THE REVIVAL OF THE OCCULT PHILOSOPHY: CABALISTIC MAGIC AND THE HERMETIC ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DAWN

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The Revival of the Occult Philosophy: Cabalistic Magic and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

by

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Abstract

It is essential that we include the history of the western magical tradition in any study of intellectual history. The belief in and practice of magic is part of an interpretation of existence with a long history. That humanity continues to turn to magic for answers about the universe, human beings, and their interaction with the world demonstrates that it is not a mode of thinking which can be dated to a certain time period. The history of the western magical tradition defied the existence of a world process of rationalisation. This thesis will show how the tradition did so in the Renaissance and continued to do so in a revival of that same magical system in nineteenth-century England. Specifically, in this study we will focus on the establishment and development of cabalistic magic and how it provided the ideal system in which many currents of esotericism could be assimilated. We will show how this synthesis began in the Renaissance by scholars such as Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, and we will show how the process was concluded by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, a co-founder of a nineteenth-century English magical society, The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Along the way we will discuss the contributions of various scholars and occultists and demonstrate their roles in either maintaining and, or expanding the system of cabalistic magic.

This dissertation builds upon the work of Dame Frances Yates and her study of cabalistic magic in her book, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*. The conclusion reached in this thesis is that the revival of cabalistic magic in nineteenth-century

England was not merely a restatement of the theories and ritual formulated by the Renaissance magi but was also a restatement of their intellectual processes. The members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn took the magical material passed down through the ages and applied the same process of synthesis, thus expanding the magical tradition and fulfilling the potential of the cabalistic magical system. This revival and expansion of the western magical tradition in an era of scientific advancement and secularisation is but one example of the eternal relevance of magic to intellectual history as a valid and popular interpretation of the world in which we exist.

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Chapter One: Beginnings

Throughout history, social and intellectual movements have occurred that defy orthodox, western sociological and historical accounts of human existence. The view that humans progress through history in an increasingly rational way is a common theory which is being challenged more and more by a variety of academic disciplines. Nevertheless, this view remains a tenacious one that is deeply embedded in much of western thought. The traditional images of primitive people tend to portray them as ape-like in both physique and mind. Just as the people are viewed as inferior, so are their beliefs and their ways of interpreting the universe. This way of viewing history was strengthened during the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century when the demarcation between science, magic and religion was also further established. Religion and science became increasingly disassociated and institutions like the Royal Society in London bolstered the importance of science in western Europe. Protestant thought of the same century played a significant role in denigrating magic vis-à-vis religion. Not only did Reformation thought reaffirm the earlier Judaic stand that magic was false religion, but it added its own stigma by claiming that magic was also inefficacious.[1] Orthodox intellectual history has been founded on the belief that rationalization is a linear process that progresses temporally. Working within this framework, much of the study of magic has been tainted with a bias. This bias supports the superiority of science over magic and reason over the irrational. Thus, when any inquiry is carried out into the role of magic in society and history, it is inevitably

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[1]Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19.

associated with inferiority and the necessity to explain the existence of this belief in the irrational in the face of a supposedly rational populace.[2] This explanation is frequently defensive and dismissive of the irrational thought for which it attempts to account. Obviously, there exist moments in history which do not support such a notion of rationalization. These moments challenge the orthodox view of intellectual history and beg for another explanation. The Renaissance produced such a moment when important developments in humanistic thought and scientific advancement occurred at the same time as a resurgence of hermetic magic and other occult beliefs. The entire Neoplatonic movement was steeped in what was thought to be the magic and myth of ancient cultures. During the Renaissance, such a clear-cut idea of a progressive rationalization of intellectual thought has no place.[3] This was an era in which advancements were made in the study of mathematics and angel magic. Prominent and respectable scholars studied both medicine and natural magic. Despite the obvious advancement in many areas deemed respectable by advocates of science, the Renaissance was also a time for retrieving knowledge from the past, and often using that knowledge to accomplish the aforementioned advancements. Progress was made in the intellectual thought of western

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[2]For examples of this attempt to explain, or for explanations of this type of reaction, see Tambiah's *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), H. R. Trevor-Roper's *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and James Webb's introduction in his *The Occult Underground* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1974).

[3]Tambiah, 24.

Europe during the Renaissance. However, that progress was made possible by looking to the past for guidance and wisdom. Some three hundred years later, a similar phenomenon occurred in a different region, once again challenging the notion of a world process of successive rationalization. Nineteenth-century England was the location of a revival of the magical philosophy and creation of occult systems of thought that had occurred in Spain, France, Italy and Germany during the Renaissance. This revival resulted, once again, in the advancement of intellectual thought. This dissertation will examine the nature of cabalistic magic in nineteenth-century England, how it revived not merely the texts of the Renaissance, but also the syncretic spirit of Renaissance Neoplatonism, and how this revival influenced, and was influenced by, intellectual history. This analysis will be carried out from a perspective different from that of traditional scholarship. The application of a linear notion of rationalization would lead to the dismissal of this revival of cabalistic magic as an anomalous lapse in the progress of reason. A less limited and less dogmatic approach may prove to be more fruitful in understanding the development of intellectual thought and the role of magic in nineteenth-century England, and in the history of western Europe.

The study of magic and esotericism has yet to take its place as a valid and respectable discipline in the academic world. Magic has continually met with hostility and condemnation, initially from the proponents of organized religion and later from those of science. The struggle between these three areas causes such heated debate because of the lack of exclusivity of each area from the other. Those areas investigated by science are the

same ones that religion and magic attempt to comprehend. All three try to explain the causal connections between people and the universe that they inhabit. The explanations offered by each are frequently quite similar once the terminology and symbolism are removed. Despite the similarities, it is the differences between the three that are often emphasized. In his study, *Magic and the Western Mind* (1991), Gareth Knight explains that the dominant difference between magic, science and religion is found in their *modus operandi*. In religion, prayer is used to request the manipulation of the universe by God or his agents; in science one does such manipulation oneself; and in magic, one also carries out the manipulation oneself, but through the use of non-physical agencies.[4] The one similarity between religion and science that unites them in a common cause against magic, is their each having held the position of authority in the history of western thought. Magic has always remained the voice of opposition and of the alternative.

A general definition of magic is adequately provided by Francis King, who writes that magic involves "...methods of entering into relationships with non-human forces and obtaining wealth, power, and pleasure..."[5], and by Richard Kieckhefer, "Magic tries to manipulate the spirits - or impersonal spiritual forces seen as flowing throughout nature -

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[4]Gareth Knight, *Magic and the Western Mind* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1991), 95.

[5]Francis King, *Modern Ritual Magic, The Rise of Western Occultism* (Dorset, Lindfield: Prism-Unity Press, 1990), 11. First published as *Ritual Magic in England* (London: Neville Spearman, 1970).

mechanically, in much the same way one might use electricity by turning it on or off."[6] It is necessary to emphasize that these definitions are starting points and that they are not entirely successful in demarcating magic from religion and science, or even from other branches of esotericism.[7] Magic within the western Christian tradition involves ritual practices that enable the practitioner to manipulate supernatural forces into action in order to produce concrete and physical results. In addition to these definitions, it is also important to note that magic is also perceived as a path to knowledge. This knowledge is specifically *gnosis* and is intended to lead one to a knowledge of one's higher self and subsequently to salvation or the divine. Magic encompasses a variety of methods of interacting with spirits or a supreme entity in order to obtain anything from the salvation of one's soul to gold for one's pockets.

It is true that recently there has been a revived academic interest in magic, which can be seen in the works of members of the *Societas Magica*[8] and in the scholarly publications of the *Magic and History* series published by Pennsylvania State University Press. The academic dismissal of magical studies due to a perceived lack of respectability is slowly changing. For the most part, however, this academic interest in magic is focussed

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[6]Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; repr. 1997), 15.

[7]These definitions are not fixed and we shall show how one of the subjects of this study, the Order of the Golden Dawn, changed the traditional definition of western magic.

[8]Founded by Claire Fanger, Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario; Richard Kieckhefer, Professor of Religious Studies at Northwestern University and Robert Mathiesen, Professor of Slavic Studies at Brown University.

on that of the early Christian, medieval and Renaissance periods. Study of the history of magic after these eras has rarely been addressed. There has also been ample work done in the fields of anthropology and sociology on the so-called "primitive magic" of other cultures by scholars such as E.E. Evans Pritchard and Bronislaw Malinowski and even more recently, and more geographically relevant to this study, by Jeanne Favret-Saada. Also, much academic work has been done on witchcraft in western Europe and elsewhere. Yet there has been very little serious scholarship carried out on the rise of ritual magic in England during the nineteenth century. This is even more surprising given the proportions and notoriety of this occult movement and of some of the people involved. Perhaps the idea of intelligent people pursuing the practice and study of magic long after science had been embraced by the western mind is baffling to some. This lack of comprehension is exemplified in modern scholarship in Keith Thomas's influential *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, "Astrology, witchcraft, magical healing, divination, ancient prophecies, ghosts and fairies, are now all rightly disdained by intelligent persons."[9] The problem is that while one is busy 'rightly' disdaining, one is not seriously exploring the role and influence of the belief and practice of such things throughout history.

In his 1974 study, *The Occult Underground*, James Webb addresses this problem of the lack of academic interest in the occult, particularly in that of the nineteenth century. He suspects this area has been ignored because of its perceived intellectual

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[9]Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), ix.

unrespectability.[10] Webb says, however, that by ignoring the occult revival of the nineteenth century, a complete view of modern intellectual history cannot be formed.[11] He goes on to suggest that it is the 'Establishment' which has rejected the relevance of the occult movement. Ironically, the occult's existence is entirely dependent upon the Establishment, existing primarily as the opposition to, and the interrelation with, that very Establishment.[12] Therefore, the occult revival of the nineteenth century must be examined to understand more fully what is the nature of the Establishment and the intellectual history of the time. During this particular revival, cabalistic magic was practised and redefined in remarkable ways. Cabalistic magic itself played an integral role in the occult tradition. This dissertation will show that at the beginning of the century there was a restatement of traditional, late medieval and Renaissance cabalistic magic, while the end of the century witnessed a revival of the actual creative magical process of the Renaissance that was responsible for the foundation of cabalistic magic in the Christian tradition.

Christian cabalistic magic developed alongside the actual formation of the Christian cabala which took place in Florence shortly before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. The person responsible for developing the Christian cabala was Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), a contemporary of Marsilio Ficino, whose revival of Hermeticism was an

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[10]James Webb, *The Occult Underground* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1974), 1.

[11]*Ibid.*

[12]*Ibid.*, 2.

important component in Pico's eventual philosophy. Pico learned about cabala from Spanish Jews and the cornerstone of cabalistic literature, *The Zohar,* which was a massive commentary on the Torah professing to hold the key to the mysteries of the Bible. The cabalistic tradition Pico encountered was a Spanish-Jewish one which claimed that when God gave the Law to Moses, he also provided a second revelation of a secret meaning of the Law. Although this esoteric tradition and its theosophical system were supposedly passed down through the ages orally, there was also an accompanying textual source, *The Zohar*. This text was composed in the late thirteenth century in Spain by Moses de Leon, a Spanish Jew and cabalist.[13] During the Renaissance, however, it was attributed pseudonymously to the quasi-legendary Rabbi Simon Ben Yohai who was supposed to have lived in "the holy land" in the second century.[14] This attribution came from the author, Moses de Leon, who wished to antiquate, and perhaps increase the importance of his writings. This was carried out in the true neoplatonic and occultist spirit of accrediting a text with an ancient history and an illustrious author. *The Zohar* describes an interpretation of the universe upon which the fundamental tenets of cabala are based. These include the belief in a hierarchical universe composed of manifestations of God, through which one may ascend with the appropriate knowledge of angelic names and the use of complicated calculations involving numbers and letters that reveal the hidden

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[13]See Gershom Scholem's *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974; repr. New York: Meridian, 1978), for the most comprehensive academic explanation and exploration of the origin and authorship of *The Zohar*.

[14]*Ibid.*, 58.

meaning of the Torah. These exegetical formulas fall into the three main categories of notarikon, gematria and themurah. Gematria involves assigning numerical values to Hebrew letters. In this way the arithmetical values of words can be compared and manipulated to explain their 'occult' or hidden meaning.[15] Notarikon is a science of abbreviations or a system of shorthand. Each letter of a word can be taken as the initial of another word, or the initial letters of an entire phrase can be extracted and pieced together to form a new word that gives the phrase, from which this new word was derived, a new meaning.[16] Themurah is a technique of shifting the letters of a word or a sentence around in order to arrive at a new word or phrase, which relates to a specific sacred word or passage. This is done by bending the alphabet in half, placing one half over the other, thus providing the appropriate substitutions.[17] These three mystical calculative methods form

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[15]The following is an example of the use of gematria taken from Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers's *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (London: George Redway, 1887; repr. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978), 7. "Thus the letter *Shin*, SH, is 300, and is equivalent to the number obtained by adding up the numerical values of the letters of the words RVCH ALHIM, *Ruach Elohim*, the spirit of Elohim; and it is therefore a symbol of the spirit of the Elohim. For R=200, V=6, CH=8, A=1, L=30, H=5, I=10, M=40; total=300." Using the same numerical substitutions the another word with a similar meaning, "Yetzer", also has the same value.

[16]An example, again from Mathers, helps illustrate this notion. "Thus every letter of the word BRASHITH, *Berashith*, the first word in Genesis, is made the initial of a word, and we obtain BRASHITH RAH ALHIM SHIQBLV ISHRAL THVRH, *Berashith Rahi Elohim Sheyequebelo Israel Torah:* 'In the beginning the Elohim saw that Israel would accept the law.'" Mathers, 8.

[17]This type of manipulation becomes increasingly complex within the Golden Dawn system. There are twenty-one different methods of substitutions as each individual letter substitution results in the bending of the alphabet at a different point. The method called "Qabalah of the Nine Chambers", or Aiq Bekar, is one form of themurah frequently

one aspect only of cabala. Along with these practical formulas there is a philosophy and an understanding of the universe that deviates from traditional Judaic or Christian interpretations. This philosophy involves access to the divine through knowledge of one's self and through magical knowledge.

Pico applied cabala to Christianity professing its ability to prove the mystery of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus. He used the cabalist manipulations of letters in an attempt to prove that Jesus is the name of the Messiah.[18] His Christian cabalistic philosophy spoke of a mystical ascent through the levels of the universe, called sephiroth by cabalists, to the divine above. Pico used cabala to validate the Christian faith and to encourage conversion. He compiled several 'Cabalistic Conclusions' which were part of his 'Nine-Hundred Conclusions' published in Rome in 1486. These conclusions supported his belief that the true revelations of Christianity were to be found through cabala. These conclusions also presented magic as the practical part of science and as the marriage between heaven and earth.[19] In *Alchemy of the Word/Cabala of the Renaissance*, Philip Beitchman claims there

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employed by members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Francis King suggests it is this method that reveals the secrets of Mathers's translation of the *Grimoire of Armadel* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1980). Mathers gives an example of a result found by using another form of themurah: "I will merely mention, as an example, that by the mode of Temura called ATHBSH, *Athbash*, it is found that in Jeremiah XXV. 26, the word SHSHK, *Sheshakh*, symbolizes BBL, *Babel*." Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, 11.

[18]Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 18.

[19]Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 28. This entire book is a valuable addition to the scholarly study of magical thought and practice in the Renaissance. Brann offers comprehensive

are three strands of Renaissance cabala; Jewish, Christian and Neopagan. Beitchman affiliates Pico with the Christian cabala alone and completely disassociates him from Neopagan cabala which he identifies with theurgy and magic.[20] This is misleading and inaccurate. Pico and his contemporary, Ficino, were unofficially the founders of Renaissance Neoplatonism, a movement which emphasized the theory that the human soul mirrored the universe and that any action occurring in the one would be reciprocated in the other. This Neoplatonism also combined a revival of early Greek philosophy with Hermeticism. Ficino was largely responsible for the addition of hermetic magic to the melting pot of thought and Pico assimilated cabala into this blend, aptly named by Frances Yates 'occult philosophy'.[21] Ficino's interest in natural magic was encouraged by his passion for Platonic philosophy and for the *Corpus Hermeticum.* The texts which compiled this corpus were believed to have come down from the ancient Egyptian magician Hermes Trismegistus. However, just as *The Zohar* was inaccurately believed to have a famous author and a great antiquity, so too were these texts. Ficino believed that his magical pursuits were sanctified by God and drew comparison of the Renaissance magician with

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information on all of the Renaissance magi, with much original scholarship on the figure of Trithemius.

[20]Philip Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word-Cabala of the Renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), x.

[21]Yates, 1. Yates provides the following definition for the term occult philosophy: "This philosophy, or outlook, was compounded of Hermeticism as revived by Marsilio Ficino, to which Pico della Mirandola added a Christianised version of Jewish Cabala." Yates is also a superior source for the accounts of the cabalistic and occult associations of the philosophies of Pico, Reuchlin, Agrippa and others.

the three Magi.[22] Ficino, however, steered clear of anything associated with demonic magic.[23] It was Pico who introduced cabala into this Platonic and hermetic notion of magic. Far from being disassociated from Beitchman's "Neopagan cabala", Pico was one of its creators. The very magical elements which Beitchman relegates purely to this third category of cabala are the elements that Pico intentionally purifies with the application of Christian cabala. Cabalistic magic was born in an era when astrology, alchemy, natural magic and belief in demons were already established components of the cultural corpus.[24] Pico did not merely christianise the Jewish cabala extraneous to the current philosophy. He incorporated his Christianised cabala into this already established corpus in an attempt to reconcile and harmonize an all-encompassing philosophy which would provide an alternative to the well-established, syllogistic scholastic philosophy. Pico believed that the addition of cabala to this Renaissance synthesis both strengthened the Ficinian magic and made it safe by protecting the magi from diabolical influences though holy powers.[25] Pico did indeed differentiate between two types of magic; one being practised in conjunction

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[22]Brann, 28.

[23]For a good exploration and discussion of Ficino's magic see D. P. Walker's *Spiritual and Demonic Magic* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint; repr. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

[24]Antoine Faivre, "Ancient and Medieval Sources of Modern Esoteric Movements", in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*. Ed. Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York: Crossroad, 1992 [World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, 21, 1992]), 64.

[25]Yates, 21.

with demons and the other being the perfection of natural philosophy.[26] He divided cabala into two main branches as well. The first involves the aforementioned mystical calculations using gematria, notarikon and themurah, which Pico called *ars combinandi.* The second branch involved the cabalistic magic for which he was responsible in synthesizing with neoplatonic thought. This magic involved capturing the powers of spirits and angels in one's ascent to knowledge and the divine.[27]

Pico was convicted of heresy by an ecclesiastical court for his belief that cabala proved certain tenets of Christianity. The conviction, however, was not unanimous and his persecution not severe. In 1487, he published an apology for his views which included his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man.* Despite this condemnation and apology, Pico's work as the first Christian cabalist, complete with magical beliefs, survived to influence his successors.

Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) of Basel was one such successor. Reuchlin was more of a Hebraist than Pico and was one of the greatest scholars of the German Renaissance. He, too, sought to replace scholasticism with a more powerful philosophy, one which he believed he had found in the Christian cabala. Inspired by the work of Pico, with whom he met during his travels in Italy, Reuchlin sought to provide a definitive text on Christian cabalism and published two works, *De verbo mirifico* in 1494 and *De arte cabalistica* in 1517. The former was structured as a conversation and religious debate

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[26]Brann, 29.

[27]Yates, 20.

involving cabala between a Greek, a Jew and a Christian. Here Reuchlin quotes Pico and discusses methods for summoning angels. Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* went on to become the bible of Christian cabalists because of its thorough theoretical and practical explanation of Christian cabala. This book also took the form of a dialogue between three men; a Moslem, a Cabalist and a Pythagorean. Reuchlin offered up a numerical approach and explanation of the universe through cabalistic means and a magical means of attaining revelation and knowledge. Just as Pico before him, Reuchlin emphasised the purifying aspect of cabala when applied to magic. Reuchlin believed that the summoning of angels helped cleanse magic of any demonic powers. Also mirroring his predecessor, Reuchlin found his works condemned by the church, the Dominicans specifically. He also endured literary attack and persecution from some of his contemporaries for both his cabalistic beliefs and their Jewish associations.[28]

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) gained the reputation as the prince of black magicians and sorcerers because of his work with cabala. Agrippa studied the works of both Pico and Reuchlin and pursued the professions of magician, cabalist, legal scholar and university professor while travelling throughout most of western Europe. Agrippa combined Ficinian magic with the cabalistic magic of Pico into one

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[28]Yates, 25-26. This is in reference to the converted Jew Johann Pfefferkorn's instigation of an antisemitic movement which also attacked the role of cabala in new intellectual movements. Reuchlin was also the target of slander and abuse from German humanists. For more information on Reuchlin and his work see François Secret's *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris: Dunod, 1964), and Charles Zika's "Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the late Fifteenth Century" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1976), 104-38.

comprehensive compendium, *De occulta philosophia*, which was published in 1533. The book was in circulation prior to publication because Agrippa actually completed the compendium around the year 1510 but held off on publishing it on the advice of Johannes Trithemius, a benedictine abbot, well versed and practised in Christian magic. Divided into three books, resembling the cabalistic division of the universe into material, intellectual and celestial, this compendium deals with the three categories of natural magic, celestial and mathematical magic, and ceremonial, cabalistic magic. Agrippa's magical system is very religious and Christian in both tone and content. He claims to offer access to the highest powers of Christianity through the safety and efficacy of cabalistic magic. Like Pico and Reuchlin before him, Agrippa emphasized the ability of cabala to make magical pursuits safe against the intervention of evil spirits or demons. Agrippa saw cabala as an insurance against demons and as a guarantee that "..bold attempts after unlimited knowledge and power will not lead to damnation."[29] Agrippa's travels and varied professions brought him to many countries and into contact with numerous influential thinkers of the time. They include the already-mentioned abbot Trithemius in Germany, John Colet in England, scholar and Hermeticist Lefèvre d'Etaples in France, and the great humanist Erasmus. These travels and contacts enabled a greater distribution of cabalistic magic, while Agrippa's actual presentation of the material added cohesion and accessibility to occult philosophy.

