

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

CONTEMPORARY RITUAL MAGIC

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INTRODUCTION

Ritual and magic are elusive concepts with long and complicated histories in academic discourse (Styers 2004; Otto & Stausberg 2013). One could easily get lost in a thicket of semantic and theoretical problems when combining the two to talk about 'ritual magic'. It is, therefore, crucial to stipulate from the outset that 'ritual magic' here refers to a historically specific constellation of texts and practices, and their receptions, reinterpretations, and transformations. We are *not* here discussing 'magic' as a cross-cultural type, embedded in (or supporting) 'ritualized' behavior, which would require the scope to be truly global. Instead, we will focus on 'ritual magic' as a (largely) emic designation for certain forms of practice in the context of modern Western esotericism. (Hence, all figures, practices, and representations mentioned in this article recognize themselves as 'magicians' and their practices as ritual or ceremonial 'magic,' although, as we shall see, the understandings of what that implies may vary dramatically.) Thus *contemporary* ritual magic refers to a set of cultural phenomena that are historically related to this historiographical category. This chapter probes the variety of contemporary ritual magic, and explores how changing conditions in society, technology, media, and economy have influenced the practice of ritual magic in contemporary esotericism.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN MAGIC

The historiographic category of 'ritual magic' covers sources and discourses that stretch from Antiquity, through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, to post-Enlightenment and contemporary times. To say anything meaningful about what is going on here and now it is necessary to look briefly at this history in order to know something about how we got here. First of all, it is important to note that all the periods mentioned above are marked by distinct developments and changes that make it impossible to talk of a stable and uniform 'magical tradition,' with contemporary custodians. Despite what some contemporary practitioners might say, there is no evidence of an unbroken tradition of ritual magic from ancient times until today. That, however, does not mean that there is no continuity whatsoever: certain

sources and ritual liturgies have indeed inspired similar practice throughout the past two millennia. But we must be clear about what we are dealing with: namely, a number of different sets of ritual practices, codified in ritual texts and liturgies authored in different centuries and cultural contexts, that have been subject to loss, rediscovery, reinterpretation, innovations, and abridgements, and which have furthermore inspired and spawned new literature as centuries have passed. Ancient sources such as the Greek magical papyri and the ‘technical’ Hermetica are thus not only sources for ritual magical practice in antiquity, but have also been of great inspiration for *new* ritual practice in later centuries. The same can be said for the philosophical and theological discourse on the magical practices of ‘theurgy’ and ‘goetia,’ associated with neoplatonic thinkers such as Porphyry and Iamblichus; these writers not only kept a ritual-magical discourse alive in late antiquity, but also inspired later interpretations of magic. They provided elements for new intellectual frameworks of understanding magic in the Renaissance, through figures such as Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Henry Cornelius Agrippa. For each new context, however, such sources are subject to entirely new interpretations. Thus the renaissance scholars mentioned above could draw not only on the *Hermetica* and Iamblichus, but a broad variety of folk magical practices as well as ‘orthodox’ Christian sources – a framework that was obviously missing in earlier ‘pagan’ sources. Meanwhile, another set of ritual texts took shape through the middle ages with the tradition of grimoires, or magical books (Davis, 2010). These books, including famous liturgies such as the *Key of Solomon*, the *Lemegeton* or ‘Lesser Key of Solomon,’ the *Ars Almadel*, and the *Heptameron*, continued to be copied and adapted throughout the early modern period, and constitute an influential set of sources for ritual magic.

These sources were, however, dispersed, and tended to differ widely in their practices, goals, and theological claims. The gradual reception and interpretation of older sources of ritual magic in the context of nineteenth-century occultism is of supreme importance for understanding the dynamic of contemporary ritual magic. In the wake of the Enlightenment we find a synthesis of ‘modern ritual magic.’ To a large extent, this synthesis bases itself on early-modern works such as Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia*, and the rediscovered grimoires, while also drawing significantly on the Christian cabala of Knorr von Rosenroth’s *Kabbalah Denudata*, and the mythology of Rosicrucianism, Templars, and secret societies. All of this is, furthermore, supplied with new frameworks for *explaining* magic, increasingly in terms of ‘sciency’ discourses such as Mesmerism, electromagnetism, and ether physics, along with ‘Romantic’ theories of the unconscious mind and the ‘night-side of nature’. In a sense, Doctor Faustus meets Doctor Frankenstein, and the result is a modern synthesis of magic understood as a practice in-between science and religion, equal parts ‘technology’ and ‘ritual.’

