. Pliny's famous definition of magic (*Historia naturalis* 30.1) declares that the art holds men's emotions in a three-fold bond of medicine (to inspire the belief that magic promoted good health), religion (to add holiness, power and mystery) and astrology (to lure with the false promise of knowing one's destiny). Moreover, Pliny's account of the origins and history of magic is the story of a contagious superstition spread across the ancient world by credulous and greedy travellers, armies and exiles.

[35] In view of this extremely negative assessment of magic, the artist of the Marciana manuscript (known as the Pico Master) faced the challenge of designing a historiated initial that was true to Pliny but also alluded to the positive potential in magic we see in Pico's works. The solution was to incorporate depictions of three different kinds of magic within the image: roman agricultural magic, contemporary learned magic and an idealised magus in the classical tradition. Agricultural magic, specifically the protection of crops from pests and vermin, takes the form of skull and fruit motifs in the top section of the image that are

22 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS lat. VI. 245 (coll. 2976). On the different kinds of magic in Pico's Oration, but especially theurgy and Cabala, see Copenhaver (2002).

23 As McHam (2016) argues, the artist of the iconographic cycle in this manuscript both adapted and rejected earlier traditions of illustration.

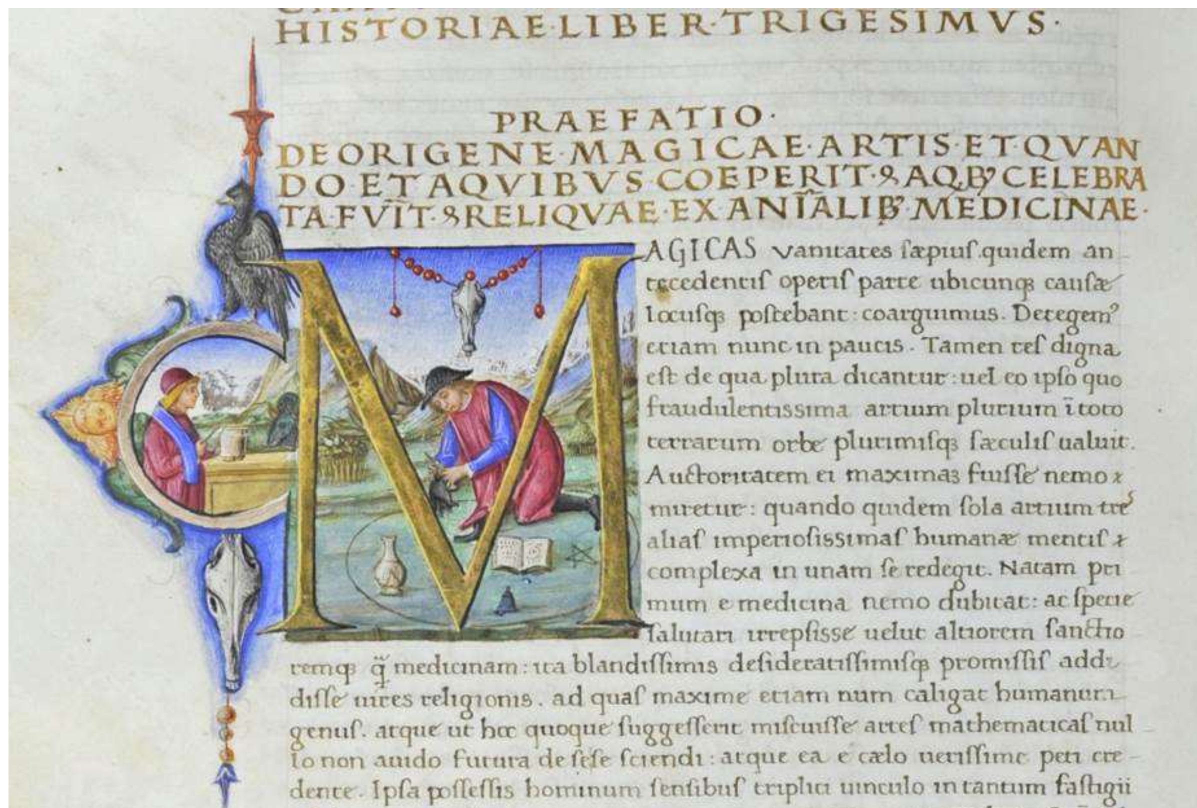

Figure 1 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS lat. VI. 245 (coll. 2976), illuminated initial accompanying Pliny's Natural History book 30.

used throughout the manuscript to evoke pagan visual imagery. In the *Natural History* Pliny proposed placing the skull of a mare on a stake in the garden to repel caterpillars and recommended hanging branches of pomegranates to keep snakes away.[24] This use of natural objects connected positively to the scholastic category of 'natural magic' and the widespread use of protective objects in households, as well as to Pliny's wider project of describing natural objects that will benefit human civilisation.

[36] In prominent position in the image is a depiction of a contemporary necromancer sacrificing a small black animal (probably a bat) in a magic circle with typical instruments of his art beside him: a vase of oil, a magic book, a bell and a pentagram. The necromancer was part of a relatively standardised repertory of images by Italian miniaturists that accompanied other fifteenth-century manuscripts and printed books of Pliny's *Natural History*, but Pico's artist chose to omit the demons that were the usual feature of this iconography.[25] This omission permitted a stronger association with the world of Pliny, in which animal sacrifice was an important part of Roman religious practice. But it is also likely this representation was intended to evoke Pico's category of *goeteia*, that is magic performed with the aid of evil spirits, and to be contrasted with the portrayal of an idealised classical magus to the left of the incipit illumination.

[37] This magus is dressed in special clothing (notably a stole) and holds a staff or wand over a

24 *Natural History*, 19.180 and 23.109.

25 Six of eight other historiated initials known to me that accompany this book in contemporary and printed books depict a necromancer. Five of these include demons. In a forthcoming article I assess this corpus of illustrations of magical practice accompanying Pliny's *Natural History* in manuscripts and printed books dating from 1300–1500.

jar that perhaps holds a portion of the sacrifice. He is looking at the head of a black ram on what is probably a pagan altar in a mountainous location in daylight.[26] To interpret this practitioner, I draw on the 'perfectly black sheep' mentioned by Pliny at the end of his prologue during a discussion of the deceitful strategies of magicians. Pliny argues that magi made their rituals extremely difficult to perform in practice in order that no one would discover that they were fake; the inevitable failure of the act could be blamed on blemishes in the performer or unsatisfactory ritual objects. But Pliny notes that on these grounds the Emperor Nero, who was passionate to learn magic, should have had success with the art because he had no physical blemishes and had the means to track down and purchase any ingredients he wanted. In Pico master's image, the elegant, calm and solemn gesture of the magus contrasts with the bent over and anxious-looking necromancer, suggesting that the former represents a positive interpretation of magic. In other words, where the cruel tyrant Nero failed, an unblemished and noble but also skilled and virtuous magus could succeed. The idealised classical magus, whose appearance and ritual entangles elements of classical past and renaissance present, engages in animal sacrifice as a minister of nature, a practitioner of natural magic, according to Pico's positive assessment of *mageia* in his *Oration*.

Conclusion: From Literary Traditions to Practice, Performance and Cult

In this article I have shown how medieval sympathisers and critics of magic were responsive to each other's perspectives and placed particular emphasis on discursive entanglements. In the final section, I will move beyond discursive entanglements towards the question of entanglements of literary traditions and practice, asking what our written sources can reveal about group activities between magical practitioners from exchanging books to performing communal rituals. [38]

Medieval critics usually understood practitioners of magic to be working by and for themselves, as distinct from heretics and witches who belonged to 'sects,' that is, large organised groups with initiation rites, communal practices and long-term goals that included the overthrow of the established Church.[27] Groups of practitioners, clerical and lay, do appear in our sources, but it is difficult to assess how far their shared practice constituted a 'cult' in the above sense.[28] Some examples suggest that a community of readers and copyists tended to develop around a book or books of magic. In 1383, for example, a group of necromancers in the village of Rugomagno near Siena using and copying the necromantic book belonging to a certain Agnolo di Corso was identified and condemned by a Tuscan Inquisitor (Brucker 1963, 19). In other cases, descriptions of large groups plotting harmful magic seems to be a function of the political importance of their target, for example Pope John XXII, Charles VI of France or Henry VI of England (Kieckhefer 1976; Veenstra 1997; Boudet 2019). Similarly, accusations against prominent men and women magnify the threat they posed to a ruler by identifying occult specialists in their entourages, from female servants to male physicians and [39]

26 Pagan animal sacrifice was often represented in a positive way by artists in the Italian Renaissance (see Saxl 1939).

27 Here I draw on a particular mythology of witchcraft gaining in prominence in the fifteenth century in the Alpine region. This question is also raised in Burnett (2019, 82): 'Do [magic texts] merely reflect a literary tradition, or can they be linked with actual practices, ceremonies and even cults?'

28 For examples in proscriptive sources see Herzig (2011), Duni (2007, 47–48) and Kieckhefer (1976, 106–47).

clerics. This reflects anxiety about informal influence in court circles as well as the literary stereotypes of female servants and clerical necromancers.

Turning to the evidence of learned magic texts, we see that many of these describe rituals that can be performed alone. But others advise the practitioner to have companions, assistants or child skryers. In astral magic the addition of companions adds solemnity to the ceremony, increases the depth of reverence addressed to spirits and creates a community invested in the ritual's success that is sometimes cemented with a communal meal (Picatrix 143). In a ritual for operating with the Moon in the *Picatrix*, for example, the practitioner directs the performance but has the help of friends and associates (*amici et socii*) to lead sacrificial animals and carry the ritual instruments, and they are supposed to take a particularly active role if the ritual's goal helps them personally (Picatrix 145). The logistics of leading, releasing, and ritually killing and skinning several animals, in this case rams, may also have lent itself to group participation. But there is no evidence that astral magic was practised by Christians in late Medieval Europe in the sense of a formal veneration of planetary spirits, even if this is what some medieval critics of magic suspected or feared. Certainly, the rituals can be very elaborate; some texts required the practitioner to dress in robes dyed with the colours of a particular planet and to suffumigate himself while addressing the planet with prayers at appropriate times,[29] and even the inner body of the operator could be attuned to the planet by eating appropriate foods to attain the right humoral complexion.[30] [40]

A rich example of ritual magic activity centred on a family relationship is provided by the angel magic texts of John of Morigny and his younger sister Bridget who was 'an early user, consulter and colleague,' even though she was at first an unlearned teenager and later attached to a religious order some distance from where John lived (Watson 2020). John and Bridget shared their experience of visions as they experimented with the 'science of infused wisdom' and collaborated as authors. For example, Bridget contributed experiments to diagnose the outcomes of sickness and pregnancy, perhaps based on her own medical activities. Nicholas Watson argues that Bridget's most important contribution to the *Liber florum* was to inspire its shaping as a set of operations that were universally available and intended toward a collective good rather than being a specialized clerical activity (2020). The wider social nature of John's enterprise included asking his friend John of Fontainejean to contribute an angelic mass to the text and circulating his text to followers as he wrote it (Fanger 2021). [41]

In necromantic rituals the presence of multiple companions seems mainly designed to guard against demonic force and malice. The magic text *De circulis* notes that it is acceptable (if not ideal) for the practitioner (*artifex*) to perform rituals for self-defence or consulting spirits alone, but for all other purposes he should have four companions (*personae*).[31] The *Clavicula Salomonis* recommends between one and nine companions (*compagni*)—or at least a dog to intimidate the spirits.[32] Certainly, a sense of demonic menace dominates the sources for necromancy although it can also be combined with a sense of play and performance that undercuts this. The four participants described in the prologue of the 1398 condemnation of magic who attempted to trap a spirit in a bottle as part of a treasure hunting experiment are said to have circled about the ritual space in their underwear wielding swords and pointing them at the sky and earth.[33] Other learned magic texts describe special crowns, mitres and [42]

29 There are multiple references in the *Picatrix*, Book 3, chapters 3, 5, 7 and 9; book 4, chapter 2.
30 *Picatrix*, 3, 5.
31 Paris, BnF MS lat. 17,178, f.33. For further details of this text see Page (2019c).
32 Paris, BnF, MS. ital. 1524, f.223v.
33 Thorndike, *University Records*, 261–2.

priestly robes to wear, which contributes to the impression of elaborate ceremonies being a part of this practice. However, when critics of magic interpreted its rituals as acts of worship (*dulia* or *latria*) or idolatry, they did not extend the accusation of blasphemous reverence into descriptions of cults or sects of magicians similar to those described in fifteenth-century witchcraft mythologies.

Critics and sympathisers tend instead to use the language of schools and scholars (*scolares*) or societies and companions (*socii*).[34] For critics the practitioner's intimacy with demons was an object of opprobrium, even horror. Augustine, in a phrase repeated by several prominent medieval theorists of magic, calls it a toxic fellowship of humans and demons (*pestifera societate hominum et angelorum malorum*).[35] But more sympathetic medieval sources on magic reveal a vibrant culture of exchanges of texts between members of religious orders, physicians and lay men, clerics and lay women—a culture of entanglement: discussion, borrowing, critique and adaptation alongside practitioner-client relationships and necessary secrecy and concealment.[36] [43]

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34 On schools of necromancy, see for example, Guillaume de Deguilleville's *La Pélerinage de l'Âme* and John Lydgate's *The Booke of the Pylgremage of the Sowle*.

35 This phrase appears in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, Gratian's *Decretum*, John XXII's account of a magical plot at the papal court in 1318 and the *Malleus maleficarum*.

36 See, for example, Adelard of Bath, *Questions on Natural Science* (1998, 58), Page (2013, 22–23), Fanger (2015, 29–31), Kieckhefer (1998, 5) and Lang (2008, pt. 3).

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Print Grimoires and the Democratization of Learned Magic in the Later Early Modern Period

Bricolage Tradition and the Cross-Cultural Transmission of Knowledge

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ABSTRACT The relationship between print and manuscript in the entanglement of 'western learned magic' provides valuable insights regarding the complexity of cultural transmission across societies and social strata. Through exploring the influence over time of two print books containing conjurations, one in English the other French, we can trace how seemingly tenuous relationships reveal unlikely global frames of reference with regard to learned magic.

KEYWORDS grimoires, Manga, conjuration, magic, print culture

Introduction

[1] The continued interest in and copying of late medieval texts of learned magic, such as the *Liber sacer*, *Clavicula Salamonis*, and *Ars notoria*, is well evidenced in the early modern period (see Page's contribution in this issue for crucial developments in the medieval history of learned magic, 2023). With regard to Britain, for instance, Frank Klaassen has listed a provisional figure of twelve manuscripts of ritual magic surviving from the fifteenth century, twenty-two from the sixteenth, and even more from the seventeenth century (2013b, 159; see also Klaassen and Hubbs Wright 2021). On the continent the trade in manuscripts was brisk, particularly in Catholic countries where the papal Indexes of Prohibited Books produced from 1559 onward and the work of the inquisitions, as well as secular legislation more generally, suppressed nascent sources of print magic in the age of the press. Even with the boom in printed Renaissance magic in Switzerland and Germany, the late medieval tradition of learned magic remained ingrained in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century magical practice across Europe. The Leipzig collection sold in 1710 provides a valuable insight into the trade (Bellingradt and Otto 2017). But change and innovation was happening through the process

of creating vernacular manuscripts, the growth of literacy amongst the professional, merchant and trades strata of society—including women—and the influence of print as a medium. Together they add up to what can be described as the democratisation of learned magic in the early modern period. To explore this phenomenon, I focus on two print books, one from late sixteenth-century England and the other published two centuries later in France; both reflect these democratising trends in learned magic in different ways, shaped by different political, social and cultural contexts.

The role of early modern print culture in defining the post-medieval Western tradition of learned magic has received relatively little scholarly attention. The interest in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books has primarily been concerned with derivations and lineages to late medieval magic text traditions, and the modern practitioner's interest in the rituals themselves (see Davies 2009; Gordon 2018). But print forms of learned magic present fascinating possibilities for exploring the socio-cultural dimensions of the transmission of magical knowledge, the relationship between magic and advancements in media technology, and the relationship between print and writing in the physical act of performing learned magic. [2]

Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: England's First Print Grimoire

In the first half of the sixteenth century, Latin predominated in the manuscript books of magic that circulated principally around religious establishments (Page 2013), but the vernacular was starting to have an impact. The Cambridge Library manuscript MS Additional 3544, described simply in the modern catalogue as "A Book of Magic," is still two-thirds in Latin, but significant portions are in English (Foreman 2015). Sloane 3853 is similarly a composite Latin-English hybrid manuscript, parts of which date to the late sixteenth century. It includes extracts from a Latin version of the *Liber iuratus* (on which see also Page 2023 in this issue) but also "a boke which is callyd the Dannel" and conjurations for locating treasure, descriptions on the use of magical circles, and advice on drawing "a spryt in a glasse whych shall tell you the trewthe of stollen good" (Chardonnens 2015). They indicate the nascent widening of the pool of grimoire users, but it was a print version of one of these late sixteenth-century composite grimoires that begins our entangled history of English print magic. [3]

Around 1580 the English gentleman and surveyor Reginal Scot began to read voraciously around the subject of witchcraft and magic in preparation for a book that critiqued and condemned the arguments for the persecution of suspected witches, and also condemned and sought to undermine those who espoused magical powers. As a good Protestant, his critical arguments against the practice of magic were also entwined with his anti-Catholicism. His hope was that the book would ultimately benefit the poor, the aged and the simple, saving them from accusations of witchcraft and the depredations of cunning-folk and cheats. He listed some 212 continental Latin publications and twenty-three English books, most of which attracted his criticism (Almond 2014). From these sources he culled and published a wide range of charms, talismans and magical recipes from a variety of European cultures. Scot's research also led him to consult with practitioners of legerdemain and illusion and brought him to transcribe or purchase a manuscript book of magic in English entitled the *Secretum secretorum*, "The secret of secrets." There were many books in manuscript circulation that bore this title, and while their contents varied considerably, most but by no means all were books that contained a range of information about the healing properties of stones, plants and animals, household recipes and sometimes the secrets of chemical reactions and metal working (see Ea- [4]

mon 1994). Scot's 'Secret of Secrets,' however, contained a series of conjurations and magical rituals belonging to the genre of late medieval manuscripts attributed to Solomon and Honorius, and in structure and content it was akin to the composite English magic books noted above (on Solomonic magic, see Véronèse 2019). When put together with the many other charms and spells in *The Discoverie* you have a highly effective work of practical magic. Frank Klaassen has understandably referred to *The Discoverie* as "entirely unlike any medieval book" in that, as a Protestant text, it deliberately conflated Catholicism with magical practice in order to denounce both. It was unusual as a miscellany bringing together popular magic with late medieval learned magic, the 'secrets' of nature, and legerdemain (Klaassen and Phillips 2006, 142).

Scot made two references to the authors/owners of the manuscript. He first notes that it was "the work of one T.R. written in fair letters of red & blacke upon parchment, and made by him, Ann. 1570." It apparently bore the introductory statement that it was for the 'maintenance of his living, for the edifying of the poore, and for the propagating and inlarging of Gods glorie' (1584, 393, 431). A few chapters later, he expands a little and states that it was also in the hands of one John Cokars, implying that he (Cokars) had augmented T.R.'s manuscript. T.R. and Cokars were almost certainly cunning-folk serving a local or regional population with their magical services, as well as probably being magical treasure hunters (Davies 2003, 125–6). One of the distinctive aspects of their manuscript is the emphasis on the spirit 'Bealphares.' Chapter 18 consists of a lengthy "experiment of Bealphares" and the following chapter concerns the binding of 'the spirit Bealphares, and to lose him againe.' Bealphares is not one of the demons listed in the influential *Pseudomonarchia Daemonium*, a list of spirits, similar to those included in some late medieval manuscripts, which was added to Johann Weyer's sceptical treatise *Praestigiis Daemonium* (1563) (see Boudet 2003). Neither is it in Scot's slightly adapted list of spirits, which is based on the *Pseudomonarchia* in Weyer's book. This suggests the Bealphares conjurations were from T.R.'s manuscript, as I cannot find any prior source, although the actual rituals are familiar enough from late medieval texts. The name 'Beallphares' does appear briefly, however, in another English magical manuscript of the 1570s or 1580s housed in the Folger collection (V.b.26). A note inserted in a list of spirits by a different hand to the rest of the Folger manuscript explains that [5]

> Beallphares or beallphare, an excelent carier. He tellethe of hidden tressuers in the earthe or of thinges stolne or loste and is trewe in all his doinges. He cometh forthe out of the east, for so he hathe bine called from the east & he appered very dewtifully to Gods pepell & his serwantes. (Peterson, Clark, and Harms 2015, 93) [6]

It is possible that this addition was inspired by a reading of Scot's *Discoverie*. [7]

T.R.'s "experiment of Bealphares" begins by describing the spirit as the "noblest carrier that ever did serve anie man upon the earth" and explains that "he will appeare unto thee in the likeness of a faire man, or faire woman, the which spirit will come to thee at all times. And if thou wilt command him to tell thee of hidden treasures that be in anie place, he will teel it thee." The rest of the experiment includes instructions for wearing a girdle of lion's or hart's skin, the use of a knife bearing the holy word 'Agla' on one side and several magic symbols on the other, and the creation of 'Solomons circle' within which the conjurer operated. [8]

While Scot's scepticism about the witch trials was not well received by the religious and secular authorities, his Catholic bashing was referenced supportively in the decades after. More to the point, it was not long before evidence appeared of its influence in shaping the vernacular [9]

tradition of learned magic. There are surviving manuscripts, like the Folger example, which suggest some second-hand copying from Scot, or at least some common source or sources in English rather than further translations from earlier Latin manuscripts or continental sources (Klaassen 2011, n15). The Antiphoner notebook (Additional MS B.1) in the Bodleian contains charms and rituals clearly copied from Scot (Klaassen and Phillips 2006). Its author was not particularly interested in the material from T.R's manuscript regarding conjurations, though, and he mostly transcribed pious healing and protective charms and prayers from the rest of Scot's book, suggesting he was less interested in learned magic and more in day-to-day practical magic for a clientele. As Klaassen notes, "the scribe's inability in Latin rendered some of the prayers and invocations nonsensical," making the printed translations provided by Scot all the more desirable (2019, 6). The scribe clearly had an interest in conjurations and the exorcism of demons and their role in treasure hunting.

[10] The contents of this handful of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century vernacular texts are collectively distinctive and related with regard to their interest in the conjuration of fairies (though Latin texts also included fairy conjurations, see Klaassen 2013a). The instructions for binding and releasing Bealphares in T.R's manuscript concludes with an image of the conjuring circle as well as the instruction that the fellow or fellows should sit back to back within it when calling the spirit, and then states "and for the fairies make this circle with chalke on the ground, as is said before" (Scot 1584, 420). Scot also includes the "maner of binding the fairie Sibylia at hir appearing." The Folger book of magic V.b.26 describes the spirit Oberyon "kinge of the fayries" as a great physician and "sheweth wher hiding treseuer is & how to obtain thesaime he telleth of thinges present paste & to comm." It also mentions Mycob as the "queene of the fayres." Folger MS Xd 234, another English manuscript, dating to around 1600, consists of several conjurations for binding and releasing the fairies (Peterson, Clark, and Harms 2015; Harms 2018; Bain 2012; see Johannsen 2023 for the continuation of the fairy queen motif in nineteenth- and twentieth-century learned magic).

[11] Dutch editions of *The Discoverie* appeared in 1609 and 1637, presumably due its affinity with the ideas of Johann Weyer (Davies 2013, 383). Then a second edition in English was published in 1651, perhaps due to an upsurge in intellectual interest in witchcraft after the recent spate of trials and executions influenced by the activities of Matthew Hopkins in East Anglia. But the motive for the publication of a third edition of the *Discoverie* in 1665 was clearly very different. It was published by Andrew Clark, who mostly published sermons and religious works, as well as a couple of astrological almanacs. It included new material described "as succedaneous to the former, and conducing to the compleating of the whole work," namely "an excellent Discourse of the Nature and Substance of Devils and Spirits," and an additional nine chapters at the beginning of Book Fifteen containing practical magic. Their purpose was clear—to further supplement and enrich the *Discoverie* as a grimoire and not to reinforce the book as an intellectual critique of witchcraft and magic. The thirst for vernacular learned magic was still there, and perhaps even growing as literacy expanded further. A second edition of Scot's *Discoverie* held in the Bodlean, for instance, contains a note at the front, "s[p]ent on this & Agrippa 5s . . . June 1655." At the back of the copy is a personal index focussed on the magical rituals such as speaking with spirits contained within (Davies 2013, 394). One can imagine the note maker would have savoured the third edition of the *Discoverie*. Furthermore, between the publication of the second and third editions of the *Discoverie*, in the middle of the Interregnum and the flourishing of radical print literature it enabled, there had been a small flurry of English translations of printed Renaissance occultism. The Cambridge-educated

astrologer-physician Robert Turner published a series of translations of well-known occult and magical books produced by continental publishers in previous decades. They included pseudo-Paracelsian texts with sigils and lamens, and a version of the *Ars Notoria* (1657). In 1655 he also put together the first English edition of the falsely attributed Agrippan text, the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, and added translations of the *Heptameron: or Magical Elements*, spuriously attributed to Peter d'Abano, and the *Arbatel of Magick* (for recent practical engagement with this particular grimoire, see Otto 2023 on Frater Acher's *Arbatel* experiences in this volume).

[12] Scot's *Discoverie* continued to come under attack during the mid-seventeenth century by those who saw criticism of the belief in witches and ghosts as a broader attack on miracles and Biblical evidence. The philosopher and clergyman Joseph Glanvill (1636–1680) dismissed the *Discoverie* for being packed with "odd tales and silly Legends," and further stated that Scot's thinking was "trifling and childish" (Glanvill 1668, 76). In his *Treatise Proving Spirits, Witches, and Supernatural Operations* (1672), the Oxford scholar Meric Casaubon (1599–1671) also attacked Scot's scepticism, linking it with irreligion, but confessed never having actually read the *Discoverie*. "I have found it by chance, where I have been, in friends houses, or Book-sellers shops; and, as the manner is, cast my eyes, here and there; by which perfunctory kind of taste, I am sure, I had no temptation to read much of him" (Casaubon 1672, 40). But it found a new audience further down the social scale. Its subsequent influence on popular magical tradition through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was because, unlike other renaissance grimoires, it was full of anti-witchcraft spells to be used and adapted in new creative ways (Davies 2003). The printing of the third edition with its extra content was certainly important for ensuring the enduring influence of Scot's *Discoverie* on the democratization of magic. It meant that, for a reasonable second-hand price during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the secrets of vernacular learned magic were available to cunning-folk and the small band of middle-class occultists who practised spirit conjuration and angel scrying as intellectual pursuits. As I have explored elsewhere, though, apart from those engaged in treasure seeking, cunning-folk rarely used Scot to conduct full-blown ritual conjurations in the medieval and renaissance tradition (Davies 2003, 2009). Rather they plundered it for holy and demonic names, phrases, and images from which to construct often nonsensical written charms that looked or felt magical to their clientele. Ritual conjurations were fragmented, broken into constituent parts and repurposed: They became ritual bricolage as part of the democratising process. This was not a unique phenomenon, though, but rather an expression of the broader creative responses to the writing and performance of magic that has also been identified in the medieval period (see Véronèse 2003; Page 2019). This type of usage of learned magic also confirms Otto's observations regarding the process of "complexity reduction" with regard to the purpose of magic, and in particular the servicing of a general clientele who had practical problems that needed solving (2016, 212–15).

From Cheap Print Grimoires to Manga

[13] Vernacular French manuscripts proliferated and circulated in early modern France just as English ones did in Britain. Their owners included a similar range of occult philosophers, treasure hunters, ritual magicians servicing the wealthy, and educated cunning-folk operating in town and country. But in the eighteenth century something happened that diverged sharply from the British experience of democratisation (Davies 2009). French printers decided that

there was a potential market for ritual magical advice lower down the social scale, despite the authorities forbidding such publications. Small, cheap, crudely printed chapbooks and booklets containing ballads, tales, proverbs, astrological advice, and the like had proved popular, selling in their tens of thousands. Now they could obtain knowledge for a few *sous* that had previously been highly restricted by law, price, availability, and education. In Britain, by contrast, there was no such publishing industry in cheap magic books in the same period. The reasons why are difficult to fathom. There was a massive trade in fortune-telling books, some of which included a few items of advice on love magic, and astrological almanacs were hugely popular, so the lack of practical magic is something of a mystery (Davies 1999, 120–67).