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[29]Yates, 47.

> Beyond the wild, if surreal and fascinating, Neoplatonic divagations of a Pico, the monkish eccentricity of that rare and stubborn Hebraist, Reuchlin, it was Agrippa's treatment and communication of the subject, its wide and open mindedness, susceptibility to modification, wit, humor, and erudition that brought Cabala into the public domain and kept it there for so long.[30]

Agrippa's work, however, met with great opposition. The subsequent condemnation of his work by religious and legal authorities left him with an irreparably damaged reputation as a black sorcerer. This reputation completely discredited his work. Agrippa did not have the fortune of living in a time or a place that was conducive to his interests. The sixteenth century saw the beginning of the infamous witch hunts of western Europe. All types of magic and esoteric thought were united in the view held by many Church authorities that they were diabolical. Christian cabalistic magic had traditionally met with opposition from its very beginning with Pico and his 'Cabalistic Conclusions'. This occult philosophy was always a challenge to the established and traditional systems of thought. In the sixteenth century, however, as scholars known as demonologists began producing written definitions and codifications of diabolical magic, this perceived threat of the occult philosophy became more pronounced. One of the most influential demonologists was the brilliant French lawyer, Jean Bodin (1529/30-1596). He wrote prolifically on history, politics, economics and religion. Much of his writing is characterized by religious tolerance and rationality. As a biting, alarmist, intolerant, and superstitious work, *De la*

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[30]Beitchman, p. 96.

démonomanie des sorciers appears as an anomaly to some Bodin scholars.[31] When the book came out in 1580, Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* and its Christian cabalistic contents had been in circulation for several decades. Bodin's scathing attack on Renaissance magic and the works of Pico and Agrippa was to gain even wider circulation and to become a definitive authority on the occult. *De la démonomanie des sorciers* underwent at least twenty-three editions and was translated into German, Italian and Latin.[32] In this work, Bodin declared the use of cabala as magic forbidden and he damned Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* as well as the man himself. Bodin calls Agrippa "the master of diabolical art" and "the Master Sorcerer".[33] He forgives Pico, Reuchlin and earlier "Neo-Academics" for their belief and instruction in cabala, excusing them for their ignorance. Agrippa is given no such mercy.

> ...the Master Sorcerer instructs his disciples in every idolatry, impiety, and witchcraft. It seems though that the Academics, as I said, practised it through ignorance and error, proceeding in good faith thinking that they were doing good. But Agrippa employed it because of despicable impiety, for he was for his whole life the greatest witch of his age. And immediately after his death, writes Paulus Jovius, and several others, people noticed a black dog, which he called "monsieur" coming out of his room, which went and dove into the Rhône, and was not seen again.[34]

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[31]Jonathan L. Pearl, introduction to *On the Demon-Mania of Witches.* Translated by Randy A. Scott. (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), 11.

[32]*Ibid.*, 9.

[33]*Ibid.*, 68-9.

[34]*Ibid.*, 69-70.

This interpretation of cabalistic magic as the devil's work was immensely influential. It left a historical portrayal of Agrippa as a black magician that endured for centuries.[35]

The formative years of Christian cabalistic magic were marked by syncretism and opposition. It was created through the assimilation of numerous esoteric, religious, and philosophical beliefs and systems, stretching across cultures and across time. Christian cabalistic magic was also formed as part of an attempt to offer another way of thinking, an alternative philosophy to the dominant and established scholastic one. In challenging the establishment, early cabalistic magic influenced and was influenced by the humanist movement and the Reformation. The arrival of a more secular and material age threatened the religious and magical tenets upon which Christian cabala is based and required a reformulation of those tenets in order to preserve them.

The syncretism carried out by the Christian cabalists and neoplatonists of the Renaissance, namely Ficino and Pico, did not demand the creation of new and original esoteric ideas. The assimilation of various magical and gnostic systems required a fitting-together of a number of already existent philosophies and religious systems. This, in itself, was a complicated and brilliant accomplishment. It is important to note, however, that these magical systems and beliefs existed in medieval western Europe prior to the Renaissance. They enjoyed a syntheses and revival during the Renaissance and then fell

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[35]For further reading on Agrippa, apart from the already mentioned Yates, Walker, Beitchman and Brann, see Charles G. Nauert's *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

into a bleak period of persecution and damnation. Cabalistic magic, however, did not disappear. Many of its philosophical tenets were preserved and assimilated into Rosicrucianism in the seventeenth century.[36] While this assimilation certainly helped Christian cabalistic magic survive and spread, the association did not do much to the already tarnished reputation held by cabalistic magic, thanks to the efforts of the demonologists. It did establish, however, the concept of secret societies as having access to the transmission of esoteric knowledge. The highly ornate symbolism of the Rosicrucian tradition also left its mark on magical developments to come. Despite its association with Rosicrucianism, cabalistic magic was not exclusive to such secret groups. The texts of the Christian cabalists were not obsolete and they fell into the hands of many individuals. Francis King provides accounts of astrologers and 'cunning-men' at the beginning of the seventeenth century in England, who practised astrological and talismanic magic akin to that outlined in Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia.*[37] That cabalistic magic continued to be

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[36]Rosicrucianism derives its name from the name "Rose Cross" or "Rosenkreutz". A series of manifestos were published anonymously in the years 1614, 1615 and 1616 concerning a Christian Rosenkreutz and his mystical journey towards divine knowledge. The language used throughout the literature is cabalistic, hermetic and gnostic. As would be expected, the history of this secret society is difficult to ascertain. For a discussion of the cabalistic influences upon and the various themes of Rosicrucianism see Roland Edighoffer, "Rosicrucianism: From the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century", in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality,* 186-209. For an extensive study of Rosicrucianism, its manifestos, and its role in intellectual history see Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; repr. 1993). Here Yates continues her research of a continuous magical philosophical tradition first explored in *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*.

[37]King, 11-21.

practised throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is a fact verified by the existence of these fragmentary accounts and by occasional publications, such as that of Ebenezer Sibley's *Celestial Sciences* in 1784. The Gothic revival of the late eighteenth century helped popularise magic of all varieties, yet in a most romanticized and frivolous light. Cabalistic magic had yet to become a popular pursuit of Britain's intellectual circles. Its classification with astrology, alchemy, and witchcraft as 'superstition' may have been responsible for its lack of appeal at this time.[38] It was not until Francis Barrett's impressive text book on ritual magic, *The Magus or Celestial Intelligencer,* was published in 1801 that the comprehensiveness and intellectual grasp of cabalistic magic that was so characteristic of the Renaissance cabalists, was once again evident in western magic.

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[38]Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon. A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 69. Hutton also suggests that the type of person who may have been interested in such magic in earlier and later times would have perhaps been diverted to exploring the new sciences at this particular point in time.

the revival of the Renaissance occult philosophy in England.

There has been little scholarship on *The Magus* and its author. This, of course, is symptomatic of the overall lack of acknowledgement of the entire occult revival of the nineteenth century and its role in intellectual history. To understand that larger picture we must begin with the pieces and Barrett's *Magus* is a very important piece. This chapter will discuss what the compendium and the man can tell us about the state of occult studies at the beginning of the nineteenth century. An analysis of the contents of the book and of Barrett's sources will demonstrate both the continuation of a cabalistic tradition developed in the Renaissance and the evolution of this tradition into a more accessible and practical one. We will show how Barrett's compendium is heavily reliant upon Renaissance texts, yet original in its novel compilation and its commencement of a new way of transmitting magical knowledge. This analysis will demonstrate how *The Magus* and its author set the stage for the institutionalisation of occult studies.

The title page proclaims Barrett to be a professor of chemistry, natural and occult philosophy and the cabala.[3] Barrett was no mere theorist of magic, frequently practising what he preached and, as will be shown, was a self-proclaimed magician. Barrett's compendium was published in 1801, emerging out of a relatively silent era of the western magical tradition. In fact, *The Magus* is the one bright star after at least a century of

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[3]Francis King questions these claims in writing: "...it is unlikely that Francis Barrett was fully qualified to teach all of the occult techniques referred to in this puffing announcement." *The Flying Sorcerer: Being the magical and aeronautical adventures of Francis Barrett author of The Magus* (Oxford: Mandrake, 1992), 24.

silence in the magical world. After Barrett, the next substantial sensation in magical circles occurred at the end of the century with the foundation of the Order of the Golden Dawn, the society which embodied the true spirit of Renaissance magical syncretism and creativity. *The Magus* predates this revival by about eighty years and its very existence is testimony to an interest in and awareness of occult studies in certain circles of nineteenth-century England. The contents of the book affirm that ceremonial magic, as well as alchemy was indeed being practised and that the "secrets of cabalistic lore" were in circulation at that time.[4]

While Barrett gives voice to an era of occult studies that is relatively undocumented, it should not be assumed that he was alone in his work. At one point in his life, Barrett was a student of the occult and, as such, had colleagues with whom he learned, and teachers from whom he learned. He does, however, hold the honour of being the first early modern practising magician to compile available sources into a complete system of magic, a task unheard of since Agrippa. Barrett follows the cabalistic tradition of professing the existence of an integral oral aspect of occult studies. The things transmitted orally in magical learning he claims to omit in *The Magus*, reserving such knowledge for its proper method of instruction. It follows that Barrett himself may also have learned such things orally. There is no question concerning the availability of English translations of cabalistic texts in Barrett's day. Scholars of occult studies could easily have had access to instruction from these texts. In his biography of Barrett, Francis King argues for the

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[4]Summers, 176.

existence of an occult tradition whereby Barrett studied with astrologer Ebenezer Sibly, learning from him the techniques of crystal gazing.[5] Sibly was a well-known astrologer and magician of late eighteenth-century England who published works on these areas of interest. By 1807 his lengthy tome *New and Complete Illustration of the Occult Sciences* was in its tenth edition, and Sibly's work displays a knowledge and practice of ceremonial and cabalistic magic.[6] Barrett himself, speaks of witnessing certain magical experiments at which it is inferred, or stated outright, that others are present and actively participating. So, while the publication of *The Magus* marks an important, influential and extraordinary step in the western occult tradition at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Barrett's work by no means emerged from the bleak emptiness of an era in intellectual history devoid of occult knowledge or of an occult tradition.

Little is known of Barrett's own history. Even King's biography fills in few of the blanks. He provides educated guesses of birth dates and lineage. He suggests that Barrett could have been the Francis Barrett born December 18, 1774 to Francis and Ann Barrett in Marylebone.[7] King pieces together a life for Barrett, using dates and locations of events such as his marriage and the addresses of some of his acquaintances. This life presents Barrett at one point as an apprentice to an apothecary and, at another, following an

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[5]King, *The Flying Sorcerer,* 40. King also suggests, on flimsy evidence, that Barrett's landlady was also a student of Sibly.

[6]For a discussion and analysis of Sibly's work and the nature of the magic which influenced it see Summers, 176-179.

[7]King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 28.

occupation close to the sea, such as a surgeon's mate.[8] King's book aptly covers Barrett's other career, as an enthusiastic and determined balloon adventurer, and traces his riotous attempted ascents from Greenwich to Swansea in 1802. Barrett's physical attempts at ascension are mirrored by his spiritual attempts as demonstrated by his knowledge and practise of cabalistic magic. Interestingly, a hundred years later, another important figure in the western magical tradition, Aleister Crowley, also paired his desired magical ascents with actual physical ascents in his passion for mountain climbing. King was unable to discover any information about Barrett after his ballooning adventures of 1802, save for a rumor that he died in the United States, and a manuscript, at present in the Library of the Wellcome Institute, which places his death as prior to the 1830s.[9]

The introduction to *The Magus* states that the purpose of the book is to provide a remedy for the inconvenience and expense of obtaining the sources Barrett himself has used in creating the compendium.[10] This indicates that Barrett is aware of a market for such a book, affirming the existence of interest in learning and practising magic. Barrett's remedy comes in the form of three books which cover the standard divisions of magic, as set out by Agrippa, of natural magic, talismanic or constellatory magic, and cabalistic and ceremonial magic. At the end of these books, there follows a "complete magical

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[8]*Ibid.*, 29. King also discovered that Barrett married Grace Hodges in January of 1800 and a year later had a son, also named Francis.

[9]*Ibid.*, 33 and 39.

[10]Francis Barrett, *The Magus or Celestial Intelligencer* (London: Lackington, Allen, 1801; repr. Leicester: Vance Harvey, 1970), v.

biography" outlining the lives of those whom Barrett has deemed to be the most important contributors to the magical arts. Here, the tradition traced by Frances Yates in her argument for a continuous hermetic and cabalistic philosophy is reaffirmed.[11] Reflecting his Renaissance predecessors' enthusiasm for ancient magical sources and Greek philosophy, Barrett begins his biographies with Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus and Aristotle. He then includes the Renaissance magus, Agrippa, from whom he borrows much of the material in *The Magus*. Barrett concludes his list of biographies with John Dee and Edward Kelly, two of the main figures in Yates' *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.[12] By looking at the people included in this list of biographies, it is obvious that Barrett is following the hermetic-cabalist tradition traced by Yates from the early Renaissance to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. It is improbable that Barrett has independently recreated this tradition, but rather that he is a participant in a continuous tradition kept up by various individuals and secret societies, and maintained by the translation and reprinting of essential texts over centuries.

The influence of the scientific revolution and the emphasis placed on scientific methods is demonstrated in Barrett's written intention to observe aspects of the occult

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[11]Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* and *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.

[12]Yates writes that Dee was the major influence behind the German Rosicrucian movement, and she presents a sound argument proving that Rosicrucianism was a movement steeped in the Renaissance hermetic-cabalist tradition, or occult philosophy as established firmly in print by Agrippa. *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1993), 220-1.

sciences under the microscope of scientific observation, promising that the result will be a balanced view between those who believe nothing and those who believe everything.[13] Barrett succeeds neither in this promised objectivity nor in putting his sources under the rigorous eyes of scientific examination. He occasionally uses an eye witness testimonial to affirm the success of a magical experiment or property, but more frequently he trusts his sources. This necessity to prove the efficacy of magic within the limits of scientific examination shows how the rules of intellectual thought have been influenced since the scientific revolution. Centuries earlier, Pico, Agrippa and Reuchlin were faced with the challenge of proving magic to be safe; now we see magicians attempting to prove that magic is real.

Barrett deals with natural magic in the first book of *The Magus*. Here, he presents his stand on astrology, a stand reminiscent of Ficino, Pico and Agrippa. Barrett admits that the planets have an influence over people, but maintains that this influence is tempered by the existence of free will and the power of God. He draws upon the Renaissance occult perspective that the individual is a microcosm of the universe, and therefore cannot help but reflect internally that which occurs externally. Barrett demonstrates the perpetuity of both the importance of religion within the magical tradition and the neoplatonic influences that were characteristic of the Christian magical tradition of the Renaissance.

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[13]Barrett, v.

This section on natural magic also contains an explanation of the creation of the world and its inhabitants, including humans, three feet high transparent creatures[14], and good and evil spirits. For his sources, Barrett claims to draw upon the book of Genesis and the work of Jean Baptiste van Helmont, a famous Belgian alchemist and mystic physician of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.[15] Barrett also delves into the subject of sympathetic magic. He calls the properties associated with this kind of magic "antipathies" and attributes them to certain plants, animals, stones, fumigations, unctions, charms and

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[14]*Ibid.*, Book One, 24. Here Barrett depends upon an account provided by one of his preferred sources, Jean Baptiste van Helmont. Barrett claims van Helmont tells of a merchant from Aegina who sailed to the Canaries on numerous occasions. This merchant asked van Helmont for his opinion on the nature of these three feet high creatures which sailors frequently brought back from certain mountains, calling them Tude-squils or Stew'd quills. These creatures were brought back as dead carcasses that fit in the palm of one's hand. It is unclear whether the subsequent opinion on the nature of these creatures is offered by Barrett or is that of van Helmont. The opinion states that these creatures are a destroyed race of Pygmies which were the offspring of sacrilegious couplings between humans and incubii or succubii.

[15]In Beitchman's *Bibliographica Kabbalistica*, Van Helmont is presented as a pupil of Paracelsus who, along with other Platonists, rejected the new principles for explaining the soul and the body as provided by the likes of Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz and Spinoza. This mechanical, mind-body dualism was set aside in preference for traditional vitalism where the soul and body are parts of a whole that is energized by a vital force (Barrett calls this "vital spirit") which can be affected by occult techniques. Van Helmont and his son Franciscus Mercurius, used cabala to ward of this Cartesian dualism of mind and body. Their cabala was a practical and physical one that claimed not only did Hebrew words have magical power, but so did the actual position of the organs of speech when forming those words. The elder van Helmont was a colleague of Knorr von Rosenroth who translated the former's works into German. It was Rosenroth's translation of sections of the *Zohar* in his *Kabbala Denudata*, published in 1677 and 1684 that Mathers used for his English translation *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, published in 1887. For more information on the van Helmonts and their cabalistic and alchemical works and thought see Beitchman, 152-155 and 201-207.

amulets. It is in this section that we first hear of Barrett's own experimentation with magic.[16] Barrett claims that the hatred between a toad and a man is such that when placed directly in front of the man, the toad will die if the man fixes the creature with a look of intense fury for fifteen minutes. The toad apparently perishes from the fascination of terror and astonishment. Barrett admits to having successfully carried out this experiment not only with a toad but with other reptiles as well. He describes other successful magical experiments such as conjuring up a thunder storm and speaking with others from a great distance using a form of oral telepathy.[17] Barrett makes continuous references to van Helmont throughout this section, which also includes a discussion on fascination and the binding of individuals through magical concoctions, light sources, or merely with a glance.

The title page of the next section bears the heading *The True Secret of the Philosopher's Stone or, The Jewel of Alchemy wherein The Process of Making the Great Elixir is discovered.* Barrett does not waste time with modest understatement when it concerns the revelation of important occult secrets. Prior to his brief outline of the history of alchemy and its key players, Barrett presents a moral exhortation on the vices of the flesh and the necessity of purity in alchemical pursuits. This exhortation, along with a later list of ten pious and Christian rules which outline the role of the adept, echoes the advice and warnings of Pico, Reuchlin and Agrippa and is a standard component in ceremonial and cabalistic magical texts. The demonic dangers accessible through magic are allayed by

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[16]Barrett, Book One, 27.

[17]*Ibid.*, 30.

both the pure nature of the magician and by the purity inherent in cabala. The seemingly superstitious fears associated with magic from the very beginning have not been completely obliterated by empiricism and the rationality of science. While in Barrett's time there is an added emphasis on proving the efficacy of magic, there still resides the original emphasis on proving the safety of magic.

Barrett affirms that the alchemical process of transforming one matter into another, preferably gold, can be achieved. He does this through describing, in the first person, an experiment in alchemy.[18] Barrett's instructions on how to make gold are presented with a warning that a successful outcome is dependent upon the soul of the individual. He cautions that without the proper virtues, whatever material the individual begins with, will not turn into gold but will remain as is.[19]

This first book is divided into two sections. The second part is a lengthy discussion of talismanic and constellatory magic. Here Barrett focuses on the properties, images and powers of the four elements, the twenty-eight mansions of the moon, and the seven planets. The bulk of this section lies in detailed charts and tables of the planets, of the scale of numbers and the "notes" of various languages, including "Chaldean", i.e. Aramaic, and

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[18]*Ibid.*, 68. That Barrett is referring to himself is questionable. Here, he is using Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* as his source. In Agrippa's first book he writes, "And we know how to do that, and have seen it done: but we could make no more gold, than the weight of that was, out of which we extracted the Spirit." Whereas the reference in Barrett reads: "...and I have, in some of my first essays, turned both lead and mercury into good gold; but no more than that out of which the soul was extracted." Such similarity in phrasing suggests it is Agrippa who is the alchemist here, and not Barrett.

[19]*Ibid.*, 70.

Hebrew.

The second book begins with a section on magnetism, drawing once again upon the properties of sympathetic magic. King claims this section is taken directly from a Paracelsian treatise by the elder van Helmont.[20] Despite the dependency of such magic upon the inherent properties of the materials or creatures used in the procedures, Barrett further emphasizes the necessity of the magician to be sober and virtuous. Barrett presents himself once again as the successful magician. He describes the supposed phenomenon whereby the wounds of a dead man bleed anew when touched by the murderer, and claims to have witnessed such an event.[21] It is in this section that Barrett discusses the "vital spirit".

> The vital spirit in the flesh and blood performs the office of the soul; that is, it is the same spirit in the outward man, which, in the seed, forms the whole figure, that magnificent structure and perfect delineation of man, and which hath known the ends of things to be done, because it contains them; and the which, as president, accompanies the new framed young, even unto the period of its life; and the which, although it depart therewith, some smacks or small quantity, at least, thereof remains in a carcass slain by violence, being as it were most exactly co-fermented with the same.[22]

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[20]King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 21.

[21]Barrett, Book Two, 16. King uses this reference by Barrett in an attempt to verify his suspicion that Barrett was of Welsh origins, and also to describe the occult and folklore of Barrett's era and surroundings. King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 21-22.

[22]Barrett, Book Two, 20.

Barrett's vital spirit is undoubtedly the vital force described by van Helmont that is affected by occult influences in its motivation of the homogenous entities that are the soul and the body. Barrett claims that it is this vital spirit which needs stirring up in order to be able to master cabalistic magic. This spirit has lain dormant since the fall of man. This same vital spirit, according to Barrett, provides the witch with her spiritual power, independent of the devil.[23]

The second part of Book Two is titled *The Cabala; or Secret Mysteries of Ceremonial Magic Illustrated.* Following the Renaissance magi, Barrett claims cabala takes God and good spirits for its object. He promises to divulge all, save that which must be passed on by word of mouth alone, thus maintaining the cabalistic distinction between a written and oral transmission of knowledge. Yet again, Barrett preaches the necessity for secrecy, purity and the knowledge of the one true God as prerequisites for success in magical endeavours. In this section, Barrett begins to discuss cabalistic magic as developed by Pico, Reuchlin and Agrippa. The domain of Ficinian natural magic is left behind. Barrett discusses the ten Sephiroth and their respective numerations, dominions and intelligences. The mystical calculations of gematria, notarikon and themurah are also mentioned in this section as methods of deriving hidden names and phrases from the Scripture.[24] Barrett provides tables of commutations apparently used by cabalists, as well as different kinds of

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[23]*Ibid.*, 18-29.