The main figures and groups involved with the creation of modern ritual magic are all discussed elsewhere in the present volume. They include people such as Éliphas Lévi, Pascual Beverly Randolph, Samuel Liddell Mathers, William Wynn Westcott, and Arthur Edward Waite, and organizations such as the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It was with their contributions, roughly spanning the period 1850–1900, that the *groundwork* of modern ritual magic was created. The next fifty-year period saw further developments, in the form

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of schisms of old occult institutions, and the crystallization of new ‘schools’ or ‘currents’ of ritual magic. Aleister Crowley invented the new religion Thelema, and spent an enormous amount of his time developing a new approach to ritual magic. It amounted to a reform of the Golden Dawn system, the incorporation of sexual magic, and the development of an ostensibly ‘scientific’ or ‘naturalistic’ way of practicing magical ritual in what he called ‘Scientific Illuminism’ (Asprem 2008). The artist and sometime member of Crowley’s magical order, the A.:A.:, Austin Osman Spare, invented new techniques of magic and improvised ritualization in the 1910s. Dion Fortune split with the Golden Dawn in the 1920s and created her Fraternity of Inner Light, gradually revising the practices. Israel Regardie published the rituals of the Golden Dawn in the late 1930s, adding his own psychologized interpretations of magical practice filtered through his involvement with psychoanalysis and Reichian therapy. In continental Europe, the Czech occultist and writer Franz Bardon published his ‘Hermetic’ theories of ritual magic, while in Italy, the occultist and fascist Julius Evola established Gruppo di Ur, which published on ritual magic, pagan religion, and other esoteric subjects. After WWII the complexity increases, with new waves of schisms and the foundation of novel magical frameworks. Thelema splintered after Crowley’s death in 1947; different lineages of Crowley’s magical order, A.:A.:, came to emphasize different aspects of his system, and occasionally expand upon it. Likewise, Kenneth Grant’s ‘Typhonian’ current took Crowley’s magic in novel directions from the 1950s onwards. Another acquaintance of Crowley’s, Gerald Gardner, invented the modern Wiccan movement in Britain in the 1940s, paving the way for a self-described ‘pagan’ and ‘witchcraft’ oriented practice of ritual magic – soon enough to split into several fractions as per the usual procedure. In California, modern religious Satanism was born with the activities of Anton Szandor LaVey, presenting new and increasingly ‘secularized’ practices of ritual magic that became the subject of further reinterpretations and new syntheses when schisms hit the Church of Satan before a decade had passed. Thus, we also have the ‘left-hand path’ magical practice of Michael Aquino’s Temple of Set emerging in the 1970s, adding new sources, new theories, and new ways of practicing ritual magic. Meanwhile, in Great Britain, ‘chaos magic’ started taking shape (if that is not an inappropriate metaphor) with the activities of a number of anarchically oriented occultists, notably Peter Carroll, Ray Sherwin, and Phil Hine, drawing inspiration from a number of sources including Crowley and Spare, but also writers and artists like Brion Gysin and William Burroughs (Duggan, 2013, 95–97).

There is much, much more – this is in no way an exhaustive list of all the different magical currents and spokespersons that were taking shape during the first eighty years or so of the twentieth century. It merely serves to make the point that we are dealing with a great number of consecutive transformations of magical ritual, leaving us with a vast variety of impulses informing contemporary magical practice.

THE VARIETIES OF CONTEMPORARY RITUAL MAGIC: THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

When we talk about ‘contemporary’ ritual magic we should focus our attention on the novel developments of the last few decades. Although it is tricky to periodize the contemporary, it makes sense to start in the early 1990s: the Soviet Union has

collapsed, the cold war ended, Western capitalism and consumerism reign supreme, and the great ideologies of the twentieth century die as postmodernism goes mainstream. Meanwhile, a communications and media revolution is underway that rapidly changes the rules of the game: the emergence of the Internet and the development of the World Wide Web have had a remarkable effect on the production and dissemination of ritual magical texts, but also on the actual *practice* of magical ritual. In this section I shall outline how some of these broad structural changes in society and technology have impacted on the way magic is produced, disseminated, and practiced. When we have framed these important changes in the environment we can continue to look at some of the variety in the actual fauna of contemporary ritual magic. Taken together, these considerations will suffice as an overview of the 'biotope' of magic today.