The *Petit Albert* was the first in the genre and has received the most interest from scholars. It is largely a work in the 'secret of secrets' tradition and contains no conjurations other than a ritual for making the now notorious Hand of Glory. During the second half of the century, though, cheap works of spirit conjurations appeared. The *Gremoire du Pape Honorius,* for instance, with its spurious publication date of "Rome 1670," contains numerous conjurations for calling up spirits for each day of the week, as well as invisibility spells and the like. But it also included a whole range of receipts of use to the peasant and farmer, such as how to ward off rabbits, remove fleas and banish hemorrhoids. All concerns of the medieval period as well, of course, but unlikely to feature in early manuscripts of the *Ars Notoria,* for instance. The likes of the *Gremoire du Pape Honorius* mimics, instead, the composite style of vernacular manuscripts that we see emerging in increasing numbers through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and probably were print versions of manuscripts that, in turn, had been compiled from earlier printed works of learned magic and books of secrets. We see a similar phenomenon with German print magic and 'secrets' in the seventeenth century (Bellingradt and Otto 2017). [14]

The treasure conjuration known as the the *Poule noire* (full text below) is one of the more intriguing of the rituals published in this popular literary genre, appearing in a cheap print publication entitled the *Grand Grimoire* or the *Dragon rouge*. It is prefaced with a discovery narrative and accompanied by a woodcut depiction of the ritual being enacted and the appearance of a spirit. The first of the conjurations to be uttered, 'the prayer', was kept in Latin and entitled 'Citatio Prædictorum spirituum.' This prayer was, in fact, first printed in Weyer's *Pseudomonarchia daemonum*, and Scot included a translated version in his *Discoverie*, presumably derived directly from the *Pseudomonarchia* or from a copy of the conjuration in T.R.s 'Secretum secretorum' (Scot 1584, 393–5). Latin and vernacular versions of the same conjuration text can be found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscript copies of the *Lemegeton Clavicula Salomonis* and related texts. It provides a clear sign of the long lineage by now of print influence, with Weyer and Scot as originators. A truncated version of the *Poule noire*, taken from the *Dragon rouge*, but minus the *Citatio Prædictorum spirituum*, was translated into English during the late nineteenth century by Edward Waite and published in his book, much thumbed by modern magical practitioners, *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (1898). "I have so modified the procedure," noted Waite, "that, in case it should be tried by a fool in these more civilised days, he will have only his pains for the trouble – by the hypothesis of the ceremonial art. This is therefore a word to the fool" (Waite 1910, 133). [15]

The initial magical words beginning the *Poule noire* ritual are, 'Eloim, Essaim, frugativi et appelavi', which appears in no other magic text or ritual of which I am aware. They provide us with further striking examples of the bricolage process and the deep entanglement of Western magic over time and in a global sense (see Otto 2016, esp. 201). These five words constitute [16]

a well-known phrase for Japanese Manga fans, appearing in the *Akuma-kun* films and live-action television series during the 1980s and 1990s. Akuma-kun (Devil boy) is the nickname of a young boy, a world messiah figure, who, under the instruction of his mentor Dr Faust, learns the power of summoning demons in order to make the world a better place. One of the summoning rituals requires standing in front of a magic circle and uttering: “エロイムエッサイム、我は求め訴えたり’ (‘Eloim, Essaim, frugativi et appelavi’).” *Akuma-kun* was created by the master Manga artist and historian Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015) and first appeared as a comic in the 1960s. No doubt influenced by *Akuma-kun*, Naoshi Arakawa’s manga drama *Shigatsu wa Kimi no Uso* (Your Lie in April) (2011–2015) also uses the “Eloim, Essaim” phrase (my thanks to a peer reviewer for this reference). Mizuki was inspired by the rich folklore regarding *yōkai* or demons and the old *yōkai* encyclopaedias that described their powers and characteristics, not unlike the *Pseudomonarchia daemonum* in this respect, but crucially with artistic representations of each Yōkai. The most influential of these encyclopaedias was *The Illustrated Night Parade of One Hundred Demons* (1776) by the Edo-era artist Toriyama Sekien (1712–1788). His visual style, as well as the way in which the *yōkai* were catalogued, inspired Mizuki and numerous other twentieth-century Japanese authors and artists (Sekien 2016; Papp 2010, 65–66; Foster 2009). There was the *akanamé* or ‘filth licker’, a creature that licked the scum out of dirty bathtubs, for example, and the *yamauba* or ‘mountain hag’, who brought the snows in winter and blossom in spring. While there had been catalogues of *yōkai* in previous centuries, the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works by Sekien and others broke new cultural ground by using the technology of the book rather than scrolls as before. There was one page for each demon, but there was no linking narrative at all. Each image told its story, and, as described by Foster (2009), each image can be seen as an independent unit of knowledge for subsequent authors and artists to repurpose: “They come to have a certain degree of manoeuvrability: they can be shuffled and manipulated as separate entities by those who have mastered them” (2009, 31).

[17] But Mizuki the scholar cast his creative net wide and drew upon folklore, art, and magic traditions from beyond Japan (Shamoon 2013), just as Manga more generally has, from its early days, been receptive to and drawn upon the worlds of Mediterranean ancient history and European myth in time-travel stories. *Red River*, by Suzuki Yūri, for instance, concerns a Japanese school student who is magicked back to the ancient world by the curse of a Hittite empress (Scilabra 2019). When stationed in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War, Mizuki became fascinated with the local folklore and claimed to have had his own encounter with a *yōkai* in the jungle. In a series of articles for a Manga magazine in the 1960s, he plotted *yōkai* from around the world on a large map and included European variants such as Dracula, werewolves, wizards, and Medusa. Mizuki perhaps came across the *Poule noire* and the Faust legend while doing this research. It is highly likely he borrowed from the truncated, translated version of the ritual given in Waite’s *Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (1898, 129) rather than an original French publication. It is also worth noting that the second edition of Waite’s book, re-entitled *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* (1910), curiously included a slightly different version of the call: “*Euphas, Matahīm, frugativi et appellavi*.”

Conclusion

[18] The *Akuma-kun* books and films have apparently never been released outside of Japan, and very few works of western ceremonial magic have been published in Japan. The author’s

Grimoires: A History of Magic Books (2009) is one of the very few European histories of the subject to be published in Japanese. But through Manga and *anime*, Japanese culture has clearly become wittingly and unwittingly entangled with the history of European magical tradition. In his wide-ranging and critical consideration of 'western learned magic' in historical context, Bernd-Christian Otto made the important point that it "was (and is) ever-changing in a vast range of domains" (2016, 224). To research the topic in all its complexities requires, as he suggests, the formation of a new coherent corpus of source materials from across time and continents as well as cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary approaches. The two examples presented here of Scot's *Discoverie* and the *Poule noire* represent one of the ways of understanding these processes of transmission. They show how coherent learned texts of magic were, through the democratising processes of vernacularisation, print, and the spread of literacy, broken down into units of simple information and symbols for reuse in novel contexts and formats—just as Foster argues for the enduring influence of the *yōkai* encyclopaedias. In this sense, there is a shared history, then, between Scot's *Discoverie*, the magic book publishers and cunning-folk of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the Manga impresarios of the twentieth century. The western learned magic tradition continues its history of adaptation and invention, extending beyond the West, the book, and the learned.

Appendix: Primary Sources

The Secret of the Black Hen. Source: *Le Veritable Dragon Rouge* (c. 1800). Author's collection.

[page 128]

> The famous secret of the Black hen, a secret without which we cannot count on the success of any *cabale*, was lost for a long time; after much research, we managed to find it, and the tests that we have made assure us that it was indeed the one for which we were looking, has perfectly answered our hopes; so we have nothing left to do today other than share our happiness with all those who will have the courage to follow in our footsteps, and we transcribe it now below:
>
> Take a black hen which has never laid an egg and which no cockerel has approached; make sure on taking it that it does not cry out, and for this you will go at eleven o clock in the evening when it is asleep, take it by the neck, making sure that it is prevented from squawking; go to a highroad, and come to a crossroads, and there, as midnight strikes, make a circle with a rod of cypress wood, place yourself in the middle of it and cut the body of the hen in two while pronouncing these words three times: ELOÏM, ESSAÏM, *frugativi et appelavi*. Turn your face to the east, kneel down and utter the prayer on page 85:

[Prayer on page 85]:

> To guard against evil spirits
>
> O all powerful father! o mother, the most tender of mothers! O admirable example of the feelings and tenderness of mothers! O son, the flower of all sons! O shape of all things! soul, spirit, harmony and number of all things, keep us, protect us, guide us and we will be well. Amen.

Citasio Præditorum Spirituum

S1

Ubi quem volueris spiritum, hujus nomen et officium supra cognosces: imprimis autem ab omni pollutione minimum tres vel quatuor dies mundus esto in primâ citatione, sic et spiritus postea obsequentiores erunt; fac et circulum, et voca spiritum cum multa intentione primum vero annulum in manu continetur: indè hanc recitato benedictionem tuo nomine et socii, si præsto fuerit et effectum tui instituti sortieris, nec detrimantum è spiritibus senties imo tuæ animæ perditionem. …

[8 more pages of this. It is a copy of a standard adjuration to make spirits appear. See discussion above]

That done, you will do the great call page 35;

[Great call on page 35]:

Great Call

Drawing the great Cabaliste

I conjure you, o spirit! To appear this minute by the force of the great Adonay, by Eloïm by Ariel, by Jehova, by Agla, Tagla, Mathon, Oarios, Almouzin, Arios, Membrot, Varios, Pithona, Magots Salphæ, Gabots, Salamandræ, Tabots, Gnomus, Terræ, Coelis, Godens, Awua, Guingua, Jauna, Etitnamus, Zariatnatmick, etc.

A…E…A…J…A…T…M…O…A…A…M…V…P…M…S…G…S…T…G…T…C… G…A…G…J…E…Z…etc [these are the first letters of the names listed above].

After having repeated two times these great and powerful words, you can be sure that the spirit will appear…

[back to the *Poule noir* section, page 132]

Then the unclean spirit will appear before you dressed in a scarlet coat, a yellow vest and pale green breeches. His head will resemble that of a dog with donkey's ears, with two horns above them; his legs and his feet will be like those of a cow. He will ask for your orders; you will give them as you see fit; because he cannot refuse to obey you, and you will make yourself rich, and as a result the happiest of men. So am I.

It is good for you to know that before you begin with all that is written above, it is necessary that you have made your devotions and that you have nothing more to reproach yourself. This is all the more essential otherwise you would be under the orders of the evil spirit rather than the other way round.

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The Entangled Imagination

W.B. Yeats' "Moods" and the Psychologization of Magic

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ABSTRACT Among modern practitioners of magic, the "psychologization of magic" has become a common strategy to adapt practices such as rituals of invocation to naturalistic thought. In this article, I discuss what was probably the most elaborate attempt to bridge the gap between the magic of the past and a magic suited for the present that took place within the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1888–1903). Approaching the Order's teachings through the lens of the contemporaneous literary discourse, the Irish poet and magician William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) attempted to consolidate supernaturalist and naturalist understandings of magic throughout the 1890s. In 1892, he made the concept of the "immortal moods" a key to both his poetry and his magical practice. Evoked through symbols in a ritual or a poem, these moods would descend "like a faint sigh into people's minds" and move them to action, causing "all great changes in the world." Yeats explored this concept in theoretical writings, poetic experiments, and his ritual practice, finding his own imagination entangled with past imaginations. Serving a brief term as the Golden Dawn's Imperator and Instructor in Mystical Philosophy in 1901, he condensed the insights gained from this work in the doctrines of the "great mind and great memory." Presenting a study of Yeats' psychology of the universal mind, this article shows how his amalgamation of literary and folkloristic theorizing paved the way to connect magical and poetic practice to the emerging psychological discourse.

KEYWORDS William Butler Yeats, Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Psychologization of Magic, Psychological Associationism, Folklore, Tradition, Literary Theory, Symbolism.

Introduction

For W.B. Yeats, magic and poetry were inextricably entwined. In his early works,[1] he developed a dual theory of magic and poetry that revolved around shifting notions of the moods, [1]

1 The year 1903 marks a reorientation in both Yeats' life and poetry in many ways and is therefore commonly used to demarcate the 'younger' or 'early' Yeats from the more mature poet. I limit my study to sources written between 1890 and 1901, the period during which he was an active member of the original Golden Dawn.

the universal mind, and the great memory. The resulting understanding of the relationship between magical and poetic practice constitutes an early instance of a "psychologization of magic," as it came to shape the interplay between the adoption of earlier practices and conceptual innovation in Western learned magic throughout the twentieth century (Otto 2016, 38).

[2] In general terms, psychologization denotes "the (unintentional) overflow of psychological theories and praxes to the fields of science, culture, and politics and/or to subjectivity itself" (de Vos 2014, 1547). In the late nineteenth century, however, the disciplinary framework of academic psychology was still in its infancy, and it was constantly being renegotiated (Gripentrog 2016). Accordingly, the "spreading of the discourse of psychology beyond its alleged disciplinary borders" was a highly diverse phenomenon (de Vos 2014, 1547), also when it came to attempts to psychologize magic. Following up on Wouter Hanegraaff's pioneering analysis of "how magic survived the disenchantment of the world" by translating historical notions and practices of magic into psychological terms and techniques (2003), Egil Asprem has convincingly argued that this psychologization does not follow a linear development or a unitary trend (Asprem 2012, 161). In a study of Israel Regardie, Christopher Plaisance provided a compelling case for the need to approach processes of psychologization as a loosely connected cluster of discursive strategies (Plaisance 2015); only some of these strategies derived from the works of (more or less) academic psychology. In her study of British occultism, Alex Owen has already highlighted the spectrum of cultural debates of the nineteenth century that revolved around the "psychologization of the self" and the resulting mystery of consciousness, making it quite natural for magic to be "conceived in psychologized terms" (Owen 2004, 149, 115–47; see also Hanegraaff 2013, 135–37). Bernd-Christian Otto and I have recently argued that the learned magical discourse of the late nineteenth century experienced major transformations in response to the re-interpretation of the faculty of imagination that took place in the emerging modern literary discourse (Otto and Johannsen 2021). Here, Otto raises the broader question "whether it was not the emerging psychological, but the emerging literary discourse that had sparked the so-called 'psychologisation of magic' of the 20th century" (2021, 363). The case of W.B. Yeats is one of the most prominent examples of this dynamic.

[3] In 1890, Yeats joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the preeminent society of learned magic at the turn of the century, and became an ardent practitioner. The system of magic that he found in the Golden Dawn catered to emerging artists (Denisoff 2013), and it allowed him to perceive his poetic work as "no different" from the practice of magic (Graf 2015, 27). The initiations outlined a transformative process of attaining a higher consciousness;[2] practices such as astral visions cultivated the "formative" imagination of the adepts (King 1997, 51; see Otto and Johannsen 2021); and the teachings mapped symbolic correspondences between the "mortal world" and "immortal essences" (Yeats 1896, 58). By 1900, during the internal struggles that soon led to the disintegration of the original Order (Gilbert 1997), Yeats became the Golden Dawn's Instructor of Mystical Philosophy, and even served a short term as its Imperator (Harper 1974). During this time, he wrote his famous essay *Magic* (Yeats 1903, 29–69 [1901]), in which he formulated three doctrines as the foundation of "nearly all magical practices":

[4]
> (1) That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single

2 For further details on this process, see Bogdan's chapter in this special issue (2023).

energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols. (Yeats 1903, 29 [1901])

In the following, I argue that the psychologized understanding of magic expressed in Yeats' doctrines does not result from a reception of a disciplinary psychology or pre-existing theories of the subconscious. Instead, it is a parallel development mediated through literary and folkloristic theory. While it may seem counterintuitive at first, Yeats relied on the pronounced naturalistic framework of psychological associationism, which he sought to subvert through his poetry and his magic. Reinterpreting the psychological creation of mental associations as a revelation of symbolic correspondences and using them to evoke spirits in the form of moods, Yeats made poetry an act of magic (Johannsen 2021) and magic a psychological therapeutic. While his theorizing remains deeply indebted to a long history of esoteric ideas, it first manifested itself in the early 1890s, embedded in a lively contemporary culture of public artistic debate and casual ritual practice. [5]

The Moods: A Fairy Tale

In 1893, W.B. Yeats published the famous collection of essays and fairy legends[3] that gave name to the Celtic Revival in Irish literature: *The Celtic Twilight*. In confronting a modern audience with an "ancient simplicity and amplitude of imagination," Yeats wanted to evoke long forgotten *moods* in his readers: [6]

> What is literature but the expression of moods by the vehicle of symbol and incident? And are there not moods which need heaven, hell, purgatory, and faeryland for their expression, no less than this dilapidated earth? […] Let us go forth, the tellers of tales, and seize whatever prey the heart long for [sic], and have no fear. Everything exists, everything is true, and the earth is only a little dust under our feet. (1894, 6–7) [7]

With this bold preface, *The Celtic Twilight* set out to defy all genre classifications. Traditional legends and descriptions of peasant-storytellers are interspersed by poems, philosophical reflections, and accounts of Yeats' own encounters with the hidden world and the occult subculture of his day. [8]

A curious example can be found in a chapter titled *Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni* (1894, 83–89).[4] It concerns "a rather interesting magical adventure,"[5] which Yeats relates as follows: [9]

> One night a middle-aged man, who had lived all his life far from the noise of [10]

3 Yeats often uses the archaic spelling *faeries* to demarcate the spirits of folkloristic traditions from characters of children's literature.

4 The title ("Queen, queen of the pygmies, come") is a reference to *William Lilly's History of his Life and Times from the year 1602 to 1681* (reprinted and known to Yeats as Lilly 1882), where the phrase is presented as a "call" used for crystal scrying (1882, 229).

5 Letter to Richard Le Gallienne, October 15, 1892 (Yeats 1986, 321).

> cab-wheels, a young girl, a relation of his, who was reported to be enough of a seer to catch a glimpse of unaccountable lights moving over the fields among the cattle, and myself, were walking along a far western sandy shore. We talked of the Dinny Math or faery people, and came in the midst of our talk to a notable haunt of theirs, a shallow cave amidst black rocks, with its reflection under it in the wet sea sand. I asked the young girl if she could see anything, for I had quite a number of things to ask the Dinny Math. She stood still for a few minutes, and I saw that she was passing into a kind of waking trance [...]. I then called aloud the names of the great faeries, and in a moment or two she said that she could hear music far inside the rocks [...]. (1894, 83–84)

With the contact established, narrator Yeats now commands the queen of the fairies from the cave, sensing her as a "faint gleam of golden ornaments, [a] shadowy blossom of dim hair." The ensuing interaction, however, remains mediated through the girl in a trance. [11]

> I asked [the queen] to tell the seer whether these caves were the greatest faery haunts in the neighbourhood. [...] No, this was not the greatest faery haunt, for there was a greater one a little further ahead. I then asked her whether it was true that she and her people carried away mortals, and if so, whether they put another soul in the place of the one they had taken? 'We change the bodies,' was her answer. 'Are any of you ever born into mortal life?' 'Yes.' 'Do I know any who were among the Dinny Math before birth?' 'You do.' 'Who are they?' 'It would not be lawful for you to know.' [12]

This interview with the fairy queen is a curious take on the European folkloristic endeavours of the nineteenth century.[6] The legends that early folklorists collected by interviewing local storytellers centred on a set of relatively static motifs presenting the faeries as hidden but in constant interaction with the human world; in one of these motifs, for example, the fairies carry away human children and replace them with a changeling. Their ambiguous nature, sometimes appearing as spirits of nature, at other times as spirits of the dead, gave rise to much scholarly debate about the roots of the fairy tradition. [13]

To resolve the issue, Yeats simply enters the story world and confronts the fairies with questions that would otherwise be directed at local storytellers. He even proposes his own theory of the nature of the fairy tradition to their queen: "I then asked whether she and her people were not 'dramatisations of our moods'? 'She does not understand,' said my friend [the seeress] [...]" (1894, 86–87). Passages like this split the audience. Many reviewers welcomed the "wild, wierd [sic], and witching" mixture of genres as a fitting homage to the "mystic side of the Celtic spirit" or the "occult philosophy" of the "wild Irish."[7] Others, notably those from some Irish papers, showed less understanding of Yeats' handling of folkloristic sources and found him "imprisoned in a small cell of mysticism."[8] The *Irish Daily Independent* found Irish folklore to be utterly "masqueraded" by Yeats' occultism ("a London whimsey"), declaring the interview with the faery queen a particularly absurd "instance of ineptitude": "Think of [14]

6 For Yeats' role in the context of the Irish folkloristic endeavour, see the chapter on "Yeats, Celticism, Comparative Science" in Garrigan Mattar (2004, 41–82). On the relation between Yeats, the fairies, and literary modernism, see Faxneld (2018).

7 *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, February 17, 1894, 8; *The Sketch*, January 31, 1894, 16; *Illustrated London News*, February 17, 1894, 202.

8 *United Ireland*, November 11, 1893, 1.

Mr Yeats when the Fairy Queen reveals herself to him inquiring if she and her fairy folk were not 'dramatisations of our moods'."[9] Only after Yeats accused the reviewer of scholarly arrogance[10] did the paper concede that poetic immersion in the traditions might yield something new: "The enchanted places of the [Irish] West […] suggest to [Yeats] whole philosophies […]. 'Dramatisations of our moods,' ways of envisaging our wants and dreams […] are an endless study for him."[11]

[15] Despite his interest in scholarly folklore, poetry and ritual magic were the two fields in which Yeats conducted this study of "the moods" throughout the 1890s. In the Golden Dawn, he was provided with the tools: The order's symbolism and the member's progression through the different degrees of initiation were carefully regulated (Gilbert 1986). Maybe a reason for the adaptability of the order during a time marked by celebrations of scientific progress, however, was the fact that it did not impose any particular theory of magic as authoritative. Yeats' concept of "the moods" stood at the centre of his attempt to fill this gap. Striving to establish himself in a literary discourse dominated by scholarly reflection, Yeats yearned "to lead a world sick with theories to those sweet well-waters of primæval poetry, upon whose edge still lingers the brotherhood of wisdom, the immortal moods" (1895a, xxvi). He found that moods, rather than rational argument, connect people and move them to action. While each individual person feels them as something subjective and passing, each individual mood transcends time, to "be felt again and again." Every feeling we experience is, in this sense, a memory of feelings others experienced in the past. As "modes of thought and feeling which recur in the children of men through all ages" (*United Ireland*, February 8, 1896, 3), the moods were, in Yeats' mind, the link between the seemingly arbitrary experiences of everyday life and an eternal world of spiritual essences. They revealed the individual mind as a reflection of some shared, universal mind.

Towards a Dual Theory of Magic and Poetry

[16] Yeats' *The Celtic Twilight* oscillates between genres; it is as much fiction as it is folklore and poetical reflection. The magical adventure of evoking the fairy queen for the purpose of an interview, however, is a biographical report from his own magical practice. Together with his uncle Georg Pollexfen and his cousin Lucy Middleton, Yeats conducted the ritual on October 14, 1892 at the caves of Lower Rosses Point, Sligo, not far from his uncle's house, where he had spent many childhood summers (1986, 321–23). At the time of the ritual, Yeats had been a member of the Golden Dawn for two years and had swiftly risen through the ranks of the outer order. Four months later, he would be initiated to the inner order, the *Rosae Rubae et Aureae Crucis*, as an Adeptus Minor, which (in theory) was the place where he would be familiarized with the evocation of spirits (see also Bogdan 2023).

[17] By the early 1890s the Golden Dawn was in many ways an institution under development, and Yeats was a particularly valued and deeply invested member. As a close friend of the order's founders, MacGregor Mathers and William Wynn Westcott, he brought his experience as a vocal member of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society and was widely recognized as one of the "coming young men"[12] of the London literary scene. With unique access to the

9 *The Irish Daily Independent*, January 3, 1894, 4.
10 *The Irish Daily Independent*, January 10, 1894, 2.
11 *The Irish Daily Independent*, January 17, 1894, 2.
12 *Inverness Courier*, April 3, 1894, 3.

Irish and British artistic avant-garde, he recruited many of the order's most promising members.[13] Yeats was not kept from engaging in practical magic, nor from inviting others to join in. He shared the results of his magical experiments generously with his literary community, at least with those he saw as comrades in arms.

In the days following the encounter with the fairy queen, he excitedly informed his friends of his success: "I was very triumphantly successful in an invokation [sic] of the Fairies at a noted location of theirs," he boasted to his political mentor John O'Leary; he also reported to his friend and editor Edward Garnett that "voices were heard & all sorts of queer figures seen. You I think have seen the symbols worked & so may understand the methods."[14] To fellow poet Richard Le Gallienne, who was about to introduce symbolism as *The Religion of a Literary Man* (1893) to the English literary debate, he wrote in detail about how he "made a magical circle & invoked the fairys [sic]" which allowed his uncle to hear "boys shouting & distant music" and his cousin to engage in a "long conversation [...]. I tell you this because I have used my symbols with you so that you can understand such things are possible."[15] [18]

We learn more about this shared use of symbols from a short essay titled *Invoking the Irish Fairies*. Yeats had published this piece two weeks earlier in *The Irish Theosophist*, a journal edited by his friend George Russell (AE), writing under his Golden Dawn motto D.E.D.I. (*Demon Est Deus Inversus*). It reveals the preparation undertaken for the invocation at the caves at Lower Rosses Point and offers a glimpse of a culture of casual rituals and astral scrying in and around the early Golden Dawn. Written in the manner of a causerie and a style that could be called 'occult decadence,' Yeats reports that "the Occultist and student of Alchemy whom I shall call D.D. and myself" one morning decided to gaze into the astral light while waiting for the kettle to boil (1892, 6–7). But to summon what? [19]

> We had called up likewise, the tree of knowledge and of life, and we had studied the hidden meaning of the Zodiac [...]. We had gone to ancient Egypt, seen the burial of her dead and heard mysterious talk of Isis and Osiris. We have made the invisible powers interpret the tablets of Cardinal Bembo,[16] and we had asked of the future [...]. 'We have seen the great and they have tired us,' I said; 'let us call the little for a change. The Irish fairies may be worth the seeing; there is time for them to come and go before the water is boiled.' I used a lunar invocation and left the seeing mainly to D.D. (1892, 6) [20]

The seeress D.D. or *Deo Date* was Dorothea Hunter. Like Yeats' uncle Georg Pollexfen, she would be initiated into the Golden Dawn the following year, but this did not keep her from entering the astral sphere to encounter the queen of the fairies at this point.[17] Because only Yeats' was familiar with the "mystic system," he controlled the vision. Following his performance of the lunar invocation, before Deo Date's eyes appeared "a barren mountain crest [21]

13 See Johannsen (2021) for a more detailed account of the influence Yeats exerted on the Golden Dawn by integrating the order's teachings into an encompassing vision of a spiritual renewal of the arts and, by extension, politics.

14 Letters to John O'Leary, October 16, 1892, and Edward Garnett, October 17, 1892 (Yeats 1986, 322–23).

15 Letter to Richard Le Gallienne, October 15, 1892 (Yeats 1986, 321).

16 The *Bembine Table of Isis* is discussed in Eliphas Lévi's *History of Magic* (2001, 81–85) and was edited by W.W. Westcott (1976), maybe serving as a part of the Golden Dawn curriculum (see Hall 1928, 160–74).

17 In the Golden Dawn, Dorothea Hunter would become the official Instructor in Clairvoyance on April 21, 1900, after serving as an important collaborator in Yeats' project of creating a Celtic mystery school, coordinating joint astral explorations to translate the Golden Dawn's symbolism into a Celtic tree of life (Warwick Gould in Yeats 1997, 663–68). Yeats would take the post of Instructor of Mystical Philosophy (Howe 1978, 228).

with one ragged tree," the invoked moon shining through its branches, "and a white woman stood beneath them." Yeats commanded the woman to show the faeries. Soon, a "multitude of little creatures" appeared for D.D., and the white woman revealed herself as their queen. Following the queen from the good fairies to those evil, Yeats writes, D.D.'s vision culminated in "that contest of the minor forces of good and evil which knows no hour of peace."

[22] In his concluding reflections, we learn why Yeats, while at the caves at Sligo beach, chose—of all possible questions to ask a fairy queen—to ask whether she was a dramatized mood. "The fairies," Yeats explains, "are the lesser spiritual moods of the universal mind, wherein every mood is a soul and every thought a body. Every form they take and every action they go through, has its significance and can be read by the mind trained in the correspondence of sensuous form and supersensuous meaning" (1892, 7). This is the first expression of the paradoxical formula that would become Yeats' dual theory of magic and poetry.[18]

Associations and Correspondences: Psychology, Folklore, and the Literary Discourse

[23] From today's perspective, it may seem natural to associate Yeats' use of the theosophical notion of a universal mind expressed in shared modes of thought and feeling with notions of the subconscious or a collective unconscious that were developing at about the same time. Several studies have argued that Yeats' understanding of the function of poetry corresponds to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis (notably Fanger 2008) or identified the similarities between his mystical system and Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology (following Hollis 2005).[19]

[24] The context in which Yeats developed his theory in the early 1890s, however, was different, and it was indebted to an earlier understanding of the mind. He had just entered a competitive artistic scene in which naturalistic conceptions of literature provided a dominant framework, against which he tried to demarcate his own poetical practice. To discover the roots of Yeats' dual theory of magic and poetry, we have to turn to psychological associationism. This theory of the mind had become the starting point for a wide psychologization of every aspect of life, especially after philosopher John Stuart Mill studied the nature of logic ([1843] 1874) and declared it "a branch of psychology" (de Vos 2014, 1547–8).

[25] In building on the tradition of British empiricism and resisting Romantic philosophers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Stuart Mill's father James Mill had already in 1829 compiled a "prototypical associationist picture of [the] mind" by reducing "the various 'active' and 'intellectual' powers of the mind to association" (Dacey 2020). Following Locke and Hume, James Mill argued that all higher cognitive functions were based on a constant "association of ideas" in the mind ([1829] 1878). The ideas themselves Mill saw as "copies" of our sensations. Memories, for example, would simply be segments of a "particular train of ideas," i.e., a chain of associated "copies" of previous sensations. When confronted with a similar sensation or a

18 The phrasing reveals a largely theosophical framework and alludes to the idea that thought forms permeate the Mahat or universal mind (see below). The dramatizations of the moods that Yeats now develops is first hinted at in a diary passage from 1889, with Yeats reflecting on the nature of Madame Blavatsky's secret teachers, the Mahatmas. He ponders whether they are spirits ("not likely") or "dramatizations of HPB's own trance nature" (printed in Yeats 1972, 281).

19 These studies focus mostly on the 'later' Yeats with concepts developed after 1903, such as "the mask." As Hollis notes, the similarities between Yeats and Jung point primarily to a shared familiarity with "common primary materials, especially those of Gnostic Eastern, platonic, hermetic, and theosophic origin" (Hollis 2005, 290).

related idea, the “laws of association” would serve to evoke the memory ([1829] 1878, 1:318–40). The same mechanism and laws, Mill argued, would also govern the imagination. The only difference between the thoughts of a merchant and the imagination of a poet was, according to Mill, the particular quality of the individual ideas derived from their underlying sensations. Whereas the merchant’s “train of ideas” was directed towards physical outcomes, the poet’s “train of ideas” was ideally composed of ideas to be appreciated as “a source of pleasure” for its own sake ([1829] 1878, 1:242–43).