[24]Definitions and examples of these methods are provided in chapter one, 9-10.

writing deemed to be used in the conjuring of spirits.[25]

The illustrations in this section are, perhaps, the most sensational and delightful aspect of Barrett's compendium. These original engravings are depictions of Barrett's fallen angels, evil demons and assorted powers of evil for which he provides detailed descriptions of their origins and natures. These delightfully horrific color illustrations vary from the charming[26] to the unsettling.[27] If these are drawn from eye witness accounts, Barrett neglects to mention it.[28] According to the occult scholar E. M. Butler, these creatures are more unnerving than the Faustian spirits of evil, but not as horrifying as those contained in an Elizabethan manuscript of black magic.[29]

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[25]Barrett, Book Two, 64.

[26]*Ibid.*, 42. See the coy-looking winged blue deceiver, Apollyon, illustrated on this page.

[27]*Ibid.*, 48. See the crazed intense look in the eyes of Ophis on this page and the devoid green glance of Belial, vessel of iniquity on page 42.

[28]According to King, Summers suggests this is the case, but King, himself, disregards such a belief. King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 25.

[29]E. M. Butler, *Ritual Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949; repr. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 256. Butler refers only to this manuscript as one which was sold by the London house of booksellers, Maggs, in 1929. Summers provides more information on this manuscript. He suggests that "The Elizabethan Devil Worshipper's Prayer Book" or "A Manuscript Book of Black Magic" written in Shakespeare's England" was written around 1600. The manuscript is illustrated with thirteen drawings, some of them colored. According to Summers, one of these illustrations is of the spirit Maymon Rex. This corresponds to Barrett's illustration of the spirit Mammon. For descriptions of the other illustrations found in the Elizabethan manuscript see Summers, 142.

The next topic which Barrett discusses is somewhat surprising and deviates from the traditional conception of Christian cabalistic magic. His introduction of the nine orders of evil spirits and their princes, complete with illustrations provides a transition from an area of seemingly white magic to that of a darker sort. Necromancy, or the raising of the dead, is magic of a different kind from that developed by the Renaissance magi and that discussed so far in *The Magus*. This kind of magic does seem to deviate from the many exhortations for piety and Christian-like morality expressed throughout most of the book. This union of piety and necromancy, however, is found in much literature associated with black magic in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and it was frequently intentional in order to render a text and its owner more orthodox.[30] In discussing the topic of necromancy, Barrett describes two different types; one involves the use of blood and the raising of the actual carcass and the other, called sciomancy, involves calling up only the shade or shadow of the dead.[31] As for the actual raising of the dead body with soul intact, Barrett leaves that kind of magic to the power of God alone.

The second part of Book Two is titled *The Perfection and Key of the Cabala or Ceremonial Magic*. It is this section that Barrett claims will reveal the practical application of all that has been described earlier in theory. Barrett describes, in great detail, the

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[30]Many of the owners of such texts of black magic were members of the clergy, hence the necessity to endow the books with a religious and orthodox nature. For an interesting analysis of the influence of the clergy on magical texts, see Richard Kieckhefer's *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 4-17.

[31]Barrett, Book Two, 69.

methods of calculation used to determine the names of various spirits. These calculations are complex and Barrett's lack of concrete references and examples do not help to clarify them. The only clear conclusion that can be drawn from the explanation he provides is that however one eventually manages to calculate the name of a good spirit, the name of its evil opposite is calculated through a reversal of that very method. Barrett also describes the characters of good and evil spirits here. Next, Barrett provides some procedures for composing magical pentacles, consecrating magical instruments, invoking good and evil spirits and the shades of the dead. This section, even more than the last, takes on a darker and more explicit tone than that of the first book, which deals with natural magic. At the end of this section there is a table "Shewing the names of the Angels governing the 7 days of the week with their Sigils, Planets, Signs &c."[32] There is also another enchanting color illustration of Cassiel, the angel of Saturday, sitting astride a winged serpent, perhaps a dragon. This illustration is actually from a page of a Book of Spirits, or *Liber Spirituum*, made of virgin vellum, of which instructions for its fabrication are provided. The name *Liber Spirituum* is sometimes used generally to identify a magical book that contains the names of various spirits and demons, but it also has a more specific use, referring to a special kind of magical book. The construction of a *Liber Spirituum* is described in great detail in the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy,* a magical text which will be discussed later as one of Barrett's sources. A *Liber Spirituum* is essential in the invocation of demons. The book must be made of virgin vellum and the magician must copy the name

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[32]*Ibid.*, 104.

and particular symbols of the demon to be invoked on the pages. A *Liber Spirituum* is very powerful and must not be opened needlessly or carelessly, nor should it fall into the hands of anyone save the magician.[33] It is not clear whether Barrett's illustration of a *Liber Spirituum* depicts one which has already been constructed by a magician or if it merely depicts an imagined one.

The third section of Book Two provides the most practical instruction of the entire book, despite Barrett's claim that the second section does this. Here we find much more practical and comprehensive instructions for carrying out invocations. The details on how to create a magical circle, what to wear when invoking, the moral condition of the practitioner, and also when and where one should set about this business, are all discussed. There is also a convenient and easy-to-use table for the rapid identification of the angels of each season, the magical names of the hours of the day and of the night, and the properties and conjurations of each day of the week.

The final section of this second book is called *The Magic and Philosophy of Trithemius of Spanheim containing his book of Secret Things and Doctrine of Spirits.* This work is actually not by Trithemius. True to the inherent penchant among occultists of all ages, the alchemical work, *Güldenes Kleinod oder Schatzkästlein,* the source Barrett

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[33]Throughout their survey books on magical literature, both Butler and Arthur Edward Waite provide the instructions given in various mediaeval grimoires on how to make a *Liber Spirituum*. Butler, *Ritual Magic.* Waite, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic.* First printed as *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (London, 1898; repr. Secaucus: Carol Publishing, 1997).

actually uses in this section, is falsely attributed to Trithemius.[34] This work was published in 1506 in Passau and the identity of the real author is unknown. It is reputed that the fifteenth-century monk Basil Valentine translated the work into German from Latin.[35] Barrett provides the first known English translation of this pseudonymous work here in *The Magus*. This last section begins with another address to the reader or student of the occult, warning them of the necessity of pure motivations in magical operations and against the vices of flattery, pride and greed. Even more detailed instructions on invocations and the making of crystals follow and Barrett repeats himself by providing yet another table showing the angels of each day of the week; the one addition here being the inclusion of the angels of every hour of every day of the week. This section marks the end of *The Magus* for the author, and Barrett takes the opportunity to try and drum up business. He advertises private lessons of instruction in the occult sciences, encouraging people to drop by at 99 Norton Street, Mary-le-Bonne, in London, between eleven and two o'clock.[36] He limits such classes to twelve students but also encourages people with questions to mail them to him, promising to respond.

Despite Barrett's claim that this is the end of his book, there is yet another section, the *Biographia Antiqua.* As we have already mentioned, this section includes the magical men of myth such as Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus as well as those whom they

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[34]Brann, 241-242.

[35]*Ibid.*, 311. This translation was published in Leipzig in 1782 by P. G. Kummer.

[36]Barrett, Book Two, 140.

inspired, such as Agrippa and John Dee. Barrett concludes this work with a promise to sketch his own biography in a later publication, thus considering himself to be on equal footing with those worthy of inclusion in a magical biography. It appears that Barrett was unable to keep this promise as *The Magus* is his sole literary work. *Lives Philosophers Alchemystical*, published in 1815, which includes a "critical catalogue of books in occult chemistry, and a selection of the most celebrated treatises on the theory and practice of the hermetic art", has been attributed to Barrett but this view is not supported by most scholars including King, D'Arch Smith and Arthur Edward Waite.[37]

We cannot understand the place of *The Magus* in the evolution of Christian cabalistic magic through knowledge of the book's contents alone. We also need to know the sources used by Barrett in order to show which threads of the tradition continued into the nineteenth century. We may then attempt to explain why these particular aspects survived, and how they were changed or assimilated, to enable a reshaping of the tradition from which they sprang. Throughout *The Magus*, Barrett continually refers to the sources used in compiling the magical information contained within the pages.[38] These sources include historical persons and those of doubtful historical authenticity, ancient texts and

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[37]This work is attributed to Barrett in an entry in the *Catalogue of the Warburg Institute Library*, vol. IV, (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1967), 240. However, King says both Timothy D'Arch Smith and Arthur Edward Waite maintain this work is not that of Barrett. King suggests the author to be J. P. Kellerman. King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 34.

[38]King provides proof that Barrett did not actually own copies of his sources, but rather he borrowed them from an occult bookseller named John Denley. King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 19.

contemporary ones. Barrett refers to the works and thought of Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Aristotle, Pliny, Trithemius, Albertus Magnus, Agrippa, John Dee, Paracelsus, Roger Bacon, van Helmont and also to various books of the Bible. Exactly how much he draws directly from these sources, or if, indeed, he even actually used some of them as references, is unclear. In many cases it appears as if Barrett refers to some of these sources with the understanding that what he says about them is commonly known and not information he has actually gathered from his own perusal of the sources. Barrett does not directly name many of the texts which he uses as primary sources. Not surprisingly, he is heavily influenced by material produced in the seventeenth century. He makes direct reference to two books published in the early and mid-seventeenth century in his section on magnetism: *The Sympathetical Powder of Edricus Mohymus of Eburo* published in 1639[39], and a book concerning a lamp and various magnetical cures for diseases published in 1611 by Uldericus Balk, a Dominican. This last source cannot be traced. Barrett's affinity for the work of van Helmont is another indication of his reliance upon seventeenth century material for his sources. The most important and obvious sources used by Barrett are found in the translations of Robert Turner. Turner was an

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[39]The reference to this book in the *British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books* actually dates publication of this work tentatively at 1640 in Brussels. It appears under the title *E. Mohyi Pulvis Sympatheticus, quo vulnera sanantur, absque medicamenti ad partem affectam applicatione & sine superstitione*...Two more editions were printed in 1660 and 1662. *British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books* vol. 162, (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1963), 55. The work is in Latin, and it is doubtful that Barrett actually used this work. He is more than likely dropping names of the best known treatises on this subject.

astrologer and botanist who graduated from Christ's College, Cambridge in 1640. There is no record of him after 1665 and it is possible he died in that year, a victim of the plague.[40] He published two books of his own: *Μικρόκοσμος* in 1654[41] and *Βοτανολόγια* in 1664.[42] It is not for these works however, that he was of such importance for Barrett. Turner also translated several magical works from Latin including Paracelsus's *Archidoxes of Magic,* the *Ars Notoria,* incorrectly attributed to Apollonius of Tyana, and most importantly, the pseudo-Agrippan *Of the Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, and the pseudonymous work of Peter of Abano, *The Heptameron.*

Most of Barrett's information provided in *The Magus*, particularly for the sections on talismanic and constellatory magic, and cabalistic magic, comes from another seventeenth-century translation of a work by the genuine Agrippa. *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim was first published in 1533 in Latin. As discussed in the first chapter, the work consists of three books dealing

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[40]*The Dictionary of National Biography,* vol. 29, Ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee. First published by Smith, Elder & Co. 1885-1901; repr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1281.

[41]*National Union Catalogue Pre-1956 Imprints*, vol. 605 (London: Mansell, 1979), 256. The full title of this work is *Μικρόκοσμος - A description of the little-world. Being a discovery of the body of man, exactly delineating all the members, bones, veins, sinews, arteries, and parts thereof, from the head to the foot. Hereunto is added ... the cure of wounds* ... It was printed in London by John Harrison, probably the same man for whom one of the printings of Turner's translation of the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* was printed. A reprint appeared in 1687 by Obadiah Blagrove.

[42]*Ibid.* The full title of this work is *Βοτανολόγια. The Brittish physician; or, The nature and vertues of English plants.* It was published in London by R. Wood for N. Brook.

with natural magic, celestial magic and ceremonial magic. This arrangement is strongly suggestive of Barrett's organization of *The Magus*. The earliest translation of Agrippa into English was by a certain J. F. and was published in London in 1651.[43] This translation was printed for Gregory Moule by a certain R. W. The catalogues of the British Museum, the Warburg Institute Library and the London Library all include entries for this particular edition, indicating that it was readily available. It is probable, therefore, that Barrett had access to this edition and used it in compiling *The Magus*. This probability is strengthened by the lack of reference to any other edition in those same catalogues.[44]

The other translations of Turner's used by Barrett are those of the pseudo-Agrippan *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* and the *Heptameron*, erroneously attributed to Peter of Abano. The earliest English translations of these works are appended to the first edition of Turner's translation and continue to be in most subsequent editions. There were two editions and several different printings of these works as translated by Turner. The first edition appeared in two printings in 1655, and there was a later printing in 1665.

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[43]Donald Tyson, in his recent edition of Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, claims this was a certain James Freake according to the "List of Books Quoted" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. According to Tyson, this same J. F. also authored the introduction to the 1650 edition of *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus*, also printed for Gregory Moule. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Trans. James Freake, Ed. Donald Tyson (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), xl. *The Dictionary of National Biography*, however, claims that the physician John French (1616?-1657) translated Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* and edited the 1650 edition of *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus*. This John French also wrote several works on chemistry and alchemy. *The Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 7, 691-692.

[44]Tyson also claims to have found no other English translations. Tyson, xl.

All three are almost identical. One of the two 1655 printings was made for John Harrison, the second one being unidentified. The third printing of 1665 was made for a certain Thomas Rooks. All three contain a preface by Turner, an Agrippan work on geomancy, the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* and the *Heptameron*. The Rooks and the unidentified printing contain further works: the *Isagoge*, *Astronomical Geomancy* attributed to Gerard of Cremona, and the *Arbatel of Magick*. In the editions published for specific individuals, Latin phrases and definitions of certain words are found in the margins. The main difference between the Harrison edition and that of Rooks is found in an advertisement-like notice in the margins near the Rooks text which describes the fabrication of a Book of Spirits.[45] The Harrison edition also provides conjurations, primarily in Latin with no accompanying English translation,[46] whereas the other two printings translate those conjurations. All of the marginalia shared by the Rooks and Harrison printings are also found in the footnotes of the third one. The conjurations that Barrett provides in *The Magus* follow verbatim the English translations found in the Rooks and the unidentified printing. It cannot be assumed, however, that he used only one of these printings as his source because he also includes a command in one conjuration that is

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[45]The note reads: "The construction of such a book requires virgin parchment which is to be had at Mr. Rooks' shop at the holy lamb at the east-end of St. Paul's church: and likewise the Virgin Parchment and the best abortives." On the *Liber Spirituum* or Book of Spirits see above.

[46]This would appear to be the printing that King believes Barrett used. King inaccurately claims that Barrett translates many of the Latin invocations himself. King, 18.

found only in the Harrison printing.[47] The conclusion is that Barrett must have consulted two separate printings from the first edition, or that he used a printing of the second edition which contained both the command found in the Harrison printing and the English translations found in the other two. This second edition was printed in 1665 by a J. C. and sold by Matthew Smelt.

Of Occult Philosophy Book Four is widely acknowledged as being falsely attributed to Agrippa. Pseudonymity was a common practice in this particular genre of literature. Arthur Edward Waite, a scholar and practitioner of the magic that evolved out of Barrett's legacy and which was practised by the members of the Order of the Golden Dawn, praises this particular book, maintaining that it offers a "...much more skillful performance than the common run of magical impostures; it connects with and rises out of the genuine work in a very curious manner...".[48] This work ties itself to that of Agrippa's both through its title, implying it is a continuation of Agrippa's first three books, and in its content. Much of the material is derived from the contents of the *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. In fact, E. M. Butler claims that a full two thirds of the material is borrowed directly from Agrippa's third book.[49] This third book, as stated earlier, deals with ceremonial magic, and this is also the subject of the spurious fourth book. Originality in

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[47]"Then let the exorcist mention what he would have done." Barrett, Book Two, 116.

[48]Waite, 77.

[49]Butler, 155.

this fourth book can be found in the descriptions of the spirits of the planets and in the instructions on how to construct and use a *Liber Spirituum*. Despite this seeming similarity with Agrippa's earlier works, there are several reasons why many doubt that he wrote the book. First of all, it appeared after Agrippa's death. Also, it is not surprising that a book about magic was falsely attributed, given the affinity for such attribution in that particular genre. Those who claim that the book is a forgery also claim that such excessive reproduction of one's own work is highly uncommon and unlikely.[50] The publishers of a recent edition of Turner's translation, however, claim that this reproduction actually points to the likelihood of its being written by Agrippa. They say that the fourth book, as a practical "lab" book of ceremonial magic, would require a recapitulation of the more theoretical material contained in the *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*.[51] The final reason the fourth book is deemed a forgery is because Agrippa's own student, Johann Weyer, said it was.[52]

Leaving aside the debate over the authenticity of this book, the *Heptameron*'s pseudonymous nature is generally accepted by all. Peter of Abano, a physician accused of heresy, died in 1316, almost three hundred years before the *Heptameron* came into

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[50]Waite, 78.

[51]*Of Occult Philosophy Book Four, Magical Ceremonies by Cornelius Agrippa.* Ed. and Trans. by Robert Turner. (Gillette: Heptangle Books, 1985), v-vi.

[52]Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 91. Weyer received equally condemning accusations from his teacher's greatest critic, Jean Bodin, for his unorthodox views on the reality of witchcraft.

circulation. This "trifling chronological disparity"[53] makes it rather unlikely that the work is his. It was rumored that Abano's heresy covered everything from denying the existence of demons to seeking consultation from seven imps he kept in a bottle.[54] The *Heptameron* itself provides practical and methodical procedures for the invocation of spirits as well as the proper conjurations for every day of the week. If the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* is primarily a more user-friendly version of Agrippa's third book, than the *Heptameron* is a foolproof method for accomplishing magical invocations. E. M. Butler claims that the author of the *Heptameron* borrowed from the *Key of Solomon* regarding the invocations for the spirits of the air and also the tables listing the angels governing every hour of every day and night of the week.[55]

Now that the main sources for Barrett's *Magus* have been identified as that of Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* and the *Heptameron*, it remains to demonstrate how Barrett used these sources, what areas he omitted, and the possible reasons for these omissions. As we have already pointed out, Barrett not only borrows textual content from Agrippa, but also its organization. *The Magus* is divided into two books. The first book is further divided into two parts, Natural Magic and Talismanic or Constellatory Magic, and the second covers the area of cabalistic and ceremonial magic. This arrangement mirrors that of Agrippa with slight deviation. The

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[53]Butler, 89.

[54]Waite, 90.

[55]Butler, 156-157.

Three Books of Occult Philosophy are organized in three books: the first dealing with natural magic, the second with constellatory or celestial magic, and the last with ceremonial magic. Much of the subject matter in the first part of the first book of *The Magus* is the same as that found in the parallel Agrippan book, yet Barrett does not copy verbatim from Agrippa quite yet. This duplication begins in Barrett's section on talismanic magic, the second part of the first book, although there are some examples to be found in the first part on natural magic as well.[56] Part Two of the first book, dealing with talismanic or constellatory magic, is taken directly from Agrippa's Books One and Two, namely the sections on the four elements and their qualities, the information on rings, and the chapters on perfumes of various planets. Barrett's chapter on seals and characters impressed on objects by the stars[57] is almost identical to Agrippa's "Of the seals, and characters of Naturall Things"[58]. This borrowing is also seen in Barrett's section on passions of the mind,[59] which is taken directly from Agrippa.[60] Barrett has taken Agrippa entirely and literally at his word for the section on mathematics, also taking all the same charts.[61] However, around the number seven, Barrett begins to edit his source and include

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[56]See chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10.

[57]Barrett, Book One, 88.

[58]Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Trans. by J. F. (London: Gregory Moule by R. W., 1651), 65.

[59]Barrett, Book One, 96-97.

[60]Agrippa, 147-149.

[61]Barrett, Book One, 99-140. Agrippa, 167-222.

extraneous information. Barrett also uses Agrippa's information on Hebrew and Chaldean numbers.[62] The planetary Magic Tables used by Barrett are the same as found in Agrippa.[63] Barrett also includes Agrippa's section on "Observations of the Celestials" and from there, copies Agrippa until the last section of this book. This includes the section on the mansions of the moon, which King inaccurately claims is a restatement by Barrett of an English translation of Peter of Abano's *Liber Experimentorum*.[64] In actual fact this chapter is taken directly from Agrippa's Book Two.

Book Two of *The Magus*, dealing with cabalistic magic, draws primarily from Agrippa's Book Three, beginning with Barrett's third chapter and continuing on to the end of this section.[65] Barrett strays from strict duplication of Agrippa, however, as he omits entire chapters. Barrett's mark of originality in these chapters is found in his engravings of various evil spirits, although the tables and charts are taken directly from Agrippa. The section in this part of *The Magus* on necromancy is also based on Agrippa despite much editing and rephrasing of ideas by Barrett.

The second part of the second book is where Barrett switches sources and looks to the pseudonymous *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy. The Perfection and Key of The Cabala or Ceremonial Magic* varies slightly from *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*

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[62]Barrett, Book One, 140. Agrippa, 232.

[63]Agrippa, 239.

[64]King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 18.

[65]Barrett, Book Two, 35-72.

in that the book of spirits is referred to by Barrett as a book of evil spirits specifically. Barrett also omits the instructions for conjuring spirits of the woods, desert and streams, and he relies less upon this source in his instructions for raising the dead. The information Pseudo-Agrippa provides in describing the images of the various planets was also supplied in the real Agrippa, and it is this latter source which Barrett prefers in using the information in his earlier section on talismanic magic. Part Three of the second book of *The Magus* is taken from the *Heptameron*. Barrett uses this source to provide detailed instruction on the composition of the magical circle, the necessary consecrations, the names of the angels of the days and their seals. Barrett changes the order of his source and tabulates the seals, but otherwise follows the *Heptameron* quite closely. The main exception to this, is a consecration which diverges from that given by Pseudo-Peter of Abano. The tables found in the following section, which provide the names and planets governing the hours, are also from the *Heptameron*. This is part four of the second book, the section claiming to contain the "Magic and Philosophy" of Trithemius of Spanheim.