Rise of the Occult Information Society

Probably the most significant characteristic of the contemporary occult world is the enormous wealth of free information now available. The rise of an 'occult information society,' or the adaptation of occultism to an emerging information society, started before the Internet became a public utility. Through the 1970s 'occult explosion,' and continuing through the 1980s, there was a massive growth in the occult publishing industry. Publishing houses such as Weiser, New Falcon, Feral House, and Llewellyn, made a great number of previously rare materials available to a broad audience, while emerging currents such as Satanism and chaos magic generated new occult subgenres of their own. The previously hard-to-get literature on Golden Dawn rituals was made easily obtainable, as were the almost inaccessible works of Crowley.

Meanwhile, something else was happening: a number of 'scholar-magicians,' mostly based in the UK, took to the archives of the British Library and the Bodleian Library at Oxford, dug up rare early modern print works and old magical manuscripts, edited and published them – not to an audience of scholars, but to fellow occultists and magical practitioners. Smaller publishing houses such as Askin Publishers, Element, and Aquarian Press were releasing primary material on obscure topics such as Enochian magic. Daniel Driscoll's 1977 edition of the *Sworn Book of Honorius the Magician* did much to foster a scholar-like interest in grimoires among practitioners. Stephen Skinner published new editions of older print works, such as Meric Causaubon's famous account of Dee's angel conversations (*True & Faithful Relations*) and the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, spuriously attributed to Agrippa. In 1979, Adam McLean established the 'Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks Series,' which set the standard for scholar-magicians of the following decade. Throughout the 1980s, McLean published works by Trithemius, Khunrath, Dee, Robert Fludd, and Michael Maier, as well as previously unpublished magical manuscripts, including an intriguing seventeenth/eighteenth-century grimoire attributed to 'Dr. Rudd,' combining angelic and demonic magic (see Asprem, 2012, 32–42). Also in the 1980s, Robert Turner and Geoffrey James published source-driven accounts of Elizabethan ritual magic, fostering an attempt to reconstruct 'original' renaissance magic.

Thus when the dissemination of magical texts went online around 1994, there was already a wealth of information available, far surpassing the state of affairs in earlier

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periods. The threshold of access to occult knowledge was lower than ever before, and the variety of sources and perspectives on the theory and practice of magic much vaster. This unprecedented freedom of occult information had significant implications. One of the most crucial effects of the occult information boom is that one could now easily get access to works pertaining to different 'schools' of magic without any direct institutional involvement or affiliation. One could pick up *The Satanic Bible* in any well-assorted bookstore, and compare its version of the Enochian keys with the material found in Regardie's *Golden Dawn*, Crowley's *Equinox*, or even the new editions of John Dee's original work. Indeed, with the publication of primary material, such as goetic manuscripts and facsimiles of early modern magical reference works, occultists now had access to magical texts that were more or less unmediated by the occult schools of the turn of the century. By contrast, it took two decades before a few members of the late-nineteenth-century Golden Dawn noticed there were discrepancies between the order's teachings of specific rituals and what the original sources said – simply because the sources were not known or available to anyone but one or two leaders. A century later, one could easily be an unaffiliated magician, aiming to reconstruct Elizabethan ritual magic, goetic demon conjurations, or rituals from the Greek magical papyri. Indeed, one effect of the explosive growth in magical information has been the emergence of a form of *magical 'purism'* – a return to older source material, and a revolt (at least on the surface) against the great magical syntheses of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Internet greatly enhanced this already pre-existing trend. Through email lists, forums, and file sharing, and later (with Web 2.0) through blogging, YouTube, and social networking sites (especially Facebook), magicians could publish, share, and access material much more easily, and irrespective of geographical boundaries. More importantly, one could discuss the theory and practice of magic with other magicians, publish accounts of one's own experiences, compare notes, and develop new systems. All of this could happen *without* the social space of occult institutions with dogmatic commitments. Thus, the new occult information society means a *weakening of occult institutions*. No single school has a monopoly on the interpretation of magic; existing institutions such as Golden Dawn temples, O.T.O. lodges, Wiccan covens, and Satanic grottoes will all have to live with the fact that their members will read up broadly online, and experiment with different types of magic as they please. One illustrative example of the impact of this infrastructural revolution is found in the Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn, established by Sam Webster in 2002 (see website). Reasoning that the digital information revolution makes old institutional frameworks obsolete, this online magical order is based on the free dissemination of magical teachings, democratic leadership, and an open profile regarding which 'traditions' its members bring in and work with. Webster himself is hard to pin down in terms of affiliation, as he simultaneously identifies as a Thelemite, an initiate of Wicca, a Gnostic bishop, and a practitioner in the Golden Dawn current.