John Stuart Mill widened his father’s strict laws of association to some degree. On the one hand, he defined sensations as mental states, allowing him (with Alexander Bain) to view both sensations and ideas as produced and processed by material organs, foreshadowing a psychology integrated with “the science of Physiology” soon popularized by Herbert Spencer (Bistricky 2013; Spencer 1855). On the other hand, he allowed for the emergence of new, superordinate ideas from the association of given elements, manifest, for example, in the complex mental pictures “put together” by a poet—such as the idea of a “Castle of Indolence” or a fairyland (Mill [1843] 1874, 591). Of course, the ontological status of such composites remained unclear and often dubious, and here logic found its domain. When serving as a cornerstone of science, Mill argued, the purpose of logical reasoning was to inquire into the validity of these complex associations with regard to the given empirical evidence. Logical inference would serve to determine whether an association of two or more ideas was sufficiently grounded in empirical reality, or whether it was just an arbitrary connection, a fantasy. This principle soon came to define the responsible use of the poet’s imagination in European literary naturalism. [26]

The literary movements of the 1870s were deeply indebted to the Mills’ associationist psychology. The French literary critic Hippolyte Taine (1871), for example, introduced Mill to France to argue that the self was but an artificial construct, to be dissected in naturalist literature (Nias 1999). The Danish literary critic Georg Brandes (1873) used Mill’s “laws of association” to call for a new literature to unveil the arbitrariness of the associations of ideas underlying religion and reactionary politics, leading to the triumphal period of Nordic realism in European literature (Johannsen 2016). [27]

Following Mill, these strands of literary naturalism would identify memory as a “train of associations” constituting the individual self, a construct that was far from stable. False memories could enter the chain arbitrarily; elements of dreams, including fantastic and surreal visions, associated themselves with real happenings and distorted memories. Because of the fragile nature of memory, blends of reality and fantasy would be remembered as if they were real, subsequently accounting for religious legends and romantic poetry (Brandes 1873, 205–8). A new realism was presented as a necessary remedy to the arbitrariness that had governed the religious and literary imagination for too long. The modern poet was no longer subject to his imagination: He became its analyst, carefully approaching the artificial chains to uncover the ‘real,’ i.e., empirical connections that governed people’s thoughts and actions. [28]

Immersed in the literary debates that took place across Europe, Yeats found himself and his fellow young poets in a “war of spiritual with natural order” (1992, 233). When he first tried to establish himself in London’s artistic scene by the end of the 1880s, naturalistic theories had become a dominant framework for serious literature. Ireland’s foremost novelist George Moore had introduced the French naturalism of Émile Zola to the public, and Henrik Ibsen’s social criticism, promoted by George Bernard Shaw, came to set the standard for stage plays. Established literary journals and book circles left little room to argue for an Irish national [29]

literature or that poetic dreams of fairyland could possess 'timeless' artistic value (see figure 1). Still, Yeats came prepared. His father, a convinced "disciple of John Stuart Mill" (Yeats 1972, 19), had (much to Yeats' dismay) familiarized him early on with the foundations of naturalistic thought. Now aiming at the death of realism (1894), Yeats developed his literary symbolism throughout the 1890s in direct confrontation with the fundamental tenets of literary naturalism.[20]

"Why should we be either 'naturalists' or 'realists'?", he challenged the literary establishment, and it was precisely the fairy tales that made his public argument (1893, 189). In presenting the queen of the fairies to the naturalists, he introduced them to folkloristic theorizing. By the 1890s, the academic study of folklore had gained prominence because of both its political and epistemological significance. It had rapidly sharpened its theoretical profile throughout the 1880s and became the most obvious candidate for taking the lead in the study of "the mythical mind" (Moe 1926). Its epistemological challenge was to mediate between anthropological models of human universals and the ruptures made evident in the study of society's temporal development. The key term that was designed to address this challenge was *tradition*, which was introduced as a collective singular only by the second half of the nineteenth century (Eriksen 2016; also see Glassie 1995; Noyes 2009). Speaking of tradition served to denote a "parallel, but different type of temporal process" that suggested permanence where historiography documented change (Eriksen 2016, 91).[21] Identifying static traditions in a changing world was a necessary ingredient to substantiate the very notion of historical development: it kept the elements of a historical narrative connected and bridged the gap between past and present. In the context of late nineteenth-century nation-building endeavours, the political relevance was obvious: In identifying (or inventing) traditions, the alleged past of a nation would legitimate its present or future form (Giolláin 2000, 63–93). [30]

By the 1880s and 1890s, scholars of folklore adapted to their new role in the public debate by adding to the psychologized notion of an internalized 'popular memory' to their empirical field of 'popular tradition.' It is here that Yeats found the foundation for his 'great memory' conception.[22] In folklore studies, memory was still understood as a process based on the association of ideas. However, the specific ideas that caught the folklorist's attention—the ingredients of mythical legends—turned out to be astoundingly stable and not arbitrary at all. In their continuity throughout time, certain recurring elements of the imagination appeared as static motifs. They would cluster to constitute traditions spreading from generation to generation, connecting the 'mythical' mentality of the people of ancient times directly to the present. As a *tradition*, fairy tales revealed some form of invariability of the mind. [31]

In a series of reviews written in the early 1890s (collected in Yeats 1970), Yeats enthusiastically documented "the books of folk-lore, coming in these later days from almost every country in the world" to testify "to the ancient supremacy of the imagination" (1893, 188). At no point did Yeats question the general mechanism proposed by the naturalists' psychology. Instead, he raised the question whether the non-empirical associations of ideas found in religious and mythical lore were indeed arbitrary, or whether they were in fact governed by hidden principles. The similar images, characters, and events of timeless "root-stories" had, [32]

20 On Yeats' and the Golden Dawn's connection to French symbolism, see Johannsen (2021, 176–80).

21 This folkloristic approach to the past complements the occult mode of reading history in literary modernism (Surette 1993, 19). Claiming to adhere to a "secret tradition" was a common strategy of legitimizing the engagement with selected ritual practices taken from a different time and context in modern British occultism.

22 On Yeats' role among the Irish pioneers of folklore studies, see Giolláin (2000, 95–113).

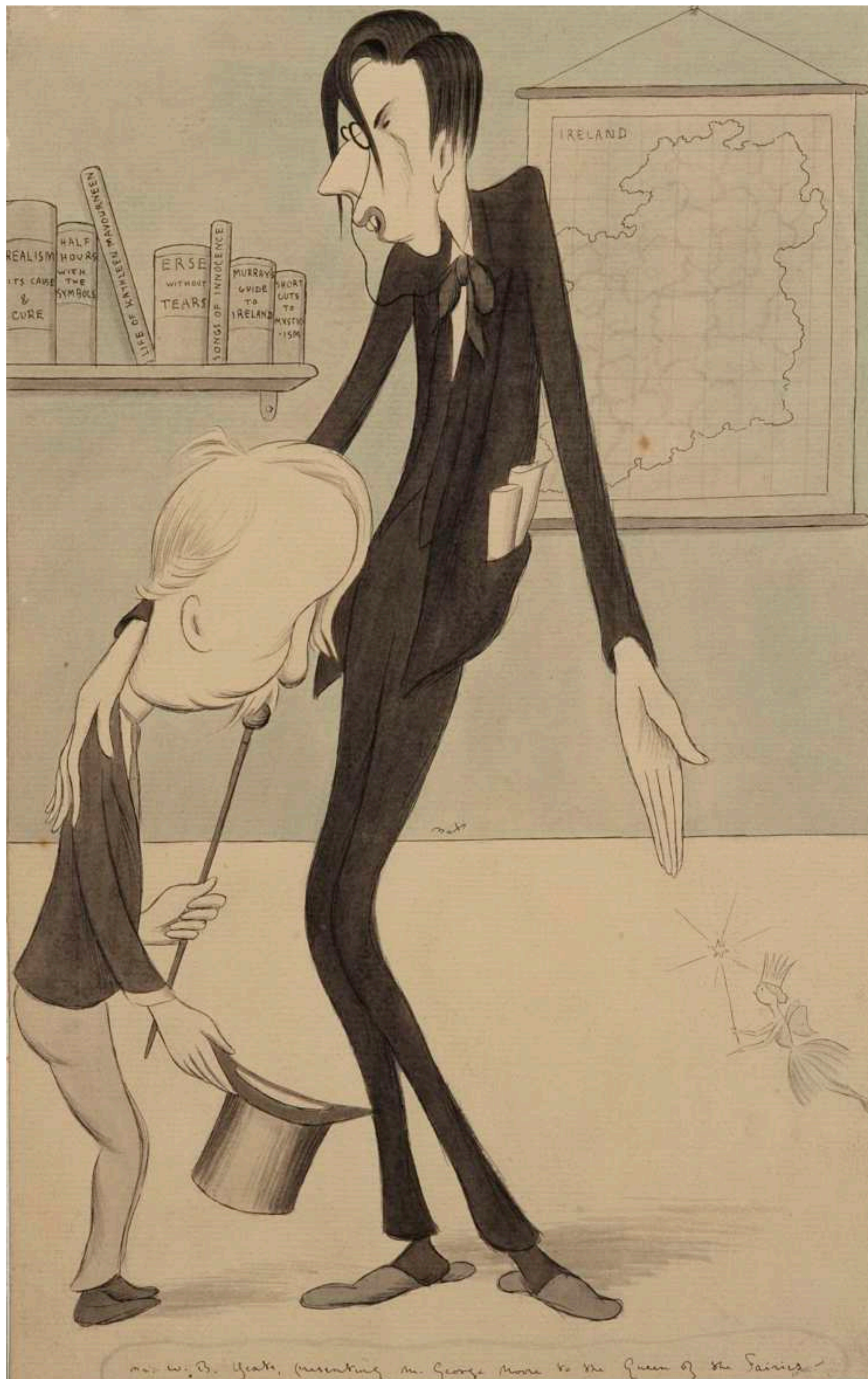

Figure 1 Sir Max Beerbohm, 'Mr W B Yeats Presenting Mr George Moore to the Queen of the Fairies' (1904). Collection & image © Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin (Reg. 71). © The Estate of Max Beerbohm. Yeats' affection for the fairies was a source of constant ridicule. Note the map of Ireland and books with titles such as *Realism: Its Cause & Cure and Short Cuts to Mysticism.*

after all, always functioned as inherent symbols for “feelings and passions which find no adequate expression in common life” (1893, 189). What in the eyes of a naturalist seemed like arbitrary associations of the individual mind, traditions revealed to be established and widely shared associations between form and meaning: they were correspondences.

[33] Through the lens of the literary discourse, Yeats saw the system of magic espoused by the Golden Dawn as a natural extension of the ongoing debate. Echoing Coleridge’s Romantic distinction between associative fantasy and a genuinely creative faculty of the imagination (1817, 1:86–87), the Golden Dawn provided a comprehensive training program aimed at cultivating the imagination’s “plastic energy” and “formative power” (King 1997, 51). Yeats learned to induce and control astral visions and engaged extensively in joint visionary journeys, where initiates ‘collected’ symbolism and compared their results, often trying to confirm the ‘objectivity’ of their insights with cabbalistic hermeneutics (Asprem 2007), studies of early modern grimoires, or, in the case of Yeats, Irish mythological cycles and folkloristic reports. Most importantly, he was not only introduced to the hermetic doctrine of the correspondences ‘between the above and the below,’ but also provided a map to navigate them in the form of tables of correspondences projected onto the cabbalistic Tree of Life, so they could be put to use in both ritual and poetry. In these practices, he found his imagination entangled with all past imaginations. The abstract notions of a universal mind and a great memory had become an experiential reality.

[34] While the tables of correspondences charted the universal mind and the great memory, they did not account for their own impact: the inner movement felt in engaging in a ritual or chanting a poem. Magic and poetry, for Yeats, was not about truth—“everything is true” (Yeats 1894, 7)—but about creating effect. In the literary discourse he found the final ingredient for his dual theory of magic and poetry. The concept of the moods became Yeats’ own contribution to theorize the effect of poetry and the efficacy of the Golden Dawn’s magic.

The Immortal Moods

[35] “Moods” was a “key word in late romanticism” and the subject of much polemic in the literary debates of the 1880s (Hönninghausen 2010, 92). According to realism, the writer’s attention was supposed to turn from emotional introspection to critique of social matters. In 1891, however, Oscar Wilde reinstated “the moods” as a core term of aesthetic philosophy. In *The Critic as Artist*, Wilde famously argued that the highest form of criticism was “the record of one’s own soul,” and that this record would trace “the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind” (1891, 114) that were always subjective but could be shared by everyone: “The aim of art is simply to create a mood” (1891, 143). At that time a protégé of Wilde, Yeats found this treatise to be “wonderful” and set out to learn to control the creation or revelation of moods (Doody 2018, 37). In working with symbols, the artist should aim not at analysis and commentary but at insight and effect—just like the magician. Giving an occult spin to Wilde’s argument, Yeats argued:

[36]
> the business of poetry is not to enforce an opinion or expound an action but to bring us into communion with the moods and passions which are the creative power behind the universe; that though the poet may need to master many opinions, they are but the body and symbols for his art, the formula of evocation for making the invisible visible. (1895b, 169)

Art turned into the occult science of symbolism. Yeats found it at work in the poetry of Shelley, described in its principles in the works of William Blake and the Theosophical Society, formulated as a literary programme by the French symbolist movement, and fully laid out in the Golden Dawn. [37]

The first public presentation of the concept of the moods used as a weapon against naturalism took place in a lecture given at the Chiswick Lodge of the Theosophical Society on July 17, 1893: *The Nature of Art and Poetry in Relation to Mysticism*. Here, Yeats contrasted the realist "mimic art […] based wholly on memory and associations of ideas" to the "true art" of symbolism.[23] Covered by several London papers, the *West London Observer* gave a concise summary of the core ideas presented for discussion (July 22, 1893, 6). The theosophists, Yeats stated in addressing his audience, had found the "true nature of the imagination" in the doctrine of *Mahat*, the universal mind "reflected in the mind of each one of us." Its substance, however, remained unclear, as the "thought forms" proposed by Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant would be composites and therefore not lasting. Instead, the universal mind must be "made up of spiritual states or moods of the universal soul," which would be immortal and unchanging, finding "expression on this plane of matter by means of symbols of colour, form, sound […]." This rather abstract argument had, for Yeats, very practical applications. He referred, for example, to recent reports of an Italian mental institution where different coloured glass windows had shown strong effect on the patients' moods, corresponding to the colours and shapes. In the same way, poetry could evoke moods by carefully assembling symbols, following "the doctrine of correspondences, in the famous Smaragdine table of Herme's Trismegistics [sic], 'as above so below'."[24] [38]

In a later essay, he expounded on the artist's use of correspondences, fully equating art and magic as hermetic disciplines.[25] Symbols were not to be confused with allegory but were simply representations of "things above" by "things below." All art "that is not mere storytelling" has "the purpose of those symbolic talismans which mediæval magicians made with complex colours and forms, and bade their patients ponder over daily […] for it entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the divine essence" (Horton and Yeats 1898, 10). In the Golden Dawn, Yeats had learned the practice of creating painted talismans, and he created his poems accordingly (Johannsen 2021). In a laborious process, he weaved words into symbolic scenes, where allusions, images, and sounds would interact just in the right way to evoke "a perfect emotion," an "immortal mood" (Horton and Yeats 1898, 11). Nothing was arbitrary: Each association of ideas was a potential revelation of correspondences with the universal mind, an actualisation of the forms inscribed in the great memory giving the moods a body to manifest themselves. The work of the poet oscillated between creation and revelation. [39]

Yeats captured this oscillation in his poetic work with the theme of the enchanted enchanter. Enchanted enchanters were the protagonists of almost all of his fiction written in the 1890s, whether they were called Hanrahan or Robartes, Aengus or Forgael. Like the prototypical Irish bard Hanrahan, for example, the artist or the magician controlling the moods is "a maker of the dreams of men," evoking by way of symbol the moods that move men to action (Yeats 1992, 143). At the same time, however, these moods had already imposed themselves on the artist or magician, urging him or her to utter the symbols. In becoming a bard, Hanrahan had [40]

23 *Middlesex County Times*, July 22, 1893, 3.
24 *West London Observer*, July 22, 1893, 6.
25 The essay was published as the introduction to a book of drawings made by his friend W.T. Horton. Yeats had sponsored Horton's initiation to the Golden Dawn in 1896.

been taken by the faeries and was himself enchanted. The moods are both the agent of change and its manifestation.[26]

[41] A first coherent account of this double nature of the moods as "wandering souls" and "passing emotions" is given in Yeats' short story *Rosa Alchemica* (1896), where it is presented as the theory of magic of a secret *Order of the Alchemical Rose*. In this story, the protagonist is taken to the mystical organization's headquarters, where he finds a mysterious book that contains listings of "symbols of form, and sound, and colour, and their attribution to divinities and demons" (1896, 67), i.e., tables of correspondences as they were used in the Golden Dawn.

> [42] The bodiless souls who descended into these forms were what men call the moods; and worked all great changes in the world; for just as the magician or the artist could call them when he would, so they could call out of the mind of the magician or the artist, or if they were demons, out of the mind of the mad or the ignoble, what shape they would, and through its voice and its gestures pour themselves out upon the world. In this way all great events were accomplished; a mood, a divinity, or a demon, first descending like a faint sigh into men's minds and then changing their thoughts and their actions […]. (Yeats 1896, 66)

[43] The moods are the 'permanent spiritual forces,' the spirits conjured in the Solomonic art, the fairies and Gods, to the extent that they are a reflection of human feelings and mental states. As wandering souls that animate men, or as passing emotions expressing "an undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions, a divine love in sexual passion," they are "alone immortal" {(1895c), p. 138], as captured in the poem that was the motto to *The Celtic Twilight* (1894, vii):

> [44] Time drops in decay Like a candle burnt out. And the mountains and woods Have their day, have their day; But, kindly old rout Of the fire-born moods, You pass not away.

A Universal Mind and an Irish Soul: A Psychologized Magic and Poetry

[45] In introducing a magical symbolism to the literary scene, Yeats announced that "the moods of men" were "the region over which art rules," as his friend Arthur Symons phrased it in a declaration written in 1896 at "the weedy rocks of Rosses' Point" in Sligo, where Yeats had encountered the queen of the faeries (Symons 1897, xiv). Timeless and universal, they make each imaginative poet and each initiated magician part of a long tradition. To them, every symbol becomes an "ancient revelation" that makes the past present. While the local faery queen had not (yet?) been able to relate to the concept in 1892, Yeats had made it his key to a new vision of art. The post-naturalistic artist would become again a "priest of those immortal moods which are the true builders of nations, the secret transformers of the world."[27] This proud announcement of a reborn Irish national literature, however, already contained a new challenge: How could the immortal moods account for a specific Irish soul?

[46] By the second half of the 1890's, Yeats began to struggle with the fact that his own theory

26 Yeats had found the idea in William Blake, as his friend Arthur Symons comments: "By *states* Blake means very much what we mean by moods, which in common with many mystics, he conceives as permanent spiritual forces, through which what is transitory in man passes, while man imagines that they, more transitory than himself, are passing through him" [quoted in Hönninghausen (2010), p. 94 [1896]).

27 *Dublin Daily Express*, July 5, 1895, 7.

highlighted the universal, while his literary ambition was leaning towards the national. Yeats was an Anglican with little knowledge of Gaelic, was educated in London and socialized in the British literary scene. To become the Irish national author, the founder of an Irish school of literature, Yeats knew that this national literature could not be defined by language, religious identity, or even provenance. Instead, it needed to equate Irish and Celtic, with the Celtic element envisioned as rooted in the depths of the Irish mind, unaltered by accidental historical events (such as Catholicism) and modes of expression (such as the Gaelic tongue). Still, folklorists and fellow writers started asking critical questions. Leading scholars like the Scottish Andrew Lang had begun to recast the study of folklore as a study of anthropological universals and questioned the idea of national traditions. Yeats conceded that the "natural magic" found in Irish folklore "is but the ancient religion of the world" (Yeats 1903, 275 [1897]). Abandoning academic claims, however, he argued that the overall character of Irish folklore still had a unique national flair because of the specifically Celtic complexion of its moods, but that this aspect of the tradition was inaccessible to the historian.[28] In Irish Literary Society circles there were calls to address the "practical problem" of the modern Irish writer along these lines: "how to cultivate Irish moods, and to ensure their adequate expression and appreciation—how to make Irishmen think and feel as an Irishman ought naturally to think and feel."[29]

The paradox of a national literature based on a universal mind and immortal moods was far too intricate to be solved by natural means, and Yeats resorted to ritual. From 1896 to 1900, he tried to build a "Celtic mystery order" as an offshoot of the Golden Dawn (Yeats 1997, 663–68; Kalogera 1977), which translated the Golden Dawn's system into a "Celtic idiom." Rooted "in the maturity of our traditions," it was meant "to fashion out of the world about us, and the things that our fathers have told us, a new ritual for the builders of peoples, the imperishable moods" (Yeats 1895c, 140). Ritually confronted with the moods they would then express ("for none but the Divine Brotherhood can tell him how men loved and sorrowed, and what things are memorable and what things are alms for oblivion," Yeats 1895c, 138), the poet-adepts of this mystery school would constitute the movement that would re-enchant Ireland. Their literature "though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or of legendary association into holy symbols" (1955, 254). [47]

In his private correspondences from this time, we find that the theoretical and political problems Yeats was struggling with had a deeply personal side. Yeats translates the dichotomy of Celtic and universal poetry into the Golden Dawn's language of occult forces: "'Solar', according to all I learned from Mathers, meant elaborate, full of artifice, rich, all that resembles the work of a goldsmith, whereas 'water' meant 'lunar', and 'lunar' all that is simple, popular, traditional, emotional" (Yeats 1955, 371). Lunar forces carried the Celtic tradition, while the universal knowledge taught in the Golden Dawn was of solar quality. With this interpretation in place, ritual invocations became a remedy against what he perceived to be imbalances in both his work and his character.[30] [48]

As a result, the experience of being torn between the opposing influences of the sun and the moon became a leitmotif of his daily magic practice. When he caught himself composing [49]

28 At this point in the debate, Yeats wondered if 'nationality' captured his ambition, as it evoked notions of a diverse national history which he could not consolidate with his search for timeless moods, and pondered if he should have rather chosen to focus on [the Celtic] race; e.g., see Letter to Standish James O'Grady, August 31, 1895 (1986, 472).

29 *United Ireland*, February 8, 1896, 3.

30 For contemporary takes on invocations of planetary spirits, see Otto's chapter (2023).

fiction interspersed with a “mysticism without any special birthplace” (Yeats 1997, 658) and thus too technical to be of any use in the “spiritualization of the Irish Imagination” (Yeats 1997, Ixi), he would invoke the moon to counter the solar influence (Yeats 1997, 52). Too much lunar influence, however, posed the danger of making his writing unattractive to the wider literary market. Even worse, while “the spirits of the moon,” which he often invoked before bedtime (e.g., Yeats 1997, 48), had given him some of his most important symbols for his poems in his dreams, they wore him down. Because moods were as much spirits as emotions, Yeats saw little difference between the magical production of literature and the magical management of his own mental health. When both he and his uncle Georg Pollexfen suffered from a period of “depression,” for example, ritual was the remedy: “I have found out what is wrong with us. We are attacked by lunar powers & must evoke the sun” (1997, 301). In his daily practice, Yeats’ magic of the moods connected intuitively with the emerging psychological discourse. With the individual mind reflecting the universal mind, and gods and spirits manifesting themselves in passing emotions, it became natural that magical evocations gained a therapeutic function.

Conclusion: The Psychology of the Universal Mind

In his famous 1901 essay *Magic*, we find the genesis of Yeats’ psychologized understanding of magic concisely summarized: [50]

> I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist. At first I tried to distinguish between symbols and symbols, between what I called inherent symbols and arbitrary symbols, but the distinction has come to mean little or nothing. Whether their power has arisen out of themselves, or whether it has an arbitrary origin, matters little, for they act, as I believe, because the great memory associates them with certain events and moods and persons. Whatever the passions of man have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the great memory, and in the hands of him who has the secret, it is a worker of wonders, a caller-up of angels or of devils. The symbols are of all kinds, for everything in heaven or earth has its association, momentous or trivial, in the great memory […]. (Yeats 1903, 64–65 [1901]) [51]

The language of the essay on *Magic*, first presented in the Golden Dawn’s literary *Fellowship of the Three Kings* (Foster 1997, 245), remains the language of the literary discourse. Associations of ideas, Yeats argues, are never arbitrary, as the naturalists had claimed. Everything exists, and the magician and the poet is, willingly or unwillingly, a creator evoking moods with symbols and thus revealing them from the great memory. From the great memory, they develop their potential. [52]

In 1901, Yeats is able to reconsider both religious traditions and magical practices in light of their efficacy. Departing from his earlier neglect of Irish Catholicism, he now finds that religious traditions are culturally effective because their symbols were ‘charged’ by the moods and passions of many generations. This is a psychological theory of religion, but with a twist. Yeats hurries to add that in order for the collective imagination to reveal passions and moods, it is not necessary to “learn” about the symbols and their meaning. His famous poems, often perceived to be obscured by the dense symbolism, were not meant to be understood either, [53]

but to be chanted and heard for their effect to unfold. As Yeats illustrates with the case of folk-magical charms, the so-called "simples," the result is not a placebo effect:

> Knowledgeable men and women in Ireland sometimes distinguish between the simples that work cures by some medical property in the herb, and those that do their work by magic. Such magical simples as the husk of the flax, water out of the fork of an elm-tree, do their work, as I think, by awaking in the depths of the mind where it mingles with the great mind, and is enlarged by the great memory, some curative energy, some hypnotic command. They are not what we call faith cures, for they have been much used and successfully, the traditions of all lands affirm, over children and over animals […]. (Yeats 1903, 65–66 [1901]) [54]

The effect of magic and poetry is thus both psychological and transcendent. As Christopher Plaisance pointed out, a broad range of approaches marks the process of a psychologization of magic in the early twentieth century. Among the modes he identifies, Yeats' approach falls into the category of an "idealistic psychologization," "whereby the esoteric is psychologized at the same time as psychology is esotericized" when "the psychologized vista is […] seen as a 'separate but connected' locus accessible to all by means of the application of esoteric praxis" (2015, 19–20). [55]

This mode is commonly contrasted with "reductionist" approaches, which were manifest in a wider Golden Dawn context in some of Aleister Crowley's writings (Asprem 2008; Pasi 2011).[31] However, Crowley's approach also emerges, though somewhat delayed, from a literary discourse. For example, in his 1904 introductory essay to the *Goetia*, *The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic*, Crowley refers to Herbert Spencer when he identifies magical phenomena as "dependent on brain-changes." The spirits of the *Goetia*, accordingly, become "portions of the human brain," turning the operations of ceremonial magic into "a series of minute, though of course empirical, physiological experiments" (Crowley 1995, 16, 18).[32] In a fin-de-siècle context, this view was neither particularly new nor bold. Crucially, it was not perceived to diminish the value of the ritual scripts. [56]

Spencer's "physiological" re-interpretation of Mill's associative psychology (first in 1855, increasingly popularized with subsequent editions), which declared the laws of association to be determined by the activities of the nervous system, had filled the literary world with enthusiasm. An "urge towards mysticism" swept through Europe, as the Austrian writer and 'prophet of modernity' Herman Bahr observed in 1890, deriving no longer from the heart but from the nervous system (Bahr 1891, 99). After the natural sciences had rejected spirituality, the sciences of the mind had rediscovered the supernatural in the minds of human beings. The artist's task was to explore the "psycho-physiological wheelworks" in order to chart the "uncharted territories of the human mind," as Swedish symbolist Ola Hansson phrased it (Hansson 1890, 321). Truly modern authors would write ghost stories again, but this time filled with "modern ghosts […]: impressions from the world around us and from processes within ourselves that extend beyond the borders of normal consciousness and understanding" (Hansson 1892, 354). In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, for example, van Helsing reveals himself as "a student of the brain," just to argue that his train of associations—hypnotism is empirically [57]

31 Both emphasize that Crowley employed different psychological models, but exchanged them for a supernaturalist model in later writings. In his contribution to this issue, Bogdan shows a continued psychologization also in later works of Crowley (2023).

32 On the *Goetia*, see also Bogdan's chapter (2023).

proven, therefore thought-reading is implied, therefore astral bodies are required, therefore corporeal transformation is possible, and therefore, vampires exist—is logically valid (Stoker 1897, 178). Precisely this kind of psychologized ghost story was the genre of choice among later novelists of the Golden Dawn. Fictional occult detectives with "suitably prepared brains" (Blackwood 1909, 70), such as Algernon Blackwood's John Silence and Aleister Crowley's own Simon Iff (2012), were using psycho-physiological reasoning to study mystifying tragedies and devise magical remedies. By the end of the nineteenth century, the naturalistic "reduction" of the imagination to a feature of the brain provides the rationale for magic.

[58] In contrast to these approaches, Yeats had chosen a different kind of literature. The difference in the mode of psychologization advocated by him and Crowley, for example, reflects their different positions in the artistic scene. Yeats had been an active part of precisely the developments that paved the way for Crowley's approach, but he had rejected the auxiliary device of a "psycho-physiological wheelwork" by the early 1890s. Instead, he cultivated an understanding of poetry that would take the psychological foundations of naturalistic literature seriously but also turn them upside down. Arbitrary associations in poetry and magic could now reveal an entangled imagination that made the passions of the past a reality in the present. In his symbolism, he created a psychologized magic in which associationism became the foundation for a psychology of the universal mind.

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Ars Congressus Cum Daemone: Aleister Crowley and the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel

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ABSTRACT This article analyses experiential knowledge in the writings of the British occultist Aleister Crowley's (1875–1947) writings, and more specifically the so-called Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. I will first discuss Crowley's own account of his attainment of communion with his Guardian Angel, which he set out to accomplish in 1900 and finally realised in 1906. Second, I will discuss a few key texts written by Crowley in which the method for attaining the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel is described, with a special focus on *Liber Samekh* (1920). The first part of this article can thus be seen as the *practiced* aspect of the Holy Guardian Angel experience, while the second part is the *prescribed* aspect. By way of concluding, I will address the entangled nature of the instructional texts of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.

KEYWORDS Experiential knowledge, Aleister Crowley, Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, magic, occultism, Holy Guardian Angel

> 'I am indeed SENT to do something.' For whom? For the universe; no partial good could possibly satisfy his equation. I am, then, the 'chosen Priest and Apostle of Infinite Space'. Very good: and what is that message? What shall I teach men? And like lightning from heaven fell upon him these words: 'THE KNOWLEDGE AND CONVERSATION OF THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGEL.' (Crowley 1912, 13)

Introduction

[1] The relationship between magic, initiation, and experiential knowledge is perhaps nowhere so systematically and dramatically expressed as in the writings of the British poet and magus Aleister Crowley (1875–1947).[1] Ever since his initiation into the Hermetic Order of the Golden

1 On Crowley's concept of magic, or 'Magick,' as he preferred to spell it, see, inter alia, Asprem (2008), Otto (2011, 600–614), Pasi (2012).

Dawn at the age of 23, Crowley devoted his life to what he termed the Great Work, and central to his understanding of this work was a specific set of experiences which he claimed had a transformative effect.[2] Framed in the terminology of the Golden Dawn, the experiences were to a large extent conceptualized by Crowley as initiations leading to "Spiritual Progress and Illumination."[3] These transformative experiences were, moreover, not unique to Crowley himself, for Crowley saw himself as a teacher, and by following his teachings, he claimed, everybody from a banker to a factory girl could attain similar experiences.[4]

[2] There is a staggering amount of references to initiation and experiential knowledge in Crowley's writings, both published and unpublished, but in this article I will focus on what is arguably the most important and significant initiatory or transformative experience in Crowley's magical system, the so-called Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.[5] More specifically, I will discuss first Crowley's own account of his attainment of communion with his Guardian Angel, which he set out to accomplish in 1900 and finally realized in 1906. Second, I will discuss a few key texts written by Crowley in which the method for attaining the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel is described. The first part of this article can thus be seen as the *practiced* aspect of the Holy Guardian Angel experience, while the second part is the *prescribed* aspect. By way of concluding, I will address the entangled nature of the instructional texts of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. However, before venturing into the topic of the Guardian Angel, I will briefly discuss Crowley's understating of Initiation and the Great Work.