We see therefore that the three main sources used by Barrett are generally followed word for word, especially *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* and the *Heptameron*. The only time he strays from the former is when the real Agrippa provides a different account or different information. It is really only the *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* which undergoes massive editing, and this is more by simple omission than by major rewriting of the material. Much of what Barrett omits concerns divination, lots and soothsaying. This could indicate a contemporary delineation between a certain type of

more popular astrology and a more academic and elite approach to the occult.[66] Barrett also used *The Magus* to define his own occult beliefs, practices, and areas of instruction. Along with his stated purpose of providing a compendium of the available sources of occult sciences, he was consciously fashioning his own school of such studies. One would imagine Barrett would keep in mind, during such a process, what would draw in students, and what subjects he felt confident to teach. King has an interesting discussion of Barrett's era in which the occult is a curious blend of old folk traditions with the imported ideas of an esoteric tradition. Perhaps Barrett's pointed omission of certain sections of Agrippa was also an effort to facilitate a transition leaving behind the more superstitious and popular elements and embracing more foreign and esoteric ones as provided in the cabalistic tradition. Barrett aids such a transition while retaining and enabling the survival of the magical ideas first formulated and provided by Agrippa and his pseudonymous associates.

We have now looked at the scanty biographical information of Barrett and the

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[66]The revival of interest in hermeticism and magic that took place in the late eighteenth century brought the techniques of astrology, crystal gazing and the use of talismans even more into the public arena. Some of these techniques, long associated with the esoteric arts, were separated from the philosophy of which they were a part and exploited for monetary gain. One of the more popular forms of astrology has come down to us today in the shape of newspaper horoscopes. Astrology within the occult philosophy was necessary in carrying out magical works. As that above influences that below, each planet has certain characteristics which make it more amenable to certain pursuits. Knowing the positions of the planets was essential in scheduling and carrying out magical acts successfully. It is this aspect of astrology that Barrett upholds in *The Magus*. He wishes to disassociate himself from the form which was practised in street stalls for a price and which encouraged a view of determinism devoid of God-given free will. King paints a detailed picture of the popular astrology and talismanic magic of late eighteenth-century England. King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 19-21.

sources he used in an attempt to comprehend the contents of *The Magus* and the context of its creation. Another way to find out more about *The Magus* and its author is to observe and investigate the responses both have garnered. Reaction to *The Magus* and Barrett's work varies from admiration to contempt. These divergent views are a result of a misunderstanding of the purpose of *The Magus* as well as a misunderstanding of the nature of occult literature. To demonstrate this, we may glance at a selection of these diverse critiques. The earliest known critique of the person Francis Barrett is by Robert Southey, a contemporary of Barrett's who was impressed neither by Barrett's balloon adventures, nor his occult endeavors. He had this to say of Barrett in a letter:

> There came in after dinner the balloon adventurer Barrett to sponge a glass of wine. Tell King I have seen a greater rogue than Solomon.[67] This same Barrett who took in the people at Greenwich-and who wrote a book called the Magus-of which I have seen the title page and his own rascally portrait as frontispiece. My gentleman professes to teach the occult sciences. Unhappily I did not know this was the fellow when I saw him-else I would have gone thro his sciences-and he puts all the titles in the alphabet after his name to look like honorary titles. A dog-he had better break his neck from a balloon to save the country the expense of hanging him.[68]

While this is obviously not an informed critique of Barrett's magical work, it may well reflect the opinion of Francis Barrett held by his contemporaries who were of a less credulous nature than that of his students. This letter suggests that Barrett's endeavors,

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[67]One would imagine that a comparison to Solomon would be a compliment to an occult author. Southey did not intend it as such.

[68]King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 9-10.

both aeronautical and magical, were viewed as eccentric if not downright dishonest. Perhaps this was because both activities drew in crowds of enthusiastic believers who, as Southey no doubt believed, were destined to be duped. In the face of such critique and condemnation, Barrett must have had great determination and faith in his two extraordinary career choices. The lack of confidence held by others in his unusual pursuits certainly did not affect his own.

Critics with more education and knowledge concerning Barrett's magical and literary endeavors, have expressed somewhat similar opinions of Barrett based solely on his composition of *The Magus*. E. M. Butler, for example, does admit the value of this compilation of sources for the student of magic, but she also claims that none of it is new, and that such a student would have seen all this material before. Butler also has little enthusiasm for the readability of *The Magus*. She calls it "an abysmally learned treatise on all the aspects of magic enumerated" which does not "advance the art of ceremonial magic by one iota."[69] While she acknowledges *The Magus* may have brought about a revival of the classic rituals of the three sources she claims that Barrett used -- *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, the *Heptameron*, and the *Lemegeton*[70] -- Butler maintains that Barrett's

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[69]Butler, 254.

[70]Here Butler is incorrect. Barrett remains true to *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, *The Heptameron*, and Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* for all of his information on Ceremonial Magic. Waite has noted that whoever the authors of *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* and the *Heptameron* were, they were obviously familiar with the *Lemegeton*. This would account for Butler's belief that the *Lemegeton* was a direct source for Barrett.

sole worthwhile act in compiling *The Magus* is to be found in the illustrations. This criticism is unfair for several reasons. Butler does not acknowledge Barrett's originality in several capacities, not least in completing the task of bringing together some of the most important books in the western occult tradition. Butler is obviously oblivious to the impact *The Magus* had upon practising magicians and the role it played in the formation and direction of occult studies precisely because it embodied this assimilation of magical texts. Also, Butler does not acknowledge Barrett's contribution through the editing of his sources. Barrett not only edits through omission, but also through expansion and exposition. It is apparent, in some of the chapters based upon Agrippa, that Barrett has endeavored to include extraneous information he has gleaned from elsewhere, and which he feels to be both relevant and important. In not acknowledging Barrett's own contributions to his work, Butler is not only unfair to the author but also to the work itself. Would-be readers are presented with an inaccurate description of *The Magus*. It is more than a duplication of earlier sources.

Donald Tyson is one of the most recent to add his name to the list of critics who are upset by Barrett's faux-pas of non-attribution. Tyson has edited and annotated the most recent republication of the 1651 English translation of Agrippa's *Three Book of Occult Philosophy*. He also claims to have corrected several errors in that work which were carried over to the first English translation from the Latin original.[71] In the very next

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[71]I am not sure if he is implying that Agrippa himself made these errors, or if he is assuming the original Latin source used for the first English translation had become erroneous through the passage of time and reprinting.

paragraph, however, he states that he has no knowledge of Latin, Greek or Hebrew. Nonetheless, he has managed to correct, for the first time in history, "many errors that have been handed down in the Western occult tradition for centuries"[72] by "examining the interior logic of the structures" [73]. How this has been done is unclear. Tyson has rather harsh words for Barrett, stating that the man "deserves nothing but contempt."[74] This contempt, Tyson says, is derived from Barrett's complete lack of originality in *The Magus* and for his plagiarization of Agrippa. Any "excellencies" in this book are Agrippa's, he claims.[75] Once again, such an opinion reflects the holder's unfamiliarity with *The Magus* and perhaps a lack of objectivity. Tyson seems to be championing Agrippa for a perceived insult inflicted upon his subject by Barrett's use of the *Three Books of Occult Philosophy.* Tyson also incorrectly identifies *The Magus* as a butchered form of Agrippa's work, which is an ignorant dismissal of, as well as a slight against, all the other sources used by Barrett. Tyson does, however, acknowledge the importance of *The Magus* in the western magical tradition. This he seems to do inadvertently in an attempt to place Agrippa as the supreme authority of magical literature. Tyson traces the roots of modern day magical methods to the teachings of the Order of the Golden Dawn which are based, as he claims, on *The Magus*. As *The Magus,* for Tyson, represents merely a hacked up version of Agrippa's

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[72]Tyson, introduction to *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, xiv.

[73]*Ibid.*, xiii.

[74]*Ibid.*, xl.

[75]*Ibid.*

Occult Philosophy, he says a single thread joins contemporary ceremonial magic with the magic of the Renaissance (particularly that of Agrippa).[76] What Tyson does not acknowledge is that *The Magus* had more of a role to play than that of a simple transmitter of Agrippan magic.

This cry of foul play over Barrett's appropriation of some of Agrippa's ideas is expressed very subtly by H. Stanley Redgrove. In *Magic and Mysticism: Studies in Bygone Beliefs*, Redgrove makes a very brief reference to *The Magus*, which does provide important information concerning the availability and use of the book. In stating that Barrett copies from Agrippa's system of talismans, Redgrove calls *The Magus* a well-known occult work.[77] As Redgrove's work was first published in 1920, this reference suggests *The Magus* enjoyed a popular reputation at the time.

Not all opinions of *The Magus* and of Barrett share the sentiments expressed by Butler and Tyson. Moving to the other extreme, there are also praises by Idries Shah, Timothy D'Arch Smith and Francis King. In his *Secret Lore of Magic*, Shah praises Barrett as the first self-professed occultist to compile the available works of the sorcerers into a unique system of magic.[78] Shah was so intrigued by Barrett's *Magus* that he claims he was in the process of editing the book himself, but if this was indeed so, the results of

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[76]*Ibid.*, xli-xlii.

[77]Herbert Stanley Redgrove, *Bygone Beliefs; being a series of excursions in the byways of thought* (London: Rider, 1920); repr. *Magic and Mysticism: Studies in Bygone Beliefs* (New York: University Books, 1971), 70.

[78]Shah, 12.

his endeavors have never appeared. Shah, however, understands the context in which *The Magus* was written and appreciates its purpose and importance in occult studies. He also demonstrates his knowledge of the nature of occult literature in the following statement:

> ...there is no known magical book which fulfills the requirements of the original authorship. Occultists sometimes delight in making distinctions between 'composite' and other rituals. The fact is that every extant book of spells, charms, divination or magical conjuration - whether working through the power of God, of the Devil, of demons or angels, of flowers, stones or familiars, crystals or visions - is a work which has gone through innumerable hands, been edited and re-edited, and translated in many cases two to three times between different languages.[79]

It is perhaps this very process which strengthens and feeds the occult tradition. In fact, according to D'Arch Smith, *The Magus* itself, accused as it is of being plagiarism, suffered the same fate as its own sources:

> ...seldom has any book been so pillaged and pilfered from by modern writers on similar subjects who have wished to bulk out their own treatises by hoisting passages wholesale and without acknowledgement from Barrett's work in order that they might make a show of having been engaged on some profound research into medieval magical texts.[80]

D'Arch Smith praises Barrett's work for its importance as a source-book for students of the occult both then and now.

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[79]*Ibid.*, 75.

[80]D'Arch Smith, 89.

King's opinion of Barrett is also complimentary. He does, however, acknowledge the lack of courtesy shown by Barrett in failing to cite his sources or give them proper recognition.[81] King's opinion is that of a scholar who has made a career of studying western magic. He is the author of several books on the subject, and had, no doubt, access to much magical literature. King had also been exposed to the world of practising occultists. His opinion, therefore, is the closest to an insider's view on Barrett and *The Magus* and he sees more in Barrett than a mere plagiarist with a flare for publicity. For King, Barrett was a

> ...synthesizer of talent, even genius, and in *The Magus* he combined and harmonized a large number of texts, varying in date from the fourteenth to the early eighteenth century, in such a way that they provided a very adequate Do-It-Yourself textbook of ritual and talismanic magic.[82]

Here we see an understanding of the purpose of *The Magus*, as an instructional text for Barrett's own brand of occultism, created, in part, from earlier sources.

In these varying opinions of Barrett and his book, we see exemplified the different understandings of both the purpose of *The Magus* as well as the nature of magical literature. That the assessments of Shah, D'Arch Smith, and King of the importance of *The Magus* are accurate may still be contested. We will therefore examine the intended role of *The Magus* as demonstrated by Barrett's own advertisement at the end of the book. We

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[81]King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 19.

[82]*Ibid.*, 21.

will also take a closer look at what influence *The Magus* continued to have on the development of occultism in England. Through this method, we will discover what the author's purpose was in compiling this work.

At the end of *The Magus*, Barrett advertises the fact that he is available to instruct students in the occult sciences.[83] This speaks of Barrett's intention to provide an instructive and practical textbook for potential students. This intent is also made clear throughout *The Magus* in the numerous addresses made to the student reader, offering advice and providing precautions. Whether Barrett actually received any students is a debated question. King has provided evidence that Barrett had at least one student in the person of a certain Dr. Parkins, who was an astrologer, herbalist and diviner in Lincolnshire.[84] This Parkins left a note in a manuscript from 1802 on invoking spirits that reads:

> This most noble Science of Divine Magic, which is the highest branches (sic) of Learning is regularly taught in all its parts by Dr. Parkins, Little Gonerly, near Grantham, Lincolnshire. Pupil to the late Mr. F. Barrett.[85]

This information points to the existence of at least one person who took Barrett up on his offer. A long-standing belief in the occult tradition, as mentioned by Summers,

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[83]There is a first draft of this advertisement that King provides in his biography of Barrett. This version is much subtler in tone, even ambiguous as to what it is announcing. It also indicates a different address. King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 32-33.

[84]Hutton, 92.

[85]King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 26.

Butler and King, is that Barrett's magical system lived on in a small group of students from which arose a Cambridge group of adepts that Summers suspected existed even at the time he wrote *Witchcraft and Black Magic* in 1945.[86] King does not dismiss this notion but suggests that the group was centered at Oxford rather than at Cambridge. King bases this on the fact that a former don at Oxford and later dean of St. Paul's in London, owned a book written in the various occult scripts provided in *The Magus*, which also included a crystal gazing invocation that resembled Barrett's.[87] This evidence is poor support for King's claim. While Butler takes no real stand on the existence of such a school, she does suggest that it is probable that Barrett had students, and that the later occult society surrounding Bulwer Lytton owed its origins to Barrett.[88] In all probability, Barrett's advertisement drew in curious students and there is no reason to assume that they were restricted to Dr. Parkins. That members of Barrett's circle would go on to form new occult circles is also likely. Barrett's work and his students no doubt provided the literature and manpower to feed the growing occult revival as well as the proliferation of secret societies of Barrett's time.[89]

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[86]Summers, 225.

[87]King, *The Flying Sorcerer*, 26.

[88]Butler, 256.

[89]To meet the needs of the occult revival of the nineteenth century several secret societies sprung up offering esoteric wisdom to their members. The masonic-Rosicrucian organization *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* was formed in 1865 or 1866 (the date is disputed). The founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn, established in 1888, were members of this society. The Order offered the esoteric knowledge of the hermetic-cabalist

The impact of *The Magus* on the future of Western occultism is not even denied by Barrett's most cantankerous critics. E. M. Butler admits the value of the book to the student of magic[90] and Donald Tyson acknowledges the influence of *The Magus* on the teachings of the Order of The Golden Dawn.[91] *The Magus*, as a compendium of natural, cabalistic and ceremonial magic, manufactured with the utmost care given to practicality and interest by its author, was compiled for the purpose of providing an authoritative source for occult studies. As such a source, *The Magus* demonstrates heavy reliance upon Renaissance sources, especially Agrippa and upon the Christian cabalistic tradition of that era. The book, and indirectly its author, reflects the curiosity concerning the occult at that time, as well as the willingness to cross the line of the cleaner Christian cabalistic rituals, into the darker realms of the delights of necromancy and the danger of corresponding with evil spirits. *The Magus* also exemplifies the assimilation that has taken place between the works of the Christian cabalists and the black magical grimoires of the Middle Ages. This fusion has created a new kind of cabalistic magic, braver in its exploits than its Renaissance predecessor. Cabalistic magic is not only used for accessing the divine and gaining self-knowledge or salvation, but for getting whatever the magician desires materially as well as celestially. This new type of magic also deviates from Renaissance magic in its

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occult philosophy. The London lodge of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, which was heavily influenced by oriental mysticism, was founded in 1883. There were several overlaps in the membership of these three societies.

[90]Butler, 254.

[91]Tyson, xli-xlii.

systematization. Barrett's *Magus* heralds a new way of learning and transmitting magical knowledge. Along with this came a new accessibility. Cabalistic magic need no longer be the domain of the academic élite or the philosophically inclined. Barrett's textbook makes cabalistic magic less exclusive in its dissemination. Granted, a majority of magical adepts will remain those from an educated and privileged class, however, the diverse membership of the Order of the Golden Dawn, at the end of the century, demonstrates the ability of men and women of all classes to have access to the esoteric secrets of cabalistic magic. *The Magus* and its subject matter found an audience and, more importantly, Barrett found students. That much of the material found in *The Magus* was not original is a criticism with no real relevance to the purpose of the book. As Barrett meticulously and consciously shaped the sources he used in creating *The Magus*, so he shaped the future of the western occult tradition.

Chapter Three: The Dawning of a New Order

If we are to argue that Barrett's *Magus* was immensely influential in the formation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, "the crowning glory of the occult revival in the nineteenth century"[1], then we must seek a continuation of Barrett's legacy from his day to the founding of the Order. We have already presented the evidence supporting an argument for some type of school of magic founded by Barrett, and we have also found at least one student of such a school.[2] Now we enter murkier territory, cloaked in all the secrecy and ambiguity that is necessary for the study of occultism and the formation of secret societies. In this chapter, we shall identify the key figures responsible for the continuation of the cabalistic magical tradition as found and preserved in Barrett's *Magus*. We shall also look at the foreign influences on this tradition in the middle of the nineteenth century and we will examine how the revival of this tradition affected its nature. This chapter will introduce William Wynn Westcott, one of the founding chiefs of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as a direct product of this environment. We will examine his influence upon the shaping of the Order, in light of the particular intellectual interests and beliefs of his time.

The first key figure we meet in the continuation of Barrett's tradition is Frederick Hockley (1809-1885), one of the best-known occultists of the Victorian age. Hockley was

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[1]Gerald Yorke, foreword to Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn. A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887-1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972; repr. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1978; repr.1984), ix.

[2]See chapter two, 57.

a distinguished collector of a great number of magical texts.[3] Montague Summers claims that a private English collection holds (or held) a manuscript translation of the *Clavicula Salomonis* by Hockley.[4] So there may be some evidence to his having been engaged in the translation of at least one of the magical texts which he collected. In *Modern Ritual Magic*, Francis King claims that Hockley was a student of Barrett's magical school but offers no evidence in support of this.[5] He does, however, offer evidence showing that Hockley was familiar with Barrett's work and impressed by it. In his biography of Barrett, King tells of a note copied from a manuscript belonging to Hockley, which stated that Barrett's sources were supplied by an occult bookseller named John Denley. According to King, Hockley describes *The Magus* as a work of great rarity and that its real value is found in the sections borrowed from Agrippa and the "Clavis or Key to unlock the Mysteries of Rabbi Solomon."[6]

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[3]In *The National Union Pre-1956 Imprints* there is an entry which confirms that Hockley was an avid collector. The entry reads: "List of books from the library of the late Frederick Hockley, esq ., consisting of important works relating to the occult sciences, both in print and manuscript; now on sale at the prices affixed, by George Redway. London, 1887." There are 1,068 books offered for sale on this list. *The National Union Pre-1956 Imprints*, vol. 249, (London: Mansell, 1979), 71.

[4]Summers, 135.. Summers says the translation is titled *Solomon's Key, by Frederick Hockley, 1828.* A label pasted inside the manuscript reads "Magia de Profundis, seu Clavicula Salomonis Regis, the key of Solomon the King, or a Complete System of Profound Magical Science with a great number of coloured drawings of the Character of the Spirits, Seals, Pentacles, etc., elegant in brown calf gilt leaves."

[5]King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 28.

[6]King, *The Flying Sorcerer,* 19.

The company which Hockley kept also makes him important for our study. Not only was he a knowledgeable adept and practising magician following in the Barrett tradition, but he was also well connected with others sharing the same interests. King writes that in the 1850s and 1860s, a group of occultists experimenting with the techniques outlined in *The Magus* gathered around the mystic and visionary Hockley.[7] We know for a fact that Hockley became a member of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* in 1875. Without relying solely on King's word, we know Hockley had associates because of the writings of Kenneth Mackenzie (1833-1886), the author of the *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*, published in 1877 by J. W. Bouton in New York.[8] Mackenzie claimed to be a Rosicrucian initiate and to have immense occult knowledge. He was an honorary member of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, as well as a member of various scholarly and occult societies throughout his lifetime.[9] It would have been through the *Societas*

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[7]King, *Modern Ritual Magic,* 194-195.

[8]Mackenzie also wrote several other works including *Burmah and the Burmese* (London: G. Routledge and Co., 1853); articles on Peking, America and Scandinavia in T. A. W. Buckley's *The Great Cities of the Ancient World, in Their Glory and their Desolation...* (London: G. Routledge, 1852); a biographical sketch of Hans Christian Andersen in C. Boner's translation of *The Shoes of Fortune and other Fairy Tales* (London: John Hogg, 1883), and a romantic novel *Zythagala; or Borne by the Sea* (London and Paris, 1872). His translations include a biography of Bismark, *The Life of Homer* attributed to Herodotus, and Alfred Crowquill's *Eulenspiegel. The marvellous adventures and rare conceits of Master Tyll Owlglass.* Along with these publications, Mackenzie also contributed articles to *The Biological Review* and the *Masonic Directory Series.*

[9]Mackenzie's knowledge of occult matters and proficiency in German, Latin, Greek and Hebrew made him a prime candidate for membership in many of the esoteric societies taking shape in the middle of the century. Howe claims Mackenzie was also a

Rosicruciana in Anglia, however, that Mackenzie would have influenced the formation of the Order of the Golden Dawn since all three of its founders were members of this masonic-Rosicrucian organisation as well. Mackenzie was a great admirer of Hockley. In a letter to William Wynn Westcott in 1879, Mackenzie writes that he owes most of his occult knowledge to Hockley;[10] and in another letter written to another member of the Rosicrucian Society in 1883, Mackenzie writes that he wishes he had "a tithe of his [Hockley's] occult knowledge."[11]

Mackenzie went on to add his own mark to the brand of magic that the Order of the Golden Dawn would eventually study and practise. He became involved in the use and symbolism of Tarot cards and thus was responsible for introducing the French influence of Eliphas Zahed Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810-1875) into Barrett's system. Mackenzie visited Lévi in Paris in 1861 and wrote an account of that meeting which appeared in the journal *The Rosicrucian and the Red Cross* in May, 1873. Lévi reportedly found Mackenzie to be "very intelligent, but excessively involved with magic and spiritualism."[12] Lévi developed the occult tarot system that was eventually adopted, with

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member of the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Asiatic Society and the Anthropological Society of London. He also attempted the formation of his own occult group, the Society of Eight, in 1883. Howe suggests that this society probably never got off the ground. Howe, 27 and 31.