Finally, one interesting trend of the recent two decades should be framed as a counter-development to the wide online dissemination of magical texts. In the 1990s and continuing through the 2000s a significant number of micropublishers specializing in limited craft editions of rare magical material, of ancient as well as contemporary provenance, have emerged. David Rankine and Stephen Skinner's Golden Hoard Press, for example, has released a number of grimoires since 2004, many of which

published for the first time, and with leather-bound special editions to complement the cheaper versions. Other craft book publishers specializing in ritual magical texts include Fulgur, Ouroboros Press, and Scarlet Imprint, all producing relatively expensive, handcrafted magical books. These works become collector's items, but also function as a sort of magical fetish in their own right: they constitute a new and sophisticated material culture of ritual magic, emerging as a response to the digital overflow of free magical information. Anyone can download the text of the *Heptameron*, but only the true aficionado would own the full imperial vellum edition, priced at \$225, from Ouroboros Press. The value of this material culture can also be gauged from the occult second-hand book market: the catalogue of Weiser Antiquarian, for example, lists first, second, and even third editions of Crowley's magical works ranging up to \$ 1,000.

Virtual Magic

The effect of the new forms of communication provided by the Internet cannot simply be seen as amplifying existing trends by providing an increase in the quantity of information. The new form of mediation has also inspired radical *qualitative* changes in the way magic is being *practiced* (cf. Cowan 2005). In the 1990s, chat protocols such as IRC were used by 'tecnopagans' for group rituals, where participants scattered around the world would get together and play their parts through instant messaging in plain text. There has even been an intriguing overlap of people involved with cutting-edge programming and occultist magic, who have embraced the emerging global Internet as a magical tool in its own right. The computer programmer Mark Pesce, for example, stated in a 1995 interview that the 'astral plane' would be reborn in cyberspace (Davis, 1995; cf. Crow, 2013).

The innovative effect of cyberspace on magical practice is clearly visible in the emergence of ritual practices in virtual reality. The development of simulated 3D environments through virtual reality platforms such as Second Life has provided the possibility to do much more than was possible with the text and static images of websites and chat forums. Virtual worlds provide a flexible, modifiable environment in which one can move about in the shape of an 'avatar,' interact with other avatars, chat with them through text or voice, purchase property, buy, build and sell items, and use scripts that animate avatars to perform specific gestures and movements in specific settings. The avatar itself can in principle be modified to any imaginable shape, and it may also fly or teleport to other locations. Unlike game platforms with similar features, e.g. massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) such as World of Warcraft, there are no predetermined goals or objectives in Second Life: it is whatever its users make it. Occult and pagan users have increasingly made it a place of magic and ritual, a site of virtual enchantment (see especially Cowan 2005; Crow 2013). If, for example, one visits the virtual village of Covenstead, one finds temples and magic circles where avatars can be animated to do rituals and invocations, solitary or in groups. Such cyber-rituals pose about as many challenges as they open possibilities: while the virtual world of Second Life is flexible and full of opportunities, its possibilities for movement, and physical and mental experience are still incredibly limited when compared to the real world. Thus, some contemporary cyber magicians improvise by combining real life and virtual practice in a singular ritual act: laptop

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computer running the Second Life software can be put on a physical altar and take the function of a ritual object, on a par with a crystal ball or magical mirror (Crow, 2013, 178). This practice potentially opens for a range of metaphysical questions for the magician: does the magic happen ‘in-world,’ or is the computer-mediated imagery merely a convenient tool for inducing ‘magical consciousness’ in a real-life ritual setting? Could the visions on the screen even be comparable, in terms of their ontological status, as those encountered in crystal visions – in other words, is it an actual, real magical world that now manifests in software? Some magicians apparently opt for this interpretation, arguing that the landscapes of virtual reality are not just *similar* to the experiences involved in the magical techniques of astral travel, but that the virtual *is* the astral plane (ibid., 179–80).

CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS OF RITUAL MAGIC

In an occult world where magical institutions are weakened, frameworks are fluid, and practices always improvised, it is problematic to describe what is going on by a rigid classification of ‘schools’ and ‘currents.’ The previous section should have made clear that some of the most interesting developments in contemporary ritual magic have less to do with ‘currents’ than with infrastructural changes in communication, technology, and social organization. The following section on ‘currents’ is thus clearly not intended to pick out stable and autonomous ‘traditions’. If, however, we follow Kennet Granholm’s (2013) proposal and define esoteric ‘currents’ as *discursive complexes* instead, the concept may indeed help us to grasp another dimension of the contemporary ritual magical landscape. In this sense, ‘currents’ are seen merely as ‘collections of specific discourses in specific combinations’ (ibid., 51). The advantage of this conception is that we will find certain discursive elements to be shared by a number of different currents – which by specific combinations give the element in question a specific flavor or meaning.

It is crucial to note that these currents or discursive complexes must *not* be confused with the *sources* of magical practice. An A.:A.:-affiliated Thelemite, an ‘Alexandrian’ Wiccan, and a rationalist ‘Satanist’ (see below for these labels) may in principle work with precisely the same ritual text (say, the Lesser Key of Solomon), but will typically attach different ontological and ethical commitments to this magical practice, expressed through discourses that are essentially at odds with each other. While their building blocks may be the same, they construct the totality of their ritual-magical practice differently. Thus, talking about currents in this sense makes it possible to home in on the fact that special ways of working with the same ritual sources have emerged, that are unique to a specific current, or cluster of currents. In the corpus of ‘Enochian magic,’ for example (a set of systems for angel magic, originating in the work of John Dee and subsequently the object of a series of reinterpretations and modifications), the Golden Dawn created a whole new way of conceptualizing and working with it that is not found in the original Elizabethan sources. Golden Dawn magicians today will typically continue to work with these innovations, while unaffiliated magicians, or magicians embedded in currents that do not have any particular view on Enochian, may decide on a more ‘purist’ approach, and work with what can be reconstructed from primary material (see Asprem, 2012). Thus ‘Enochian magic’ means different things in different currents.

This important point should be kept in mind as I continue to list some of the most prevalent currents of ritual magic that are around today. Some of these have deep roots, and may in some sense be seen as contemporary inheritors of older lineages. However, even in those cases it will be clear that contemporary spokespersons have to adapt to contemporary circumstances. Additionally, factors that are specific to each current have in most cases led to significant innovation. Some of these will be mentioned for each of the currents discussed. I will, however, be brief, and the following should only be seen as suggestive of certain trends, deemed by the present author to be particularly significant or interesting – a rough roadmap to navigate in this rather complex landscape.

Contemporary Golden Dawn Currents

The Golden Dawn was extremely influential on early twentieth-century developments of ritual magic, and in some sense the broad variety of currents that will be mentioned below are all inconceivable without the Golden Dawn impulse. As an institution, however, the Golden Dawn fell apart already in the first decade of the 1900s. Different splinter groups continued to operate temples and train new magicians in the following decades, most notably MacGregor Mathers' Alpha et Omega temple in Paris, and the Stella Matutina, which had lodges in the UK and New Zealand, and was the faction that Israel Regardie was acquainted with before publishing the order's rituals in the late 1930s. After the Second World War, however, most of these groups died out in their original form. Then in the 1970s, as a response to the new publications of primary sources, especially the Llewellyn edition of Regardie's version of the Golden Dawn rituals, a number of groups tried to resuscitate the tradition by forming new groups. Over the years this Golden Dawn revival has led to a confusing and controversial 'Golden Dawn current': at present there are at least four groups that claim to represent the 'real deal,' all of which have been involved with legal battles over the Golden Dawn 'trademark' in various countries, and frequently engage in rather hostile polemics with each other online.

The first of these groups appears to have been Charles 'Chic' Cicero's Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn Inc., started in the late 1970s with the blessing of Israel Regardie – who in the United States was metonymic for the Golden Dawn current as a whole. Chic and his wife, Sandra 'Tabatha' Cicero, have since established themselves as leading 'authorities' in Golden Dawn-style initiation and ritual magic through numerous publications. They also have to take some dubious credit for the 'businessification' of occultism in this period, as they incorporated the Golden Dawn under state of Florida legislation in 1988 in order to get rid of competitors through legal action.