Initiation—the Journey Inwards

[3] The concept of "initiation" is central to Aleister Crowley's particular form of occultism, Thelema.[6] Not only were the two organizations he used to promulgate his system—the O.T.O. and the A∴A∴—*initiatory* societies whose rituals of initiation were influenced (directly or indirectly) by eighteenth-century Freemasonry, but Crowley's process of spiritual enlightenment was explained as a series of initiations or spiritual transformations.[7] These initiations can best be described as particular experiences that have transformative effects on the initiate's understanding of existence. But what did Crowley mean by the term initiation? Crowley stated repeatedly that his definition of initiation is the "Way In" or "Journey Inwards", that is, an inner journey whereby different levels of consciousness are explored (e.g. Crowley [1938]

2 Following William James's classic study *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902), scholars of religion have dealt with the importance of religious experiences. More recently, the scholar of religion Ann Taves has referred to such experiences or "revelatory events" as the "building blocks" of religion, thus pointing towards the centrality of religious experiences in the construct of religious traditions. See Taves (2009) and Taves (2016).

3 "Primarily, this Body exists for the purpose of conferring Initiation. Secondly, It prepares people for Initiation by means of courses of instruction" (Crowley 1919a, 11); "It offers instruction in the Way of Spiritual Progress and Illumination to individual seekers" (Crowley 1919b, 10).

4 As stated in his magnum opus, *Magick In Theory and Practice*: "I have written this book to help the Banker, the Pugilist, the Biologist, the Poet, the Navvy, the Grocer, the Factory Girl, the Mathematician, the Stenographer, the Golfer, the Wife, the Consul—and all the rest—to fulfill themselves perfectly, each in his or her own function (Crowley 1929b, xv).

5 The second most important transformative experience is the so-called Crossing of the Abyss, which, however, falls outside the scope of the present article.

6 For a brief introduction to Thelema, see Bogdan (2015).

7 On the OTO, see Hedenborg White (2022); Asprem (2016); Giudice (2015); Pasi (2005). A scholarly history and analysis of the A∴A∴ remains to be written. For a post-Crowley account of these two organizations, see Readdy (2018).

1991, 49) and (Crowley [1954] 1991, 204). Crowley furthermore stated that it is impossible to distinguish initiation from enlightenment and that the initiatory process ultimately aims at the realization of the Self. Or to use Crowley's own words as he put it towards the end of his life to one of his female disciples: "What is the meaning of Initiation? It is the Path to the realization of your Self as the sole, the supreme, the absolute of all Truth, Beauty, Purity, Perfection" (Crowley [1954] 1991, 428).[8]

[4] Crowley elaborated on his understanding of Initiation to the same disciple in another letter, in which he explained that initiation "implies the liberation and development of the genius latent in us all (is not one of the names of the 'Holy Guardian Angel' the Genius?) [...]" (Crowley [1954] 1991, 460). The cultivation of the genius or creative power in man and woman was, furthermore, linked to Crowley's concept of True Will. According to the religious system of Thelema, of which Crowley saw himself as the prophet, each man and woman has a True Will or essence, and it is the main task of each one of us to discover and act according to this True Will, famously expressed in the words "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" (*Liber AL vel Legis* 1938 [sic], I:40). As indicated above, Crowley connected the discovery of the True Will with the transformative experience of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. To Crowley, the Holy Guardian Angel was nothing but the unconscious aspect of the mind, and consequently the object of his magical system was to become conscious of the unconscious. Furthermore, Crowley believed that the unconsciousness contained the very essence of each human being, and by discovering this essence one would find the answers to humankind's basic existential questions: Who am I, and what is the purpose of my life? Or to put it in the words of Crowley himself:

> [5] It should now be perfectly simple for everybody to understand the Message of the Master Therion [i.e., Crowley]. Thou must (1) Find out what is thy Will, (2) Do that Will with (a) one-pointedness, (b) detachment, (c) peace. Then, and then only, art thou in harmony with the Movement of Things, thy will part of, and therefore equal to, the Will of God. And since the will is but the dynamic aspect of the self, and since two different selves could not possess identical wills; then, if thy will be God's will, *Thou art That.* (Crowley 1919c, 42)

[6] But where did Crowley encounter the idea of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel?

The Golden Dawn, Initiation, the Great Work, and the Holy Guardian Angel

[7] A few months after Crowley's death on December 1, 1947, his former disciple and so-called Magical Son, Charles Stansfeld Jones, stated bluntly in a letter to Albert H. Handel that "all of Aleister Crowley's work is based on the Golden Dawn."[9] While this might be a bit of an exaggeration, it is undeniably true that although Crowley would remain an active member of the Golden Dawn for only two years, from 1898 to 1900, the peculiar epistemology and initiatory system of the Order would stay with him for the rest of his life. Looking back over

8 Crowley's last major work was written in the 1940s in the form of letters to his student Anne Macky (1887–1964). Originally called *Aleister Explains Everything*, it was published posthumously in 1954 as *Magick without Tears* (Hampton, NJ: Thelema Publishing Co.).

9 Charles Stansfeld Jones to Albert H. Handel, June 9, 1948. Private collection.

two decades later on his first initiation in the Golden Dawn on November 18, 1898—a date which he would commemorate until he died—Crowley recollected the impact it had upon him:

> I took the Order with absolute seriousness. I was not even put off by the fact of its ceremonies taking place at Mark Mason's Hall. I remember asking […] whether people often died during the ceremony. I had no idea that it was a flat formality and that the members were for the most part muddled middle-class mediocrities. I saw myself entering the Hidden Church of the Holy Grail. This state of my soul served me well. My initiation was in fact a sacrament (Crowley 1970, 176). [8]

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn stands as the most influential of all occultist and magical orders to have emerged in the English-speaking world.[10] Its influence lies primarily in the systematisation, on the one hand, of the theoretical occult knowledge that its members were expected to learn before advancing to the next degree in the Order's hierarchical system of initiation, and, on the other hand, of the initiatory process that the teachings and practices were believed to result in (see on the Golden Dawn also Johannsen's article 2023; for a very recent adaptation of Golden Dawn techniques, see Otto 2023, both included in this special issue of *Entangled Religions*). This process took the outward form of the kabbalistic Tree of Life, in which each degree corresponded to a sephira or path on the Tree.[11] [9]

During his brief stay in the Golden Dawn, Crowley made a swift ascent from Malkuth to Tiphereth, that is, from the grade of Neophyte to that of Adeptus Minor, but he would continue to measure or map his spiritual development by the Tree of Life after he had left the order.[12] In January 1906 he claimed the Grade of Adeptus Exemptus (Chesed), and by December the same year he Crossed the Abyss and claimed the grade of Magister Templi (Binah).[13] Eight years later, while staying in the US, he embarked on his initiation leading to Magus (Chokmah), which would take him two and a half years to complete, from November 3, 1914, to June 9, 1917. Finally, although he never stated it publicly, on May 23, 1921 he took the Oath of an Ipsissimus $10^{\circ} = 1^{\square}$, and underwent the initiation leading to the highest sephirah, Kether, which would take him three years to complete. [10]

> I am by insight and initiation an Ipsissimus; I'll face the phantom of myself, and tell it so to its teeth. I will invoke Insanity itself, but having thought the Truth, I will not flinch from fixing it in word and deed, whatever come of it (Kaczynski 2010, 370). [11]

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10 The best historical account of the Golden Dawn remains Ellic Howe's *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887-1923* (1972). See also Gilbert (1983); Gilbert (1986) and Regardie (1937–1940).

11 Crowley published (somewhat abridged versions of) the rituals of initiation of the Golden Dawn in Crowley (1909a) (Outer Order), Crowley (1909b, 244–88), and Crowley (1910, 208–23) (Adeptus Minor). Regardie published the rituals of one of the Golden Dawn's offshoots, the Stella Matutina, in part 3 of his *The Golden Dawn: An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* (1937–1940, vol. 3). The first publication of the complete rituals of the original Outer Order of the Golden Dawn is Torrens (1972).

12 Crowley's advancement through the initiatory system of the Golden Dawn was as follows: Neophyte in November 1898; Zelator, December 1898; Theoricus, January 1899; Practicus, February 1899; Philosophus, May 1899; Adeptus Minor, January 1900. The latter initiation was performed at the Ahathoor Temple in Paris, since the adepts of the Second Order in London refused to initiate Crowley on charges of immoral conduct. See Crowley (1970, 178).

13 These two initiations were confirmed by Crowley's collaborator, George Cecil Jones (1873–1960), and thereby afforded Crowley and Jones with the spiritual legitimacy to found the Order of the Silver Star, or A∴A∴ The final two grades, Magus and Ipsissimus, were claimed by Crowley on his own.

The unique point about the Golden Dawn was that at the centre of its initiatory structure, a specific type of experiential knowledge or *gnosis* was believed to be accessed. Technically, this was believed to occur once the adept had been admitted to the inner order of the Golden Dawn, at the Adeptus Minor Grade $5^{\circ} = 6^{\square}$ which corresponded to Tiphereth on the kabbalistic Tree of Life.[14] It was at this stage of the initiatory process that it was believed that the member should establish contact with his or her genius or higher self (Augoeides).[15] In the Adeptus Minor initiation ritual, the candidate was obliged to take the following obligation: [12]

> I further promise and swear that with the Divine Permission I will, from this day forward, apply myself to the Great Work—which is, to purify and exalt my Spiritual Nature so that with the Divine Aid I may at length attain to be more than human, and thus gradually raise and unite myself to my higher and Divine Genius, and that in this event I will not abuse the great power entrusted to me. (Regardie 1937–1940, 2:214) [13]

The Divine Genius that the members of the Golden Dawn sought to unite with was referred to by different names, such as the Higher Self, the Daemon, and the Holy Guardian Angel.[16] The latter term derived from the notion of the "Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel" found in *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* (1898). This book, first translated into English and published in 1898 by the Golden Dawn Chief Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918), would come to have a marked influence on Crow- [14]

14 The initiatory structure of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was based on the kabbalistic Tree of Life, and each grade was attributed to a specific sephira, which was indicated through the two numbers following the grade name. Thus, in the case of the Adeptus Minor Grade, the numbers $5^{\circ} = 6^{\square}$ refer to the fact that this grade is the *fifth* grade of the Order, and that it refers to the *sixth* sephira on the Tree of Life, counted from the top down, i.e., Tiphereth.

15 Augoeides is usually translated as luminous body or the Body of Light. The early Neoplatonist Porphyry (c. 234–c. 305) wrote of the Augoeides, and it became a popular concept in late nineteenth-century Theosophical and occultist literature through Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Zanoni* (1842). For a genealogy of the subtle body in Western culture, see Cox (2022).

16 Crowley argued that the transformative experience referred to by names such as the Higher Self or the Holy Guardian Angel was universal and that it could be found in all religious systems—the name differed, but the experience was the same. "Lytton calls him Adonai in 'Zanoni,' and I often use this name in the note-books. Abramelin calls him Holy Guardian Angel. I adopt this: 1. Because Abramelin's system is so simple and effective. 2. Because since *all* theories of the universe are absurd it is better to talk in the language of one which is patently absurd, so as to mortify the metaphysical man. 3. Because a child can understand it. Theosophists call him the Higher Self, Silent Watcher, or Great Master. The Golden Dawn calls him the Genius. Gnostics say the Logos. Zoroaster talks about uniting all these symbols into the form of a Lion—see Chaldean Oracles. Anna Kingsford calls him Adonai (Clothed with the Sun). Buddhists call him Adi-Buddha—(says H. P. B.) The Bhagavad-Gita calls him Vishnu (chapter xi.). The Yi *K*ing calls him "The Great Person." The Qabalah calls him Jechidah. We also get metaphysical analysis of His nature, deeper and deeper according to the subtlety of the writer; for this vision—it is all one same phenomenon, variously coloured by our varying Ruachs—is, I believe, the first and the last of all Spiritual Experience. For though He is attributed to Malkuth, and the Door of the Path of His overshadowing, He is also in Kether (Kether is in Malkuth and Malkuth in Kether—'as above, so beneath'), and the End of the 'Path of the Wise' is identity with Him. So that while he is the Holy Guardian Angel, He is also Hua and the Tao. For since Intra Nobis Regnum del all things are in Ourself, and all Spiritual Experience is a more or less complete Revelation of Him. Yet it is only in the Middle Pillar that His manifestation is in any way perfect. The Augoedes invocation is the whole thing. Only it is so difficult; one goes along through all the fifty gates of Binah at once, more or less illuminated, more or less deluded. But the First and the Last is this Augoeides Invocation" (Crowley 1909b, 159–60).

ley.[17] First published in German in 1725, (Worms 1725)[18] this early seventeenth-century magical handbook follows a similar modus operandi as other grimoires in the sense that the magician, through purifications and divine empowerment, seeks to control demonic forces for material ends.[19] *Abra-Melin* differs, however, from other grimoires in that the divine force is envisioned as a personal guardian angel with whom the magician can establish contact through a six-month long elaborate ritual which includes daily prayers, mediations and a strict moral conduct.[20] Once the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel has been experienced, the magician is supposed to consecrate 49 talismans which provide him with 316 servitors. In his lengthy introduction to the book, Mathers was conspicuously brief about this unique feature of the Abra-Melin system of magic, and he merely stated that:

> […] to each man is attached naturally both a Guardian Angel and a Malevolent Demon, and also certain Spirits that may become Familiars, so that with him it rests to give the victory unto the which he will. (κ) That, therefore, in order to control and make service of the Lower and Evil, the knowledge of the Higher and Good is requisite (*i.e.*, in the language of the Theosophy of the present day, the knowledge of the Higher Self). [15]
>
> From this it results that the *magnum opus* propounded in this work is: by purity and self-denial to obtain the knowledge of and conversation with one's Guardian Angel, so that thereby and thereafter we may obtain the right of using the Evil Spirits for our servants in all material matters. [16]
>
> This, then, is the system of the Secret Magic of Abra-Melin, the Mage, as taught by his disciple Abraham the Jew; and elaborated down to the smallest points (Mathers 1898, xxvi). [17]

It is perhaps not all that surprising that Mathers did not elaborate any further on the notion of the Guardian Angel, since the importance and full significance of this concept in the Golden Dawn system was, presumably, restricted to members of the highly secretive Second or Inner Order, the Rosæ Rubeæ et Aureæ Crucis (the Rose of Ruby and the Cross of Gold).[21] What *is* surprising, however, is the lack of any official Golden Dawn documents or instructions for uniting with the Divine Genius, or in the terminology of Abra-Melin, for reaching the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.[22] As we will see, there is in fact only one Golden Dawn instruction for this particular purpose, a Second Order invocation which Israel Regardie named "The Bornless Ritual for the Invocation of the Higher Genius" [18]

17 Mathers's translation of the book was based on a French manuscript held at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, entitled "La sacrée magie que Dieu donna à Moyse Aaron David Salomon, et à d'autres saints patriarches et prophètes, qui enseigne la vraye sapience divine, laisse par Abraham à Lamech son fils, traduite de l'hebreau. 1458" (MS. 2351). For a detailed discussion of the publishing history of Mathers's edition of *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*, see Howe (1972, chap. 12 and 13).

18 For a modern English translation, see Dehn (2015).

19 For a discussion of the grimoire genre, see Davies (2009) and Davies' article published in this special issue of *Entangled Religions* (2023).

20 The earlier German manuscript version, and the von Worms edition of 1725, prescribed an 18-month long ritual, rather than six months as prescribed in the Mathers's edition. See Dehn (2015, 123–29).

21 See the Adeptus Minor obligation quoted above.

22 For a complete catalogue of all Second Order documents, see Gilbert (1986, 98–117). References to the Divine Genius, Daimon, etc., can be found in various Golden Dawn papers—see, for instance, the paper called "The Microcosm"—but there are no papers that deal exclusively with this central concept, as far as I have been able to ascertain.

(1937–1940, 4:259–265).[23] However, this ritual is not listed among the official Second Order rituals, and this raises the question as to what degree this transformative experience was actually an established part of the Golden Dawn tradition. Be that as it may, Crowley was deeply impressed with *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Magic*, and his encounter with the book deserves to be quoted in full:

> It was not long before I found out exactly where my destiny lay. The majority of old magical rituals are either purposely unintelligible or actually puerile nonsense. Those which are straightforward and workable are, as a rule, better adapted to the ambitions of love-sick agricultural labourers than those of educated people with a serious purpose. But there is one startling exception to this rule. It is *The Book of the Sacred Magick of Abra-Melin the Mage*. [19]
>
> This book is written in an exalted style. It is perfectly coherent; it does not demand fantastic minutiae of ritual or even the calculations customary. There is nothing to insult the intelligence. On the contrary, the operation proposed is of sublime simplicity. The method is in entire accordance with this. There are, it is true, certain prescriptions to be observed, but these really amount to little more than injunctions to observe decency in the performance of so august an operation. One must have a house where proper precautions against disturbance can be taken; this being arranged, there is really nothing to do but to aspire with increasing fervour and concentration, for six months, towards the obtaining of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. Once He has appeared, it is then necessary, first, to call forth the Four Great Princes of the Evil of the World; next, their eight sub-princes; and, lastly, the three hundred and sixteen servitors of these. A number of talismans, previously prepared, are thus charged with the power of these spirits. By applying the proper talismans, you can get practically anything you want. [20]
>
> It cannot be denied that the majesty and philosophical irreproachability of the book are sensibly diminished by the addition of these things to the invocation of the Holy Guardian Angel. I should have preferred it without them. There is, however, a reason. Anyone who reaches a new world must conform with all the conditions of it. It is true, of course, that the hierarchy of evil appears somewhat repugnant to science. It is in fact very hard to explain that we mean by saying that we invoke Paimon; but, to go a little deeper, the same remark applies to Mr. Smith next door. We do not know who Mr. Smith is, or what is his place in nature, or how to account for him. We cannot even be sure that he exists. Yet, in practice, we call Smith by that name and he comes. By the proper means, we can induce him to do for us those things which are consonant with his nature and powers. The whole question is, therefore, one of practice; and by this standard we find that there is no particular reason for quarrelling with the conventional nomenclature. At this time I had not worked out any such apology for the theories of transcendentalism. I took everything as it came and submitted it to the test of experience. As it happened, I had no reason at any time to doubt the reality of the magical universe (Crowley 1970, 172–73). [21]

23 In a paper written 1978 by Regardie entitled "The Bornless Ritual: Several versions and a cursory analysis," it is stated that the ritual was actually compiled by Regardie himself, using Golden Dawn formulae.

The Abra-Melin Working & The Bornless Invocation

On February 21, 1900, Crowley commenced the Abra-Melin working at Boleskine House by Loch Ness in Scotland, which he had bought a few months earlier for the specific purpose of carrying out the elaborate rituals described in *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*. At the outset of his diary for the period, he recorded the following Oath: [22]

> I, Perdurabo, Frater Ordinis Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis. A Lord of the Paths in the Portal of the Vault of the Adepts. A $5^{\circ}=6^{\square}$ of the Order of the Golden Dawn; and an humble servant of the Christ of God; do this day spiritually bind myself anew: by the Sword of Vengeance: by the Powers of the Elements: by the Cross of Suffering: that I will devote myself to the Great Work: the Obtaining and Communion with my own Higher and Divine Genius (called the Guardian Angel) by means of the prescribed course: and that I will use any Power so obtained unto the Redemption of the Universe So help me the Lord of the Universe and mine own Higher Soul! (Crowley Forthcoming)[24] [23]

Crowley prepared the Abra-Melin Working by acquiring the necessary equipment, such as a new censer for the incense. Surprisingly, he commenced the work by constructing and charging the Abra-Melin squares or talismans, contrary to the instructions laid out in *The Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*, in which it is stated that the talismans should be consecrated *after* the magician had reached the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.[25] On March 10, he reaffirmed the Oath of carrying out the Abra-Melin magic and to unite his consciousness with the divine, but only a few weeks later he had to abandon the working and travel to Paris and London in order to assist Mathers in his attempt to resume control over the Golden Dawn, which ultimately failed. The perhaps most conspicuous feature of this abortive attempt at carrying out the Abra-Melin magic is the emphasis that Crowley placed on interpreting his dreams, and it appears that he believed that the invocations of various deities manifested in his dreams. Although Crowley would continue to place great importance on dreams as a means to explore the unconscious, the direct correlation between invocations and dreams seems to have become less important for Crowley as he matured as a magician. [24]

It would take six years, until February 1906, before Crowley made a new attempt at attaining the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel.[26] At the time, Crowley was travelling with his wife Rose (1874-1932) and their baby daughter Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith (1904–1906) across China, and since they were travelling on horseback Crowley did not have the possibility of carrying out the elaborate rituals as described in the *Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*. Instead, Crowley chose to use the so-called "Preliminary" or "Bornless Invocation", which he had included in his 1904 edition of the classic grimoire *The Book of the Goetia of Solomon the King* (Crowley 1904, vii–ix).[27] The inclusion [25]

24 All subsequent quotes from Crowley's diaries in this article are taken from this source, unless otherwise stated.

25 Crowley kept his Abra-Melin squares in a large-sized scrapbook, which remained with him until he died in Hastings in 1947. The book was later shipped to Crowley's successor as head of the O.T.O. and A∴A∴ Karl Germer (1885–1962) in the US, from whose library it was eventually stolen by members of the Solar Lodge. See Shiva (2007, 162–65). See also Yorke (1972, xvi).

26 On a very different but related take on the Holy Guardian Angel, see Otto's chapter on Frater Acher (2023) and the latter's recent book *Holy Daimon* (2020).

27 For a full discussion of Crowley's edition of *The Goetia*, see the Editor's Foreword, written by Hymenaeus Beta, to the second edition of *The Goetia* (1995, xiii–xxvi).

of this invocation to *The Goetia* was a strange decision, for the text had nothing to do with the grimoire tradition of Western Learned Magic.[28] In fact, it is an exorcism taken from the Greek London Papyrus 46, first published in English in 1852 by Charles Wycliffe Goodwin (1817–1878) under the title *Fragment of a Græco-Egyptian Work upon Magic* for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society.[29] The exorcism (named "An address to the god drawn upon the letter" by Goodwin) was written down in fourth century-Egypt and obtained in the early nineteenth century by the Armenian merchant and collector of Egyptian antiquities Giovanni Anastasi (1780–1857). Anastasi, who was appointed Consul-General in Egypt to Sweden and Norway in 1828, amassed a huge collection of ancient Egyptian artefacts, including a large number of important papyri. The Trustees of the British Museum acquired many of these papyri at an auction held in London in September 1839, one of which was the exorcism later published by Goodwin.[30]

[26] As can be seen below in Table 1, the "Preliminary Invocation" from Crowley's edition of *The Goetia* closely follows Goodwin's English translation of section four of the Greek London Papyrus 46, together with the "Barbarous Names" included by Goodwin in the Greek text only (such as Ar, Thiao, Rheibet, Atheleberseth, etc.).[31] While Crowley had commissioned Mathers to "translate" *The Goetia*—the manuscripts which Mathers used were actually written in English—it is unclear who the actual author of the "Preliminary Invocation" was, although it seems likely that it was Mathers.[32] Significantly enough, it was Crowley who decided to include "The Preliminary Invocation" in Mathers's translation of *The Goetia*.[33]

[27] In contrast to *The Goetia* and other grimoires, the Bornless Invocation is not directed towards any Judeo-Christian divinities or demonic powers, but instead includes so-called Barbarous Names of Evocation (which Crowley would analyze in detail in *Liber Samekh*).[34] Furthermore, the exorcism is reinterpreted as an invocation, and "the headless one" is renamed "the Bornless one", understood to represent the Genius or the Holy Guardian Angel. Not only has the original Greek exorcism been radically reinterpreted as an invocation, but the division of the text into several parts headed by Hebrew letters indicates that the "Preliminary Invocation" was construed as a ritual of purification through the elements—an intrinsic component of the Golden Dawn system of magic. Thus Aleph, the first subdivision, represents the element Air. Shin, the second, represents the element Fire. Mem, the third, represents Water, and Tau, the fourth, represents the element Earth. Finally, the word Amen (Aleph, Mem, Nun) would

28 For a thorough discussion of the scholarly category "Western Learned Magic", see Otto (2016).

29 The title of the invocation, consisting of section 4 of the papyrus, is given as "An address to the god drawn upon the letter". The original Greek with an English translation can be found on pp. 6-9. The first 12 lines of Goodwin's English translation were reprinted by the Egyptologist A.E. Wallis Budge (1857–1934) in *Egyptian Magic* (1899, 176). A modern English translation can be found in Betz (1986, 103), specifically PGM V, "Stele of Jeu the Hieroglyphist in his letter".

30 For a brief overview of Giovanni Anastasi's role in bringing Egyptian antiquities to Europe, see Dawson (1949, 158–66).

31 Frater Acher, the practitioner discussed in Otto's article in the present special issue (2023), in a similar manner implemented an ancient recipe from the Greek Magical Papyri into his *Arbatel* workings.

32 The Golden Dawn and Crowleyana collector Gerald Yorke (1901–1983) states unequivocally that "The Preliminary Invocation" was written by Mathers (Yorke 1972, xv).

33 "I had employed Mathers to translate the text of *The Lesser Key of Solomon the King* of which *The Goetia* is the first section. He got no further; after events of 1900, he had simply collapsed morally. I added a translation of the conjurations into the Enochian or Angelic language; edited and annotated the text, prefixed a 'Preliminary Invocation', added a prefatory note, a Magical Square [taken from Abra-Melin] (intended to prevent improper use of the book) and ultimately an Invocation of Typhon when the First Magical War of the Aeon of Horus was declared" (Crowley 1970, 362).

34 See also Goodwin's detailed discussion of these names (1852, 38–42).

in this context represent the fifth element, Spirit. Crowley would, almost two decades later, expand on these attributions to the elements in *Liber Samekh*.

Table 1 Comparison between "An address to the god drawn upon the letter" (1852) and "Preliminary Invocation" (1904)

"An address to the god drawn upon the letter"	"Preliminary Invocation"
I call thee, the headless one, that didst create the earth and the heaven, that didst create night and day, Thee the creator of light and darkness. Thou art Osoronnophris, whom no man has seen at any time; thou art Iabas thou art Iapos: thou hast distinguished the Just and the unjust, thou didst make female and male, thou didst produce the seeds and the fruits, thou didst make men to love one another and to hate one another.	Thee I invoke, the Bornless one. Thee that didst create the Earth and the Heavens: Thee that didst create the Night and the Day. Thee that didst create the Darkness and the Light. Thou art Osorronophris: Whom no man has seen at any time. Thou art Iäbas Thou art Iäpôs: Thou hast distinguished between the Just and the Unjust. Thou didst make the Female and the Male. Thou didst produce the Seed and the Fruit. Thou didst form Men to love one another, and to hate one another.
I am Moses thy prophet, to whom thou didst commit thy mysteries, the Ceremonies of Israel: thou didst produce the moist and the dry, and all manner of food. Listen to me: I am an angel of Paphro Osoronnophris; this is thy true name, handed down to the prophets of Israel.	I am Mosheh Thy Prophet, unto Whom Thou didst commit Thy Mysteries, the Ceremonies of Ishrael: Thou didst produce the moist and the, dry, and that which nourisheth all created Life. Hear Thou Me, for I am the Angel of Paphrô Osorronophris: this is Thy True Name, handed down to the Prophets of Ishrael.

“An address to the god drawn upon the letter”	“Preliminary Invocation”
Listen to me,…………………….. hear me drive away this spirit. I call thee the terrible and invisible god residing in the empty wind, ………………………… thou headless one, deliver such an one from the spirit that possesses him. ………………………………… strong one, headless one, deliver such an one from the spirit that possesses him. ……………………………….. deliver such an one…………………… This is the lord of the gods, this is the lord of the world, this is he whom the winds fear, this is he who made voice by his commandment, lord of all things, king, ruler, helper, save this soul………………………………….. angel of God…………………………………..	[Aleph] Hear Me:– Ar: Thiao: Rheibet: Atheleberseth: A: Blatha: Abeu: Ebeu: Phi: Thitasoe: Ib: Thiao. Hear Me, and make all Spirits subject unto Me: so that every Spirit of the Firmament and of the Ether; upon the Earth and under the Earth: on dry Land and in the Water: of Whirling Air, and of rushing Fire: and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me. [Shin] I invoke Thee, the Terrible and Invisible God: Who dwellest in the Void Place of the Spirit:– Arogogorobraô: Sothou: Modoriô: Phalarthaô: Döö: Apé, The Bornless One: Hear Me: etc. [Mem] Hear me:– Roubriaô: Mariôdam: Balbnabaoth: Assalonai: Aphniaô: I: Thoteth: Abrasar: Aëöôü: Ischure, Mighty and Bornless One! Hear me: etc. [Tau] I invoke thee:– Ma: Barraiô: Jôêl: Kotha: Athorêbalô: Abraoth: Hear Me: etc.

"An address to the god drawn upon the letter"	"Preliminary Invocation"
I am the headless spirit, having sight in my feet, strong, the immortal fire; I am the truth; I am he that hateth that ill-deeds should be done in the world; I am he that lighteneth and thundereth; I am he whose sweat is the showerthat falleth upon the earth that it may teem; I am he whose mouth ever burneth; I am the begetter and the bringer forth (?); I am the Grace of the World; my name is the heart girt with a serpent. Come forth and follow. – The celebration of the preceding ceremony. – Write the names upon a piece of new paper, and having extended it over your forehead from one temple to the other, address yourself turning towards the north to the six names, saying: – Make all the spirits subject to me, so that every spirit of heaven and of the air, upon the earth and under the earth, on dry land and in the water, and every spell and scourge of God, may be obedient to me. – And all the spirits shall be obedient to you. ……………….	[Aleph, Mem, Nun] Hear me! Aôth: Abaôth: Basum: Isak: Sabaoth: Iao: This is the Lord of the Gods: This is the Lord of the Universe: This is He Whom the Winds fear. This is He, Who having made Voice by His Commandment, is Lord of All Things; King, Ruler and Helper. Hear Me, etc. Hear Me:– Ieou: Pûr: Iou: Pûr: Iaôt: Iaeô: Ioou: Abrasar: Sabriam: Do: Uu: Adonaie: Ede: Edu: Angelos ton Theon: Aniaia Lai: Gaia: Ape: Diathanna Thorun. I am He! the Bornless Spirit! having sight in the feet: Strong, and the Immortal Fire! I am He! the Truth! I am He! Who hate that evil should be wrought in the, World! I am He, that lighteneth and thundereth.
	I am He, from Whom is the Shower of the Life of Earth: I am He, Whose mouth ever flameth: I am He, the Begetter and Manifester unto the Light: I am He; the Grace of the World: "The Heart Girt with a Serpent" is My Name! Come Thou forth, and follow Me: and make all Spirits subject unto Me so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether: upon the Earth and under the Earth: on dry Land, or in the Water: of whirling Air or of rushing Fire: and every Spell and Scourge of God, may be obedient unto Me! Iao: Sabao: Such are the Words!