[10]*Ibid.*, 30.

[11]*Ibid.*, 32.

[12]*Ibid.*, 28.

some modifications, by the Order of the Golden Dawn, and he was the first to connect the tarot with cabala. He claimed that cabala was unintelligible without the tarot, which, in turn, could not be understood without reference to cabala. He used the tarot in conjunction with cabala as a means of discovering hidden truths. Lévi incorporated the tarot so deeply into the occult tradition that it has become almost impossible to separate it and examine the tarot as an individual ingredient in western magic.[13] As Alphonse Louis Constant, Lévi was a revolutionary imprisoned for his humanitarian ideas, and he was also a candidate for the priesthood. He opted in favour of becoming a priest of a more magical nature. As the central figure of the French occult revival, which occurred more or less at the same time as its British counterpart, Lévi wrote many magical works in the middle of the century which met with great success and exerted great influence.[14] His works include *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie,* published in 1854-1856, *Histoire de la magie,* 1860, and *La Clef des grands mystères,* 1861. In these works Lévi romanticises the magical tradition, blending ceremonial magic with alchemy, tarot, and cabala. He was a brilliant synthesizer of esoteric traditions and it was he who made the word "occultisme" famous.

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[13]Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis, and Michael Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards. The Origins of the Occult Tarot* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 174. Here the authors also claim that because of his integration of the tarot with the other aspects of magical imagery, western occultism is identified as deriving from Lévi. It is through his writings that the western tradition of magic "flowed down to modern times."

[14]Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (London: Rider, 1972), 11.

> His discoveries were meant to end the monstrosity of a world without God, by revealing the unity of universal dogma in the secret doctrines of the Hebrews, Egyptians, and Chaldeans...[15]

Lévi left his mark on the occult revival in both France and England. He supported both the antiquity, efficacy and ubiquity of magic. Lévi claimed that humanity had once possessed semi-divine powers which could be regained through the study and practice outlined in magical texts.[16] He maintained that the doctrines of magic were behind the symbolism of all popular religion, and that magic was indeed the only universally valid religion.[17]

As we may now see, Hockley preserved the valuable learning and systematization presented in Barrett's *Magus*. Lévi began anew the process of synthesis so important to the development of magic by introducing the symbolic relevance of the tarot. Mackenzie, as an admirer of both Hockley and Lévi, bridged the gap between French and British occultism and introduced Lévi's thought to the esoteric circles in which he travelled. Hockley, Lévi and Mackenzie all held membership of some sort in the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*. In a document entitled *The Historic Lecture for Neophytes*, written shortly after the formation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, founding

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[15]Jean-Pierre Laurant, "The Primitive Characteristics of Nineteenth-Century Esotericism", in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*. Ed. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York: Crossroad 1992 [World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, 21, 1992]), 280.

[16]Hutton, 71.

[17]King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 24.

member William Wynn Westcott counts Hockley, Lévi and Mackenzie among adepts of the Order in France and England whose deaths caused the Order to lie dormant for a time.[18] While the truth of that account is doubtful, those three men were certainly responsible not only for the form of magic practised by the Order, but for its actual formation as well. For the occult world of the nineteenth century absorbed their ideas and writings, blending them with the Renaissance magical tradition supplied by Barrett. This new reformulation was then disseminated systematically in the characteristic fashion developed in the nineteenth century, advancement through a series of ascending grades. To this important development we must now turn our attention.

The surge of secret societies promising to deliver esoteric knowledge to its initiates was a booming business in England in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The original source for many of these societies was Freemasonry, however, due to recent archaeological discoveries, nineteenth-century secret groups were redefined through the introduction of ancient Egyptian imagery, Greek and Roman mystery religions, and the cultures of early Mesopotamia.[19] As we have seen, Hockley and Mackenzie both held membership in at least one of these societies. This school-like setting for the teaching of occult knowledge was the result of Barrett's school and the institutionalisation of magic. Cabalistic magic and its cognates were being taught to large groups by those who had

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[18]Howe, 23.

[19]Hutton, 57. Hutton claims that the 'finishing touches' of this reshaping of the structure of secret societies occurred in the 1920s when prehistoric tribal rites were added to the masonic system.

already acquired such knowledge. The lone scholar absorbing the secrets found in magical books became a rarity. Instead, people gathered in groups to learn the secrets from a master. The popularity of such groups and the interest in occultism were the result of a desire to explain the world through a preexisting method. The nineteenth-century emphasis on ancient cultures and their inherent wisdom strengthened the arguments behind astrology and alchemy. Just as in the Renaissance we saw philosophers reach back into the past in an attempt to assimilate many forms of knowledge into one interpretation of the world, we see this same attempt in the occult revival of the nineteenth century. This time around, however, there are some new twists which result from the intellectual milieu of the era.

> Reacting to the explosion of knowledge and of religious, intellectual, and political authorities, the occult sciences aspired to transfigure the world by submitting revelation to criticism - not to deny it, which had been the fatal error of eighteenth-century ideologues, but to render it obvious.[20]

One of these new twists was this institutionalisation of occult learning. This new method of transmitting esoteric knowledge was also heavily influenced by masonic fraternities and their hierarchical infrastructure. Many of these new groups adopted the same grade system used in the masonic lodges. This grade system is, of course, reminiscent of the various levels of initiation implied in the legends of ancient Greek and Egyptian mystery religions.[21] By the eighteenth century, interest in Rosicrucianism and the

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[20]Laurant, 280.

[21]According to Hutton, the multiplication of degrees of initiation and titles throughout the history of secret societies structured on the masonic system is inevitable as each new society could not be presented as a novelty but rather as a reversion or genuine

occult had developed among the Freemasons,[22] and occult knowledge, together with other masonic secrets, were passed on to members over a series of grades.

The *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* was one such society which adopted the grade system. This group is of utmost importance to this study because it is the organisation into which all of Hockley's, Mackenzie's, and Lévi's preservation and development of magical studies were deposited, and it is from this very society that the three founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn came. The society was founded in London in 1865 or 1866 by two scholarly esotericists and occultists: Robert W. Little (1840-1918) and Mackenzie. It was an esoteric society of Freemasons interested in studying occultism with an emphasis on cabala and masonic symbolism. The society had a clearly Christian orientation.[23] The aim of the society as stated by its Supreme Magus from 1891-1925, William Wynn Westcott, is as follows.

> To afford mutual aid and encouragement in working out the great problems of Life, and in discovering the Secrets of Nature; to facilitate the study of the system of Philosophy founded upon the Kabbalah and the doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus, which was inculcated by the original Fratres Rosae Crucis of Germany, A. D. 1450; and to investigate the meaning and symbolism of all that now remains of the wisdom, art and literature of the ancient

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version of the 'real' tradition. Such an interpretation required the preservation of the traditional degrees of initiation along with the latest additions. Hutton, 58.

[22]King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 25.

[23]Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 90.

world.[24]

In this same lecture, Westcott tells the story of the society's formation. Apparently, Little had found some old rituals in the store-rooms of a Freemason's hall and brought them to Mackenzie's attention with the intention of forming an esoteric group. Mackenzie had earlier received both Rosicrucian initiation and the authority to form the society (which Westcott refers to here as an "allied English Masonic Rosicrucian Society of a less esoteric character than the Continental system") while living in Austria with a certain Count Apponyi.[25]

We have already introduced some of the writings of Westcott; now we shall examine the man. Westcott was born at Leamington, Warwickshire in 1848. His father was a surgeon and both he and Westcott's mother both died before Westcott was ten years old. His uncle, also a surgeon, took him under his wing and Westcott followed in his uncle's and his father's professional footsteps. Westcott studied medicine at the University of London and joined his uncle's practice around the age of twenty-three. He was appointed coroner for North-East London in 1881 and held that position until 1918. Prior to this appointment, Westcott had gone into seclusion for two years to study cabalistic philosophy, and hermetic, alchemical and Rosicrucian writings.[26] He joined the *Societas*

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[24]Westcott, "Data of the History of the Rosicrucians", in *The Magical Mason. Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus.* Ed. by R. A. Gilbert (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1983), 39.

[25]*Ibid.*, 34-35.

[26]Howe, 36.

Rosicruciana in Anglia in the early eighties at which time he also married. Westcott was familiar with the teachings of the Theosophical Society, having presented several lectures to its membership, but whether or not he was ever a member is unclear. Ellic Howe, in his documentary account of the history of the Order of the Golden Dawn, claims he was not, suggesting that Westcott was too steeped in the western hermetic cabalist tradition to adhere to the eastern flavor of Madame Blavatsky's theosophy.[27] Ithell Colquhoun, however, in her biography of Mathers claims that both Westcott and Mathers were honorary members of the Theosophical Society's Hermetic Society, founded by Dr. Anna Kingsford.[28] Westcott learned much from his membership in the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* and from his association with the Theosophical Society about how to establish a secret order. The eastern focus and lack of exclusivity of the latter and the lack of concentration on ceremonial magic in the former left an opening for Westcott to fill. He used his knowledge and experience as a theosophist, as a freemason, as a member of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, as an accomplished student of the occult and even as a medical practitioner, to formulate the initial thought that sparked the beginning of a new order and a new brand of magic in 1888. After co-founding the Order, Westcott concentrated his occult energies upon this new society. The Order of the Golden Dawn provided Westcott with the opportunity to pursue an area which fascinated him, cabalistic

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[27]*Ibid.*, 8.

[28]Ithell Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom. MacGregor Mathers and "The Golden Dawn"* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 77.

magic. He did not, however, withdraw from his other esoteric duties in other groups. He was the Supremus Magus of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* from 1891 until 1925. In fact, after the initial establishment of the Order of the Golden Dawn, Westcott's role in it became less and less necessary and instrumental. One of his co-founders, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, quickly achieved status within the Order as the ultimate authority despite the original plans for three co-equal chiefs. Westcott did not appear to have the ability nor the desire to challenge Mathers's authority, and when accused by Mathers in 1900 of forgery and deception in the establishment of the Order, Westcott retreated to the security of his earlier occult associations. He occasionally resurfaced in Golden Dawn affairs when the Order began to splinter into differing factions. Westcott finally departed from the occult world of nineteenth-century London in 1918 when he retired to South Africa to live with his daughter. He died in July of 1927.

Mystery and intrigue surround the establishment of the Order of the Golden Dawn, as is appropriate for a secret society of magicians. Westcott apparently discovered ancient manuscripts written in a cypher. A certain Reverend Adolphus F. A. Woodford had evidently given the manuscripts to Westcott.[29] Upon deciphering the text, Westcott

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[29]Howe, 8-9. Westcott recorded a meeting with Woodford about the manuscript in which Woodford says he showed it to Mackenzie who was surprised and had never seen such a manuscript before. In Westcott's entry, Woodford claims that he received the manuscript from France and that it had once been in the possession of Lévi. Ithell Colquhoun provides another account of the origins of these manuscripts. She tells of the claim that Frederick Hockley deposited these manuscripts in a Masonic store-cupboard before his death and that is where Woodford found them. Colquhoun does not argue that this account is true as she also offers the explanation that Westcott may have manufactured them. Colquhoun, 74-75.

discovered that it contained five mystical rituals similar to those practised in masonic lodges.[30] Among the leaves of the manuscripts, Westcott also discovered the address of a certain Fräulein Sprengel, a German Rosicrucian adept. Westcott wrote to this woman and received instructions from her to establish an English branch of her occult Order, "Die Goldene Dämmerung". This led to the establishment of the Isis-Urania Temple of the Order of the Golden Dawn in 1888. Westcott asked fellow occultists and members of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and William Robert Woodman, to join him as chiefs of the Order. Westcott also commissioned Mathers to compose new rituals in accordance with those discovered in the cypher manuscripts, in order to add to the new Order's corpus. Scholars of the Order of the Golden Dawn, including Howe and King, as well as members of the Order, have all expressed doubt about the authenticity of the manuscripts, and about the existence of Fräulein Sprengel and her "Goldene Dämmerung". Arthur Edward Waite, for example, joined the Order in 1891 and he knew Westcott, Mathers and Woodman. He was familiar with the cypher manuscripts, had made his own copy in the early 1900s.[31] Waite suspected that the manuscripts were not as old as Westcott asserted, but rather of quite recent origin. He based his suspicions upon two facts. First, the manuscripts included ancient Egyptian material, which was incomprehensible until hieroglyphs were deciphered in 1822; and

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[30]According to Colquhoun's research, the code was created by Trithemius of Spanheim and examples of it were readily available in manuscripts in the collection of the British Museum. Colquhoun, 75.

[31]Howe, 2.

secondly, the manuscripts also contained allusions to the compatibility of the tarot with the cabalistic Tree of Life, a comparison that first occurred in the writings of Eliphas Lévi in 1856.[32] Howe confirms Waite's suspicions with yet another piece of evidence. He claims that the title of one of the grades in the cypher manuscripts is taken directly from Mackenzie's *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*.[33] Howe also conducted extensive research attempting to verify Fräulein Sprengel's existence, but to no avail. He concludes that the entire German connection and the person of Fräulein Sprengel were fabricated by Westcott. [34] Through his association with the Theosophical Society and with masonic-Rosicrucians, Westcott was well aware that every secret occult society needs a tradition from which to grow and secret chiefs from whom to take guidance. Westcott conveniently disposed of his fabrication by having Fräulein Sprengel grant the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn autonomy and then having her die. That Westcott made up this German correspondence is further supported by Mathers's accusation in 1900 that Westcott had

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[32]*Ibid.*

[33]*Ibid.*

[34]*Ibid.*, 5-25. In his investigation, Howe examines various types of writing paper in England and Germany in the nineteenth century. He asks an expert to examine the German grammar used in correspondences between Sprengel and Westcott. The findings show that Sprengel's German is ridden with common mistakes made by English-speaking people. Howe presents the following alternative to the real history behind the founding of the Order of the Golden Dawn, with regard to the whole German connection. Westcott forged the letters from Sprengel with the help of a stash of foreign writing stationary, an employee with German ancestry who worked for a surgical supply company in which Westcott held financial interest, and lastly with the help of Westcott's own ingenious imagination.

forged these letters or caused them to be forged, and that Westcott had pledged Mathers to secrecy concerning the matter. Howe offers two possible scenarios concerning the fabrication. In the first, Westcott was told about Sprengel by Woodford when he was given the manuscripts and, having tried unsuccessfully to find the real Fräulein Sprengel, he invented one. In the second scenario, Howe has Westcott inventing the very name and person of Anna Sprengel.[35] Howe does not judge Westcott too harshly for this indiscretion as he deems such deceptions to be inevitable in the business of occultism.

> Neither Westcott nor Mathers, who appears to have known, more or less, what was afoot, were swindlers in the accepted sense of the word; they were occultists and therefore liable to confuse illusion and reality.[36]

With all the proper credentials, namely an obscure manuscript, encoded with esoteric rituals, and a foreign esoteric Rosicrucian order looking for a successor, Westcott, Mathers and Woodman were in business.

To understand the nature of this new Order, we must look at the writings of its founders. Westcott was an amazingly prolific writer and lecturer. Over a forty-year period he wrote dozens of papers and numerous books concerning all things occult including astrology, divination, cabala, alchemy and numerology.[37] He also wrote textbooks in his

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[35]*Ibid.*, 10.

[36]*Ibid.*, 11.

[37]These include a translation of the *Sepher Yetzirah* (Bath: R. H. Fryar, 1887), *The Isiac Tablet of Cardinal Bembo. Its History and Occult Significance* (Bath: R. H. Fryar, 1887), *An Introduction to the Study of the Kabalah* (London: J. M. Watkins, 1926) and

professional field on topics such as suicide and treatments for syphilis.[38] In his esoteric writings, Westcott exhibits a breadth of knowledge and interest. He is a stickler for providing the history of each topic he approaches, stretching back to the beginning of time to support the antiquity and validity of many occult sciences. While his books and translations add to the available scholarship and material on cabala and hermeticism, it is his lectures that reveal his personal beliefs and interests. By looking at the papers which Westcott presented to the Order of the Golden Dawn, the Theosophical Society and the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, we can also uncover his vison for, and his influence upon the Order's formation.[39]

The lectures that Westcott delivered before the Theosophical Society can be categorized under two headings: Rosicrucian and cabalistic. One of his Rosicrucian lectures, "Christian Rosenkreuz and the Rosicrucians", contains Westcott's stand on occultism in relation to the scepticism that had been growing in the western intellectual

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Numbers: Their Occult Powers and Mystic Virtues (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1890). Several of Westcott's lectures were printed for and sometimes by the various esoteric societies of which he was a member of associate.

[38]These include *The Extra Pharmacopoeia* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1892), *"Salvarsan" or "606" (dioxy-diamino-arsenobenzol): its Chemistry, Pharmacy and Therapeutics* (New York: P. B. Hoeber, 1911), both of which were co-authored by a certain William Harrison Martindale, and *Suicide; its History, Literature, Jurisprudence, Causation, and Prevention* (London: Lewis, 1885).

[39]To undertake the analysis of the contents and purpose of Westcott's lectures we will use R. A. Gilbert's anthology *The Magical Mason, Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1983). This compilation contains more than twenty-five papers delivered by Westcott to the three aforementioned societies.

world ever since the scientific revolution and the onset of "enlightened" modernity. Describing himself as being "...not one of those who scoff at all that seems at first sight improbable..."[40] he chastises the society in which he lives for its interpretation of the occult.

> Our present world has taken almost no notice of the Rosicrucian philosophy, nor until the last twenty years of any mysticism, and when it does condescend to stoop from its utilitarian and money-making occupations, it is only to condemn all such studies, root and branch, as waste of time and loss of energy.[41]

In this same lecture, Westcott identifies the similarities between Christian Rosenkreuz's Rosicrucianism and Madame Blavatsky's theosophy. These similarities include the founders having received instructions from the East, founding their societies in the closing quarter of a century, receiving scorn and ridicule from the world for their teachings, basing these teachings upon a high standard of morality and suggesting that these teachings may lead to magical powers and founding a home or dwelling for the work of their societies.[42] It is interesting to note how these similarities are also shared by the Order of the Golden Dawn and its establishment. We can only wonder if Westcott intentionally set about creating these characteristics as part of the Order of the Golden

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[40]Westcott, "Christian Rosenkreuz and the Rosicrucians", in *The Magical Mason*, 19.

[41]*Ibid.*, 27.

[42]*Ibid.*, 26-27.

Dawn's foundation story, or if most of them are not simply inherent features of all esoteric societies.

Most of Westcott's lectures to the Theosophical Society concern the cabala. He tends to place more emphasis on aspects of Rosicrucianism in his lectures to the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* as one would expect. His cabalistic lectures to Madame Blavatsky's followers display his knowledge of cabala and proclaim his status as Praemonstrator of the Kabalah in "one of the present day Rosicrucian Societies."[43] In "The Kabalah", Westcott discusses the origins of cabala and its two major texts *The Zohar* and the *Sepher Yetzirah*. He defines what he calls the 'practical Kabalah' as involving the use of gematria, notarikon and themurah, divine and angelic names and amulets, and magic squares. Westcott states that combined with the tarot, these cabalistic techniques formed the bases of medieval magic.[44] Here we see that the assimilation of the tarot with western occult philosophy, initiated by Lévi, has taken hold. Westcott also continues the cabalistic tradition of an unwritten knowledge, transmitted from master to student. Such knowledge he claims to have learned in his Rosicrucian and Golden Dawn lodges.

Westcott's lectures to the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* were numerous and spanned a period stretching from before his involvement in the Golden Dawn to long after he removed himself as an active authority of the Order. These lectures primarily concern all things Rosicrucian including a history of the movement, its association with

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[43]Westcott, "The Kabalah", in *The Magical Mason*, 81.

[44]*Ibid.*, 86.

Freemasonry, cabala, angelology, demonology, numerology, and divination. In his lecture concerning the history of the Rosicrucians, Westcott provides his own account of the founding of the Order of the Golden Dawn, claiming it was formed by permission of a continental Rosicrucian adept in 1887 in order to give instruction in "the Medieval Occult Sciences."[45] Here Westcott also provides information concerning his membership in a semi-Rosicrucian society in Bradford called The Order of Light. Westcott was Chief of the Council of Instruction in this group which was run by Maurice Vidal Portman from 1870-1880 and was revived in 1901.[46] In another historical lecture on the Rosicrucians, Westcott comments on the reoccurrence throughout history of interest in the occult. Here he supports an argument against the notion of historical progress of rationality and confirms the attraction of the human mind to a magical interpretation of existence.

> It is curious to note that the waves of interest in occult and mystical subjects, seem to sweep over a nation at intervals; periods of Rosicrucian enlightenment alternate with other periods of materialistic dogmatism.[47]

Westcott's emphasis on cabala and its role in western esotericism is also evident in this lecture. He claims that cabala is the basis of western occultism as a coherent scheme of theology, cosmology, ethics and metaphysics.[48]

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[45]Westcott, "Data of the History of the Rosicrucians", in *The Magical Mason,* 36.

[46]*Ibid.,* 37.

[47]Westcott, "The Rosicrucians, Past and Present, At Home and Abroad", in *The Magical Mason*, 40.

[48]*Ibid.,* 45.

In "Rosicrucian Thoughts on the Ever-Burning Lamps of the Ancients", Westcott expresses the political philosophy that tends to exist behind some forms of occult knowledge such as cabalism. This philosophy contains elements of élitism that can be traced back to the early days of Christian Gnosticism, and even further back to the beginnings of dualism in the Manichean and Zoroastrian religions. This élitism took on a more revolutionary nature in Westcott's time as the obliteration of powerful ruling classes by the advances of democracy and equality was still fresh in the cultural memory of western Europe. Westcott revitalizes this élitism as it existed in the origins of esoteric and magical learning.

