Magic Made Modern?
Re-evaluating the Novelty of the Golden Dawn's Magic

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Abstract

This is an article in the history of magic that re-evaluates Alison Butler's thesis regarding the novelty of the magical praxis of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It consists of a response to two claims made by Butler as to the morphological novelty of the order's magic: 1) the utilization of active, as opposed to passive modalities of the *vis imaginativa*; and 2) the techniques of unmediated invocation. In both domains, not only do Butler's works mischaracterize the practices of the Golden Dawn itself, but also wrongly identifies these categories as instances of innovation. In fact, there is a strong degree of formal similarity between the ritual mechanics of the order and those earlier antique, medieval, and Renaissance practitioners in the specific areas of visualization and invocation. These similarities strongly call into question the characterization of the Golden Dawn's magic as fundamentally modern in form.

Keywords

Golden Dawn; Magic; Theurgy; Neoplatonism; Western Esotericism

Introduction

During the course of its brief yet explosive existence, the chief officers of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (hereafter the Golden Dawn) developed and promulgated a practice of magic which drew on techniques and doctrines culled from a wide variety of antique, medieval, and Renaissance

sources, harmonizing them into a unique system.[1] In recent years, several scholars have analyzed the ways in which the curriculum of the order represented a fundamentally modern transformation of Western esoteric praxis. Among these stand two works of Alison Butler: the essay, "Making Magic Modern: Nineteenth-Century Adaptions,"[2] and the monograph, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition*.[3] In both the essay and monograph, Butler defends the thesis that the Golden Dawn's magic was a constructed tradition which, while drawing on antique sources, re-interpreted and filtered these sources through distinctly Victorian lenses, the result of which was a *new* magic whose intrinsic modernity can be contrasted against the magic of prior historical epochs.[4] *Victorian Occultism* is of particular importance in that it is only the second full-length monograph to deal exclusively with the Golden Dawn's complex relationship with the two, seemingly opposed, poles of traditionalism and modernism.[5]

Discussing the idea of continuity and similarity within temporally separated traditions, Olav Hammer describes a framework for comparison composed of the following four levels at which analysis can be undertaken: cultural context, social context, emic interpretation, and form.[6] The first level of cultural context

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[1]   For treatments of the order's history, see: Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887–1923* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1972); Ithel Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975); R.A. Gilbert, *Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983); Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1995); R.A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1997); Daniël van Egmond, "Western Esoteric Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, eds. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Albany: State University New York Press, 1998), 311–46; Christopher McIntosh, "'Fräulein Sprengel' and the Origins of the Golden Dawn: A Surprising Discovery," *Aries* 11, no. 2 (2011): 249–57.

[2]   Alison Butler, "Making Magic Modern: Nineteenth-Century Adaptions," *The Pomegranate* 6, no. 2 (2004): 213–30.

[3]   Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[4]   This is an argument which runs throughout the whole of both works, but see especially: Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 17–61.

[5]   The other being Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[6]   Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 34–35: "Firstly, there is the formal level: doctrines or rituals may resemble (or differ from) each other at the level of overt characteristics or form. Secondly, there is the level of social context, e.g. questions such as the stratification of the participants and their

has been the principal focus of the bulk of contemporary secondary litera-
ture on the subject. Wouter Hanegraaff and Alex Owen's landmark studies,
which both discuss the Golden Dawn's magical praxis in terms of Weberian
ideas of secularization and disenchantment, exemplify this level of analysis.
Hanegraaff sees the Golden Dawn's praxis as distinct from pre-modern forms
in that it currently exists within the context of a "disenchanted world" and is
thus a "disenchanted magic" whose "dominant tendency" is that of psychol-
ogization.[7] Similarly, Owen notes that the order's magic represented a "newly
envisaged modern subjectivity," and was "both a response to and a measure
of a Weberian disenchanted modernity."[8] The second level of social context is
dealt with at great length by Owen and Butler, both of whom are particularly
keen to clarify the ways in which the Golden Dawn dealt with issues of gender
at an intra-organizational level.[9] The third level of emic interpretation has not
received a great deal of scholarly attention, in part, I believe, owing to the fact
that it is relatively uncontested that the members of the order interpreted their

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place within society as a whole. Thirdly, there is the level of cultural context, e.g. the place of
a given ritual within the ritual cycle or of a doctrine within a general worldview. Fourthly, and
finally, there is the level of emic interpretation, i.e. how the specifics of the ritual or doctrine
are understood by members of the community."