So why did Crowley choose to include the "Preliminary Invocation" in *The Goetia*, and perhaps more importantly, why did he use it as a substitute for the Abra-Melin magic when invoking his Holy Guardian Angel in 1906? The answer is simply that he got it from the Golden Dawn, where an extended version was circulated among select members of the Second Order.[35] It was most likely MacGregor Mathers, or perhaps Allan Bennett (1872–1923), who devised this extended version, which was divided into five parts corresponding to the elements Air, Fire, Water, Earth, and Spirit, respectively (see Appendix). Although not stated explicitly by Crowley in the account of his attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, it seems likely that Crowley used the extended Golden Dawn version in 1906.[36] [28]

The first recorded invocation of the Guardian Angel, using the Bornless Invocation from *The Goetia*, is dated February 16, 1906. From then until June, when he had returned to England, Crowley performed the invocation on an almost daily basis, and over 140 invocations are recorded in his diary for the period. Crowley noted the quality of the invocations, from bad to good, and the conditions, such as being sleepy or suffering from fever and diarrhea. Upon his return to England on June 2, he learned of his daughter's death (Rose and the baby had taken another route back to England). He noted in his diary the same day that he "solemnly reaffirmed the oath of mine obligation to perform the operation, offering under these terrible circumstances all that yet remains. On the following day, he simply noted "I have lived through the day. [The invocation] a sad mechanic exercise". Despite being devastated about his daughter's death, Crowley continued with the invocations, and on October 9 he finally reached what he called the greatest event in his career: "Tested new ritual and behold it was very good! […] I did get rid of everything but the Holy Exalted One, and must have held Him for a minute or two. I did. I am sure I did." The published version of the event does not explain what this "new ritual" was, but he wrote down in his private diary that he had taken hashish, resulting in "many very strange illusions of sight, sense of proportion, locality, illusions of muscular distortion […]". On the following day, Crowley noted in his private diary: "But the hashish enthusiasm surged up against the ritual-enthusiasm; so hardly know which phenomenon to attribute to which." [29]

Whether or not Crowley's attainment of the "greatest event in his career" was due to the use of hashish, the event had a profound effect upon him. Not only had he mastered the technique of communicating with the divine, and as a consequence was able to repeat the communication, but he took it upon himself to teach others to reach similar experiences. Less than a year later, Crowley founded his reformulated version of the Golden Dawn, the Silver Star or A∴A∴, in which the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel was described as "the crisis" of each member's career in the Order. As in the Golden Dawn, this attainment was attributed to the Adeptus Minor grade, corresponding to Tiphereth. In the official description of the Grades of the A∴A∴, *One Star in Sight* first published in 1921, the importance of the attainment was spelled out in full: [30]

35 The version consulted for this article is contained in a notebook entitled "2nd Order Invocations". The notebook is to be found in the George E.H. Slater Collection. For the significance of this collection, see Bogdan (2016b, 91–111). For an expanded and commented version, see Regardie (1937–1940, 3:259–265).

36 I am basing this assumption on the fact that Crowley, in his *Confessions,* emphasizes that he did not merely recite the invocation but performed it as a ritual set in a temple: "I did not need an aeroplane: I had a magical carpet. I could travel in my astral body to my temple and perform the Operation, perhaps even more conveniently than in the flesh. *Per contra*, I could construct my own temple about me and perform the Operation in my physical body. For various reasons, I preferred the latter method" (Crowley 1970, 517).

> The Grade of Adeptus Minor is the main theme of the instructions of the A∴A∴ It is characterised by the Attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. […] This is the essential work of every man; none other ranks with it either for personal progress or for power to help one's fellows. This unachieved, man is no more than the unhappiest and blindest of animals. He is conscious of his own incomprehensible calamity, and clumsily incapable of repairing it. Achieved, he is no less than the co-heir of gods, a Lord of Light. He is conscious of his own consecrated course, and confidently ready to run it. (Crowley 1929c, 238) [31]

It was furthermore stated that it is impossible to lay down precise rules by which one may attain to the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel since "that is the particular secret of each one of us", and that the "Masters of the A∴A∴ have therefore made no attempt to institute any regular ritual for this central Work of their Order," save two generalized instructions: *The Vision and Voice* and *Liber Samekh* (Crowley 1929c, 239). [32]

The Vision and Voice and Liber Samekh

The first of these generalized instructions was communicated to Crowley by his own Guardian Angel on December 8, 1909, in the Algerian desert between Bou-Saada and Biskra. Being part of the record of Crowley's exploration of the 30 Aethyrs of the Enochian system of magic, discussed in detail by historian Alex Owen, the instructions for attaining the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel were given in the Eight Aethyr, in which a 91-day long ritual was described (Owen 2012).[37] The instructions were clearly based on those found in *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, and included descriptions of the temple, the lamp, the altar, the anointing oil, the robe, wand, pentacle, etc. It differed, however, in that it included the Thelemic divinities Nuit, Hadit, and Ra-Hoor Khuit rather than the Judeo-Christian god names found in *The Book of Abra-Melin*. The climax of the ritual described in the Eight Aethyr is the appearance of the Guardian Angel: [33]

> Then, at his prayer, shall the chamber be filled with light insufferable for splendour, and a perfume intolerable for sweetness. And his Holy Guardian Angel shall appear unto him, yea, his Holy Guardian Angel shall appear unto him, so that he shall be wrapt away into the Mystery of Holiness. [34]
>
> All that day shall he remain in the enjoyment of the knowledge and conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. [35]
>
> And for three days after he shall remain from sunrise unto sunset in the temple, and he shall obey the counsel that his Angel shall have given unto him, and he shall suffer those things that are appointed (Crowley 1911, 112–13). [36]

The clearest and most comprehensive instruction for attaining the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, however, is given in *Liber Samekh*, which Crowley wrote while staying at his Abbey of Thelema in Cefalù, Sicily. This ritual is a revised version of the full Bornless Invocation, which Crowley had used in 1906. The revisions consist in large part of adapting the ritual to Thelema, in addition to an exegetical commentary from a Thelemic perspective. What is striking about *Liber Samekh*, however, is the ecstatic nature of the ritual. [37]

37 For an historical overview of the Enochian magical tradition, see Asprem (2012). See also Bogdan (2016a).

Not only did Crowley emphasize the importance of frequently invoking the Guardian Angel, but he used words such as rapture, illumination, enthusiasm, intoxication, ecstasy, intimacy, spiritual spasm and intensive consummation to describe the union with the Guardian Angel.

[38] The full title of this work is "Liber Samekh Theurgia Goetia Summa Congressus Cum Daemone, Sub Figura DCCC, being the Ritual employed by the Beast 666 for the Attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel during the Semester of His performance of the Operation of the Sacred Magick of ABRAMELIN THE MAGE." It was written in 1920 by Crowley at the Abbey of Thelema in Cefalù, Italy, to one of his Australian disciples, Frater Progradior, Frank Bennett (1868–1930).[38] The text is divided into three points or parts: (1) "Evangelii Textus Redactus", consisting of a revised version of the Bornless Invocation; (2) "Ars Congressus Cum Daemone", a line-by-line commentary on the Bornless Invocation; and (3) "Scholion on Sections G & Gg", an explanatory comment on the nature of the ritual. Sections 2 and 3 are mainly concerned with kabbalistic and Thelemic exegesis, and while these aspects deserve to be studied in detail, it falls outside the scope of the present article. It is section 1, however, which concerns us here. As shown in the Appendix, the Bornless Invocation is here divided into ten parts, lettered from A to J, with an additional three subparts (Aa, Ff, and Gg). The text here closely follows an expanded Golden Dawn version of the Bornless Invocation, which has survived in the George E.H. Slater Collection, consisting of papers from Mathers's Golden Dawn Temple in Paris, the Ahathoor Temple. Given the fact that Crowley had access to this Golden Dawn ritual, it seems likely that he received it before he left the order in 1900, and that this is the version which he used when reaching the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel in 1906. The main differences between the Golden Dawn version and the "Evangelii Textus Redactus" version of the Bornless Invocation are, on the one hand, the substitution of certain key names in conformity with Thelema, and, on the other, Crowley's interpretation of the Barbarous Names of Evocation. As for the first, Osorronophris is exchanged for Asar Un-Nefer ("Myself made Perfect") in section A; Moses is exchanged for Ankf-f-n-Khonsu, the Angel of Phapro Osorronophris is exchanged for Ptah-Apo-Phrasz-Ra, and Israel for Khem in section Aa; Balbnabaoth for Babalon-bal-Bin-Abaft ("Babalon! Thou Woman of Whoredom. Thou, Gate of the Great God ON! Thou Lady of the Understanding of the Ways!") in section D, etc.[39] As for the second difference, the addition of Crowley's interpretations of the Barbarous Names of Evocation, it includes some more or less idiosyncratic interpretations, e.g., Sabaoth explained as "Nuith! Hadith! Ra-Hoor-Khuit! Hail, Great Wild Beast! Hail, IAO!" in section F.

[39] So, what is this higher self, this Holy Guardian Angel which Crowley was so preoccupied with? Judging by *Liber Samekh*, it is clear that we are dealing with an ecstatic transformative experience, an altered state of consciousness, which would lead to an existential shift in how one relates to the divine: the Godhead is within, not without, or, to put it in the words of Crowley, "There is no god but man" (Crowley 1941).[40] Crowley tried to explain his 1906 experience in mystical terms such as *samadhi*, *Atmadarshana*, and *Shivadarshana*, but he was quick to point out that these terms were inadequate for describing his experience. In his discussion of the encounter with the Guardian Angel in *Liber Samekh*, he refers to visual and auditory phenomena which are frequently found in literature on mystical experiences, such as

38 On Frank Bennett, see Bennett (2004) and Crowley et al. (2009). The fact that Crowley included Abra-Melin in the title of his revised and extended version of the Golden Dawn rendition of the Bornless Invocation shows the extent to which Crowley regarded these two systems of attainment as interconnected.

39 On the role and significance of the goddess Babalon in Thelema, see Hedenborg White (2020).

40 For a discussion of the concept of God in Crowley's magical writings, see Bogdan (2020).

brilliant light, outbursts of stupendous and sublime sounds, and visions of glittering galaxies. A common topos in mystical tradition, it is, according to Crowley, difficult or even impossible to describe the encounter with the Guardian Angel, as that would limit the experience to mere words. In fact, the experience can be so overwhelming that one cannot even remember what has happened, or to put it into Crowley's own words:

> But the results of the Ritual are too various to permit of rigid description. One may say that, presuming that union to be perfect, the Adept need not retain any memory soever of what has occurred. He may be merely aware of a gap in his conscious life, and judge of its contents by observing that his nature has been subtly transfigured. Such an experience might indeed be the proof of perfection (Crowley 1929a, 296). [40]

During the Cefalù period in the early 1920s, when *Liber Samekh* was written, Crowley rejected supernatural explanations of the experience, and instead interpreted spiritual enlightenment as a to all intents and purposes psychological process.[41] Inspired by Freud, Jung and depth psychology, Crowley sought to explore the unconscious, and he stated openly that "A thorough comprehension of Psycho-analysis will contribute notably to the proper appreciation of this Ritual". In fact, the communion with the Holy Guardian Angel was not interpreted by Crowley as a divine intervention but as becoming conscious of the unconscious, or to quote Crowley's own words: "The Holy Guardian Angel is the Unconscious Creature Self", or "This means the recognition of the Angel as the True Self of his subconscious self, the hidden Life of his physical life." In this respect, Crowley is an illustrative example of the psychologisation of the occult, identified by Wouter J. Hanegraaff as part of the secularisation of Western esotericism, but we can also approach the Holy Guardian Angel experience as an early version of what Paul Heelas has termed "Self-Spirituality" (1996, 18–20), in that the Guardian Angel is seen as a higher aspect of ourselves that we are normally not aware of.[42] [41]

41 Whilst the psychologization of magic and initiation in Crowley's writings falls outside the scope of the present article, it should be mentioned that Crowley relied on different—and sometimes even conflicting—types of psychology: For instance, he would rely on Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) for his naturalistic framework, on William James (1842–1910) for his understanding of mystical experiences, and on Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and C.G. Jung (1875–1961) for psychoanalysis and the concept of the unconsciousness, while at the same time stating in private that the best psychoanalytical author was Alfred Adler (1870–1937), the founder of the school of individual psychology.

42 Towards the end of his life, however, Crowley appears to have rejected the idea that the HGA is merely the unconscious and he was highly critical of popular notions of the so-called higher self. Instead, he seems to have reverted to a more enchanted interpretation of the HGA as a separate and individual entity or intelligence, existing outside of the individual mind. See Pasi (2012). Crowley's last recorded thoughts on the HGA can be found in a letter to his close friend Gerald Yorke, dated March 26, 1945: "With regard to the H.G.A., one is obliged to restrain oneself by a feeling which I can only describe as personal delicacy, the sort of thing which prevents a Mohammedan asking even his dearest friend–'How is your wife this morning?' Unless anyone had attained to that Knowledge and Conversation, it is difficult to explain. It is in fact so powerful that one does not wish to say anything about it at all. If you will look back at your *Magick* page XXIX. You will notice that the Motto in the Grade of 5 equals 6 is left blank—and that is why. I cannot agree with you wholly when you say that the Hindu had no H.G.A. In the important Samadhi's there is one between Vishnarupadarshana and Atmadarshana, the Sanskrit name of which I have unfortunately forgotten, which is at least of this character. I never experienced it, and so can tell you nothing about it. […] The relation between the H.G.A. and His client is strictly a personal matter. Two different men could not have the same H.G.A. […] I think it would be fair to say that the H.G.A. is a Being in the identical Path with that of His client and this fact is probably the reason for the confusion between Him and the 'Higher Self' " (Aleister Crowley to Gerald Yorke, March 26, 1945. Gerald Yorke Collection, Warburg Institute).

Concluding Remark

[42] Today, the Bornless Invocation as a means to achieving the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel can be found in a wide range of practical manuals, both in printed form and online. As such, it is a remarkable testament to the entangled nature of Western Learned Magic. An exorcism once written down in fourth-century Egypt, obtained by the renowned collector and dealer of antiquities Givanni Anastasi and sold to the British Museum, found its way via an English translation edited for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society in 1852 into a highly secretive society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, where it was reinterpreted as an invocation of the divine aspect of man, the genius or the Holy Guardian Angel. From there it appeared in print in an unlikely context, as a "Preliminary Invocation" to *The Goetia*, part of the infamous grimoire *Clavicula Salomonis Regis*. It was used by none other than the Great Beast 666, Aleister Crowley, on a daily basis in 1906 when he travelled across China, resulting in the "greatest event in his career"—the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel. Published again in 1929, the text was now reinvented as an official instruction for a new religious movement, Thelema, offering a new dispensation to mankind. In addition to this, the Bornless Invocation was conflated and entangled with the early modern grimoire tradition, through *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*, and the concept of the Holy Guardian Angel. A strange adventure for a text.

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welche Moses in der Wüste aus dem feurigen Busch erlernet, alle Verborgenheiten der Kabbala umfassend. Cologne.

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Appendix

Table 2 Comparison between Second Order Golden Dawn Invocation, George E.H. Slater Collection and Liber Sameck, Part 1.

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
INVOCATION	**Section A.**
(West of Altar, facing East)	The Oath
1. Thee I invoke, the Bornless One:	1. Thee I invoke, the Bornless One.
2. Thee that didst create the Earth and the Heavens:	2. Thee, that didst create the Earth and the Heavens.
3. Thee, that didst create the Night and the Day:	3. Thee, that didst create the Night and the Day.
4. Thee, that didst create the Darkness and the Light.	4. Thee, that didst create the darkness and the Light.
5. Thou art OSORRONOPHRIS, Whom no man hath seen at any time.	5. Thou art ASAR UN-NEFER (“Myself made Perfect”):
6. Thou art IÄBAS:	Whom no man hath seen at any time.
7. Thou art IÄBAS: 8. Thou art IÄPOS	6. Thou art IA-BESZ (“the Truth in Matter”).
9. Thou hast distinguished between the Just and the Unjust:	7. Thou art IA-APOPHRASZ (“the Truth in Motion”).
10. Thou didst make the Female and the Male.	8. Thou hast distinguished between the Just and the Unjust.
11. Thou didst produce the Seed and the Fruit.	9. Thou didst make the Female and the Male.
12. Thou didst form Men, to love one another, and to hate one another.	10. Thou didst produce the Seeds and the Fruit.
	11. Thou didst form Men to love one another, and to hate one another.
	Section Aa.
1. I am MOSES Thy Prophet, unto Whom Thou didst commit Thy Mysteries, the Ceremonies of Israel.	1. I am ANKH - F - N - KHONSU thy Prophet, unto Whom Thou didst commit Thy Mysteries, the Ceremonies of KHEM.
2. Thou didst produce the Moist and the Dry; and that which nourisheth all Created Life.	2. Thou didst produce the moist and the dry, and that which nourisheth all created Life.
3. Hear Thou Me; for I am the Angel of PHAPRO OSORRONOPHRIS; this is Thy True Name, handed down to the Prophets of Israel.	3. Hear Thou Me, for I am the Angel of PTAH - APO - PHRASZ - RA (vide the Rubric): this is Thy True Name, handed down to the Prophets of KHEM.

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
AIR At East	**Section B.** Air
Hear Me:	Hear Me:
AR	AR “O breathing, flowing Sun!”
THIAO	ThIAF “O Sun IAF! O Lion-Serpent Sun, The Beast that whirlest forth, a thunder- bolt, begetter of Life!”
RHEIBET	RhEIBET “Thou that flowest! Thou that goest!”
ATHELEBERSETH	A-ThELE-BER-SET “Thou Satan-Sun Hadith that goest without Will!”
A	A “Thou Air! Breath! Spirit! Thou without bound or bond!”
BLATHA	BELAThA “Thou Essence, Air Swift-streaming, Elasticity!”
ABEU	ABEU “Thou Wanderer, Father of All!”
EBEN	EBEU “Thou Wanderer, Spirit of All!”
PHI CHITASOE	PhI-ThETA-SOE “Thou Shining Force of Breath! Thou Lion-Serpent Sun! Thou Saviour, save!”
IB	IB “Thou Ibis, secret solitary Bird, inviolate Wisdom, whose Word in Truth, creating the World by its Magick!”

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
THIAO	ThIAF “O Sun IAF! O Lion-Serpent Sun, The Beas that whirlest forth, a thunder- bolt, begetter of Life!”
HEAR ME; and make all Spirits subject unto me; so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether, upon the Earth and under the Earth; and in the Water; of Whirling Air and of Rushing Fire; and every Spell and Scourge of God, may be obedient unto Me!	*The conception is of Air, glowing, inhabited by a Solar-Phallic Bird, “the Holy Ghost”, of a Mercurial Nature.* Hear me, and make all Spirits subject unto Me; so that every Spirit of the Firmament and of the Ether: upon the Earth and under the Earth, on dry land and in the water; of Whirling Air, and of rushing Fire, and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me.
FIRE At South	**Section C.** Fire
I invoke Thee, the Terrible and Invisible God, Who dwellest in the Void Place of the Spirit:	I invoke Thee, the Terrible and Invisible God: Who dwellest in the Void Place of the Spirit: -
AROGOGOROBRAO	AR-O-GO-GO-RU-ABRAO “Thou spiritual Sun! Satan, Thou Eye, Thou Lust! Cry aloud! Cry aloud! Whirl the Wheel, O my Father, O Satan, O Sun!”
SOCHOU	SOTOU “Thou, the Saviour!”
MUDORIO	MUDORIO “Silence! Give me Thy Secret!”
PHALARCHAO	PhALARThAO “Give me suck, Thou Phallus, Thou Sun!”
OÖÖ	OOO “Satan, thou Eye, thou Lust!” Satan, thou Eye, thou Lust! Satan, thou Eye, thou Lust!

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
APÉ	AEPE “Thou self-caused, self-determined, exalted, Most High!”
THE BORNLESS ONE:	The Bornless One. (Vide supra).
HEAR ME; and make all Spirits subject unto me; so that every Spirit of the Firmament; and of the Ether: upon the Earth; on dry Land; and in the Water; of Whirling Air and of Rushing Fire; and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto me!	*The conception is of Fire, glowing, inhabited by a Solar-Phallic Lion of a Uranian nature.* Hear Me, and make all Spirits subject unto Me: so that every Spirit of the Firmament and of the Ether: upon the Earth and under the Earth: on dry Land and in the Water: of Whirling Air, and of rushing Fire, and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me.
WATER At West	**Section D.** Water
HEAR ME: -	Hear Me: -
ROUBRIAO	RU-ABRA-IAF “Thou the Wheel, thou the Womb, that containeth the Father IAF!”
MARIODAM	MRIODOM “Thou the Sea, the Abode!”
BALBNABAOTH	BABALON-BAL-BIN-ABAFT “Babalon! Thou Woman of Whoredom. Thou, Gate of the Great God ON! Thou Lady of the Understanding of the Ways!”
ASSALONAI	ASAL-ON-AI “Hail Thou, the unstirred! Hail, sister and bride of ON, of the God that is all and is none, by the Power of Eleven!”
APHNIAO	APhEN-IAF “Thou Treasure of IAO!”

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
I	I “Thou Virgin twin-sexed! Thou Secret Seed! Thou inviolate Wisdom!”
THOLETH	PhOTETh ”Abode of the Light ……………..
ABRASAX	ABRASAX “……of the Father, the Sun, of Hadith, of the spell of the Aeon of Horus!”
ÄËÖÖÜ	AEOOU “Our Lady of the Western Gate of Heaven!”
ISCHURE	ISChURE “Mighty art Thou!”
MIGHTY AND BORNLESS ONE	Mighty and Bornless One! (Vide Supra)
HEAR ME; and make all Spirits subject unto me, so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether; upon the Earth and under the Earth; on dry Land; and in the Water; of Whirling Air; and of Rushing Fire; and every Spell and Scourge of God, may be obedient unto me!	*The conception is of Water, glowing, inhabited by a Solar-Phallic Dragon-Serpent, of a Neptunian nature.* Hear Me: and make all Spirits subject unto Me: so that every Spirit of the Firmament and of the Ether: upon the Earth and under the Earth: on dry Land and in the Water: of Whirling Air, and of rushing Fire: and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me.
EARTH At North	**Section E.** Earth
I invoke Thee;	I invoke Thee: -
MA	MA “O Mother! O Truth!”
BARRAIO	BARRAIO “Thou Mass!”

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
IOEL	IOEL “Hail, Thou that art!”
KOTHA	KOThA “Thou hollow one!”
ATHOREBALO	AThOR-e-BAL-O “Thou Goddess of Beauty and Love, whom Satan, beholding, desireth!”
ABRAOTH	ABRAFT “The Fathers, male-female, desire Thee!”
Hear Me: and make all Spirits subject unto Me: so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether: upon The Earth and under the Earth: on dry land and in the Water: of Whirling Air, and of rushing Fire: and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me.	*The conception of Earth, glowing, inhabited by a Solar-Phallic Hippopotamus* [2] *of a Venereal nature.* Hear Me: and make all Spirits subject unto Me: so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether: upon The Earth and under the Earth: on dry land and in the Water: of Whirling Air, and of rushing Fire: and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me.
SPIRIT At West of Altar	**Section F.** Spirit
Hear Me;	Hear Me:
AOTH	AFT “Male-Female Spirits!”
ABAOTH	ABAFT “Male-Female Sires!”

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
BASUM	BAS-AUMGN “Ye that are Gods, going forth, uttering AUMGN. The Word that goeth from (A) Free Breath. (U) through Willed Breath. (M) and stopped Breath. (GN) to Continuous Breath. thus symbolizing the whole course of spiritual life. A is the formless Hero; U is the six-fold solar sound of physical life, the triangle of Soul being entwined with that of Body; M is the silence of”death”; GN is the nasal sound of generation & knowledge.
ISAK	ISAK “Identical Point!”
SABAOTH	SA-BA-FT “Nuith! Hadith! Ra-Hoor-Khuit! Hail, Great Wild Beast! Hail, IAO!”
FGF This is the Lord of the Gods: This is the Lord of the Universe: This is He Whom the Winds fear: This is He, Who having made Voice by His Commandment is Lord of all things, King, Ruler and Helper. HEAR ME; and make all Spirits subject unto me: so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether; upon the Earth, and under the Earth; on dry Land and in the Water; of Whirling Air and of Rushing Fire; and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me.	**Section Ff.** 1. This is the Lord of the Gods: 2. This is the Lord of the Universe: 3. This is He whom the Winds fear. 4. This is He, Who having made Voice by His commandment is Lord of all Things; King, Ruler and Helper. Hear Me, and make all Spirits subject unto Me: so that every Spirit of the Firmament and of the Ether: upon the Earth and under the Earth: on dry Land and in the Water: of Whirling Air, and of rushing Fire: and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto Me.
	Section G. Spirit
HEAR ME: –	Hear Me: -

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
IEOU	IEOU “Indwelling Sun of Myself”
PUR	PUR “Thou Fire! Thou Sixfold Star initiator compassed about with Force and Fire!”
IOU	IOU “Indwelling Soul of Myself”
PUR	PUR (Vide Supra)
IAOT	IAFTh “Sun-lion Serpent, hail! All Hail, thou Great Wild Beast, thou I A O!”
IAEO	IAEO “Breaths of my soul, breaths of mine Angel.”
IOOU	IOOU “Lust of my soul, lust of mine Angel!”
ABRASAX	ABRASAX (Vide Supra).
SABRIAM	SABRIAM “Ho for the Sangraal! Ho for the Cup of Babalon! Ho for mine Angel pouring Himself forth within my Soul!”
OO	OO “The Eye! Satan, my Lord! The Lust of the goat!”
UU	FF “Mine Angel! Mine initiator! Thou one with me - the Sixfold Star!”

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
ADONAÏE	AD-ON-A-I "My Lord! My secret self beyond self, Hadith, All Father! Hail, ON, thou Sun, thou Life of Man, thou Fivefold Sword of Flame! Thou Goat exalted upon Earth in Lust, thou Snake extended upon Earth in Life! Spirit most holy! Seed most Wise! Innocent Babe. Inviolate Maid! Begetter of Being! Soul of all Souls! Word of all Words, Come forth, most hidden Light!"
EDE	EDE "Devour thou me!"
EDU	EDU "Thou dost devour Me!"
ANGELOS TOU THEOU	ANGELOS TON ThEON "Thou Angel of the Gods!"
ANLAIA LAI	ANLALA "Arise thou in Me, free flowing, Thou who art Naught, who art Naught, and utter thy Word!" LAI "I also am Naught! I Will Thee! I behold Thee! My nothingness!"
GAIA	GAIA "Leap up, thou Earth!" (This is also an agonising appeal to the Earth, the Mother; for at this point of the ceremony the Adept should be torn from his mortal attachments, and die to himself in the orgasm of his operation.)
APA	AEPE "Thou Exalted One! It (i.e. the spritual 'semen', the Adept's secret ideas, drawn irresistibly from their 'Hell' by the love of his Angel) leaps up; it leaps forth!

MS. 2nd Order Invocations. George E.H. Slater Collection. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn	Liber Sameck, Part 1: Evangelii Textus Redactus. Aleister Crowley, 1920.
DIACHANNA CHORUN	DIATHARNA THORON “Lo! the out-splashing of the seeds of Immortality”
	Section Gg. The Attainment
I am He, the Bornless Spirit, having sight in the feet, strong, and the Immortal Fire: I am He, the Truth: I am He Who hateth that Evil should be wrought in the World: I am He, that lighteneth and thundereth: I am He from whom is the Shower of the Life of Earth: I am He, Whose mouth ever flameth: I am He, the Begetter and Manifester unto the Light: I am He; The Grace of the World. THE HEART GIRT WITH A SERPENT IS MY NAME!	1. I am He! the Bornless Spirit! having sight in the feet: Strong, and the Immortal Fire! 2. I am He! the Truth! 3. I am He! Who hate that evil should be wrought in the World! 4. I am He, that lighteneth and thundereth! 5. I am He, from whom is the Shower of the Life of Earth! 6. I am He, whose mouth ever flameth! 7. I am He, the Begetter and Manifester unto the Light! 8. I am He, The Grace of the Worlds! 9. “The Heart Girt with a Serpent” is my name!
	Section H. The “Charge to the Spirit”
Come THOU forth, and follow me, and make all Spirits subject unto me, so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether; upon the Earth and under the Earth; on dry Land or in the Water; of Whirling Air and of Rushing Fire; and every Spell and Scourge of God may be obedient unto me!	Come thou forth, and follow me: and make all Spirits subject unto Me so that every Spirit of the Firmament, and of the Ether, upon the Earth and under the Earth: on dry Land, or in the Water: of Whirling Air or of rushing Fire, and every Spell and scourge of God, may be obedient unto me!
	Section J. The Proclamation of the Beast 666
IAO: SABAO Such are the Words!	IAF: SABAF Such are the Words!

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Conjuring Planetary Spirits in the Twenty-First Century: Textual-Ritual Entanglements in Contemporary 'Magic(k)'

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ABSTRACT This article illustrates textual-ritual entanglements in Western learned magic across almost two millennia through an analysis of Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience*. Frater Acher is a contemporary practitioner of 'magic(k)' who, between 2010 and 2013, performed a series of conjurations of six planetary spirits inspired by an early modern manual of learned magic named *Arbatel*. Frater Acher combined the *Arbatel* with ritual techniques from numerous further contexts, among them the late ancient *Greek Magical Papyri*, the *Clavicula Salomonis* tradition, Paracelsianism, Hermeticism, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, theurgy, modern imagination techniques, as well as chaos 'magic(k)'. As a consequence, Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience*—as he frames his ritual diaries published online—reveals a strikingly entangled ritual that illustrates the breadth, depth, and complexity of Western learned magic, as well as its manifold entanglements across time and space. His diaries also demonstrate that, even while following largely formalistic premodern scripts of learned magic, contemporary practitioners may nonetheless display a high degree of flexibility, creativity, and innovation. The article closes by reflecting on whether it is likely that such strategies were also present in premodern practitioner scenarios. In doing so, it calls for taking the—extensive but hitherto almost completely neglected—data of experience reports by contemporary practitioners of 'magic(k)' into account when interpreting premodern sources of learned magic. As a consequence, this is the first systematic attempt to compare and juxtapose premodern and modern interpretations and mindsets of practitioners of learned magic. It is thus also the first scholarly article that aims at elucidating a premodern manual of learned magic through reading and analysing the experience report of a contemporary practitioner.