> The great tendency of modern times has been to reduce all men to a level, a dead level of mediocrity, an effort fatal to the supremacy of individuals, and which has tended to discourage research into the hidden Mysteries of Nature and Science, as opposed to the parrot-like study of what are known as modern sciences, a study of enormous value to mankind, but yet not the stepping stones on the direct road to Deity ...We may all be born with an equal right to existence; but it is absurd to say we are all to be chiefs or Magi, for, as we are told in the Master's Degree, 'some must rule, and some obey.[49]

In three of these lectures presented before an audience of fellow Freemasons, Westcott addresses the origins of Freemasonry. In "The Religions of Freemasonry Illuminated by the Kabalah" he argues that Judaism is the religious root of Freemasonry rather than Christianity. He claims that Freemasonry is the development of a long series of monotheistic secret associations which have their roots in the Jewish Kabalah and its

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[49]Westcott, "Rosicrucian Thoughts on the Ever-Burning Lamps of the Ancients", in *The Magical Mason*, 55.

monotheistic truths.[50] In "Freemasonry and Its Relation to the Essenes", Westcott questions the theory that the Essenes were prototypes of the Freemasons; a theory asserted by Mackenzie.[51] In another lecture, Westcott argues that the Freemasons owe much to the cult of Mithra for their rituals, grade system and ceremonials.[52] In this same lecture, Westcott demonstrates his awareness of the essentials necessary in the operation of an efficient esoteric society.

> There can be no doubt that the secrecy, rituals and ceremonials of an occult sodality do produce intense devotion among its members, and the hope of advancement grade by grade to a ruling position is well calculated to conserve an enthusiasm for progress toward a goal of which all the seniors of a young member speak as of unparalleled importance.[53]

Another lecture that Westcott presented to the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* also indicates his consciousness of how to form a successful secret society. In "An Essay on the Ancient Mysteries", Westcott comments on the bond between initiates claiming that "Men who have suffered and then succeeded together have an intimate link which is not easily broken."[54]

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[50]Westcott, "The Religion of Freemasonry Illuminated by the Kabalah", in *The Magical Mason,* 117 and 122.

[51]Westcott, "Freemasonry and its Relation to the Essenes", in *The Magical Mason,* 240-241.

[52]Westcott, "The Resemblance of Freemasonry to the Cult of Mithra", in *The Magical Mason,* 255.

[53]*Ibid.*

[54]Westcott, 'An Essay on the Ancient Mysteries", in *The Magical Mason*, 286.

We can see in these papers that Westcott was highly educated in the history of occult sciences and the history of religions. His methodical approach in these papers indicates thorough research teamed with a desire to assert the validity and respectability of occultism. Westcott was concerned with establishing a long tradition behind his interests, based on cabala. These lectures portray two different aspects of Westcott as an occult scholar and practitioner. The first shows him as an enthusiastic proponent of occultism, intent upon demonstrating, through scholarly research, that magic is real and has been recognized as such by adepts since ancient times. The second aspect reveals Westcott as a self-interested analyst. He wants to become one of the occult leaders that he writes so much about, such as Mithra, Christian Rosenkreuz and even Madame Blavatsky. His research was not purely for historical verification. Westcott was also gathering tips on how to start one's own esoteric society and his writings indicate he learned much.

We can assume that the lectures that Westcott presented before members of the Order of the Golden Dawn were tailored for that particular audience. By looking at these lectures, we can learn what were the areas of interest of the Order, and also in which direction Westcott wished to guide its members. In Gilbert's anthology, *The Magical Mason*, there are four papers that are associated with the Order. Two of these, "Man, Miracle, Magic. From the Ancient Rosicrucian Dogmata" and "Courage Versus Obsession", were given as addresses to members of the Order, while "The Vestiges of Tetragrammaton" was part of an instructional text for members and "The History of

Astrology" formed the introduction to one member's book.[55] As the titles indicate, Westcott's Golden Dawn papers dealt with topics similar to those in his papers that he presented to the other two esoteric societies. Those topics are namely Rosicrucianism, magic, cabala and astrology. There is an important difference however, in the style of these papers, particularly in the ones intended as lectures to an audience of Golden Dawn members. Westcott strays from historical accounts and factual reports and takes on a more personal and instructive tone. His "Man, Miracle, Magic" explores the nature of magic and miracles. Westcott reaffirms the Renaissance notions of the individual as a microcosm of the universe and the existence of a vital spirit or energy which moves the world and which the adept can command.[56] He claims that there is no such thing as a miracle, meaning that nothing occurs outside of the laws of nature. Our unfamiliarity with a particular occurrence does not make that event miraculous, as we are not completely knowledgeable of the world.

> If you find a teacher who can call down Rain from a cloudless sky, you do not see a Miracle, you see only that your Master is possessed of more knowledge of nature's laws, and has more powerful faculties than you yet possess. It is folly to think that any finality of science has been reached by modern Thought; it is

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[55]This Golden Dawn member, Frederick Leigh Gardner, had a great interest in astrology. Westcott's paper on the history of astrology served as the introduction to Gardner's *Bibliotheca Astrologica*, printed privately in London in 1911.

[56]Westcott, "Man, Miracle, Magic. From the Ancient Rosicrucian Dogmata", in *The Magical Mason*, 68-69.

> equally folly to think that no knowledge once common to the learned ever lapsed.[57]

Here Westcott again demonstrates his belief in a continuous tradition of occult knowledge handed down throughout history.

In these two lectures to Golden Dawn members, Westcott also discusses the reality and potential danger of magic. There is no doubt that he believes that magic can be employed successfully and that the magician risks certain perils. In the lecture on miracles and magic, he verifies the existence of black magic saying that through this terrible reality an individual can achieve abnormal powers over other individuals and over events by concentrating one's will towards an evil object.[58] He condemns such practice, referring to these individuals as "soul-less" and lacking moral sense. In "Courage Versus Obsession", Westcott repeats his warning. He advises initiates to beware of the danger to which they expose themselves in their exploration of mercurial-natured magic.

> ...for he who puts his hand to the plough of the field of the unknown may raise up a host of powers of evil, of Dwellers on the Threshold, of Elementals, of Elementaries, who are the shells or Astral Shadows set free at corporeal death, for the shells of the wicked have evil purposes that have not yet been accomplished.[59]

We have heard these warnings before. The Renaissance magi warned of the perilous nature of certain aspects of cabalistic and ceremonial magic when used improperly

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[57]*Ibid.*, 67.

[58]*Ibid.*, 68.

[59]Westcott, "Courage Versus Obsession", in *The Magical Mason*, 72.

or with the aid of evil spirits. Pico, Agrippa and Reuchlin found it essential to prove that magic was not dangerous when carried out through cabalistic and Christian methods. In the previous chapter we saw how, at the beginning of the century, Francis Barrett upheld the magi's side of the debate by insisting that magic was safe when carried out by those pure of intention. We also saw Barrett struggle with a more modern criticism of magic with regards to its efficacy. Here at the end of the century Westcott finds it necessary to confront both the modern and the Renaissance criticisms of magic. The efficacy of magic is a subject that he addresses frequently in his lectures to Rosicrucian and theosophical audiences. The safe practising of magic is one which he reserves for the initiates of the Order of the Golden Dawn. This is undoubtedly because of the different natures and purposes of the different societies. The Order of the Golden Dawn was very much an active and participatory magical society. Its members were fully convinced that magic was real. They needed to know how to protect themselves from the potential evil involved in their practice and study. One of the recommendations from Westcott is to avoid communication with higher powers as a medium. For his Golden Dawn audience, he outlines the difference in being an adept and being a medium. The medium is a negative being that allows itself to used by every "elemental force" evil or good, thus opening oneself to danger, whereas the adept uses the vital energy of the universe, discriminating between evil and good intent.[60] The former is a passive vessel and the latter active.

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[60]Westcott, "Man, Miracle, Magic. From the Ancient Rosicrucian Dogmata", 68-69.

Westcott must present this differentiation in order for him to identify the nature of the magic practised by the Order and the goals of the society. He must define the Order as distinct from the spiritualist movement that was sweeping over America and England at the end of the nineteenth century and from Madame Blavatsky's theosophy, in order to carve out the appropriate niche for the Order of the Golden Dawn.

Westcott's lectures to members of the Order are more creative, inspirational, and focussed. They tend to be less scholarly than those presented to the other esoteric groups. Yet at the same time they are far more practical and instructional whereas the lectures to the Theosophical Society and the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* are more historical. Westcott's Golden Dawn lectures demonstrate that he has taken what he has learned from his extensive studies and has begun to shape it into his own pattern of esotericism. Instead of merely tabulating information, he is beginning the creative process of forming his own theories and interpretations. In this way, Westcott contributes greatly to the establishment of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Although his most important contributions remain his having come up with the idea of forming the Order, and then either inventing, or elaborating upon, the necessary components of an already established tradition and a secret chief.

As a prominent member of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, Westcott was trained in the magical school of thought upheld by Hockley and Mackenzie. This school of thought, as we have shown, was based upon Barrett's *Magus*, Lévi's occultism and masonic structure. To this, Westcott added his own mark through his ample historical

research and his assimilation of certain characteristics existent in other contemporary esoteric groups. His focus upon cabala was also a major contribution to the kind of magic which was developed and practised in the Order. As an adept, Westcott belonged to many different esoteric societies. The Order of the Golden Dawn was partly his creation, but was also, nonetheless, one of many groups from which he fed his thirst for occultism. In the same manner, magic was one of many types of knowledge which Westcott explored and studied. Westcott was "... no Magician but a kindly scholar of all things occult."[61] Westcott invoked the respect and affection of the Order's members.[62] The loyalty of certain members continued even after Mathers's accused Westcott of forgery; an event which must have at least encouraged, if not forced, Westcott to retire from active leadership of the Order. This loyalty was demonstrated by his continuous participation in several extra-curricular occult activities practised on the side by members of the Order. Throughout the Order's history such splinter groups existed, occasionally causing much strife and frustration to those members who envisioned the Order as a uniform body. Until the moment of Mathers's revelation of Westcott's alleged forgery, Westcott was probably admired by all of the members for his love of knowledge and his desire to share that knowledge. Mathers's accusations may have affected some members' opinions of Westcott, but certainly not all.

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[61]Yorke, xvii.

[62]Howe, 37.

In the next chapter, we will look at the man who breathed life into the structure that Westcott sought to establish. Unlike Westcott, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers understood magic not as one particular kind of knowledge, but as the only kind of knowledge, and for Mathers, the Order of the Golden Dawn became the only Order in which to study and practise that knowledge.

Chapter Four: Mathers's Magic and the Rebirth of the Occult Philosophy

William Wynn Westcott developed the original structure of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, using the tools and material provided by Francis Barrett, Frederick Hockley, Kenneth Mackenzie and Eliphas Lévi. It was the extraordinarily talented Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers who bestowed mind and spirit upon the Order and transformed an esoteric society into an association of practising magicians. Westcott conceived the notion of the Order and provided it with an appropriate history and tradition, but for it to take shape as a living and growing organism it required nourishment. Mathers furnished this with the rituals he created, the addition of other occult systems through the translations he produced, and with the leadership (sometimes disputed) that he provided to the members of the Order. Westcott understood from the beginning that the Order needed more spirit and substance than that which he could offer. He immediately turned to Mathers, requesting his assistance in overseeing the Order and in composing more rituals based on the recently-discovered cypher manuscripts. Westcott already had an appreciation and awareness of Mathers's intelligence, charisma and talent; and he was probably aware of his own inadequacies as a magician, realising that his primary interest and passion were in acquiring magical knowledge as opposed to practising it. Ellic Howe claims it was never Westcott's intention to teach practical magic and that he was more of a scholar than a magician.[1] In comparing the two men, Howe identifies Westcott as a

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[1]Howe, 33.

sorcerer's apprentice and Mathers as the magician personified.[2] We shall show the accuracy of this depiction through an examination of Mathers's life and work.

As is fitting for a man of magic, the details concerning Mathers's birth and death are hazy, providing fodder for the myth of immortality that surrounds many legendary occultists such as Cagliostro and the Comte de Saint-Germain. This lack of clarity concerning Mathers's death is important for the similarity to the mystery surrounding James IV of Scotland's final resting place, a man with whom Mathers desired to be identified.[3]

Mathers's birth certificate states his full name as Samuel Liddell Mathers, the MacGregor, as we shall see, will be added later. He was born on the 8 January 1854 in West Hackney in the County of Middlesex. His parents were Mary Ann and William, a merchant's clerk. William Mathers died while his son was still very young and Mathers lived with his widowed mother until her death in 1885. There is some debate over the education which Mathers received in his youth. Howe and King both claim that he was educated at Bedford Grammar School.[4] Colquhoun, however, questions this. She doubts that Mathers's mother could have afforded to pay the required school fees and she is

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[2]*Ibid.*, 34.

[3]Colquhoun, 273.

[4]Howe, 39 and King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 48. This account is also verified by Mathers's wife, Moina MacGregor Mathers, in her introduction to *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, xii. Here she also claims that her husband specialized in Classics during his stay at Bedford Grammar School.

suspicious of the mediocre marks achieved by the student named Mathers who is on record as having attended Bedford Grammar School.[5] Colquhoun suggests that this Bedford Mathers was a cousin of Samuel Liddell and that the former's schooling was adopted by the latter as his own later in life.[6] The next documented event in Mathers's life and his initiation as a Mason in the Hengist Lodge in Bournemouth at the age of twenty-three in 1877. He achieved the level of Master Mason and it is upon this document that we see the first example of Mathers's desire to pass himself as something, or someone, other than he was. Here he uses the title 'Comte de Glenstrae' and so begins his self-determined lineage with the MacGregors of Glenstrae.[7] Mathers later joined the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* at the invitation of Westcott and Woodman. As part of his initiation he took the name 'S Rioghail Mo Dhream (Royal is my race), the motto of the MacGregor clan, thus reaffirming his aspiration to be known as a descendant of Highland ancestry. Mathers was also acquainted with Mackenzie, who thought highly of him and expressed his regard for Mathers in a letter which praised Mathers's intelligence and earnestness in his pursuit of occult studies.[8] In joining the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, Mathers placed himself within the tradition maintained by Barrett and elaborated by Hockley, MacKenzie and

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[5]Colquhoun, 67-68.

[6]*Ibid.*, 68-69.

[7]Howe claims that not even the most determined genealogist could have established Mathers's descent from the MacGregors of Glenstrae. Howe, 39.

[8]*Ibid.*

Lévi. He also opened himself up to the influence of his colleague and benefactor, Westcott, whose varied interests in all types of occult knowledge, especially cabala, expanded the horizons of the occult revival. Through these associations, Mathers also came to be familiar with the ideas of the theosophists and their brand of eastern occultism. One particularly influential person in Mathers's life was Dr. Anna Kingsford (1846-88), a medical doctor and mystic who became the president of the Theosophical Society's London branch in 1883, and then went on to found its Hermetic Lodge which eventually splintered off in its pursuit of western hermeticism. Colquhoun claims that under Kingsford's influence, Mathers became an ardent feminist and that it was because of her that Westcott and Mathers admitted men and women equally into the Golden Dawn.[9]

Mathers's interest in magic and occult matters was certainly one of the main influences in the shaping of his life and his personality. Another passion of his, however, played an almost equally important role. Mathers had a keen interest in war and military tactics and at one point in his life, he actually joined the First Hampshire Infantry Volunteers. Mathers combined his skill at translation with his military interests and in 1884 published *Practical Instruction in Infantry Campaigning Exercise,* a translation of a French military manual that he adapted to British military requirements. This translation

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[9]Colquhoun, 76. Colquhoun describes Kingsford as one of the earliest fighters for Women's Lib. Her opposition to vivisection and her vegetarianism were characteristics also shared by Mathers. Colquhoun here reports the unfounded rumour that Mathers helped Kingsford in her attempt to liquidate, through extra-sensory means, doctors at the Sorbonne, including Louis Pasteur, who practised vivisection. Hutton says that the open-door policy of the Theosophical Society also influenced the founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn regarding both religion and gender. Hutton, 76.

was followed a year later by *The Fall of Granada: A Poem in Six Duans*, published by Williams and Strahan in London.[10] His occult and military interests were combined with a competitive and energetic nature displayed in his skill and zeal as a boxer and a fencer. Mathers believed that an occultist should strive for intellectual and physical fitness[11], and both in mind and body he exhibited a desire to lead and to win. This desire, harnessed with his intelligence and creativity, eventually led him naturally to the position of supreme authority within the Order that he helped create.

We have now traced what little is known of Mathers's history from his birth to his first associations with the other founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn. All that can be inferred from this sketchy information is that Mathers, like Westcott, was influenced by Masonic structure and symbolism, and that he had a yearning to recreate his own past and a desire to establish a new identity for himself, one of a higher social status than that into which he was born and one of foreign flavour, namely Scottish.[12] Masonic lodges and esoteric societies provided a perfect environment in which to create a different identity through the drama of initiation and the use of mottos as new names for individuals. The process of elevation of status via initiation into higher levels in the lodge or society also

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[10]Howe, 41.

[11]Colquhoun, 73-74.

[12]One of the main features, according to Hutton, of secret societies based on masonic structure, is a claim of immemorial initiatory descent. Hutton, 58. It would appear that Mathers was compelled to adopt this feature on a personal and individual level as well.

suited Mathers's aspiration to rise above his original station in society. The ambiguous nature of his educational history may be frustrating to a biographer, but, it is irrelevant to our present investigation. There is no questioning Mathers's intelligence. He spent his life translating obscure esoteric texts and synthesising magical rituals using the knowledge he absorbed from the shelves of the British Museum, the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*. His intelligence and creativity are found in the legacy he left behind in his written work and in his living work, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

Without Westcott, Mathers's life may have taken a very different path. Westcott not only introduced Mathers to the idea of forming an Order, but he provided financial support for Mathers to carry out his translations and to simply survive. If it had not been for Westcott, Mathers would have led a different life; but without Mathers, the Order of the Golden Dawn would have been a very different society. Westcott recognized Mathers's talent, though he might not have been fully aware of his colleague's ambition and capabilities. Both Woodman and Westcott commissioned Mathers to make the first English translation of Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbalah Denudata*. The resulting text, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, was published in 1887 in London.[13] The next work Westcott required of Mathers resulted in his being invited to join Westcott and Woodman as one of the three founding chiefs of Order of the Golden Dawn. Westcott needed more rituals than those

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[13]The publisher, George Redway, acquired the copyright of other works by Mathers, including *Fortune-telling Cards. The Tarot, its Occult Significance and Methods of Play,* 1888, and a translation published as *The Key of Solomon the King: Clavicula Salomonis,* 1889. Redway paid Mathers thirty-five pounds for the copyright of *The Kabbalah Unveiled*. Howe, 41.

provided in the cypher manuscripts to fuel the society's occult needs and he knew who to ask for this necessary component. Westcott's faith in Mathers was not unfounded, and Mathers set about this task with ambitious enthusiasm. However, he had no intentions of limiting his place in the Order to a composer of rituals. In creating the texts of the Order, Mathers fashioned the essence of the Order. The concept of formation, the tradition upon which the Order was based, and the original founding manuscripts were all borrowed elements. What Mathers contributed was what made the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn a living, breathing and, most importantly, growing body of magical adepts. Without his direction and creative genius there would have been little to differentiate the Order from the other esoteric societies existing in England at the end of the nineteenth century. The Order would have simply existed as an offshoot of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* with an emphasis on cabalistic and ceremonial magic. Instead, it not only revived the Renaissance process of synthesis which is so essential to the occult tradition, but it also stepped back further into magical history in its assertion of having established communication with mysterious masters of magic. We will discuss this at greater length when we speak of Mathers's Secret Chiefs. It is important to understand the uniqueness of the Order to appreciate the value of Mathers's work. With this understanding it is easier to comprehend what may appear at first glance as sheer and ruthless ambition when Mathers eventually came to rule the Order alone. He must have placed great value on the Order that he created and worked so diligently to establish as a successful magical society. He must have felt that the Order was his, and in a sense it was. Nonetheless, the perception of

Mathers as a tyrannical bully would not be entirely erroneous, and it was a view held by many members who were at the receiving end of his wrath. When Mathers felt his authority or teachings were being challenged he acted quickly to quell any subversion or uprising in the Order, but, as we shall see, he was not always successful in smothering the flames of rebellion.

After creating the rituals for the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and attracting some initiates, including Mathers's wife, Moïna Mathers (formerly Mina Bergson), Mathers created a second order within the Golden Dawn, called the Red Rose and Golden Cross in 1892. It was commonly understood that he and Moïna used clairvoyance and astral projection to access the material used in the Second Order's rituals.[14] At this point the third chief, Woodman, had passed away, leaving Westcott and Mathers to run the Order in 1891.Mathers had already begun to assume command both in the administration of the original, or outer, order and in the creation of the Second Order. The Second Order was open to initiates by invitation only, meaning by the invitation of Mathers, as Westcott had very little to do with this extension of the Golden Dawn. At the time of this Second Order's appearance, there were already several initiates in the original order. Reverend W. A. Ayton and his wife were among the first to join in 1888. A medical doctor Edward Berridge joined in 1889, and Annie Horniman, a friend and fellow student of Mina Bergson at the Slade School and the daughter of a wealthy tea importer, also

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[14]King, *Modern Ritual Magic,* 45. Colquhoun, 81. Colquhoun claims that it was primarily Moïna who carried out the clairvoyance.

joined in the same year. The actress Florence Farr joined the following year. William Butler Yeats claims he joined in 1887 although that date seems a little early. He introduced Maud Gonne to the Order in 1891 when Arthur Edward Waite also became a member. These are just some of the initiates of the Order of the Golden Dawn prior to the establishment of the Second Order. We can see that the magic taught and practised by the Order attracted a variety of people from many different backgrounds, but there does appear to have been a particular magnetism to the Order for people involved in the arts, especially visual art, writing, and theatre. Other common interests of some members include political activism and medicine.

Five years after Mathers began the Second Order, initiating invited members in a complicated ritual reminiscent of ancient Greek mystery religions and Rosicrucian legend[15] that took place in an amazingly extraordinary setting created by the artistic Moïna[16], Westcott retired. Howe provides a copy of Westcott's announcement of his intention to do this.