One of the competitors of Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn Inc. is the Order of the Golden Dawn®, a registered trademark in Quebec, Canada, originating with the New Zealander Pat Zalewski. This group currently runs a temple in Montreal, besides being active in Australia and New Zealand. Its teachings appear to be relatively standard Golden Dawn material, derived from the Stella Matutina faction that survived in New Zealand.

Two other Golden Dawn orders are notable for their more extravagant claims and novelties of practice. Robert Zink's Esoteric Order of the Golden Dawn has attracted

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some notoriety in occult circles for its emphasis on ‘astral initiation.’ To become an initiate, all one needs to do is pay the fees to the higher chiefs, enter the astral plane, and receive initiation from a distance. It easily comes across as the ritual-magical equivalent of a post-order Ph.D. Zink’s version of the Golden Dawn current is perhaps the clearest example of occult ritual magic incorporating discursive elements from the general ‘alternative spirituality’ landscape: for example, Zink not only claims the ceremonial titles of the traditional Golden Dawn hierarchy, but adopts contemporary trends by styling himself ‘Miracle Mentor’ and ‘Alchemy Life Coach,’ while inventing other hybrids such as ‘neuro-linguistic alchemy’ and playing with the ‘law of attraction’ (Zink, 2013).

Zink’s fiercest critic has been Robert Griffin, himself an eccentric magical adept and the leader of another ‘original’ Golden Dawn current. Completely immersed in the legal side of the Golden Dawn franchise, Griffin sports a number of trademarks in Canada, the US, and Europe, and seems to spend a lot of time making this fact known to the world. A unique stamp of Griffin’s current is a strong emphasis on the role of ‘secret chiefs’: these legendary figures are, according to Griffin, real people that have obtained a state of near immortality through the workings of Rosicrucian initiation and alchemical practice. Griffin in fact claims to have been in touch with the very same adepts that once gave Mathers the authority and means to run the ‘inner order’ of the Golden Dawn, and consequently has gone on to claim that his order teaches certain forms of magic, apparently of an alchemical and erotic character, that have successfully been kept a secret through all exposés and publications of Golden Dawn documents (Griffin, 2009).

The Thelemic current

Thelema, the new religious framework established by Crowley in the early decades of the twentieth century, and embodied in a number of institutions, has inspired another broad current of ritual magic. The main institutional carrier of Thelema today is the ‘Caliphate’ O.T.O. It should, however, be noted that the O.T.O. is not in itself a ritual magical organization, comparable to the Golden Dawn – it is an initiatory fraternal organization working for the development of the individual in compliance with Thelemic principles (thus especially the discovery of the ‘True Will’), and the concerted effort of creating a Thelemic society by promoting the Law of Thelema (‘Do what thou Wilt shall be the whole of the Law’). As for the development and practice of ‘Thelemic magic’ (or ‘magick,’ to follow the Crowleyan jargon) this has been done in particular through the lineages of Crowley’s magical order, the A.:A.:. In modern and contemporary times, authors and magicians such as Marcelo Ramos Motta, James Wasserman, Christopher Hyatt, Lon Milo DuQuette, Rodney Orpheus, J. Daniel Gunther, and many others have continued to develop a distinctly Thelemic take on ritual magic, extending the heritage of Crowley’s work.

It must also be noted that the Thelemic current, like most others, has been shaken by schisms and the formation of new sub-currents. Kenneth Grant’s Typhonian current is beyond doubt the most significant of these. Through a corpus of six books known as the Typhonian trilogies (the first appearing in 1972, and the last in 2002) Grant crafted an original ritual magical current mixing ‘classic’ Thelemic elements with elements taken from sources such as Lovecraftian fiction, UFO-lore, Austin

Osman Spare, and the emerging chaos current (cf. Evans, 2007). A final sub-current emerging from the Thelemic mainstream may be discerned in the 'Franco-Haitian' O.T.O. current associated with Michael Bertiaux. Bertiaux's approach to magic, equally original, combines the Thelemic framework with elements of Haitian voodoo and what the author calls a 'Gnostic' impulse (e.g. Bertiaux, 2007).