KEYWORDS Magic, rituals, entangled history, history of magic, grimoires, Arbatel, conjuring spirits, occultism, Hermeticism, contemporary esotericism, Frater Acher

Introduction

Contemporary 'magic(k)'[1] is a vast, highly complex, and unexpectedly heterogeneous, but also extremely fascinating, field of research. At the time of writing, we lack even a tentative overview of its multitudinous currents, its diverse groups and sub-groups, its manifold ritual techniques, its hundreds of thousands of protagonists (including both the recognizable leaders and authors as well as its 'invisible' practitioners), its enormous textual output, its ongoing appropriation and production of ritual sites and artefacts, its use of media and hence its public (in)visibility, its political struggles and agendas (consider the recent Bind Trump movement),[2] its moral and legal implications, and its ongoing tendency to change and innovate. If we wish to squeeze contemporary magic(k) into established categories of the study of religion, and thus look at it in the sense of 'contemporary esotericism' or a 'new religious movement,'[3] while at the same time acknowledging its enormous textual output, it seems obvious that magic(k) is a strikingly understudied topic in the study of religion. The scholarly community is only slowly becoming aware of the depth and complexity of both contemporary magic(k) and the broader tradition to which it belongs, that of Western learned magic. Similarly, scholarship has only recently begun to take modern practitioners of magic(k) seriously beyond frames of reference drawn from well-worn master narratives or age-old stereotypes (these are often related to polemical characterisations of 'occultism' that associate it with unverified and unverifiable pseudo-knowledge, neurotic escapism, naïve self-delusion, or egocentric megalomania). [1]

The present essay cannot, of course, compensate for this lacuna in the modern study of religion. Its main purpose is to present a single but telling case study from the twenty-first century that ties well to the other articles in this special issue. It does so by highlighting textual, conceptual, and ritual continuities from many of the sources presented in the other articles of this issue, but also by discussing interesting innovations, re-configurations, and re-interpretations of the art by a contemporary practitioner. The article also demonstrates the value in studying premodern manuals of learned magic as more than just dry, dead texts. Instead, we can usefully view them through the lens of the experiences of modern practitioners who have, much like experimental archaeologists, given these ritual manuals a trial and tested what works (for them) and what does not, often charting their observations in a systematic manner. Studying modern practitioners of premodern texts of learned magic also allows for interesting analytical juxtapositions of the original contexts and mind-sets of these texts (if we are able to reconstruct them) and the—obviously—very different circumstances and mind-sets of their (post-)modern practitioners. [2]

The case study at the centre of the present article is a series of conjurations of planetary [3]

1 Most practitioners of contemporary 'magic(k)' fall under the criteria for conceptualizing Western learned magic outlined in Otto (2016) (such as Western-ness; the self-referential, identificatory use of the term 'magic'; literacy; striving for lengthy, sophisticated rituals; stereotype reversal; self-defence and self-justification strategies; etc.). However, in the present article I will abstain from labelling their ritual art as 'learned magic'—which, as an analytical category, makes more sense in premodern scenarios—and will instead use the term 'magic(k),' which is the main spelling found in the practitioner literature. Going back to Aleister Crowley, this spelling is used to acknowledge the reality and efficacy of 'magic' despite living in modern secular or post-secular environments—in which this efficacy is usually denied by the dominant cultural and scientific discourses. Some practitioners spell 'magic' with the 'k' and some without it, so I put the 'k' in brackets. I will, for aesthetic reasons, avoid using quotation marks from now on.

2 See its Facebook page—https://www.facebook.com/groups/OfficialBindTrump/ (accessed February 05, 2023)—and Asprem (2020).

3 Notably, this would be a misleading point of departure, as this article—and the entire special issue—demonstrates. See also my conclusions below.

spirits performed by an informant of mine between the years 2010 and 2013. The informant followed—while also reinterpreting and expanding upon—an early modern ritual script of learned magic commonly known as *Arbatel*. The informant is an experienced German practitioner of magic(k) who has published several books and e-books under the pseudonym "Frater Acher" and also runs a much-frequented website named theomagica.com. I had several in-person and email conversations with Frater Acher, but my main sources for this article are the excerpts of his ritual diaries—published online—in which he recalls and narrates his experiences before, during and after the aforementioned series of conjurations. Frater Acher's *Arbatel* conjurations demonstrate several interesting ambivalences inevitably faced by contemporary practitioners of magic(k). These include the oscillation between traditionalist or creative/innovative approaches towards the ritual art, between psychological or spiritual interpretations of evoked entities, and between identifying the purposes of magic(k) as oriented towards either inner-worldly benefits or self-transformation.

[4] The article is structured as follows. In order to tie properly to the other articles in this special issue, section 1 will first discuss contemporary magic(k) as a distinct and promising field of research, outlining the criteria that allow for the delineation of the field and tying it to the *longue durée* tradition of Western learned magic. The section will then go on to provide a brief glimpse into Frater Acher's biography, his career and motivations as a contemporary practitioner of magic(k), and my personal acquaintance with him. Section 2 presents a description of the original *Arbatel*, based on the first printed edition of 1575, outlining its history, ritual structure, and purpose. Section 3 describes and analyses Frater Acher's conjuration of Phul, Ophiel, Hagith, Och, Phaleg, and Bethor (he omitted the conjuration of the seventh spirit ascribed to Saturn for reasons outlined below) and discusses some of the insights that he claims to have gathered during and after these conjurations. Section 4 concludes by discussing the dynamics and textual-ritual entanglements of Western learned magic as a living tradition that extends from late Antiquity to the twenty-first century, and provides some tentative answers to a question that might emerge while reading this article: Why conjure planetary spirits in the twenty-first century by following a ritual script that is more than 400 years old?

Contemporary Magic(k)

Delineating the Field

[5] As has already been mentioned, the notion of contemporary magic(k) used in this article is tied to my conceptualisation of Western learned magic (Otto 2016). Accordingly, I argue here that the main criterion for gathering research data outlined in my *Aries* article on historizing Western learned magic—"I will only focus on […] sources that include an etymological derivate, linguistic equivalent or culturally established synonym of 'magic' as a self-referential and thus identificatory term" (2016, 173)—can also be applied to delineate the field of contemporary magic(k). Countless contemporary practitioners make frequent use of the term (spelled either with or without the 'k'), so the criterion seems to work perfectly well for collecting and studying practitioner discourses from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[4]

4 Egil Asprem made a similar argument with regard to the notion of contemporary ritual magic (2014, 238): " 'Ritual' and 'magic' are elusive concepts with long and complicated histories in academic discourse (Styers 2004; Otto & Stausberg 2013). One could easily get lost in a thicket of semantic and theoretical problems when combining the two to talk about 'ritual magic'. It is, therefore, crucial to stipulate from the outset that 'ritual magic' here refers to a historically specific constellation of texts and practices, and their

There are two advantages and two disadvantages to applying this discursive strategy[5] to delineate the field of contemporary magic(k) when compared to, for example, using a mono- or polythetic working definition with a fixed set of defining criteria. The most important advantage is that contemporary magic(k) can be interpreted as being part and parcel of the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic. As this tradition is characterized by both continuity and changeability from late Antiquity to the present day (see Otto 2016, 183–99), contemporary magic(k) can fruitfully be analysed for its use of and reliance upon premodern texts of learned magic, its re-interpretations, adaptations, and transformations of these texts, its ritual entanglements (on 'entangled rituals' in Western learned magic, see ibid., 201f.), as well as a large number of modern innovations. What is more, a *longue durée* perspective on contemporary magic(k) allows for the systematic comparison of contemporary magic(k) and the learned magic of previous centuries, thus illuminating both through juxtaposition (see Freiberger 2018, 10). Such a comparison sheds light on changing ritual techniques, concepts of ritual efficacy, practitioner milieus, and moral considerations, as well as further textual and ritual entanglements across time and space. The present article is an example of precisely such an approach. [6]

The second advantage is that the puzzling heterogeneity of contemporary magic(k)—which makes it impossible to delineate the field by means of a substantive definition—remains unproblematic from an analytical perspective. Admittedly, the field encompasses a large number of non-uniform currents (e.g., the Golden Dawn current, the Martinism current, the Thelema current, the Satanic current, the Chaos magic(k) current, the Wicca current, and various neo-pagan and neo-shamanic currents such as the Sweet Medicine Sundance Path, etc.), ritual techniques (e.g., astral magic(k), sigil magic(k), rune magic(k) such as F/Uthark, sexual magic(k), Enochian magic(k), Cthulhu magic(k), Draconian magic(k), Cyber magic(k), Hoodoo, etc.), groups and sub-groups (e.g., The *Ordre Martiniste* and its offshoots; the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* and its offshoots; the *Ordo Templi Orientis* and its offshoots, the *Astrum Argenteum*, *AMORC*, the *Fraternity of the Inner Light*, the *Fraternitas Saturni*, the *Servants of the Light*, the *Church of Satan*, the *Temple of Set*, the *Illuminates of Thanateros*, *Amookos*, the *Dragon Rouge*, the *Grey School of Wizardry*, etc.), a plethora of individual authors and practitioners, an enormous amount of written sources in numerous languages, as well as ritual tools and other aspects of the material culture of learned magic. The heterogeneity of these currents, techniques, groups and sub-groups, authors and practitioners, and textual sources is not problematic from an analytical perspective because the discursive strategy outlined here simply maps the emic use of the concept of magic(k) by contemporary practitioners who, quite naturally (due to certain implications of the conceptual history of magic), continue to subsume a large variety of things under the concept. As Western learned magic has been an entangled [7]

receptions, reinterpretations, and transformations. We are not here discussing 'magic' as a cross-cultural type, embedded in (or supporting) 'ritualized' behavior, which would require the scope to be truly global. Instead, we will focus on 'ritual magic' as a (largely) emic designation for certain forms of practice in the context of modern Western esotericism. (Hence, all figures, practices, and representations mentioned in this article recognize themselves as 'magicians' and their practices as ritual or ceremonial 'magic,' although, as we shall see, the understandings of what that implies may vary dramatically.) Thus contemporary ritual magic refers to a set of cultural phenomena that are historically related to this historiographical category." In contrast to Asprem, who uses the notion of 'ritual magic,' I prefer to proceed here with the label 'magic(k)' (partly because I consider 'ritual magic' a redundant formulation, as the notion of 'ritual' is already implied in the semantic field of 'magic').

5 On my understanding of 'magic' as a discursive concept, with some reflections on first-order and second-order categories, insider and outsider perspectives, as well as emic and etic approaches, see Otto (2018a).

tradition and a multifaceted ritual art since its earliest days **(see Otto 2016, 199–203)**, it is as necessary as it is rewarding to map these manifold nuances and entanglements without falling prey to the temptation to look for a unifying core.

[8] Whereas the analytical foci of continuity, changeability, heterogeneity, and hybridity provide important methodological advantages of the discursive strategy proposed here for delineating the field of contemporary magic(k), there are also two methodological consequences that we might perceive as disadvantages. The first disadvantage relates to the thematic boundaries of the field. Things not considered magic(k) by modern practitioners will automatically fall outside the research field, even though we may have reasons to include them. For example, advocates of the New Thought Movement teach basic visualisation techniques for individual wish-fulfilment, often focused on the acquisition of wealth (consider the book and documentary *The Secret*). There is today in fact a huge market for such self-help techniques, partly inspired by New Age interpretations of the Human Potential Movement, as is clearly shown by examples such as the online self-improvement curriculum Mindvalley (https://www.mindvalley.com/; accessed February 05, 2023). Many of the techniques propagated here are also applied in contemporary magic(k), but protagonists of the New Thought movement or of Mindvalley typically avoid the term 'magic' for strategic reasons. We might also think of contemporary esoteric practitioners who believe in and instrumentalise archangels for all sorts of inner-worldly purposes—similar to, say, contemporary practitioners of Enochian magic(k) (see Asprem 2012)—but who deliberately avoid the term 'magic' or even use it as a pejorative label to refer to other practitioners only. Since this type of boundary work is part of the game and as we are applying a discursive rather than a substantive criterion to delineate the field, these things will, however interesting, necessarily fall outside the horizon of our analysis, initially at least. Yet, in a second step, it may also be viable and fruitful from a discursive perspective to trace the magic(k)al roots of practices and ideas that eventually came to penetrate discourses on neurolinguistic programming or visualisation techniques, even though the latter would not belong to the field of contemporary magic(k) in a strict sense. Even though some interesting cases will have to be neglected for the moment, the discursive approach suggested here still yields more than enough data to ponder.

[9] The second disadvantage relates to the geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries of the field.[6] Where does it begin and where does it end, given that the world is today largely interconnected through global markets, brands, technologies, media, and the internet? Do we only include Europeanist practitioners, or also Crowley-readers from China, India, or Tanzania? What about synonyms for magic(k) in languages such as Hebrew or Arabic? Should we include contemporary *Israeli* practitioners of *qabālā maʿăśīt* (practical kabbalah) or a contemporary Egyptian saḥir who fabricates *wufuq* (numerological talismans)? What about syncretistic currents such as Haitian Vodou or Brazilian Umbanda, which have been inspired in part by the textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic but have also been shaped by other trajectories? There are no easy answers to these questions, but my own strategy will

6 As I have noted elsewhere already (2019, 760n3), scholarship on contemporary magic(k) has thrived over the past decade, but it is still largely anglocentric. Most recent monographs and fieldwork studies—such as Hedenborg-White (2020), Lycourinos (2018), Granholm (2014), Asprem (2012), Mayer (2008), Greenwood (2000), or the classic Luhrmann (1989), as well as the *Aries* special issue on 'Modern Western Magic' (see Bogdan 2012) and anthologies such as Feraro and Doyle White (2019) or Bever and Styers (2017)—focus on anglophone and Scandinavian practitioners. As a consequence, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, France, Italy, Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and even Germany, as well as various other regions, remain black boxes from a scholarly perspective. A transnational assessment of contemporary magic(k) is still, thus, a desideratum.

be to decide pragmatically on a case-by-case basis. Given our contemporary focus, the field is alive, ever-changing, and its boundaries continue to shift and blur. The discursive strategy proposed here works precisely by acknowledging these floating boundaries. The field is obviously there, however amorphous, and scholars of contemporary magic(k) have every right to make strategic yet pragmatic decisions about what to include in the scope of their studies.

The Case of Frater Acher

[10] Despite the complex questions relating to the inclusion of edge cases when considering the field as a whole, the example discussed in the following falls rather straightforwardly within our area of focus. Frater Acher readily admits that he "has studied Western Ritual Magic in theory and practice at I.M.B.O.L.C. and has been actively involved in magic as a lone practitioner for more than twenty years."[7] Frater Acher[8] is a middle-aged German national currently residing near Munich, Germany. According to his self-description, he "holds an MA in Communications Science, Intercultural Communications and Psychology as well as certifications in Systemic Coaching and Gestalt Therapy."[9] I.M.B.O.L.C. (*Internationale magische Bildungsstätte für okkulte Lebenskunst und Credo*: https://www.magielernen.de/; accessed February 05, 2023), where Frater Acher underwent his training, currently offers one of the most elaborate and demanding distance learning courses on magic(k) in the German-speaking world.[10] Its curriculum consists of seven modules and 33 'didactic letters' (Lehrbriefe), each of which takes a minimum of 3 months to complete. The entire curriculum thus requires a time investment of roughly 10 years, based on 1–2 hours of daily practice.[11] The person responsible for I.M.B.O.L.C. is another German national who has run this educational establishment since the early 1990s under the pseudonym of Agrippa. Agrippa dedicated much of his early career as a practitioner of magic(k) to a London-based branch of the Golden Dawn, but pursued his own trajectory from 1992 onwards by founding I.M.B.O.L.C. His training covers the conjuring of spirits, kabbalah, Tarot, astrology, numerology, alchemy, concentration and imagination techniques, yoga, dream interpretation and control, language training (e.g., Latin, Hebrew), astral projection, and numerous other ritual and mind-oriented techniques. In an interview I conducted in September 2018, Agrippa claimed that I.M.B.O.L.C. emerged in the late 1990s as one of the first internet-based distance learning courses on magic(k) in the German-speaking world, and that he had trained circa 500 students over the past three decades.[12] Agrippa never entered the public sphere as an author (apart from his course website), in stark contrast to Frater Acher, who passed through large parts of the I.M.B.O.L.C. curriculum over the course of roughly the first decade of the new millennium.

[11] Frater Acher is now a fairly well-known name in contemporary magic(k) due to his website www.theomagica.com, on which he regularly publishes essays, experience reports, practical tips and exercises, and historical speculations. He also offers a number of downloadable electronic tools that facilitate the practice of magic(k)—such as excel tables that calculate

7 https://www.paralibrum.com/frater-acher (accessed February 05, 2023).
8 'Acher' is a Hebrew byname (Hebr. אחר) for Elisha ben Abuyah, a Jerusalem rabbi from the first century CE who developed worldviews that were considered heretical by his fellow rabbis. Literally, 'Acher' means 'the other' or 'the apostate.' Frater Acher confirms that his pseudonym references this figure.
9 https://www.paralibrum.com/frater-acher (accessed February 05, 2023).
10 See also its English website: https://occidentalmagic.com/ (accessed February 05, 2023).
11 See the overview in https://static1.squarespace.com/static/607d0adfa13d08033aa17add/t/61dd4af3edb17d5a4d4969c0/1641892602159/IMBOLC+Prices+2022.pdf (accessed February 05, 2023).
12 This was confirmed via email on March 25, 2020.

numerological squares, gematria results of random words based on the *Sepher Sephirot*, or the possible name of one's own genius ("holy guardian angel": see Bogdan's chapter in this issue for further details on this concept, 2023) based on one's birth horoscope. Frater Acher's opening remarks on the website run as follows:

> Welcome to **theomagica.com**, on the safe side of Frater Acher's temple. As a service to our community, I offer here things I have found of value in the course of my mago-mystical explorations, may these be goêtic or theurgic in nature. In particular, you can find on this page free ebooks, in-depth essays, and my regular blog updates. […] Today, I have been actively involved in magic for more than twenty years. I am a German national, and after several years of living abroad, returned to Munich, Germany in 2009.[13] [12]

[13] At the time of writing, Frater Acher is also the author of two e-books (*In search of a holy magic*;[14] *On the order of the Asiatic brethren*[15]) and eight printed books (*Cyprian of Antioch: A Mage of many faces* [2017]; *Speculum Terrœ: A Magical Earth-Mirror from the 17th Century* [2018]; *Holy Daimon* (2018]; *Black Abbot: White Magic* [2020]; *Rosicrucian Magic: A Reader of Becoming alike to the Angelic Mind* [2021]; *Clavis Goêtica: Keys to Chthonic Sorcery* [2021; co-written with José Gabriel Alegría Sabogal]; *Ingenium—Alchemy of the Magical Mind* [2022]; and *Holy Heretics* [2022]), all published in English. Theomagica.com also includes a blog where Frater Acher posts occasional reflections on his current practice.[16] To my knowledge, Frater Acher has not been the subject of any previous academic study.

[14] In addition to his publishing activities, Frater Acher is, together with British practitioner Josephine McCarthy, the co-founder of www.quareia.com (accessed February 05, 2023), another extensive, online-based distance learning course in contemporary magic(k). Unlike most other existing teaching curricula in this precarious field of knowledge, all of its 30 modules are available on the website free of charge ("Quareia is a new school of magic for the 21st century. It is open to anyone, everywhere. Its content is entirely free of cost.").[17] Josephine McCarthy is well-known in the scene for her concept of a visionary magic(k) that works predominantly through imagination and mind-based techniques. She has outlined this approach in a trilogy of books entitled *Magical Knowledge* (re-published 2020 with Quareia Publishing). Quareia furthermore offers a distinct set of Tarot cards (the 'LXXXI magicians set') and a corresponding interpretation system.

[15] Frater Acher also runs another project, a website dedicated to the transcription and translation of manuscripts of the Leipzig collection of 'codices magici' from the early eighteenth century (www.holydaimon.com, accessed February 20, 2023). This collection was the topic of my book *Magical Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe: The Clandestine Trade in Illegal Book Collections*, co-authored with Daniel Bellingradt (2017), which led to my first meeting with Frater Acher, who attended a conference in Leipzig where I presented the findings of my work. We remained in contact thereafter. Frater Acher works together with several university-trained people who are able to read and transcribe early modern German handwritings.[18] As of to-

13 See https://theomagica.com/home (accessed February 05, 2023).
14 See https://theomagica.com/s/ISOAHM.pdf (accessed February 05, 2023).
15 See https://theomagica.com/s/Frater-Acher-On-the-Order-of-the-Asiatic-Brethren.pdf (accessed February 05, 2023).
16 See https://theomagica.com/blog (accessed February 05, 2023).
17 See https://www.quareia.com/#course (accessed February 05, 2023).
18 See https://www.holydaimon.com/contributors (accessed February 20, 2023).

day, seven manuscripts of the collection have been transcribed and translated into English on holydaimon.com, where they are presented in a graphically appealing way.

[16] Frater Acher apparently undertook training in a large number of modern currents and techniques of magic(k), from the Golden Dawn to Chaos magic(k) and beyond, but he is probably best characterised as a 'traditionalist.' In other words, he is a contemporary practitioner with a particular fondness for premodern texts of learned magic, which he seems to deem more accurate, trustworthy, and inspiring than most of the (post-)modern sources. This is clearly visible in his dedication to the holydaimon.com project, where he relates his underlying intention to trace and uncover an original, unbiased tradition of medieval Christian angel magic (e.g., in the works of Pelagius) that he may eventually use in his own ritual work (see especially his recent work on Trithemius: *Black Abbot: White Magic* [2020]). Yet, these 'traditionalist' interests have not prevented him from combining all sorts of modern—i.e., twentieth and twenty-first-century—ritual techniques of magic(k) with those outlined in premodern sources such as the *Arbatel*. Hence, before delving into Frater Acher's re-interpretation of this text and his practical experiences therewith, let us first consider the contents of the original *Arbatel*.

The Arbatel

Historical Context

[17] The *Arbatel* is a Latin text of learned magic that was first printed in 1575 in Basel by Peter (or Petrus) Perna under the title *ARBATEL DE MAGIA VETERUM*. That 1575 was the date of the text's first appearance has been argued by Carlos Gilly, who has shown that all printed editions that display earlier dates on their title pages (1510, 1531, 1564) are, in fact, later fabrications (2005, 209). Even though the printing of the *Arbatel* caused a scandal in Basel at the time, the text was sufficiently popular to justify several re-editions and translations in both printed and manuscript form. From 1579 onwards, it was frequently appended to printings of Agrippa of Nettesheim's *Opera Omnia*, and an English translation circulated from 1655 onwards as an appendix to Robert Turner's English edition of Ps.-Agrippa's spurious *Fourth book of occult philosophy* (see Davies 2009, 52). The first German translation of the *Arbatel* was printed by Andreas Luppius in 1686. The *Arbatel* also circulated widely in manuscript form from the late 1570s onwards, including early German translations that were also re-translated into Latin before the end of the sixteenth century. As a consequence, an ever-larger number of different versions and translations of the *Arbatel* circulated in early modern Europe, and in the light of its enthusiastic reception, the text can be seen as something of an early modern best-seller of learned magic. This success is somewhat striking, given that the work was published at the height of the European witch persecutions and was one of the first printed texts to outline detailed techniques for the conjuration of spirits.

[18] Even though some of the German manuscript translations claim Theophrastus of Hohenheim (Paracelsus) as the *Arbatel's* author, an assumption that was also shared by early Rosicrucian sympathisers such as Paul Nagel and Valentin Weigel, its authorship remains unclear today (note that Paracelsus is cited several times in the text). According to Carlos Gilly, the author "was undoubtedly an enthusiastic follower of Hermes Trismegistus and Paracelsus as well as a great expert in Medieval and Renaissance magic" (ibid.). Joseph H. Peterson adds that the author also had "remarkable command of the Bible, which he apparently quoted from memory" (2009, XIV), and offers several convincing arguments for taking the author to be

the French Paracelsianist Jacques Gohory (1520–1576). Be this as it may, it is highly likely that the *Arbatel* was composed after the posthumous publication of Paracelsus' *Philosophia Sagax* in 1571, as it draws on that work's divisions of 'magic,'[19] its unique conceptualisation of 'magical creatures' (which include elemental spirits, pygmies, 'sagani,' and dryads),[20] and particularly its notion of 'Olympian spirits'—a term that apparently refers to seven spirits ascribed to the seven 'wandering stars' of Ptolemaic cosmology which are visible to the unaided eye (Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn).[21] The *Arbatel* furthermore stands in the learned magic manuscript tradition of spirit lists, such as *De legionibus angelorum septem planetarum* (e.g., Ms. Halle UB, Ms. 14 B 36, 289–296) and *De officiis spiritum* (e.g., Ms. Coxe 25, fols. 173–87). However, the names that the *text's* author ascribes to the seven planetary spirits—ARATRON (Saturn), BETHOR (Jupiter), PHALEG (Mars), OCH (Sun), HAGITH (Venus), OPHIEL (Mercury), and PHUL (Moon)—[see peterson_arbatel_2009, 29f.][22] were a novelty at the time, and they also differ from the list of seven planetary spirits outlined in Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* (book 3, ch. 24).[23] The *Arbatel* was also innovative in its use of the notions of 'theosophy' and 'anthroposophy' which are here—for the first time—understood as two basic types of positive *scientiae* of learned magic (see Peterson 2009, 100–101).

[19] The *Arbatel* is clearly indebted to the humanist discourse on 'magia naturalis,' which had been thriving for roughly a century prior to the text's publication, even though it does not use this particular vocabulary. However, when compared to Marsilio Ficino's writings on 'magia naturalis,' which remained rather cautious regarding its practical application (Ficino outlines the use of herbal medicines, planetary songs, and, rather reluctantly, astrological talismans for healing purposes—see Otto 2011, ch. 10), the *Arbatel* offers a much more explicit and straightforward technique for 'drawing down the power of the stars'[24] and thereafter encountering them directly "IN CONVERSATION" (aphorism 16, Peterson 2009, 31),[25] either "visibly or invisibly" (aphorism 17; ibid.).

[20] In doing so, the text also ties into much older Islamicate traditions of conjuring planetary

19 See aphorism 38 in the *Arbatel*.

20 In the *Arbatel*, these creatures are mentioned in aphorisms 9, 24, and 38.

21 The root meaning of 'Olymp' as something high above, where the Gods reside (in classical Greece, the twelve *Olympioi* were thought to reside on Mount Olympus), was, in Paracelsus' *Philosophia Sagax*, adapted to the discipline of 'Astronomia Olympi novi.' Even though this chapter of the text is lost, it will have referred to the celestial sphere with its seven 'wandering stars' (*planētes asteres*) and their manifold influences on the sublunar sphere. Paracelsus also spoke of a single 'Olympian spirit' ('Olympischer Geist') that is related to the powers of divine creation and human imagination (Paracelsus here also referred to 'Gabalia', i.e., some unknown kabbalistic works he had read) (see Gilly 2005, 216n28). There is no room here to trace the Paracelsian influences on the *Arbatel*, even though the connection is interesting and deserves further research.

22 Here and in the following, all capitalised words are taken verbatim from the 1575 Latin edition, following Petersons's rendering of the text.

23 Agrippa there mentions Oriphiel, Zachariel, Zamael, Michael, Anael, Raphael, and Gabriel, thus tying into Judaeo-Christian archangel traditions.

24 This formulation mirrors the basic understanding of 'magia naturalis' in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*. See, e.g., the title of the first chapter of book 3: "In What, According to Plotinus, the Power of Attracting Favor from the Heavens Consists, Namely, That Well-adapted Physical Forms Can Easily Allure the World-soul and the Souls of the Stars and the Daemons [In quo consistat secundum Plotinum virtus favorem coelitus attrahens, scilicet in eo quod anima mundi et stellarum daemonumque animae facile alliciuntur corporum formis accomodatis]" (Kaske and Clark 1989, 242–43).

25 All spelling and capitalisation is taken verbatim from Peterson's rendering of the 1575 edition. I will mostly follow his reliable English translation of the Latin text.

spirits, which go back at least as far as the eighth century CE and are usually ascribed to the Sabians of Harran (for further details on this Islamicate trajectory, see Michael Noble's article in this issue). Some of the planetary conjuration practices of this legendary religious group (which is mentioned three times in the *Qur'ān*) seem to have survived in the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (mid-tenth century CE) and particularly in the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* (late tenth century/early eleventh century).[26] As is well known, the latter text was translated into Old Castilian and Latin in the mid-thirteenth century under the title *Picatrix* (see Sophie Page's article in this issue for further details, (2023)), with the consequence that Islamicate ritual techniques for conjuring planetary spirits were already circulating in medieval and early modern Europe long before the publication of the *Arbatel*. However, even though such techniques originated in the Arabic-Islamicate world, the *Arbatel* clearly represents an early modern, heavily Christianised, and decidedly humanist-Paracelsian version of the same basic idea. The text is hence a fine example of longue-durée and trans-religious textual-ritual entanglements in the history of Western learned magic.

[21] The *Arbatel's* Christian dimension is not only visible in its more than 70 biblical quotations, but also in the omnipresence of the term 'GOD' throughout the text, which appears over 180 times. In fact, the *Arbatel* stresses over and over again that practitioners should "Love the Lord your God with all your heart" (aphorism 5, Peterson 2009, 15), that the " 'Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' and of the beneficial use of all magic" (aphorism 49, 2009, 99), and that they should use the art "with gratitude for the honor of God, and the benefit of their neighbors" (2009, 5). Accordingly, the *Arbatel* distinguishes between divine, benevolent 'magic' on the one hand, and demonic, malevolent 'magic' on the other (see also aphorism 38), sharply distinguishing all those "cacomagi, who with forbidden superstitions associate themselves with demons, and although they can achieve certain things which God permits, they in turn suffer punishment from the devils" (aphorism 26, Peterson 2009, 57, see also aphorism 41). It may be that it was this extremely pious varnish that enabled the *Arbatel* to be printed and continuously re-printed at the height of the European witch persecutions. In fact, the text is often considered to be one of the first decidedly 'white magic' texts.[27] Frater Acher, as we will see, practiced the *Arbatel* for precisely this reason.

[22] The *Arbatel's* reception and impact was, in the words of Carlos Gilly, quite "overwhelming" (2005, 213). Of course, the *Arbatel* quickly prompted polemical, indignant, and condemnatory reactions from the authorities of the time, such as Martin Delrio, Andreas Libavius, and the Basel bishop Simon Sultzer (see Davies 2009, 53f.). Much more interesting, however, is the positive or affirmative reception of the work over the following centuries. It influenced many subsequent texts dedicated to the practice of learned magic, including Großschedel's *Calendarium Naturale Magicum Perpetuum* (1614), Ps.-Faust's *Magia naturalis et innaturalis*, the *Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses*, a range of French *Grimoires* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ebenezer Sibly's *Clavis or Key to Unlock the Mysteries of Magic* (1792), and Francis Barrett's *The Magus* (1801), to name just a few. The *Arbatel* also influenced, directly or indirectly, various authors who contributed to the emerging discourse about 'Christian theosophy'—such as Valentin Weigel, Heinrich Khunrath, Adam Haslmayr, Johann Arndt, and Benedikt Figulus—

26 For conjurations of the seven planetary spirits, see therein book 3, ch. 7 and book 4, ch. 2 (I refer to Ritter's/Plessner's German translation from the Arabic (1962), for the Latin version, see Pingree (1986)).

27 See the title of Gilly's 2005 article. The underlying claim, however, seems rather misleading if we acknowledge the benevolent and pious self-understanding of many previous texts of learned magic, such as the *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, the *Ars notoria*, or many texts that belong to the early modern humanist discourse on 'magia naturalis': see, in particular, Otto (2011, chap. 10).

as well as a range of other influential figures of the time, including John Dee, Theodor Zwinger, Wolfgang Hildebrand, and Robert Fludd.[28] Several versions of the Arbatel also made it into the Leipzig collection of 'codices magici' (on which see Bellingradt and Otto 2017),[29] with the names of the seven planetary spirits appearing even more frequently in this particular corpus of manuscripts.