> ... The reason is a purely personal one, owing to my having recd. An intimation that it had somehow become known to the State officers that I was a prominent official of a society in which I had been foolishly posturing as one possessed of magical powers - and that if this became more public it would not do for a Coroner of

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[15]For a detailed description of the initiation, see Howe, 75-90.

[16]It is worth reading the description of "the vault" in Howe's *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*. The description of the alchemical, cabalistic and astrological symbolism contained in the wall inscriptions and of the overall design and colours of the room, makes one truly sad that there is no trace left of this magical chamber, or others like it, to view for one's self. Howe, 82-84.

> the Crown to be made shame of in such a mad way. So I had no alternative - I cannot think who it is that persecutes me - someone must talk.[17]

In the letter, Westcott goes on to express his wish to continue giving "private help" to members as long as it doesn't bring on Mathers's wrath. Evidently Mathers was known for his possessiveness over the Order and his demand for supreme authority. Howe suggests that the "someone" whom Westcott suspected as having orchestrated his need for retirement was Mathers himself.[18] Certainly Mathers had grown to see himself as the natural leader of the Order, and with his direct access to the Secret Chiefs he had no use for any other equals. Westcott served no further purpose administratively, magically or financially. The Mathers's were being comfortably supported by Annie Horniman for the time being.

With Westcott out of the way. Mathers continued to run the Order from his residence in Paris where he and Moïna had moved in 1892 after establishing the Second Order. The move was financed by the generous Annie Horniman. While in Paris they established another Golden Dawn temple; this one dedicated to the Egyptian God, Hathor. In this temple there was a greater emphasis on new rituals that were "communicated" to Mathers by the Secret Chiefs. These rituals were the Rites of Isis. In 1896 Mathers suspended Annie Horniman from the Order for making mischief and meddling in the

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[17]*Ibid.*, 165. From a letter by Westcott to Golden Dawn member Frederick Leigh Gardner.

[18]*Ibid.*, 166.

society's affairs.[19] From then on there was continuous mutiny and rebellion culminating in the disastrous initiation of Aleister Crowley, who served as Mathers's avenger initially in an attempt to quash the revolt, but then came to question Mathers's authority himself and to seek his own path in the study and practise of magic. Generally the source of the bickering and rebellion was a lack of agreement on various methods and formats of magical practice. At the onset of the Order's troubles, while things were still somewhat stable, Mathers's second translation of a magical text was published. *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* was published in 1898 by John M. Watkins in London. Golden Dawn member Frederick Leigh Gardner helped finance the publication of this book as he had stepped in to fill, to some extent, the place of benefactor left empty by Annie Horniman's dismissal.

A most serious disturbance amongst initiates was caused by Mathers's announcement in 1900 of the supposed forgery behind the Order's formation. Mathers's defamation of Westcott was in defense of the origins and true founder of his Second Order. In the letter he writes to Florence Farr, who had assumed many of Westcott's duties upon his retirement, Mathers tells of the alleged forgery of the cypher documents in order to make the point that Westcott could not have had anything to do with the founding of the Second Order and the communication of its rituals from the Secret

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[19]For a complete account of these internal conflicts see Howe, 110-138. This suspension met with outcry from other members who petitioned to have her re-admitted.

Chiefs.[20] Once more, Mathers is displaying his fear of any claimant to his position of power and authority both within the first and second orders.

Mathers's creation had begun to assume its own will as many members began to question the Order's authenticity and authority. The Order began to decentralize as disillusioned members either left it entirely, or regrouped in a fashion dictated by their own notions of what the Order should be. The seeds of doubt planted by Mathers's accusations of forgery, the dismay by some members of the treatment of Annie Horniman, and the physical distance between the Order's sole remaining chief and his followers made for unstable ground. And things did not improve. The superstition that bad things happen in threes held true for Mathers at the turn of the century. A split occurred in the Second Order leaving only five members loyal to Mathers. Then Mathers met up with some fraudulent characters who duped Mathers and Moïna, with one of them claiming to be Anna Sprengel. This couple was Mr and Mrs Theo Horus. They made a living through the exploitation of others. They found their victims in the occult world and conned them into providing for their financial and sexual needs. The couple was prosecuted and convicted on charges of fraud and the rape of minors in London in 1901, after their encounter with the Mathers's. The case received immense publicity and the name of the Order was tarnished through inaccurate association with the scam artists. The Horus's had taken

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[20]*Ibid.*, 210. Howe provides the full content of the letter. Mathers is responding to a letter from Florence Farr but unfortunately that letter has gone missing, so it is difficult to know what it is that Farr wrote to provoke this condemnation and attack on Westcott's credibility.

some rituals from Mathers, which were read aloud before the court. Several members subsequently left the Order.[21] The final fiasco was Crowley's rejection of Mathers and the Golden Dawn. Crowley had been Mathers's protégé and champion in earlier skirmishes with defiant members, but in 1910 he published large portions of the Order's rituals in an occult journal *The Equinox*. For this, Mathers brought Crowley to court in London and won his suit against him while enduring public ridicule and mockery.[22] Mathers returned to Paris in 1912 and presumably continued his magical pursuits both ceremonially and academically. It is most probable that it was in these years that he translated *The Grimoire of Armadel*, a text which remained unpublished until sixty-two years after his death when it appeared thanks to the efforts of Francis King.[23] We know that Mathers died in Paris in 1918, but there are conflicting accounts of the cause of his death. Colquhoun tells of Yeats's account which includes a street-brawl and bouts of melancholia. This is contested by Moïna who claimed Mathers was never ill save for an illness which lasted for three months, inferring it was this unnamed illness which caused his death. Dion Fortune claims that it was the Spanish influenza which claimed Mathers's life. There is no cause of death

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[21]*Ibid.*, 239. King also provides substantial details of this affair as well as much information about Mr. and Mrs. Horus. King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 79-93.

[22]Colquhoun, 91.

[23]Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, *The Grimoire of Armadel.* Ed. Francis King. (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1980). King gained access to the original manuscript through the collection of Gerald Yorke, and it now rests in the library of the Warburg Institute. Mathers, 14.

recorded on Mathers's death certificate.[24]

We examined Westcott's writings to show the nature of his magical beliefs and the direction in which he guided the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Now the same must be done with Mathers's work. His writing is remarkable for several reasons. The diversity of his subject matter is shown not merely through the obvious examples of military tactics and the cabala, but even within the genre of occult literature he tackles a variety of magical systems in his translations. He uncovers obscure manuscripts and melds them into coherent aspects of the magic taught and practised by the Order of the Golden Dawn. There are three main categories of Mathers's work: military, translations of magical texts, and original rituals which he himself composed. The first category does not here concern us, though his military interests certainly influenced his attitude towards the Order's administration and hierarchy. They did not, however, necessarily change in any radical way the magical tradition in which he was working. The second and third categories, however, will give us important insights into the major innovations undertaken by Mathers in his reformulation of the magical legacy he inherited.

Like a true Renaissance cabalist, Mathers looked to the original texts of Christian cabalism for his first translation, though it is true that Westcott and Woodman had pushed him in this direction. They had commissioned him to translate Knorr von Rosenroth's two-

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[24]Colquhoun, 94-95.

volume Latin version of the original Hebrew text, extracted, in part, from *The Zohar*.[25] Knorr von Rosenroth's translation was the primary source for non-Jewish cabalistic literature until the end of the nineteenth century and while his *Kabbala Denudata* contains many errors and mistranslations, it still adequately represents the cabalistic philosophy expressed in *The Zohar*.[26] Mathers's translation of this translation therefore contains both the same technical errors and the same accuracy in conceptual representation. Published in 1887, Mathers dedicated *The Kabbalah Unveiled* to his friend Anna Kingsford and the co-founder of her Hermetic Society, Edward Maitland. As the book is primarily a translation, it is in the introduction that we can catch a glimpse of Mathers's understanding of the work he is translating and his motivations for doing so. He felt that in providing this first ever English translation, he was giving the English speaking world the key to understanding some of the mysteries of the universe. Mathers felt that such a key was particularly in demand at this point in time.

> At the present time a powerful wave of occult thought is spreading through society; thinking men are beginning to awake to the fact that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in their philosophy;" and, last but not least, it is now felt that the Bible, which has been probably more misconstrued than any other book ever written, contains numberless obscure and mysterious passages which are utterly unintelligible without some key wherewith to unlock their meaning. THAT KEY IS GIVEN

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[25]Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata: "The Kabbalah Uncovered, or, The Transcendental, Metaphysical, and Theological Teachings of the Jews"* (Sulzbach, 1677-84). See page 20 in chapter two for another reference to Knorr von Rosenroth and his role in the history of cabalistic magic.

[26]Scholem, 416.

IN THE QABALAH.[27]

Mathers's awareness of the identity of the magical cabalistic tradition he was following and perpetuating is shown in his reference to Reuchlin, Pico, Agrippa and van Helmont. Mathers claims that it was these men, among others, who settled on cabala as the most fitting system with which to explain divine nature and to display the "real tie which binds all things together".[28] His explanation of the origins of cabala corresponds with the Renaissance account which teaches that God gave cabala to a select group of angels who transmitted this knowledge down through Adam to Solomon until it was finally recorded in written form in the second temple period in the sixth century bce. Mathers also differentiates between four different kinds of cabala: practical, literal, unwritten, and dogmatic. Practical cabala refers to its use in talismanic and ceremonial magic. Literal cabala involves the use of numerical permutation in scriptural exegesis, that is to say, the techniques of gematria, notarikon and themurah, which have already been discussed and defined using Mathers's own examples in an earlier chapter.[29] The unwritten cabala is the oral tradition passed on from master to student that has been an integral part of the Christian cabala since its formation in the Renaissance. The final type, dogmatic cabala, consists of the doctrines contained in cabalistic literature such as *The Zohar* and

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[27]Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (London: George Redway, 1887; repr. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978), 1.

[28]*Ibid.*, 5.

[29]See chapter one, 9-10.

the *Sepher Yetzirah.*[30] These doctrines, Mathers explains, account for the existence of a supreme being, cosmogony, the creation and destiny of humans and angels, the nature of the soul, the mystery of Hebrew letters, the transcendental symbolism of numbers and the balancing of opposites. Mathers explores the similarities in cabalistic explanations of such notions with those offered by eastern mysticism, using, as an example, the philosophy expressed in the Bhagavadgita. The introduction to this translation portrays Mathers as an adherent to the Christian cabalism of the Renaissance. He is using the same texts as Reuchlin, Pico and Agrippa and verifying many of the same conclusions and beliefs established by his predecessors. At the same time, he is incorporating some of the contemporary trends in occultism through his references to, and examinations of, Eastern thought. This shows the effect upon Mathers of other esoteric groups such as the Theosophical Society, which were largely responsible for importing Eastern influences.

As the first English translation of this text, *The Kabbalah Unveiled* signals a revival of interest in orthodox Christian cabalism. The cabalistic magical tradition has returned to one of its primary sources and has restated the importance of the text. The end of the nineteenth century saw a tendency to disseminate occult knowledge in groups. The Order of the Golden Dawn certainly followed this trend, but its founders also established a return to the traditional view of the occult scholar as that of an individual poring over mystical books. Mathers, as well as Westcott, continually looked to the original textual sources for knowledge and understanding.

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[30]Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, 6.

The next translation Mathers tackled was *The Key of Solomon the King*, which was also published by George Redway in 1888. *The Key of Solomon the King* belongs to a solomonic tradition of esoteric literature, for throughout history, several magical texts have been attributed to or named after Solomon.[31] The legend that surrounds Solomon maintains that he owed his power and riches to magic. The tradition that he left behind instructions outlining how to acquire such riches in magical texts persisted throughout western history and therefore his name became associated with many magical matters, but especially with grimoires, or grammars, of magical instruction. *The Key of Solomon the King* has been referred to by scholars such as Butler, Richard Cavendish, Colquhoun and King as the most important and influential grimoire of western magic.[32] In compiling his translation, Mathers made use of seven manuscripts in the British Museum in an attempt to provide a comprehensive and accurate English version. In the introduction to this translation Mathers states that it is a great honour to be able to provide the first

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[31]Butler, *Ritual Magic,* 47-48. Butler includes a reference from Psellus in the eleventh century to a treatise on stones and demons by Solomon; a thirteenth-century reference by a historian to a book by Solomon being in the collection of an emperor's interpreter; Roger Bacon's denunciation of Solomon's authorship of several magical texts in the thirteenth century; a fourteenth-century text on demon invocation named for Solomon that was ordered to be burned by Pope Innocent VI; a fifteenth-century pamphlet warning of two magical books with Solomon's name attached; and a reference by Trithemius in the sixteenth century to a book attributed to Solomon.

[32]Butler, 48; Cavendish, in the foreword to *The Key of Solomon the King* (London: George Redway, 1888; repr. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), v; Colquhoun, 98; King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, 195.

publication of this text for students of the occult.[33] The text itself is filled with the standard, overly detailed and laborious instructions for the invocation of spirits and all of the necessary tables for appropriate planetary scheduling, naming of angels and making of talismans. Colquhoun claims that the Order of the Golden Dawn relied heavily upon this text for planetary attributions, angelology and talismanic magic.[34] Mathers believed that this was the authoritative source for several occult writers including Lévi. He did have some difficulty with the text, however, when it came to the issue of so-called Black Magic. He intentionally omitted sections which he felt dealt with this topic and warns the reader against the use of blood in magical experiments. Like his colleague, Westcott, Mathers thought that the danger of magic was a reality that must be avoided. Mathers praised the text as a "fountain-head and storehouse of Qabalistic Magic, and the origin of much of the Ceremonial Magic of mediaeval times."[35]

Mathers next translation was the *Lesser Key of Solomon* or the *Lemegeton.* This text is made up of five books, and only Mathers's translation of the first of these books was ever published with his having had nothing to do with its publication. By 1898, Mathers had translated this first book, called *Goetia*, and it was being circulated to members of the Order. Aleister Crowley eventually obtained a copy and in 1904 published the book as his own, justifying his actions in a prefatory note by accusing Mathers of

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[33]Mathers, *The Key of Solomon the King*, vii.

[34]Colquhoun, 99.

[35]Mathers, *The Key of Solomon the King*, vii.

inadequacy as demonstrated by his having been deceived by the Horus couple.

> The G. H. Fra., [Mathers] having succumbed unhappily to the assaults of the Four Great Princes (acting notably under Martial influences), it seemed expedient that the work should be brought to its conclusion by another hand. The investigations of a competent Skryer into the house of our unhappy Fra., confirmed this divination; neither our Fra. Nor his Hermetic Mul. [Moïna] were there seen; but only the terrible shapes of the evil Adepts S. V. A. and H., whose original bodies having been sequestered by Justice, were no longer of use to them. On this we stayed no longer Our Hand; but withdrawing Ourselves, and consulting the Rota, and the Books M. and Q. did decide to ask Mr. Aleister Crowley, a poet and skilled student of Magical Lore, and an expert Kabbalist, to complete openly that which had been begun in secret.[36]

This first book of the *Lesser Key* provides an introductory definition of magic and goes on to describe the methods with which to deal magically with evil beings, as practised successfully by Solomon. The published text also describes the contents of the other four books, as yet unpublished. The second book, *Theurgia-Goetia* or *The Magical Wisdom of the Spirits Aërial*, deals with partly good and evil spirits. The third is called *Ars Paulina* or *The Pauline Art* and it addresses the subject of good spirits who govern the planetary hours, the signs of the zodiac and the planets themselves. *Ars Almadel Salomonis* or *Almadel of Solomon* is the title of the fourth book which concerns good spirits which

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[36]Aleister Crowley, introduction to *The Book of the Goetia of Solomon the King.* Translated by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. (Boleskine, Foyers, Inverness: Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth, 1904; repr. London: The Equinox, 1976), v-vi.

govern the four altitudes and the degrees of the zodiac.[37] The fifth and final book is a book of Solomon's orations and prayers called *Ars Nova,* or *Ars Notaria,* or the *Notary Art.*[38] Whether Mathers translated all five of these sections is uncertain, but he did go through four manuscript versions of the text in Hebrew, Latin and French, all at the suggestion of Westcott.[39]

The Key of Solomon the King and certainly a section of the *Lesser Key* were just two of several grimoires translated by Mathers. The third is the unusual and demanding *Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*. This text describes and prepares the reader to undertake a seventeenth-century theurgic ritual. Mathers discovered the manuscript in the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* and published this work in 1898 with financial backing from Frederick Leigh Gardner.[40] The ritual was quite distinct from those found in other western grimoires and involved an entirely unique hierarchy. It found favour with the members of the Order and was often practised by several of them including Aleister Crowley.[41] The

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[37]King says that this fourth book was printed in Ralph Shirley's journal *Occult Review* in 1915.

[38]Mathers, *The Book of the Goetia of Solomon the King,* 7-9.

[39]Colquhoun, 104.

[40]Howe gives the title of the manuscript that Mathers used in this translation (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal MS. 2351) as "*La sacrée magie que Dieu donna à Moyse Aaron David Solomon, et à d'autres saints patriarches et prophètes, qui enseigne la vraye sapience divine, laissée par Abraham à Lamech son fils, traduite de l'hebreu.* 1458." Howe, 159n.

[41]Faivre, 91.

tedious detail and seemingly endless requirements involved in ceremonial magic is taken to the limit in this grimoire with the successful magician emerging after six months of gruelling preparation. Success meant having conversed with and gained knowledge of one's guardian angel, a being which is not external to the self, but rather a "higher genius" or "higher self."[42] The length of preparation and necessary seclusion meant that while several members of the Order attempted the ritual, few rarely completed it, not having the time nor the luxury to remain vigilant to the one ritual. Apart from the demanding preparation involved the other striking feature of this text is the religious tolerance that it professes. This tolerance is necessary for the most important ingredient behind the success of this magic, absolute faith.

> To the sincere and earnest student of Occultism this work cannot fail to be of value, whether as an encouragement to that most rare and necessary quality, unshaken faith; as an aid to his discrimination between true and false systems of Magic; or as presenting an assemblage of directions for the production of Magical effects, which the author of the book affirms to have tried with success.[43]

The original author recognizes that there is a truth behind every religion and belief in that truth is the key to magical triumph. Mathers tells how the author warns against any kind of conversion to another religion as that would involve denouncing one's former

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[42]King, *Modern Ritual Magic*,197.

[43]Mathers, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* (London: John. M. Watkins, 1898; repr. New York: Dover, 1975), xxii.

belief and therefore denouncing the truth upon which it is based.[44]

By bringing this system of magic into the Order of the Golden Dawn, Mathers helped to create a new system. Unlike the detailed description of how to make magical circles and carry out ceremonial rituals, the magic of Abramelin requires isolation and withdrawal, bringing a somewhat more Eastern approach to the Western tradition. In translating texts other than the standard grimoires of the western world such as the *Key of Solomon* and the *Lesser Key,* Mathers enabled the process of synthesis, a process which began the cabalistic magical tradition and allowed it to survive and adapt.

The last grimoire Mathers translated is *The Grimoire of Armadel*. Mathers also found the original manuscript for this book in the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*. This translation was not published until 1980 although speculation places the time of Mathers's translation between 1897 and 1899.[45] According to Colquhoun, there were only two copies ever made of this translation, one of which she personally viewed and describes as having been written in an exercise-book with the sigils of the spirits drawn in bright-coloured inks.[46] The grimoire itself is another practical instructional textbook of ceremonial magic. It describes the natures and offices of evil spirits and provides the sigils

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[44]*Ibid.*, xxiii-xxiv.

[45]King suggests in his introduction to the translation that Mathers undertook this translation after completing the Abramelin manuscript and before it had become a financial disaster. King, introduction to *The Grimoire of Armadel.* Translated by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1980), 5.

[46]Colquhoun, 105.

of each spirit. King suggests that these sigils were used in a similar manner in which Tarot cards were used by the Order of the Golden Dawn. Each sigil or card would provide a doorway to a spirit world. Depending on the purpose of such astral projection or skrying, the appropriate card or sigil would be used to enable the user to reach the desired location in that spirit world.[47] Colquhoun guesses that the system may be derived from a Chaldaean system of magic while King, more recently, only traces its origins back as far as a family of seventeenth-century German magical texts produced to cash in on the legend of Faust.[48]

There exist other works by Mathers which are not available for analysis. Two of them have not yet surfaced in any collection and it is unknown if one of those even existed. In her preface to *The Kabbalah Unveiled,* Moïna Mathers refers to a book, *Egyptian Symbolism*, and states that Mathers was the author of the work.[49] Colquhoun has found no trace of this work nor of another work, *Splendor Solis.*[50] This latter text was written by a fifteenth-century alchemist and supposed teacher of Paracelsus, Salomon Trismosin. Colquhoun describes how Mathers's edition of this work ended up in the hands of Frederick Leigh Gardner, who apparently published it in 1907.[51]

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[47]King, *The Grimoire of Armadel,* 13-14.

[48]Colquhoun, 105 and King, *The Grimoire of Armadel*, 6.

[49]Moïna Mathers in her preface to *The Kabbalah Unveiled,* xin.

[50]Colquhoun, 103-104.

[51]*Ibid.,* 104.

There remains more of Mathers's writings than these mysterious texts and his works of translation. Mathers was responsible for the majority of the rituals that made up the magical system of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Some of these rituals have been published in collections of the Order's rituals such as King's *Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn* and Israel Regardie's *The Golden Dawn.*[52] Many of the written texts describing the rituals were called "Flying Rolls." The Golden Dawn took this term from the Old Testament, Zechariah 5:1. These Flying Rolls addressed various aspects of the Golden Dawn system including clairvoyance, alchemy, cabalistic magic and initiation procedures for the different degrees. The rituals that can be readily identified as having been penned by Mathers in these two collections deal with the subjects of clairvoyance, the symbolism of certain initiations, and divination. Mathers continually emphasizes the importance of concentration, visualisation and being in a peaceful state when carrying out magical operations.[53] The will is the most important tool in magic. Many of Mathers's instructions found in these rituals were supposedly handed down to him by Secret Chiefs, human beings with super-human powers with the ability to travel through other planes apart from the physical. Mathers claims he never learned the earthly names of these occult masters and saw them on only a few occasions.