Wiccan currents

Along with the emergence of Thelema, the invention of the Wiccan witchcraft religion by Gerald Gardner in post-war UK has meant a lot for the changing perceptions and practices of ritual magic in the West (see Hutton, 1999). For our present purposes, it will suffice to say that this current, in general, combines Golden Dawn practices with witchcraft folklore and the notion of a suppressed Pagan religion based on the worship of a horned god and a mother goddess. This current has, as the others discussed, broken up into a number of different currents and local practices. The most noteworthy sub-currents are the 'Gardnerian' and 'Alexandrian' (after Alex Sanders, known in the 1960s as the 'king of witches') schools, operating as initiation systems organized in 'covens,' carrying the religious practice of the god and goddess and the teaching of a variety of ritual magical practices. There is, however, a lot more going on. For example, the 'Dianic Wicca' that has grown out of the activities of Hunagrian-American activist Zsuzsanna Budapest rejects the gender-duality of the British groups, replacing it with an exclusive focus on the goddess and casting itself as 'feminist' spirituality. Yet other forms of Wicca may be classified as 'eclectic,' lacking any formal organization and blending in seamlessly with the Pagan segments of contemporary occulture.

Other Neopagan currents

The broader Neopagan current is thus another important factor to consider. It is, however, hard to describe this as a single current, even in the sense of a discursive complex – and the discernible currents that are collected under the heading of Neopaganism are far too many and diverse to be given justice here. We should nevertheless note that the attempt to reconstruct pre-Christian religious traditions, whether these be Norse, Germanic, Roman, Celtic, Greek, or 'Shamanic,' have provided additional discursive elements as well as 'raw materials' for contemporary magical practice. The use of runes for divination and spell-casting is one clear example of this, and the incorporation of techniques such as drumming, dancing, and the use of psychoactive agents to induce extravagant visionary experiences, indicate another area of innovation that can be roughly related to the Neopagan movement.

Satanic and Left-Hand Path currents

It is slightly easier to delineate a cluster of Satanic and (post-Satanic) Left-Hand Path currents, that build on and renew the magical discourses and practices of the Golden Dawn and Thelema (but cf. Petersen, 2012). In itself, the contemporary 'Satanic milieu' is, however, yet another fragmented and complex field. Anton LaVey created a discourse on magical ritual that is quite distinct in its thorough 'secularization' of

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magical efficacy. In this ‘rationalistic’ line of Satanic magic, the boundary between magic and ordinary social-psychological mechanism (i.e. dressing or speaking a certain way to manipulate one’s social surroundings) is blurred. On the more ‘esoteric’ pole of the spectrum, however, we find something rather different: magicians affiliated with one of the pylons of the Temple of Set are, for example, more likely to conceive of ritual magic in supernatural, or at least ‘esoteric’ terms: one evokes powers and beings that are quite real, quite distinct from ordinary social or psychological mechanisms. What the ‘rationalist’ and the ‘esoteric’ Satanist have in common is that the magic is conceived of in antinomian and strongly individualistic terms, and that they place themselves in opposition to schools of ‘white magic’ – which to these practitioners would typically include Golden Dawn, Thelemic, and witchcraft groups.

More recently, other Left-Hand Path organizations have appeared, expanding this current of ritual magic in new directions by incorporating various ‘pagan’ elements from e.g. Norse sources. This is notably the case with Stephen Flowers (a.k.a. Edred Thorsson), who mixed scholarship on rune magic (the subject of his Ph.D. in Germanic languages) with influences from the Church of Satan, Temple of Set, and reconstructionist Ásatru when forming his new organization, the Rune-Gild. Similarly, the Swedish scholar and magician Thomas Karlsson (another Ph.D., this time in the history of religion) founded the Dragon Rouge in the early 1990s, today one of the most successful Left-Hand Path organizations in the world. It practices a form of ritual magic that draws heavily on grimoire traditions for liturgical inspiration, and on a mix of ‘gothic’ literary romanticism, psychology, and previous Left-Hand Path ideologies for its ‘theological’ outlook (cf. Granholm, 2014).

Chaos currents

Since, for pedagogical reasons, we have already been rather liberal with the use of the term ‘current’ we may as well continue to give the label to yet another dubious entity. Chaos magic was, as mentioned briefly, an anarchic magical phenomenon emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Even though things have changed since then, and chaos magic never really became fixed in the first place, we may nevertheless speak of a chaos current running into the 1990s and continuing today. New generations of (primarily very young) occultists have picked up the published books of main ‘chaos magic’ authors, such as Peter Carroll’s *Liber Null* and Phil Hine’s *Prime Chaos*, taking inspiration from them in order to play and improvise with magic, focusing on what is simple, fun, and ‘seems to work.’ Since the mid-1990s, countless chaos-themed personal websites have emerged, collecting personalized spells and advice for using techniques such as ‘banishing by laughter,’ making magic sigils, or employing video games as a focus for channeling emotional energy in order to ‘charge’ such sigils (e.g. Ellwood, 2004).