[23] In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the *Arbatel* was re-printed, re-edited and re-translated several times, and was thus easily accessible to modern practitioners of magic(k). Johann Scheible published the 1686 Luppius version in his *Das Kloster* (vol. III) in 1846 and then a different German translation in his 1855 edition of Agrippa's *Magische Werke*. A few decades later, the Berlin-based publisher Herman Barsdorf Verlag also provided a German translation in its five-volume Agrippa compendium *Magische Werke in fünf Theilen* (1921). The *Arbatel* seems to have been of particular importance to Franz Bardon, who was one of the leading German-speaking practitioners during the mid-twentieth century and who dedicated several works to the conjuration of planetary spirits, yet without mentioning the *Arbatel* by name (e.g., *Die Praxis der magischen Invokation*, 1956). A French translation was published by Marc Haven in 1946 (see Peterson 2009, 103–04). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century milieus of the Golden Dawn, the *Arbatel* was first popularised through Arthur Edward Waite's *Book of Black Magic and Pacts* (1898), but apparently never achieved the prominence of related early modern manuals for conjuring spirits, such as the *Clavicula Salomonis* or the *Abramelin* in the Golden Dawn. Aleister Crowley experimented with invoking planetary spirits, possibly inspired by the *Arbatel*, in his Rites of Eleusis, a series of seven rituals publicly performed at London's Caxton Hall in 1910 (see Crowley 1911; and Doyle White 2021). However, in his assessment of pivotal premodern texts of learned magic, Crowley obviously preferred the *Abramelin* over the *Arbatel* (see Henrik Bogdan's article in this issue, (2023)). Nevertheless, through Crowley, the *Arbatel* may also have inspired Gerald Brousseau Gardner and his conceptualisation of the central Wiccan rite of 'drawing down the moon' (see Doyle White 2021 for further details). Turner's English translation of Agrippa's *Fourth book of occult philosophy* was reprinted continuously, most recently by practitioner-scholar Stephen Skinner in 1978, which may have prompted renewed interest among English-speaking practitioners from the 1980s onwards.[30] In 2009, Joseph H. Peterson produced a novel 'semi-critical' bilingual Latin-English version, based on the original 1575 printing, which is also the edition used here. All in all, the *Arbatel* is one of many striking examples of textual-ritual entanglements in Western learned magic across time and multiple cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries.

Ritual Mechanics

[24] The mechanics of the *Arbatel* ritual are surprisingly simple and straightforward, and much less demanding than those set out in other texts of learned magic from that era, such as those belonging to the Solomonic cycle. Solomon is, in fact, not even mentioned in the *Arbatel*, even though its author clearly adopted a range of ritual patterns from the *Clavicula Salomonis* and related texts—such as the use of sigils ascribed to spirits, the observance of their respective timeframes and cardinal directions, the divine revelation of their names, and the acquisition of an assistant or guardian angel. The *Arbatel* is divided into 49 chapters, or 'aphorisms,' and

28 See for further names and references Peterson (2009, XXIX-XXX); Gilly (2005, 213).
29 See CM 55 (2017, 97) and CM 68 (2017, 81).
30 See Asprem (2014) for the great productivity of the occult publishing industry from the 1970s onwards.

covers some 90 pages in a regular book format. The *Arbatel* ritual (as outlined in the 1575 version) consists of five steps.

[25] The first and foremost prerequisite for successful *Arbatel* 'magic' is the faith of the practitioner. According to aphorism 2, "you should intend to undertake or accomplish nothing without the invocation of GOD through his only begotten Son" (Peterson 2009, 13). Aphorism 39 stresses that the practitioner "should learn to worship, love, and fear the eternal God, and to honor him in spirit and truth" (2009, 79). There are many similar formulations that run through the text like a red thread, and thus amplify the aforementioned 70 biblical quotations and innumerable praises of 'GOD.' Of course, the reason for the Christian God's omnipresence in the *Arbatel* is that, according to the author's frame of reference, all creation is bestowed by God, including all arts and sciences, and hence also the 'magia veterum' outlined in the *Arbatel*. Only by being absolutely faithful and obedient towards God and his spirits will the practitioner succeed in the art, as it "is not delivered unless divinely, to those to whom God is willing to reveal these secrets" (aphorism 11, 2009, 19).

[26] If this basic prerequisite is met, the art is taught "through the instructions of the holy spirits of God: Because true faith comes FROM HEARING" (aphorism 12, 2009, 23). From the perspective of the ritual procedure, this claim is primarily related to knowing the spirit's correct names: "Your GOAL therefore must be that you master the names of the spirits, that is their office and powers, and how they are subjected to your ministry or service by God" (aphorism 13, 2009, 25). The *Arbatel* suggests that the practitioner ask for an angelic assistant or transmitter, and for this purpose provides a brief prayer to God, who shall grant the practitioner "one of your spirits, who will teach me whatever you wish me to learn and understand" (aphorism 14; ibid.). In aphorism 26, the *Arbatel* also suggests "that each one may recognize their guardian spirit, and that he obeys him as if it were the word of God" (2009, 55). As side-prerequisites, the *Arbatel* also mentions being secretive regarding the art (aphorism 1 and 39), "liv[ing] for yourself and for the Muses," not mingling too much with others, being "beneficent to all people," being "diligent in your vocation" (aphorism 3, 2009, 13), and "support[ing] nothing which is wicked, unfair, or unjust, or even entertain such thoughts" (aphorism 39, 2009, 81).

[27] If these prerequisites are met, the *Arbatel* frequently asserts that "there is nothing that your soul will desire that will not be granted in the future" (aphorism 5, 2009, 15), that "EVERYTHING WILL COME TO A HAPPY AND DESIRED OUTCOME" (aphorism 15, 2009, 29), or, even more promisingly, that "YOU WILL RECEIVE WHATEVER YOU HAVE ASKED FOR" (aphorism 11, 2009, 21). The text is so straightforward with regard to what appears to be blatant wish-fulfilment through Christian faith and prayer alone (further instances: "All things are possible to those who believe and are willing," aphorism 20, (2009), 43; "whoever incites passionate prayer for what he desires, will not suffer rejection," aphorism 28, (2009), 63) that it reminds the attentive reader of the modern New Thought Movement. Is there a chance that Phineas Quimby or Emma Curtis Hopkins read the *Arbatel*? Whatever the case, no further preparatory steps are specified in the *Arbatel*, with such typical 'Solomonic' practices as fasting, washing, or austerity completely absent.

[28] The second step involves the practitioner deciding upon his ritual goal and identifying the corresponding spirit. ARATRON (Saturn), for instance, "turns treasures into coal, and coal back into treasure […] He gives familiars with definite power […] He makes one invisible […]"; BETHOR (Jupiter) "exposes treasures, and secures the cooperation with aerial spirits […] and provide[s] medicines which are miraculous in their effects" (aphorism 17, 2009, 31–33). Irritatingly, the *Arbatel* provides a second list in aphorism 24, in which 21

so-called "secrets"—ritual goals in my analytical terminology—are divided into three categories: "greatest secrets" (which include healing, longevity, and "To know God and Christ," 2009, 49), "medium secrets" (such as the transmutation of metals, natural magic, prophetic visions), and "lesser secrets" (e.g., acquiring wealth, exceling in military matters, or being "a good theologian […] educated in all writers of theology, ancient and modern," 2009, 51). Aphorism 27 provides a graphical tool, namely a circle with 112 spokes (divisions), with four primary divisions based on the cardinal directions. These are said to help one to determine one's wishes (or 'secrets') and to relate them to the corresponding spirits. However, no further instructions are given regarding the use of this circle, apart from the hint that the spirits responsible for the "greatest secrets" should be invoked while facing towards the East, the spirits of the "medium secrets" while facing towards the South, and the spirits of the "lesser secrets" while facing towards the West and North.[31] It seems to me that the author has amalgamated two different sources here—one list of goals ascribed to the Olympian spirits, and another list of 21 goals mapped onto a circle and ascribed to the cardinal directions—which do not fit together properly. The goals ascribed to the Olympian spirits also do not correspond to the goals mentioned in the 'secrets' aphorism. However, it is most likely that the intention was for the practitioner to first choose a goal, then look for its cardinal direction in the circle, and then for its corresponding Olympian spirit or sub-spirit.

In the third step, the practitioner identifies the name of the spirit which corresponds to the chosen ritual goal or 'secret.' There are, of course, the names of the seven Olympic spirits—who "inhabit the firmament and the stars of the firmament, and their duty is to decide fate, and to administer accidents of fate, inasmuch as God agrees and permits" (aphorism 15, 2009, 27–29)—each of which may be evoked directly.[32] However, the practitioner may also, voluntarily or involuntarily, conjure subordinate spirits ascribed to the "governors or different offices of the Olympians" (aphorism 16, 2009, 29). The *Arbatel* thus specifies the number of 'offices' that each Olympic spirit controls (e.g., ARATRON: 49; BETHOR: 42; etc.) and numerous subordinate spirits that reside in these 'offices' (e.g., ARATRON: "49 kings, 42 princes, 35 governors, 28 dukes, 21 attendants standing before him, 14 servants, 7 messengers: He commands 36000 legions; a legion numbers 490," 2009, 33). In fact, "with average magi, the governors will send some of their spirits, who will obey within certain limits" (aphorism 17, 2009, 39). The practitioner may also consciously decide to address a subordinate spirit: "if you covet a lesser office or dignity, magically summon the subordinate of the prince, and your request will be granted" (aphorism 32, 2009, 69). [29]

As mentioned previously, the names of these subordinate spirits are not provided in the text, and we may assume that they are delivered by the guardian or assistant spirit that one has invoked previously.[33] The beginner is, however, recommended to "operate without names, but only with the offices of the spirits" (2009, 41–43) and then await further revelations or divine instructions. Indeed, spirits are so crucial to the *Arbatel* that they determine its very [30]

31 Peterson's suggestion that we should assume that "the seven lesser secrets listed […] are actually sought from the west, while the north secrets […] are destructive and are not explicitly mentioned" is eminently plausible (see Peterson 2009, XIX).

32 See also aphorism 17: "The seven governing princes are evoked solely by magic, in that time, day, and hour, wherein they preside, appearing visibly or invisibly, through the names and offices given to them by God, and by displaying their characters, which they have confirmed, or they themselves have given" (Peterson 2009, 31).

33 See aphorism 18: the "names of the Olympic spirits have been delivered by others, but the only ones that are effective are those which are delivered by the revealing spirit, visible or invisible. And each will be delivered to those who are predestined" (2009, 41).

definition of the 'magician': "The *magus* is, for us, one to whom the spiritual essences serve to reveal the knowledge of the whole world and of nature, whether visible or invisible, through divine grace. This definition of the magus applies broadly, and is universal" (aphorism 41, 2009, 85).

[31] Alongside the spirit's name, the practitioner observes the correct cardinal direction in which the spirit is to be conjured, the correct timeframe (i.e., when they preside, probably on one of the seven days of the week, and preferably during the first hour after sunrise: see aphorism 21), and prepares the respective sigil that is ascribed to the corresponding Olympian spirit (named 'CHARACTER' throughout the text). In contrast to contemporaneous texts of learned magic dedicated to the Solomonic art of conjuring spirits, the *Arbatel* does not properly explain how to actually use the sigil during the conjuration (e.g., by wearing it on the body, holding it in one's hand, or placing it somewhere).

[32] The description of the fourth step, the conjuration itself, is surprisingly short and simple. The location for the rite is not even specified. No ritual circle needs to be drawn on the ground, and no fabrication of further ritual tools and devices (such as a special cloth, wands, swords and daggers, a trumpet, pens, inks, and paper, etc., as in the case of the *Clavicula Salomonis*) is required. The invocation reads as follows (aphorism 21):

> [33] O GOD ALMIGHTY AND ETERNAL, you who have established all of creation for your praise and honor, and the service of mankind, I beg you to send your SPIRIT N.N. of the solar order, to inform and teach me the things I have asked (or, that disclose to me the cure for edema, etc.), but may your will, not mine be done, through JESUS CHRIST your only begotten son, OUR LORD. Amen. (Peterson 2009, 45)

[34] There are no fumigations involved, no sacrifices, and no recitations of *voces magicae*.

[35] In the fifth step, the *Arbatel* recommends that the practitioner "not detain the spirit beyond one hour" (ibid.). The following formula is provided for the dismissal:

> [36] BECAUSE YOU CAME PEACEFULLY AND QUIETLY, and answered my petitions, I give thanks TO GOD in whose name you have come, and may you go now in peace to your order, returning to me when I call you by your name, or order, or office, which is permitted by the Creator. Amen. (ibid.)

[37] All in all, the *Arbatel* reads like a trimmed version of the *Clavicula Salomonis*, or one of the related early modern ritual texts dedicated to the art of conjuring spirits, that has been heavily simplified (with regard to its ritual complexity) and at the same time made far more pious (with regard to its overflowing theological and biblical lip service). In a way, the author's background intention may have been the same as that of John of Morigny who, a few centuries earlier, fabricated his own version of the contested *Ars notoria* ritual in his *Flowers of heavenly teaching*. As Claire Fanger has demonstrated, John's attempt to circumvent theological condemnations of his ritual practice by exchanging the dubious *notae* with worship acts dedicated to the Virgin Mary failed dramatically (the book was publicly burnt in 1323: see Fanger 2015, 2021). We have no further evidence of the intention or fate of the author of the *Arbatel*, but the pattern seems both fairly similar and also similarly unsuccessful, at least with regard to various later 'crimen magiae' trials in which the possession of copies of the *Arbatel* was not particularly conducive to the longevity of their owners.[34]

34 On the trial of Philipp Homagius and Georg Zimmermann in Marburg around the year 1617, see Gilly (2005, 213); on the trial of Jean Michel Menuisier in 1604 in Moulins, see Davies (2009, 64–65).

Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience*

As mentioned at the outset of this article, Frater Acher claims to have conjured six of the seven planetary spirits[35] mentioned in the *Arbatel* between the years 2010 and 2013, i.e., shortly after having finished 10 years of daily training in magic(k) and having passed through his graduation at I.M.B.O.L.C. (in 2009). What may seem like an unusual choice at first glance becomes less surprising if we quickly browse through the internet, for the *Arbatel* seems to be a rather popular ritual script among contemporary practitioners of magic(k). There is a (private) Facebook group named "Arbatel & Olympic Spirits Grimoire Magic Group" with currently no fewer than 3.006 members.[36] The word "Arbatel" currently (February 20, 2023) prompts ca. 113.000 hits on google, and there are hundreds of videos on youtube.com dedicated to the *text*, the most watched of which has more than 253.000 views.[37] Limited deluxe goat leather editions of the *Arbatel* go over the counter to the true aficionado for $450.[38] If we search for "Arbatel amulet" or "Arbatel talisman," we encounter a large number of commercial vendors of neat golden or silver emblems with inscriptions of the *Arbatel's* spirit names and their sigils.[39] There are numerous further blogs and websites providing experience reports and suggestions with regard to practicing the *Arbatel*. As a contemporary practitioner of magic(k), it thus seems almost impossible to overlook the text. Despite this plenitude, Frater Acher's *Arbatel* experiences are analysed here because they are by some margin the most detailed, elaborate, and self-reflective accounts that have so far been made publicly available by a contemporary practitioner. [38]

Re-interpreting the *Arbatel*

Given that modern practitioners have sigil magic(k) and sex magic(k) (or combinations of the two) at their disposal—two extremely simple ritual techniques that take little time yet are nonetheless highly effective, according to many practitioners—why bother spending months or even years to conjure planetary spirits by following a centuries-old script? Frater Acher's explanations are helpful when it comes to answering this question. In the introductory part of his "The Arbatel experience" website, he outlines the advantages and risks offered by the wide availability of premodern manuals of learned magic on the internet. In particular, he points to what he sees as a common misunderstanding: [39]

> There is another, much more rarely talked about aspect that is troublesome. Some [40]

35 In what follows, I attempt to portray—from an emic perspective—Acher's experience reports that re-narrate his alleged ritual encounters of entities which he identifies as planetary spirits or the 'Olympians' mentioned in the *Arbatel*; of course, I do not take the existence of such entities for granted, nor do I wish to suggest that Acher actually encountered spirits, whether 'Olympian' or other. To be sure, from a methodological perspective, experience reports are textual documents in themselves which do not give us direct access to the actual nature and contents of the experience as such. Yet I will follow the strategy to let Frater Acher speak for himself in the next chapters, in order to properly grasp his perspective and intentions as a contemporary practitioner of learned magic; only in the concluding chapter will I engage in a more comprehensive analysis of the underlying textual-ritual entanglements, thus reflecting the agenda of this special issue.

36 See https://www.facebook.com/groups/arbatelgroup/ (accessed February 20, 2023).

37 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1fROdAhNTA (accessed February 20, 2023).

38 See https://www.miskatonicbooks.com/product/heptameron-of-peter-abano-the-arbatel-of-magic(k)-deluxe-limited-edition-bound-in-goatskin-leather-purple/ (accessed February 20, 2023).

39 Such as this one sold via etsy.com: https://www.etsy.com/ch/listing/762442303/das-siegel-der-sieben-erzengel-siegel (accessed April 20, 2023).

> of the magical grimoires - and the Arbatel certainly is one of them - actually can be utilised as self-initiatory systems and might have even been conceived as such. […] It seems the tradition and art to bring to life such initiatory aspects of the grimoires has almost been lost entirely. Instead it has been replaced by a surface—maintained both online and in print—that makes these books seem like another shortcut towards instant gratification. Something that of course blends well with the spirit of our time.[40]

Frater Acher goes on to explain that he—and an unnamed friend—decided in 2009 to practice the *Arbatel* not for its promise of "instant gratification" (i.e., short-term inner-worldly wish-fulfilment), but, rather, precisely as a ritual tool contributing to the spiritual ascension of the practitioner: "We believed that the Arbatel presents a highly practical system that allows the practitioner to ascend on the Hermetic ladder—through each planet's phase—all the way from Malkuth to Binah.[41] Testing this assumption was the goal of our work and we were willing to pay the related price for it" (ibid.). Frater Acher goes on to compare this interpretation of the *Arbatel* with a practice that had already been performed by members of the Golden Dawn and, in particular, Aleister Crowley, a type of astral projection known as 'rising on the planes': [41]

> What we have here are two pretty different magical techniques that still aim towards similar ends. The Rising on the Planes elevates the astral body of the practitioner above Earth and then onwards through the seven planetary realms. That is, it pulls the astral energy of the magician upwards into higher realms. The ritual cycle of the Arbatel takes the opposite approach with a similar goal—it opens gateways of planetary forces into the material realm and pulls down their energies one after the other to be grounded within Earth and the physical body of the practitioner. The major difference between the two thus is that the first exercise predominantly works on the astral plane, whereas the latter aims to bring down the planetary forces through all planes and into the material realm.[42] [42]

Accordingly, Frater Acher considers the *Arbatel* to be a "method to cathartically re-balance and reintegrate the planetary forces into one's own psyche, subconscious mind and magical art" (ibid.). [43]

This description nicely illustrates a significant shift of interpretation that happened in the history of Western learned magic from the nineteenth century onwards. As I have shown elsewhere, practitioners at that time tended to devalue the short-term inner-worldly ritual [44]

40 See https://theomagica.com/the-arbatel-experience (accessed April 20, 2023).

41 It is common practice among modern practitioners of magic(k) to relate the 'planets' of Ptolemaic astrology to the Sephirot of the kabbalistic tree of life (see also Tegtmeier 2011, 137). Usually the correspondence runs as follows: Malkuth—Earth; Yesod—Moon; Hod—Mercury; Netzach—Venus; Tiferet—Sun; Gevurah—Mars; Chesed—Jupiter; Binah—Saturn; Chokhmah—Uranus; Kether—Neptune; Da'at, the mystical centre of the tree of life, is ascribed to Pluto. This system of correspondences is somewhat irritating because Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto are added to those that were part of the Ptolemaic model—and hence also addressed in the *Arbatel*—and because Saturn, Uranus and Neptune are, even though innerworldly, ascribed to those Sephira that are considered to reside beyond the 'abyss' and thus in divine realms (Binah, Chokhmah, Kether). Be this as it may, for Frater Acher, rising through the planetary planes and the Sephira of the tree of life seem to be to metaphors for the same process.

42 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phaleg (accessed April 20, 2023). Acher cites Crowley's description of the practice in the latter's *Magic(k) in Theory and Practice*, Chapter XVIII.

goals that pervaded the premodern literature, and instead began to re-interpret the practice of magic(k) as a tool for personal transformation, spiritual ascension, and self-deification or apotheosis (a process that was fully sparked with the workings of the Golden Dawn, see Otto 2018b, 88–89). The oft-evoked terminology used to describe the practice which aimed at this new goal—the shift being from optimising the outer circumstances of life to perfecting the inner self—was 'theurgy' or 'higher magic.' Even though there are, as we have seen, no traces of methods in the original *Arbatel* for rising up the 'Hermetic ladder' or the Sephirot of the kabbalistic tree of life, this is exactly how Frater Acher and his ritual partner re-interpreted the text in 2010.

[45] This re-interpretation is mirrored by Frater Acher's basic motivation for actually conjuring planetary spirits and figuring out what to 'do' with them. As we have seen, the *Arbatel*'s ritual logic is entirely based on choosing a specific (usually short-term, inner-worldly, i.e., purely instrumental) ritual goal and then conjuring the corresponding spirit, who will, the text suggests, quickly fulfil one's wish or 'secret'. Frater Acher's motivation was different, as he explains in the ritual diary that outlines the first invocation of PHUL (moon):

> [46] Let me briefly talk about my personal attitude and intention for the acts(s). It was important to me that the successful communion with the respective Olympic Spirit should be the only goal of the rites. Rather than performing the rituals for reasons of personal material gain or spiritual support, my focus should be entirely on understanding the nature of the Olympic Spirits themselves.[43]

[47] Accordingly, as Frater Acher points out in his OCH diary, his main motivation to conjure a planetary spirit was to "be in his presence for a short while, experience his energy, his qualities and learn about his influence on myself and the world in general."[44] In other words, Acher's *Arbatel* practice functioned as an experimental "exploration into the nature of the Olympic Spirits through questions and answers.“[45] Taking Acher's interpretation of the Olympic spirits into account, we can understand that he intended to tap into those basic forces that "create creation itself" and that are hence to be considered more powerful than other intermediary beings such as demons or angels, as he claims retrospectively while pondering the risks and necessities of his practice.[46] Interestingly, thus, Acher does not 'psychologise' planetary spirits

43 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phul (accessed April 20, 2023).

44 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_och (accessed April 20, 2023).

45 See https://theomagica.com/trithemius-table-of-practice (accessed April 20, 2023).

46 See https://theomagica.com/the-ritual-of-bethor (accessed April 20, 2023): "In fact, it needed to be asked if they were 'beings' at all - given that all beings were only created through the weaving of their essential forces. If the four elements are the spirits and substances through which everything created is veiled into physical and astral shapes, then the Olympic spirits are what creates creation itself. It is through them that each divine impulse is initially formed into a spiritual being; everything bound to flow into creation receives its particular pattern of being through the forces stored in these seven divine bodies. It is through the Olympic spirits that each divine spark is veiled into its spiritual body. […] They are the forces taking the divine breath and helping it to transform first into a spiritual, then into an astral and ultimately into a physical form. In this process, however, they always remain passive - like an unmovable light, shining fixed in its assigned space, like a well, never judging, offering its force to anything passing by. It is the assigned angels who make use of them, who move and weave and build from their pools of resource and being - in order to bring new beings to life. […] It is because of the nature of these spirits why the mage should never try to manipulate them. In fact it is advisable not to work directly with these spirits at all; better rely upon the intelligence and skills of angels who hold millenials of experience on how to harness their powers in order to impact creation constructively. When the magician brings down the Olympic spirits into their temples it should be for one reason only: to enlighten their own mind with better understanding of how this world works. And then to get out alive again."

which for him are external entities, due to his 'traditionalist' self-understanding as a learned magician. Yet, his aforementioned re-interpretation of the *Arbatel* as a "method to cathartically re-balance and reintegrate the planetary forces into one's own psyche, subconscious mind and magical art"[47] represents a typically modern strategy of psychologising magic(k) (on this strategy see, among others, Hanegraaff 2003; Asprem 2008; Pasi 2011; or Plaisance 2015) and of using its techniques for quasi-therapeutic and/or self-growth purposes (see on this motif especially Luhrmann 1989, 244–45, 279–80, 287–88).

Re-designing the Ritual Choreography

[48] Alongside this fundamental re-interpretation of the original text, Frater Acher and his ritual partner developed a ritual choreography for conjuring the Olympic spirits that differs markedly from the procedure outlined in the original text. The reason is that, from their perspective, "the actual ritual structure that is supposed to frame the Arbatel prayers" was rather obscure and they thus had to "fill in these blank spots ourselves."[48] They assumed that there existed a missing part of the *Arbatel* that outlined "instructions on how to actually summon the Olympic Spirits in a ritual setting rather than purely praying for their appearance" (ibid.).[49] With this in mind, they developed a ritual choreography that was predominantly oriented towards ritual procedures from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (the main source of inspiration of Acher's teacher Agrippa) and hence towards ritual scripts that rather belong to the Solomonic tradition—as these had partly informed the Golden Dawn—[50] than to the *Arbatel* itself (in contrast to the mindset originally underlying the *Arbatel*, as we have seen above). Accordingly, they chose "the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram together with a slightly adjusted version of the Ritual of the Hexagram as frame rituals", and came up with the following basic design for the conjuration of PHUL (Moon):

[49]

1. Kabbalistic Cross
2. Lesser Banishing ritual of the Pentagram
3. Welcoming of God in the four quarters of the circle
4. Adjusted Hexagram ritual of the Moon
5. Gesture of the opening of the veil
6. Arbatel prayer for protection of God and consecration of Table of Practice (from Second Septenary, Aphorism 14)
7. Arbatel evocation of Phul (from Third Septenary, Aphorism 21)
8. Communion with Phul
9. Gesture of the closing of the veil
10. Lesser Banishing ritual of the Pentagram
11. Ritual license to depart. (Ibid.)

[50] Connoisseurs of Golden Dawn rituals will be sure to recognise that most of these ritual elements are derived from the Golden Dawn current, whereas only two prayers are taken from

47 https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phaleg (accessed April 20, 2023).
48 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phul (accessed April 20, 2023).
49 Regarding Acher's interpretation, I would note that, from a sixteenth-century perspective, it is not entirely implausible to "purely pray" for the appearance of a spirit.
50 On the Golden Dawn, see the contribution of Dirk Johannsen in this issue (2023); on the influence of Solomonic texts on the Golden Dawn, see Otto (2011, 565–66), Butler (2011, ch. 1-3).

the *Arbatel* itself.[51] Acher in fact concedes that the structure is inspired by previous conjurations of planetary spirits which "had been set up and conducted according to the classic Golden Dawn approach and expanded with more recent techniques for solitary practitioners by my previous teacher or myself."[52] What is more, in contrast to these previous conjurations, which had been invocations ("i.e. I used my body and consciousness as a vessel for the planetary influence and then acted as a personification of the respective divine principle"), Acher and his ritual partner decided that the *Arbatel* rituals should be of "evocative nature"—they hence fabricated "a version of Trithemius' Table of Practice as the 'locus of manifestation' for the spirits" (ibid.). Acher provides a detailed script for the production of this device—which is essentially a black mirror on a wooden table—on his website (see figure 1).[53]

During the *Arbatel* conjurations, Frater Acher installed this mirror in the ritual chamber that he had built into an old barn close to his house, which is situated in a small Bavarian town.[54] The mirror was placed on the altar in the middle of a ritual circle (see figure 2), and the evoked planetary spirits were thus meant to 'appear' in or above said mirror. [51]

Frater Acher's and his partner's ritual choreography for the *Arbatel* included a few further elements that are not provided in the original text. One concerns purification rites that, as we have seen, are not prescribed in the *Arbatel*. Nevertheless, Frater Acher's training demanded various preparatory rites such as "Continued abstinence of meat, alcohol and cigarettes since the beginning of the Arbatel operation," "consciously focussing on the forthcoming ritual during every day of that week," "Dedicating the full day of the operation to the work, including several hours of preparatory work (e.g., creating the Lamen) and meditation," as well as "Ritual cleansing, bath and meditation before the performance of the rite" (ibid.).[55] To Acher, these preparations are key to being "able to alter your state of consciousness in order to break through or avoid perceptive filters which normally inhibit direct experience of and communion with spirits" (ibid.). The same goes for the use of various 'paraphernalia,' as Frater Acher calls the items used in the ritual, namely a self-made robe, crown, belt, ring, dagger, and sword. Again, the ritual framework here is the Solomonic art of conjuring spirits [52]

51 The structure also partly resembles the outline of a typical planetary ritual discussed in Tegtmeier 2011, 174f. In fact, it is likely that Acher and his teacher Agrippa were inspired by Tegtmeier's written oeuvre.

52 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_ophiel (accessed April 20, 2023).

53 See https://theomagica.com/trithemius-table-of-practice (accessed April 20, 2023). The mirror itself "is created according to Franz Bardon's instruction for physical condensers and then coated with black paint in multiple layers" (ibid.).

54 Acher notes a few interesting obstacles that practitioners of magic(k) may today face: "At the moment I finished the evocation the church bells started to ring. Now, for all of you who are planning to set up a temple at the moment; let me share this piece of painful personal experience: never ever set it up in a catholic village around 200m from the local church. It is completely absurd how often and at what times these old church bells still ring"; https://theomagica.com/arbatel_ophiel (accessed April 20, 2023); "When I cleaned and prepared my temple on the morning of that day I forgot to realize that the atmosphere in it was cold and damp from the long winter months during which it hadn't been used. I did realize a lot of large spiders and white cobwebs behind the black curtains—but here we are living on the countryside and I guess building a temple into an old barn will always come with these types of silent visitors. Yet, what I overlooked was that the presence of spiders and cobwebs should have pointed me to the astral state of my temple: the energy was low and there were certainly some astral cobwebs on the curtains. I should have purified it by burning menthol crystals and performed a ritual cleansing of the entire sacred space. Perform a ritual act to revive the energies sleeping in the astral patterns of the temple so that they would actively vibrate and resonate when I entered for the Hagith rite at night… I took this as a deep learning and hope not to repeat it too soon: as a magician it is just so easy to become overly focussed on ourselves and forget about the world we are living in"; https://theomagica.com/arbatel_hagith (accessed April 20, 2023).

55 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_hagith (accessed April 20, 2023).

Figure 1 'Table of Practice,' © Frater Acher.