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[52]*Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn.* Edited by Francis King (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1997); first published as *Astral Projection, ritual magic, and alchemy.* (London: Spearman, 1971). Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn.* Sixth edition (St. Paul: Llewellyn's Publications, 1997); first published in four volumes in 1937-40.

[53]*Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn,* 78, 79, 279.

> ... on such rare occasions the rendezvous was made astrally by them at the time and place which had been astrally appointed beforehand. For my part I believe them to be human and living upon this earth; but possessing terrible superhuman powers ... there has been nothing in their personal appearance and dress to mark them as differing in any way from ordinary people except the appearance and sensation of transcendent health and physical vigour ... the sensation was that of being in contact with so terrible a force that I can only compare it to the continued effect of that usually experienced momentarily by a person close to whom a flash of lightning passes during a violent storm; coupled with a difficulty in respiration similar to the half-strangling effect produced by ether.[54]

There is bound to be speculation concerning the reality of these Secret Chiefs, but their existence is not seen as necessary for the effectiveness of the rituals they supposedly passed on to Mathers. King states that many occultists have found that the Flying Rolls work. He maintains that their source and their form of expression is unimportant and that "the Flying Rolls demand the attention of all serious occultists, not because of their source, not because of their literary merit, but because of their magical content."[55] These rituals have received the attention that King claims they deserve, and continue to be practised, perhaps successfully, by adepts of several occult societies including modern day offshoots of the original Order of the Golden Dawn.

While the Secret Chiefs may be unimportant to King in order to validate the efficacy of the magic which they apparently passed on to Mathers, those odd occult

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[54]Mathers in a manifesto dated October 29, 1896. Howe, 129-130.

[55]King, introduction to *Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn,* 19.

masters are very important for our analysis of the magical tradition in nineteenth-century England. Having looked at the immense contribution made by Mathers through his translations of obscure and rare magical manuscripts, there is no doubt that he played an important role in shaping both the magic practised by members of the Order which he co-founded and the overall western tradition of magic as a whole. His contribution was not momentary, but rather enduring and revolutionary. It was more than the actual texts which he left behind, however, that had such an impact on the magical tradition. Certainly it was through his synthesis of these texts which he had translated, and through his assimilation of Eastern and Egyptian magical elements that he mirrored the synthesis carried out in the Renaissance by Pico, who had integrated Ficinian magic and hermeticism with the Christian cabala. Just as those Renaissance magi wove together threads of various esoteric traditions to create a new, unified one that would better serve the spiritual needs of their time, so did Mathers incorporate all of the magical systems to which he was exposed into one great magical system. These esoteric components did not lose any of their uniqueness or strengths in this assimilation. Instead, magical elements such as the tarot, ceremonial magic, alchemy, astrology, talismanic magic, and cabala were required to become more comprehensive in order to support and sustain the entire magical system of the Golden Dawn which they combined to form. Howe claims that the Order's synthesis of Hermetic knowledge and practical magic was a unique phenomenon and that during the first decade of its establishment, the Order was the "equivalent of a Hermetic University".[56]

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[56]Howe, xxii.

While this synthesis is reminiscent of that carried out in the Renaissance with the formation of Christian cabalism and cabalistic magic, Mathers took this revival of magical growth one step further. By claiming contact with these Secret Chiefs, Mathers actually mirrored the ancient magicians upon which the Renaissance magi had formulated their concept of Christian cabalism and its magical potential. Mathers employed Renaissance and medieval texts and methods of synthesis to build upon Pico, Reuchlin and Agrippa's work. It was through direct communion with the powers that be, however, that Mathers initiated a new stage in hermetic learning and magical knowledge for humankind. By claiming to be the recipient of esoteric knowledge, Mathers positioned himself as a modern-day Christian Rosenkreuz or even a Hermes Trismegistus. In this fashion he also parallels the nineteenth-century Masonic Templars and their 'Unknown Superiors', a group with which occultism became firmly linked through the efforts and synthesis of Lévi.[57] In a more contemporary association, Mathers borrows directly from theosophy and its founder Madame Blavatsky in his dealings with secret chiefs. Blavatsky's teachings were based on knowledge revealed to her by super-human leaders in the Himalayas. After her death in 1892, Mathers announced that he had been contacted by the same secret chiefs who authorized him to found the second and inner order of the Golden Dawn.[58]

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[57]Peter Partner, *The Murdered Magicians. The Templars and their Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 169. Partner provides a detailed study of the progression of the story of the Templars from fact into myth and discusses why the Templars were attractive to secret societies and occultists alike.

[58]Hutton, 76.

Mathers claimed to have direct access to these beings with super-human powers and he said that they had chosen him as the one with whom they wished to share their magic. Unlike Westcott, MacKenzie, Hockley, Barrett and even Agrippa, Reuchlin and Pico, Mathers did not rely purely on textual sources and contemplation to uncover the secrets of magic. He learned from a secret master in the true cabalistic fashion of word-of-mouth. Whether these revelations from occult masters to their chosen priests were real or imaginary, either in the legendary era of Hermes Trismegistus or the very real era of MacGregor Mathers, is unimportant. What is important is that this step in the history of the magical tradition took place. Learned magic is dependent upon written sources for its survival; but it is dependent upon the interaction of humans with beings who hold occult knowledge for its very existence. The medieval grimoires and the cabalistic texts of the Renaissance all hold information acquired from magical or divine sources. Mathers's communication with the Secret Chiefs signals the advent of growth and creation in the western magical tradition, and particularly in cabalistic magic, which had been, more or less, in a state of preservation since the days of Agrippa. We have seen how this growth was stimulated by Barrett, Hockley, Mackenzie and Levi, but it was Mathers, as the consummate synthesiser and consummate magician, who guided this growth to its fruition.

Before we leave this topic, we must mention the third co-founder of the Order. Little is known about Dr. William Robert Woodman. He was born in 1828 and was the eldest of the three founders. He passed away in 1891 before the Order had reached its full magical glory. Like Westcott, Woodman had studied medicine and was a member of the

Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, succeeding its founder, Little, as Supreme Magus in 1878. He left no writings for us to analyse to uncover his interests and goals.[59] While he shared Westcott's enthusiasm for cabala, astrology, the Tarot and alchemy[60], it is unknown if he had any dealing with the Theosophical Society as did the other two founders. Colquhoun suggests that Woodman was enlisted as a member of the Order's founding trinity in order to give the society an air of respectability through Woodman's reputation as a learned Freemason and occult scholar.[61] We know that Woodman served as a mentor to both Westcott and Mathers, encouraging their cabalistic studies, but surely this man had a larger role than this to play in the history of nineteenth-century magic and the founding of the Order. Colquhoun tells of the impression Woodman left on the London publisher who printed Mathers's *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*. John Watkins recalls Woodman as the "moving spirit in the founding of the Golden Dawn".[62] Apart from this particular comment and occasional references by Westcott and other members of the Order, Woodman left little by which we could know him better. Given the undoubted intelligence, charisma and creativity of the other founders, we cannot

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[59]In one of Westcott's Golden Dawn lectures reference is made to manuscripts written by Woodman which are in the "Library of the Second Order". None of these manuscripts seem to have been published. Westcott, "The Golden Dawn's Official History Lecture" in Francis King's *Modern Ritual Magic*, 217.

[60]Howe, 44.

[61]Colquhoun, 172.

[62]*Ibid.*

accept that Woodman is as inconsequential as the paucity of available material on him suggests. There is no question that after the establishment of the Order it was Mathers's effort, intellect and creative insight that enabled the Golden Dawn to become the vibrant centre of esoteric knowledge and practice that it was. Yet without the others, Mathers may never have had the opportunity to become involved with such a society. All three founders, Woodman, Westcott and Mathers, made their own contribution to a magical system and therefore, together they changed the direction of western magic forever. Now we shall examine the implications of that change on the history of western magic and how it has affected our understanding of the role of magic in intellectual history.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In the preceding chapters we have shown that Frances Yates's occult philosophy survived well into nineteenth-century England where the tradition was fortified through the rituals and practices of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This occult philosophy had given birth to a Christian cabalistic magic based on "ancient" esoteric knowledge. It is this aspect of the western magical tradition that rose to importance in the nineteenth century and that was partly responsible for the synthesis of esoteric knowledge that took place under the auspices of Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and other Golden Dawn members. Cabalistic magic was developed by Pico della Mirandola partly to unify the three major religions of his time, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. With such a purpose in mind, the structure upon which the principles of cabalistic magic are based is comprehensive enough to allow for multiple interpretations and multiple systems of symbolism. It is this adaptability and tolerance of cabalistic magic that has ensured its survival and made it so amenable to synthesis. With its all-encompassing symbolism, cabalistic magic easily incorporated other aspects of occultism into its system. In the nineteenth century, people like Eliphas Lévi and Mathers recognized this adaptability and put it to use.

We have also demonstrated how cabalistic magic entered the nineteenth century in our analysis of Barrett's monumental work *The Magus*. In this compendium, the original structure of cabalistic magic, as defined and developed by Pico, Reuchlin and Agrippa, is maintained. There is still the emphasis upon textual learning and original sources that

existed in the Renaissance and late medieval period, but Barrett transformed the tradition through the implementation of a systematised method of learning. He formed a school in which students could learn the secrets of magic, and he also provided the text book by compiling all of the available sources of cabalistic and ceremonial magic. Barrett's school at the beginning of the century was a forerunner of the numerous esoteric societies which would come at the end. In the second half of this century, the English occultists Frederick Hockley and Kenneth MacKenzie and the French magician Eliphas Lévi maintained and elaborated upon the tradition established by Barrett. At the same time, Masonic hierarchy and symbolism were influencing the structure and content of the magical tradition as was the eastern philosophy and mysticism taught in groups such as the Theosophical Society. Among the numerous esoteric societies flourishing during this revival of interest in magic was the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*; a masonic society which focussed on the study of Rosicrucianism and cabala. From this group came the three founders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, invigorated with the knowledge they had already acquired, and eager to form their own society concentrating on cabalistic and ceremonial magic. In doing so, William Wynn Westcott, William Robert Woodman and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers achieved what had never been done before. If Barrett's *Magus* was the authoritative source of magical knowledge at the beginning of the century, then the Order itself achieved that status at the end of the century. This society, composed of individual

magicians, became the major source of western magical learning.[1] The Order achieved this status through the assimilation of every known esoteric thread of the occult world at the time. And it was Mathers who gathered these threads and used them to reinforce the fabric of cabalistic magic. The Order's methods not only influenced magic as it was practised in England, but it also found root in many other countries including the United States where a strong Golden Dawn following exists today.

The phenomenon of the Golden Dawn cannot be explained entirely, however, two factors can be identified which were partially responsible for bringing the Order into existence. The first is sociological. To some degree, the Golden Dawn was a product of its environment. The scientific and industrial revolutions had both reshaped the world and the place of the individual. Webb explains in his study of nineteenth-century occultism that with the application of scientific and rationalist methods in the interpretation of one's existence, humankind had begun its ascent to a position of authority over the natural world.

> There is, nevertheless, evidence that Western man as a whole was undergoing a severe trial of his capacity to adapt to an environment which for the first time seemed beyond his powers to control ... as man advanced to greater mastery over the physical, so his always precarious hold began to slip upon the more

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[1]This remains a recognized fact to this day. In T. M. Luhrmann's anthropological study of witchcraft and magic in modern day England, she claims that several thousands of people in that country seriously practise magic and that most of the groups in which they participate have descended, in some form or another, from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It is still viewed as the pinnacle of magical achievement. T. M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft. Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4, 38.

> intangible aspects of his relationship with the universe. His society, his awareness, his methods of thought, and most importantly the conclusions he reached, were all changing round him. What is more, they could be seen to be changing; and that was frightening.[2]

In reaction to this over-abundant rationalism, there was a return to spiritual beliefs and an interest in the unknown, or that which science had yet to explain. This was demonstrated in the Spiritualist movement which attracted a huge following in both England and the United States from the middle of the century and onwards. The Spiritualist movement was not for everyone, however, and its dubious techniques, such as table-rapping and mediumship, along with its questionable results, made more circumspect by the money-seeking frauds who cashed in on this movement, sent many knowledge seekers elsewhere. Many of those looked to supposedly ancient knowledge for answers.[3] This knowledge was made up of a variety of esoteric traditions including cabala, hermeticism, alchemy, astrology and ceremonial magic. Magic offered the allure of secret knowledge and spiritual revelation, both of which were becoming scarce commodities in an era of secularisation and scientific domination. People were hungry for faith and for the promise of self-realisation through spiritual means. Through magic, especially cabalistic magic, faith was re-introduced to a secular society without the constraints and intolerance that came with organized religion. Within the magical societies, the idea of progress,

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[2]Webb, 6.

[3]Ellic Howe, "Golden Dawn" in *Encyclopedia of The Unexplained. Magic, Occultism and Parapsychology.* Ed. Richard Cavendish (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 99.

synonymous with the industrial and scientific revolutions, was accommodated through an overly hierarchical structure. The need for advancement was also appeased through the individual's gradual progress towards acquiring this secret knowledge.

> In suggesting the possibility of spiritual revelation, the occult played on a Victorian triumphalist notion of progress while allaying fears that advances in knowledge and understanding might result in the desecration of a mysterious and wonderful universe. Occultism's founding impulse, the elaboration of human destiny as a quest for the key which would unlock the secrets of creation, promised a revelation as a prelude to spiritual growth and enlightenment.[4]

The intellectual environment created by the various social, political and cultural movements resulted in fertile ground for an occult revival. But it was more than simply environmental factors which enabled the success and influence of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Magic has always been part of a natural interpretation of existence for humankind. As we have discussed in the first chapter, magic shares this privilege with religion and science. And as we have seen, the distinctions between the three are not always clear. The characteristic that can safely be applied to magic and which make it distinct to some degree from religion and science, is that it professes to have control over things in the natural world though the use of powerful and unseen forces. This differentiates it from religion in that magic requires the individual taking control in order to achieve a goal whereas religion tends to leave the matter in the hands of one's god. With this characteristic, magic differs from science in its belief in the existence of, and the possibility

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[4]Alex Owen, "The Sorcerer and His Apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity" *Journal of British Studies* 36 (January 1997), 101.

of communication with, these unseen forces. Despite this distinction, the similarities are obvious. And it is these similarities that make the struggle between the three interpretations more complex. The similarities make strict definition impossible. Areas of study and practice such as alchemy and astrology have been categorised at different times, under the different headings of magic and science. Golden Dawn members, in fact, are recognised as having been some of the first people to practise psychoanalysis as a part of their magical rituals.[5]

Condemned throughout the ages, magic has alternately been accused of being dangerous and inoperative. As we have seen, these accusations continued throughout the nineteenth century. Barrett, Westcott and Mathers warned of the dangers of black magic and commerce with evil forces. All three also emphasized the importance of the magician being in a pure state, with Westcott and Mathers further emphasizing that this pure state included a peaceful state of mind. The rigorous demands required in the ritual of *The Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* provide a good example of this emphasis. In the Order of the Golden Dawn we see how the acknowledgement of the danger involved in magic is extended to the immense potential for danger that the individual holds for oneself. Mathers had developed a psychologically-intense system of magic whereby the magician became the force which was invoked rather than working magic through the name or the

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[5]*Ibid,* 122. Here Owen discusses Aleister Crowley's acknowledgement of Freudian theory concerning the conscious and the unconscious and its similarities to ritual magic. Crowley, however, felt Freud was a bit out-dated in his theories as he was merely restating what magicians had known for centuries.

force itself.[6] The purpose for doing this was to empower the practitioner by strengthening the will and attaining an altered state of consciousness. This radical change revolutionized the western magical tradition in its shift in purpose from practising magic for concrete material gains to enabling one to evolve into the divine.[7] With this shift in purpose, there is an accompanying shift in the nature of danger. Instead of fearing the actions of evil spirits summoned to do one's bidding, the danger is in the psychological perils involved in altering one's state of consciousness. Meanwhile, the charge of ineffectiveness is one which developed alongside the advancement of science. We saw how Barrett defended magic against this charge. The founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn were less concerned with this accusation perhaps because they were already preaching to the converted.

The accusations against magic continued throughout history for the simple reason that the belief in magic continued as well. The Order of the Golden Dawn was able to exist because of this continued belief and practise of magic. The actual magic of the Order was able to exist because of the Renaissance magi and their first great synthesis of magical knowledge and the development of Christian cabalistic magic. In the characteristic fashion of magical development, the Renaissance scholars reached back into both a real and a supposed past to assimilate numerous aspects of magic into the one system. Four hundred

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[6]Gerald Yorke, in his foreword to Howe's *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, claims such a practice held great potential to result in an inflated ego. Howe, xv.

[7]Hutton, 82-83.

years later, the Order of the Golden Dawn repeated the action. Without the original synthesis in the Renaissance, however, Mathers and Westcott would have been starting from scratch. The Order was both a product of the intellectual environment of late nineteenth-century England and a logical development of an unfolding magical tradition.

Viewed in this comprehensive fashion, the phenomenon of the Order and its magic is more than an eccentric anomaly in intellectual history. The establishment and development of the Order demonstrates the continued relevance of magic in the western world as a valid interpretation of existence. This, of course, completely destroys any notions of humanity being engaged in a process of progressive rationalisation. Tambiah discusses how such a mainstream historical account of world historical process is discredited by the work of Frances Yates and her argument for the development of an occult philosophy in the Renaissance.[8] Such a backwards looking movement, plagued with superstitious and antiquated notions, does not help support an argument for the process of rationalization, especially when it occurred in the same time period in which great advancements in science were being made. With the Order of the Golden Dawn we have another example of an apparent retreat from rationalistic interpretations of creation which discredits a theory of progressive rationalisation. The Renaissance magi were reacting against scholasticism and looking for an alternate philosophy in their revival of magic. The founders and members of the Order were part of a movement that was reacting against

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[8]Tambiah, 24-31.

rationalism and secularisation while offering an alternative history of western culture.[9] The Order itself, however, was more than a reactionary movement. The Order also incorporated many aspects of analytic philosophy and scientific enquiry into its structure; just as the Renaissance magi used the framework of scholasticism in developing an occult philosophy. Neither of these two magical revivals was purely reactionary. Rather, they both attempted a balance between two competing philosophies: one entrenched in rationalism and progress, the other concerned with salvation through knowledge and ancient wisdom.

The revival of magic and occultism in the late nineteenth century, as well as the earlier revival in the Renaissance, supports the argument that a magical interpretation of existence is a natural one for humanity. The magic practised by the Golden Dawn survived as an underground intellectual movement gaining public recognition primarily during its revival in popular society. Its appeal was most apparent when the dominant philosophy was leaning heavily towards rationalism and empiricism. Magic is a necessary critic of both science and religion as it allows for the existence of mystery in the world while placing the individual in a position of power. The magic of the Golden Dawn maintained that we do not know everything about the natural world, and yet it provided its members with an active role in the interpretation of its existence without imposing an all-knowing authority

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[9]Hutton, 72. Hutton claims that Lévi's synthesis and development of occultism commenced this new revolutionary form of the western magical tradition by creating a "middle way between a defensive Christian orthodoxy and a science which threatened to despiritualize the universe and question the special status of humanity."

on humans and a limited, regulated set of laws upon nature. It allowed for both the respect of power and the potential to wield power. The attractiveness of this understanding of existence is undeniable.

Writers such as T. M. Luhrmann and Ithell Colquhoun have attempted to provide a list of characteristics to describe the kind of individual who would be drawn to magic, or in Colquhoun's case, specifically to the Order of the Golden Dawn. Luhrmann claims that the two hundred or more magicians with whom she was acquainted during her study had certain personality traits.

> ... imaginative, self-absorbed, reasonably intellectual, spiritually inclined, and emotionally intense. He also may be rebellious and interested in power, possibly dreamy or socially ill at ease. He may be concerned on some level with issues of control - controlling himself, or the world, or the two in tandem ... magicians are middle-class people of a particular, and not uncommon, temperamental cast - not people with similar socio-economic profiles.[10]

Luhrmann is an anthropologist and her impulse towards the scientific method of categorisation has led her into the error of stereo-typing. Colquhoun's list of characteristics are less categorical and based on observations of the Order's actual members and their lifestyles. Some of the common circumstances of Golden Dawn members include having lost one or both parents at a young age, physical weakness or frequent illness, being of Celtic or partly-Celtic descent, sexual indifference or inhibition,

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[10]Luhrmann, 100.

having an urge to travel, financial difficulties, and being childless.[11] Colquhoun appears to be making simple observations in outlining these similar circumstances of some members. She does not imply that one specific circumstance or combination resulted in a personality drawn towards magic. Luhrmann, on the other hand, does, but it is dangerous to develop a theory that magic appeals to a specific type of personality. We do not hear such arguments for scientists, although people involved in organized religion have often been subjected to the same prejudice. In fact, the Golden Dawn attracted members of both scientific and religious persuasion. Several medical doctors, two analytic chemists, political activists, legal professionals, writers, actors and artists were all desirous of joining the Order and ascending its levels of learning and practise. What they learned in the Order affected the practice of their other professions, and the magic of the Golden Dawn was to have a deep influence on nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, art and politics.[12] The magic of the Golden Dawn appealed to its members as an alternate philosophy which provided an alternate interpretation of existence. Specifically, it offered an alternate interpretation of existence that exercised the imagination, the human will, and creativity. Long before the Order was ever formed, the same magical system appealed to Renaissance scholars who were seeking to make sense of the world that surrounded them. The Order of the Golden

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[11]Colquhoun, 176.

[12]A good example of the influence of the Order and its magic on nineteenth-century culture is demonstrated in Kathleen Raine's *Yeats, the Tarot and the Golden Dawn* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1972). The inspiration, sometimes bordering on plagiarism, Yeats drew from Golden Dawn rituals and materials is clearly demonstrated.

Dawn became the magical landmark that it is partly because of the intellectual era in which it took shape and because of the perennial attraction of magic as a creative and responsible way to understand and live in the world. This continuous attraction of the human mind towards magic makes its study essential in understanding intellectual history. Viewing magic as an integral component in the history of ideas as opposed to dismissing it as an embarrassing lapse in rationale will help us to better understand ourselves and the world in which we live.

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