As a whole, however, chaos magic is symptomatic of a number of intersecting trends and currents. Thelema, Satanism, and the Left-Hand Path coalesce, and form new expressions in the meeting with ‘underground’ artistic milieus and dissemination structures. Indeed, chaos magic has always been interwoven with intricate and innovative channels of dissemination, whether through the anarchist/artist ‘zine scene,’ online file sharing, or eclectic underground periodicals. One notable example of the latter is *The Fenris Wolf*, run by Swedish occultist and author Carl Abrahamson.

The first three volumes of this journal, published between 1989 and 1993 gathered notable spokespersons from the broader international ‘chaotic’ and Left-Hand Path milieu, including author William Burroughs, Satanic pope Anton LaVey, artist, musician, and magician Genesis P-Orridge, chaos magician Lionel Snell, Thelemite Rodney Orpheus, O.T.O. ‘caliph’ Hymenæus Beta, and Church of Satan high priest Peter Gilmore. *The Fenris Wolf* has recently been revived, with the fourth volume appearing in 2011.

CONCLUSION: NEW LOCATIONS OF RITUAL MAGIC

A major conclusion of this survey must be that ritual magic is migrating to new locations.

With the emergence of new media, through connections with new artistic scenes and forms of expression, and by way of new channels of dissemination and consumption, ritual magic is becoming embedded in intricate feedback loops with other aspects of contemporary culture. We have already dealt with the way that the Internet and especially virtual reality has functioned as a new location for magic, a new environment that also invited drastically new ways for magic to be practiced. In closing, we should focus on two other significant developments, both having to do with the migration of ritual magic, and its integration in other areas of culture.

The first of these is the interface of ritual magic and underground art and music scenes. The interest of ‘underground’ artists and musicians in magical practices is by no means new, but it appears to have taken a radical new spin around the 1980s (cf. Partridge, 2013). The chaos magic scene is important here, as already mentioned, being intricately connected with new expressions on the intersection of ritualized art, magical practice, and a punked up esoteric esthetic. Musical acts such as Throbbing Gristle and performance artists such as Genesis P-Orridge are key examples of this integration of magic and artistic expression, while the activist art collective known as Center for Tactical Magic (CTM) serves as an example of more recent developments. On its website, CTM defines its magical approach (‘tactical magic’) as a ‘fusion force summoned from the ways of the artist, the magician, the ninja, and the private investigator,’ leading to ‘an amalgam of disparate arts invoked for the purpose of actively addressing Power on individual, communal, and transnational fronts’ (CTM website). The magical theories and practices discussed on the website are clearly derived from the chaos current.

Another development concerns the integration of ritual magic in products of ‘popular culture’ with truly broad exposure, especially through films and television programs. While most such integration is purely *representational* (that is, reconstructions and representations of magical practice as plot devices), there are also intriguing examples of popular culture being used *as* magic – again, unsurprisingly, with reference to chaos magic. Thus, the Scottish comic book writer Grant Morrison has claimed that his graphic novel, *The Invisibles* (running from 1994 to 2000), was intended to function as a ‘hypersigil,’ one giant magical invocation to push culture and society in a certain direction by imprinting on readers’ psyches (cf. Kripal, 2011, 21). While Morrison may remain a rather exotic example (always ‘occultural,’ but more ‘cult’ than ‘pop’), we should not dismiss the representational expressions mentioned above either. This is because the descriptive, in fact, easily becomes

– Egil Asprem –

prescriptive, and thus we find that a new generation of occultist magicians, coming of age in the late 1990s and 2000s, are likely to have had their first encounter with witchcraft through shows such as *Charmed*, or to have learnt about the binding and exorcism of demons with the Key of Solomon through the episodes of *Supernatural*. Thus, the extensive popular dissemination of ritual magical representations must be considered an integral part of the ritual-magical landscape today. While fiction, folklore, and mythology have no doubt always been major sources for beliefs and practices of magic, present-day representations tend to borrow primarily from the occultist syntheses that have emerged since the nineteenth century, rather than from earlier mythological sources. Thus, the practices and beliefs of occult ritual magic are being passed on primarily through a massive popular occulture, rather than through secret lodges.

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