Figure 2 The ritual chamber with Frater Acher's altar, © Frater Acher.

as handed down via the Golden Dawn tradition, and then interpreted from a personal and contemporary perspective.[56]

Another important deviation from the original script is the great importance of imagination techniques in Frater Acher's practice. These techniques are not only used during the 'communion' with the Olympic spirits themselves. In his records of the rituals, Acher usually describes what he 'sees' *with closed eyes*. A nice example of this type of what he calls "inner spirit contact" is his description of PHALEG (Mars): [53]

> When I felt stable in my magical trance, I closed my eyes and looked upwards. Only at this moment did I realize that the moon had descended right into my circle. It hung over my head like a huge silver cloud. Had I raised my hand I could have touched the round belly of the moon. The entire circle under my closed eyes was filled with silver light.[57] [54]

In Frater Acher's *Arbatel* experiences, imagination techniques are also involved during the various sub-rituals that are derived from the Golden Dawn. For instance, Acher performs the pentagram and hexagram rituals not only physically, i.e., in his ritual chamber, but simultaneously also in his mind through imagination.[58] Acher here draws inspiration from the German [55]

56 See Acher's interpretations of these ritual tools: "Then I put on my sacred robe and paraphernalia. The belt for taming my desires, the crown for taming my mind, the moon stone ring for directing the energies released from my right, the Lamen to protect my heart and to put it under the protection of the operating spirit"; https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phul (accessed April 20, 2023).

57 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phul (accessed April 20, 2023).

58 An illustration can be found in Acher's conjuration of PHALEG: "The colors behind my eyes were intense and sparkling and on welcoming God in the quarters I felt pressing waves of divine elemental presence

practitioner Franz Bardon (1909–1958) and his *Praxis der magischen Evokation* (1956), aiming to create within the ritual circle a 'vacuum-like' space that resembles the characteristics of the evoked spirit, for instance through visualising its colors, so that it will be willing to appear and will feel most comfortable.[59] The relevance of imagination techniques for Acher's *Arbatel experience* became more crucial over time, as he became acquainted with Josephine McCarthy and her concept of 'visionary magic(k)' only after the fourth conjuration. As a consequence, the description of the last conjuration of BETHOR, in particular, reads quite differently from those that precede it, as Frater Acher here systematically differentiates between the 'inner realm' and the 'outer realm' and stresses that it is necessary "to be present in both realms at the same time—inside and outside."[60] Acher thus engages in interesting re-interpretations of his previous practice and the necessity of performing the 'outer' rituals at all.[61] Today, he claims that the experienced practitioner may produce the same effect with much less ritual effort.[62]

overflowing my small circle. On drawing the hexagrams the glowing lines almost exploded when activated by Phaleg's sigil in their centers. The hexagrams hung like blistering bars of iron in the dark around me. Then, when I concluded the opening ritual with the central hexagram above the altar the entire temple realm was focussed on this very point, vibrant of tension and contact. Now I lit the incense of Mars and the sweet smoke filled the sphere of the spirit. At this point of the rite I was completely caught in a Faraday cage of spirit presence—safe yet surrounded by a powerful electrical current—the sigil of Phaleg pounding like a living heart above the altar. I closed my eyes, immersed myself into singing the mantra of Phaleg's name and opened my mind to the inner spirit contact"; https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phaleg (accessed April 20, 2023).

59 See the following email communication from November 11, 2018: "Du erzeugst ein Vakuum / eine sphärische Kugel, die frei von der Atmosphäre und Bindungen der Erde ist. Diese kann man dann laden / befruchten mit jeglicher Planetenenergie / -bewusstsein. Das Vakuum ist somit ein 'neutraler' Ort" (see also Bardon 1990, e.g., 62-74).

60 See https://theomagica.com/the-ritual-of-bethor (accessed April 20, 2023).

61 See ibid.: "At this stage a strange feeling overtook me: it was the deep conviction of being completely ready for the actual rite in this very moment - without putting on any robes or magical belts or lamens, without any additional prayers or incenses lit. […] The insight just hit me and I could see exactly in the inner temple what happened when I put on the consecrated robe: I disappeared within it. My body and inner being immediately were veiled behind the shining power of the robe. […] This robe was a device of protection and what it protected was this fragile pattern I called 'myself'. It shielded me from the magical energies about to enter this temple; forces that weren't meant to interact with humans without many astral filters and layers in-between. […] By the time I had performed the Pentagram- and Hexagram-Rituals a few further things had dawned on me. These types of rituals—as simple as they may seem—were never meant to be performed from one side only. A magician standing in their temple drawing the signs and uttering the divine names was only one side of the coin. The other was waiting for us in the inner realms—rarely discovered and actively worked with by magicians these days. However, when I performed the rites the contacts of the quarters were just as actively as myself."

62 See email communication from November 11, 2018 (in response to a question about the complexity of his approach, which differs from the original *Arbatel*): "Man kann diese Rituale auch viel einfacher gestalten. Schlichtheit der Ritual bei gleichem magischen Effekt wäre ein Zeichen hohen magischen Könnens. Komplexe Rituale sind einfacher, da die Komplexität dazu dient eine magische Gnosis / Trance zu induzieren—sowohl in der Vorbereitung, als auch in der Durchführung. Ein Adept müsste diese Gnosis aus der hohlen Hand, also 'einfach so' induzieren können (er würde dabei inhaltlich den gleichen Schritten folgen, müsste aber nicht mehr alle davon physisch manifestieren). Ich würde mir das heute weitgehend zutrauen. Aber nur eben nach jahrelanger Übung—und v.a. nach langem Studium der Quareia Materialien". Frater Acher's focus on ritual gnosis may be inspired by modern Chaos magic(k) (see Otto 2019 for further details on this current).

Frater Acher's Experimental Approach

This last observation—that Acher continuously changed his ritual procedures and interpretations over the course of the *Arbatel* conjurations—is crucial for understanding his overall approach. It shows that even traditionalist magic(k), with its lengthy ritual scripts, its multitudinous rules and paraphernalia, and its alleged ritual formalism, is nothing but an experimental enterprise for the practitioner—an enterprise that necessitates open-mindedness, ongoing re-calibration, and creativity (on experimental creativity as a common trait in modern magic(k), see also Luhrmann 1989, e.g., 69-70, 120). [56]

We can see this in, for instance, Acher's amendment of an additional conjuration formula—taken from a late ancient ritual text, namely PGM IV—before the second conjuration of OPHIEL;[63] his change of time-frames before the third conjuration of HAGITH;[64] his 'deep learning' that consists in properly preparing the ritual site after it has been occupied by physical and 'astral' cobwebs;[65] his on-going reflections on his spiritual encounters and how they might actually have worked;[66] his omission of basic prayers before the fifth conjuration of PHALEG, which he deemed unnecessary or even as hindering the ritual at that point,[67] and thus his reflections on how far he actually differs from the Renaissance practitioner;[68] and finally, his much more systematic implementation of 'visionary magic(k)' during and after [57]

63 Acher's justification for adding a passage from the PGM: "My aspiration was to find a liturgic frame text that I could maintain for all seven Olympic Spirits—as all of them have essential characteristics in common if one takes a perspective of how they govern and influence life on earth. Luckily I found elements for this frame evocation in the Greek Magical Papyri, more precisely in PGM IV. 986-1036. This section contains a 'God-bringing spell to be spoken' which was a great fundament to build an Olympic Spirit evocation from. The sequence contained poetic lines that seemed as if they had been written with the memory of the Olympic Gods in mind, e.g. 'You who are seated on top of the world and judge the universe, surrounded by the circle of truth and honesty' "; https://theomagica.com/arbatel_ophiel (accessed April 20, 2023).

64 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_hagith (accessed April 20, 2023): "During previous rites I had discovered differences in the perceived energy patterns of the planetary forces during their day and night hours. While the cause of this simply might be my different state of mind in the morning versus the evening here is what the actual difference was: rites in the morning produced an energy and spirit connection that was more subtle and fleeting. Whereas rites during the night hours (i.e. after sunset) revealed results that were more charged and forceful in experience. Irrespective of where this difference stemmed from it was too obvious to be ignored. Even more so as my good friend—with whom I conduct these rites in parallel—had discovered the same difference without me sharing my observations to him. This is why I chose the evening hour for the rite of Hagith."

65 See above, footnote 54.

66 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phul (accessed April 20, 2023): "Thus, whether the presence and voice of Phul entered predominantly through the lamen on my chest, through my ears, through my forehead or the top of my skull I cannot tell. Yet, I can tell that all these organs were in contact with Phul's voice at the same time. On reflection I can see psychologically how much the Table of Practice helped to induce self-hypnosis as the black surface of the mirror captures the gaze so easily while not providing any fixed objects for the stare to settle on. From a magical perspective, however, I am unable to tell how the spirit influence was transferred between the outside of the circle, the Table of Practice, the lamen and my bodily and mental senses."

67 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phaleg (accessed April 20, 2023): "I had learned from previous rites that after entering the inner temple my magical trance was induced mostly by physical movement, a calm mind and open senses for inner realm perceptions. Reciting the actual evocation of the Olympic Spirit was enough spoken word one the rite. Had I included the additional two prayers at this point it would have rather reduced my trance level."

68 See ibid.: "While the long prayers to God might have fulfilled the first or maybe even both of these goals for the Renaissance practitioner and magician, I more and more learned that this wasn't the case for me. Reciting these prayers certainly allowed my mind to focus and my heart to open. Yet for some reason it felt like starting each car ride with a read through the manual, an official thank you to the car dealer who

the conjuration of OCH.[69] Acher's ritual diaries thus demonstrate that even the use of a seemingly straight-forward and easy-to-use ritual template such as the *Arbatel* calls for ongoing creativity and innovation.

[58] Acher's experimental approach is, of course, most visible in his self-proclaimed 'encounters' with the Olympic spirits. During these encounters or, in his tongue, 'communions,' Acher seems to have followed two different strategies. First, he engaged in what he calls 'immersion,' a process through which he identified with the respective spirit in his mind and body. A good example of this type of experience is found in his description of PHALEG (Mars):

> [59] And through my being, through the substance I turned into roams the presence, the electrical current of Phaleg. His forces swirl and dance through my expanded consciousness and body like invisible currents through water, like wind through the skies. He is weightless, yet full of living force. If I ever encountered a spirit smiling or in a happy state it is right now. I continue to sing Phaleg's name and allow his electrical currents to fill everything with vibrant life. All my body has turned into organic, Venusian matter just to balance his immense power.[70]

[60] During the actual 'communion,' i.e., the evocation of the spirits into or onto the black mirror, Acher attempted to 'receive' their respective shapes and secret names, in addition to any further information that they were willing to share with him. Hence, all six ritual diaries provide a drawing of the spirit (see figure 3 for the spirit of OCH as an example), a specification of their secret names, and an 'interview' that Acher conducted with the spirit during the evocation.[71]

Repercussions

[61] Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience* had a range of more or less significant repercussions on his private life, according to his own narrative. These included long-term effects of the practice which extended beyond Acher's primary goal to be in the spirit's "presence for a short while,

brought you this wonderful device and a sincere request to God to show you the ignition key slot, while the key was already in your hands."

69 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_och (accessed April 20, 2023): "It was during this phase when I got in touch with Josephine McCarthy and read her seminal book 'Magical Knowledge II'. This opened many doors for me that I hadn't seen before. One of them was the ability to get in touch with Olympic Spirits in advance of the actual ritual—thus starting to form a relationship, a better understanding of each other before we were to meet face to face in the void of the magical circle. For my ritual of Och this turned out to be a central element of preparation that I hadn't been able to do for the previous three rites. You can find an account of my first encounter with Och on my blog under the Arbatel tag."

70 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_phaleg (accessed April 20, 2023).

71 See, for instance, the final proclamation of OCH (sun): "I am the light that shines in silence. I burn what came before me and I burn what follows me. I am the conscious of my own presence. I drink from the blood of each moment. Do not follow me, nor do not search me. Sit still, become a single line, continuously extending into the void. Then explode in light, become the line that expands into all directions. Forget your words, hold my presence. I am within you, I am around you. Your thoughts becloud me, your earths blacken me. Turn yourself into glass, become the vessel of my light. Silence. And I will shine through you"; https://theomagica.com/arbatel_och (accessed April 20, 2023).

72 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_och (accessed April 20, 2023): "I stopped the mantra and allowed my mind to be soaked with the energy in the room. The shape over the altar slowly become move visible. It was moving, spinning around its own axis and changed its size in a pulsating light as if it was breathing. This is the closest approximation of what I saw—consider this a snapshot of a shape that oscillated and spun in a strange rhythm."

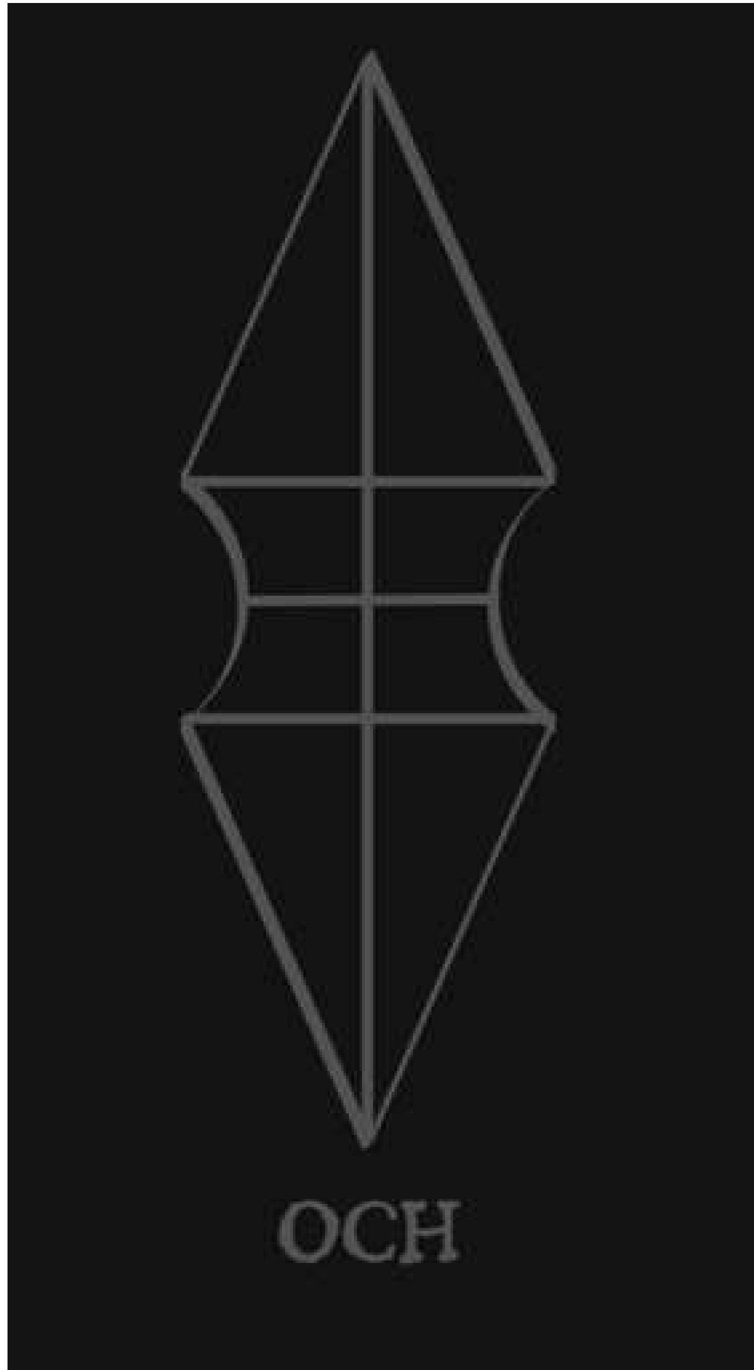

Figure 3 The shape of OCH,[72] © Frater Acher.

experience his energy, his qualities and learn about his influence on myself and the world in general."[73] As mentioned at the outset of this article, Frater Acher re-interpreted the *Arbatel* as a "method to cathartically re-balance and reintegrate the planetary forces into one's own psyche, subconscious mind and magical art" (ibid.). In fact, Acher is convinced that "any successful spirit communion will express itself in changes in our lives […] The forces of the spirit we work with will take shape and merge into our personality as soon as we allow them to sink into our subconsciousness and become one with who we are underneath our skins."[74] So, what were the long-term effects of Acher's *Arbatel experience,* according to his own narrative?

[62] On the one hand, he regularly hints at the repercussions of his communication with a given planetary spirit in his private life, albeit without going into great detail.[75] For instance, after the conjuration of HAGITH (Venus), he writes:

> [63] One of the most interesting results was physical illness which stemmed from an overload with Hagith's (i.e. Venusian) energies which again led to a breakthrough of the barriers that I had built around these in my body and mind. As a result Hagith's qualities became much more predominant—or I should say balanced—in my life since then. The aspects of 'love as a tool that opens and life as the seed that follows' established itself as the central theme in my work, private and magical life for several months. Essentially that period lasted for three months, from March until May 2011.[76]

[64] While this sounds like a rather pleasant experience (physical illness aside), Acher also underwent a severe crisis after the conjuration of OCH (sun). In a blog post entitled "the beast that almost got me," he concedes that as "a human we are not made to live in the Sun, but to live in its orbit. We are not meant to be the centre of our own universe—but to circle around it in spheres."[77] He goes on to imply that OCH in fact had a rather destructive impact on his life: "Every other life, every other career, every other relationship will suddenly seem in reach. The power to re-imagine and start afresh will be abundant and the ease to destroy what we have built uncannily alluring" (ibid.). Accordingly, he warns the reader that after identifying with the sun itself, "Ego and hunger will be infinite."[78]

[65] This corresponds to Acher's general warnings regarding the practice of the *Arbatel*. All in all, it does not seem to have been a purely healthy and benign practice. Acher frequently mentions severe exhaustion, particularly after the conjurations.[79] In later sections of the conjuration

73 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_och (accessed April 20, 2023).

74 See https://theomagica.com/blog/2011/7/30/the-beast-that-almost-got-me-or-ochs-aftermath.html (accessed April 20, 2023).

75 See, for instance, https://theomagica.com/arbatel_ophiel (accessed April 20, 2023): "Right after the ritual of Ophiel a sudden irruption of Plutonic forces took place in my life (and body)"; https://theomagica.com/arbatel_hagith (accessed April 20, 2023): "During the days and weeks after the ritual this important aspect of Irasil's influence continued to dawn on me and started to change my understanding of and view on basically all things alive around me."

76 https://theomagica.com/arbatel_och (accessed April 20, 2023).

77 See https://theomagica.com/blog/2011/7/30/the-beast-that-almost-got-me-or-ochs-aftermath.html (accessed April 20, 2023).

78 Ibid.: "When we encounter the spirit of OCH it take all our willpower and a busload of faith not to burn down the bridges of the live we had created before… Because once we shift identification from the objects we see in the Sun, to sunlight itself no single shape will ever be good enough. Ego and hunger will be infinite."

79 See https://theomagica.com/arbatel_hagith (accessed April 20, 2023): "Then I am sinking downwards and the vision fades. Only now do I realize that my knees have been trembling throughout the communion and

series (from HAGITH onwards), and particularly in texts written in the aftermath, he thus takes a critical perspective towards the entire practice:

> The Olympic spirits are not meant to be present in the physical realm unfiltered. They are forces beyond the world of creation that manifested on this planet. Calling them down unfiltered, establishing a physical space for them on earth was a very dangerous act that easily could impact and unbalance creation around it. This was true for their impact on the inner as well as the outer realm; in both realms performing this rite meant for these spirits and their forces to enter a space they weren't meant to be in. Equally the space they were called into wasn't intended to hold such capacities of immediate power.[80] [66]

[67] In a similar vein, Frater Acher claims that it "is because of the nature of these spirits why the mage should never try to manipulate them. In fact it is advisable not to work directly with these spirits at all" (ibid.). He ponders self-critically whether he may have barked up the wrong tree in the first place and concludes with the telling words: "When the magician brings down the Olympic spirits into their temples it should be for one reason only: to enlighten their own mind with better understanding of how this world works. And then to get out alive again" (ibid.).

[68] As of today, Frater Acher has not yet practiced the seventh conjuration, that of ARATRON (Saturn). In an email communication from November 11, 2018, he concedes that the practice of the *Arbatel*, as well as his further practice of magic(k), had such severe consequences that he has hitherto refrained from the final conjuration of the Saturn-spirit (which, given Saturn's astrological reputation, might also be the most efficacious yet challenging one).[81] What is more, in 2013, i.e., shortly after the conjuration of BETHOR (Jupiter), Acher had several critical and life-changing experiences while practicing other types of magic(k), as a result of which he "almost lost my job as well as the wonderful relationship to my wife."[82] Most importantly, he also became severely ill. In hindsight, Acher ascribed this disease to his practice of magic(k) and decided to reduce his commitment for some time.[83] However, he also suggests that he did not forget ARATRON and will eventually complete the cycle, as soon as he "gets around to doing it" (ibid.).

my mind is completely exhausted. It seems elevating myself close enough to be able to communicate with her drew upon all available resources in my body and mind and left me richly rewarded yet also equally worn out."

80 See https://theomagica.com/the-ritual-of-bethor (accessed April 20, 2023).

81 See email communication from November 11, 2018: "Leider hatten die anderen Rituale (zusammen mit meiner Ritualpraxis ausserhalb des Arbatel) allerdings so heftige körperliche Auswirkungen, dass ich das letzte Ritual noch nicht gemacht habe."

82 See his online essay "On crossing the abyss": https://theomagica.com/on-crossing-the-abyss (accessed April 20, 2023).

83 See the email communication from November 11, 2018: "das Heilungsritual fand ausserhalb des Arbatel Zykluses statt; allerdings nach dem letzten Arbatel Ritual. Die heftigen Auswirkungen dieses Rituals waren der Grund, weshalb ich bisher nicht weitermachen konnte."

Conclusions (or: Why Conjure Planetary Spirits in the Twenty-First Century?)

Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience* is perfectly suited as an illustration of this special issue's overall topic: 'Western learned magic as an entangled tradition.' We have here a ritual script—the *Arbatel*—that was first printed in Basel in 1575, but whose foundational idea can be traced back to the Arabic-Islamicate realm of the eighth century CE. At the time of the *Arbatel's* composition, the author picked up this idea—that it is possible and indeed promising to conjure spirits ascribed to the seven 'wandering stars' of Ptolemaic astrology—and disguised it with over 70 biblical quotations, adopting in parallel further textual-ritual patterns from both the humanist-Paracelsian discourse on 'magia naturalis' and the Solomonic art of conjuring spirits. In other words, the original text already attests various types of religious and ritual hybridity and thus outlines a highly 'entangled ritual,' characteristics that are, however, typical of the tradition of Western learned magic at large. [69]

Over the course of the following centuries, the text was repeatedly transmitted, re-edited, and translated, ultimately becoming a much-discussed 'classical' script of learned magic in practitioner discourses of the twentieth and twebty-first centuries. Yet, we know little of its practical applications. Was it, in premodern times, ever practiced in the way outlined in the text? Or was it rather an early modern fantasy novel in the shape of a ritual script? That we are not able to answer such questions—due to the notorious lack of trustworthy premodern ego-documents—is one of the fundamental methodological difficulties we face in the study of large parts of Western learned magic. Premodern ritual texts, even though vivid and fascinating, thus appear 'dead' to the modern scholar. [70]

However, as this article seeks to demonstrate, it may be both worthwhile and interesting—from a historical as well as an analytical perspective—to tap into the experiences of contemporary practitioners of magic(k) who appropriate these texts. There is a wealth of hitherto neglected experience reports authored by modern practitioners of magic(k) who have—much like experimental archaeologists—given these texts a trial run and described how one might actually succeed in practicing a premodern ritual script such as the *Arbatel*. However, we have also seen that for a contemporary practitioner of magic(k) such as Frater Acher, such an undertaking is anything but quick and easy. Such a months- or years-long process is no mere fascination-driven self-entertainment, nor is it an effort- and riskless 'exploration into the spirit realm.' It requires significant amounts of training, time, resources, and creativity. Even more importantly, for someone who believes that the spirits outlined in such texts actually exist and thus possess the power and efficacy ascribed to them, it will also be a dangerous enterprise that requires commitment, courage, and respect: "In magic, like in many performing arts, *the practitioner themselves is the only safety net* [sic]."[84] It is precisely this belief that may legitimise the analytical comparison of modern and premodern practitioners of learned magic—assuming that premodern practitioners are likely to share this belief (even if they would typically have considered God to be their 'safety net')—and thus encourage scholars to take into account contemporary experience reports more systematically in the study of Western learned magic. [71]

However, even if we consider such experience reports to provide legitimate data for the academic study of Western learned magic, we must, of course, take into account the wide array of cultural adaptations, theoretical re-interpretations, ritual re-configurations, and on- [72]

84 https://theomagica.com/the-arbatel-experience (accessed April 20, 2023).

going innovations that underlie these reports. Undoubtedly, the practice of the *Arbatel* in the twenty-first century will differ significantly from its premodern application. This difference relates to a second type of ritual entanglement that does not concern the text itself but rather the ever-changing mindset, intention, and creativity of its practitioners. In the case of Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience*, we have seen that this second type of ritual entanglement—which arises during the practical application of a ritual script—can be at least similarly extensive. Like many other ritual scripts in the history of Western learned magic, the *Arbatel* can thus be interpreted as a 'living' text in two senses of the word: It attests to changeability and textual-ritual entanglements not only on the level of the text itself and its century-long transmission history, but also on the level of its practical application and creative adaptation to ever-changing cultural and religious circumstances, worldviews, and mindsets.

[73] As we have seen, Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience* merges (1) a late ancient conjuration formula from the Greek Magical Papyri, (2) the Arabic-Islamicate (ultimately Sabian) art of conjuring planetary spirits, (3) late medieval and early modern ritual techniques for conjuring spirits taken from Solomonic grimoires, (5) early modern Paracelsian motifs and ideas, (6) Christianate prayer patterns taken from the *Arbatel*, (7) the notion of the spiritual ascension of the magician, here interpreted as a 'hermetic' ascent through planetary spheres, (8) various ritual techniques taken from the Golden Dawn current (e.g., the lesser banishing pentagram ritual), (9) imagination techniques taken from twentieth and twenty-first-century authors such as Franz Bardon and Josephine McCarthy, (10) an emphasis on ritual 'gnosis' (trance) which might be inspired by modern Chaos magic(k) literature, (11) a strong focus on self-transformation and psycho-spiritual maturation through magic(k), and, finally, (12) a rather 'mystical' striving towards temporary communion with planetary spirits.

[74] Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience*, even though inspired by the original script, thus points to the construction of an entirely novel, unprecedented, and highly innovative ritual series—in stark contrast to his 'traditionalist' self-understanding. Even though Western learned magic has always been subject to all sorts of chrono- and geographical entanglements and thus tended to produce strikingly 'entangled rituals,' we might consider Frater Acher's interweaving of such a large number of ritual techniques and motifs from the past two millennia as a particularly noteworthy illustration of this overall tendency. Acher's *Arbatel experience* thus provides a perfect illustration for the argument outlined at the beginning of this paper, namely that it is misleading to "squeeze contemporary magic(k) into established categories of the study of religion, and thus look at it in the sense of 'contemporary esotericism' or a 'new religious movement'." It is in fact much more reasonable to interpret contemporary magic(k) as being part and parcel of the *longue durée* textual-ritual tradition of Western learned magic, and thus to analyse contemporary texts and techniques of magic(k) against the backdrop of their manifold inspiring sources, which may go as far back as late ancient Egypt.

[75] Does Acher's *Arbatel experience* illustrate a significant rise of ritual entanglements in modern magic(k)—eventually sparked by the internet era, which has facilitated access to and the combination of a large number of ritual scripts and techniques from premodern centuries? Certainly: from reading premodern grimoires, particularly from the Solomonic cycle, we get the impression that learned magic in those centuries was a rather formalistic enterprise: *following the script* seems to have been of utmost importance. However, this impression might be misleading due to an apparent lack of trustworthy experience reports and ego-documents from those centuries. Instead, it may be more reasonable to assume that oscillating between a formalist-traditional and a creative-innovative approach towards the ritual art may always

have been a reasonable, if not necessary, strategy—say, in order to cope with opaque passages or gaps in the script, to make pragmatic decisions in the case of differing ritual templates, or to heighten one's ritual efficacy after repeated failure. Seen from this perspective, the striking heterogeneity and volatility even among outwardly 'similar' manuscripts of the Leipzig 'Cod. Mag.' collection (see Bellingradt and Otto 2017) might point to such a strategy of oscillation, wherever deemed necessary, thus bearing witness to a significant degree of creativity and innovation among premodern practitioners of learned magic as well. However, the apparent heterogeneity and volatility in premodern manuscript-based learned magic may have been overlooked or suppressed from the nineteenth century onwards, when some select (few) manuscripts became 'standardised' through printed text editions or translations (e.g., those published by members of the Golden Dawn).

This brings me to my last point, namely the question of the striking continuity and longevity of Western learned magic over the course of the last two millennia, and also the ongoing popularity of magic(k) in the twenty-first century. What the case of Frater Acher's *Arbatel experience* adds to our consideration of this question is that contemporary magic(k) might have something to offer that other types of religious or spiritual practices appear to lack. I am not speaking of the *Arbatel's* original promise of guaranteed wish-fulfilment, or 'instant gratification,' as Acher puts it. Twenty-first-century cultural fabrics provide a vast array of cultural techniques for all sorts of wish-fulfilment, be it in the realm of institutionalised religion, science, and technology or the entertainment industry. Much more telling is Acher's re-interpretation of the *Arbatel* as a ritual tool for direct encounter with spiritual entities. As I have shown elsewhere (Otto 2018b), this interpretive shift from an optimising (inner-worldly) ritual agenda towards one that aims at perfecting or transforming the self underlies important strands of modern magic(k). From a broader perspective on the history of religions, one might argue that this shift in interpretation transformed modern magic(k)—at least partly—into a rather mystical enterprise. Yet, even in so-called higher magic(k) or theurgy, the fundamental promise is that of a more or less total—ritual—controllability of the entire process.[85] If we compare this inherent promise to the mystical branches of established religious traditions—for instance, to the practices and experience reports of Christian mystics, Sufis, or ecstatic kabbalists—there is no such thing as a ritual controllability of the process. It may be that it is precisely this quality of magic(k) that appeals to contemporary practitioners who deem it 'real' and efficient. Next to its ascribed effectiveness in the realm of inner-worldly wish-fulfilment, it may also appear to be a ritual tool for controlled, repeatable, and self-determined encounters with 'spiritual beings' or 'transcendent realms.' Frater Acher nowhere writes of failed contact attempts—all six of his rites were clearly successful from his subjective viewpoint. The Christian monk who prays for decades, humbly awaiting the eventual epiphany of God or His angels, might be amazed by such a 'magical' success rate. [76]

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85 For an interesting practitioner reflection on the relationship between 'magick' and 'mysticism', see Tegtmeier (2011, 263–64).

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