[7]   Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," *Religion*
33 (2003): 336. For further examinations of psychologizing tendencies among broader cur-
rents of late modern and contemporary esotericism, see: T.M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the
Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989),
274–82; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of
Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 196–97, 216–17, 483–503;
Egil Asprem, "Magic Naturalized? Negotiating Science and Occult Experience in Aleister
Crowley's Scientific Illuminism," *Aries* 8 (2008): 139–65; Egil Asprem, *Arguing With Angels:
Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture* (Albany: State University New York Press, 2012), 74–77;
Marco Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley's Views on Occult Practice," in
Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2012), 53–87.

[8]   Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 248. For further examinations of late modern and con-
temporary esotericism in terms of Weberian disenchantment and secularization, see: Wouter J.
Hanegraaff, "New Age Religion and Secularization," *Numen* 47, no. 3 (2000): 288–312; Chris-
topher Partridge, vol. 1 of *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization,
Popular Culture, and Occulture*, 2 vols (London: T&T Clark International, 2004–2005), 8–15,
40–44; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London:
Equinox, 2005), 133–46; Kocku von Stuckrad, "Discursive Transfers and Reconfigurations:
Tracing the Religious and the Esoteric in Secular Culture," in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil
Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 226–43.

[9]   Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 85–113; Butler, "Making Magic Modern," 213–30; Butler,
Victorian Occultism.

magic as being similar to the historical practices upon which they drew.[10]

The fourth level of morphological similarity is briefly touched by Hanegraaff,[11] but is only dealt with in great detail by Butler, who advances a theory that novelty is the dominant characteristic not only of the levels of social and cultural context, but of the formal level as well. While this level of comparison does not comprise the totality of Butler's argument in favor of the order's overall characteristic of novelty, it does form an essential cornerstone of her thesis. It is this series of claims—that there are strong morphological differences in the ritual mechanics of the Golden Dawn's magic and those pre-modern practices upon which the order drew—which this present study re-evaluates. As such, I neither attempt to affirm nor deny the claims of Owen, Hanegraaff, Butler, or other scholars regarding the first two levels of Hammer's matrix, but intend to show that there are, in fact, important morphological similarities between the ways members of the Golden Dawn and their magical forebears in preceding centuries *practiced* magic.

My analysis of Butler's argument takes the following shape, and is rooted in the "homological-diachronic" method of comparison proposed by Egil Asprem,[12] a method of comparing two phenomena which are at once temporally separated *and* genealogically comparable with respect to a given property.[13] What this means is that the homological-diachronic method of analysis proceeds by comparing two phenomena which are, in terms of a given property under discussion, genealogically related and separated in time. For the purposes of this study then, the bracketed phenomena are the Golden Dawn's magic on the one hand, and the practices of pre-Victorian periods on the other. The points of comparison are the two specific ways in which Butler claims that the former represents a morphological break from the latter.

As such, I first proceed to examine her two claims of instantiations of

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[10]   The paramount example of this notion of the order existing within the continuum of the *philosophia perennis* can be seen in order's work of emic historiography: W. Wynn Westcott, "The Historical Lecture," in *The Golden Dawn Source Book*, ed. Darcy Küntz (Edmonds: Holmes Publishing Group, 1996), 46–51.

[11]   Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived," 369.

[12]   For an outline of the various ways in which phenomena can be analytically compared, see: Egil Asprem, "Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esotericism," *Correspondences* 2, no. 1 (2014), 20–27.

[13]   Asprem, "Beyond the West," 22. Where C signifies comparison, a and b the two properties being compared, p the "*tertium comparationis*," and the arrow indicating a genealogical relationship, Asprem formally defines the homological-diachronic method as: "C (a, b), where b is later than a and $a \rightarrow b$, with respect to p."

morphologically new ritual praxis. Following this, each claim is independently evaluated in a two-pronged fashion: first, by determining whether or not the claim itself accurately reflects the Golden Dawn's practice; and second, by investigating the degree to which the claim similarly reflects the practice of "magic" throughout history. As such, I begin with a statement of the three areas in which Butler claims the Golden Dawn innovated. The first instance is in the use of visualization, where she claims that one of the "fundamental changes that the Golden Dawn made to Western magic" was "the dominance of the imagination in the magical process."[14] The second "fundamental change" alleged to have been made by the Golden Dawn was the shift "from using an intermediary spirit to either directly communicating with the force invoked or invocating, or evocating it within oneself, by either drawing down the power of the macrocosm or bringing it forth from within oneself."[15] My contention is that in both instances, Butler's claims of novelty are fundamentally flawed both in terms of how the position of the order itself is presented, as well as in the characterizations of historical practices. Rather than representing a break with tradition, the picture that emerges is one of morphological continuity with the past.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to note that throughout this article, the term "magic" is used in the general sense that appears throughout the Golden Dawn's literature. This usage is inclusive of practices which have, throughout history, been seen to be diametrically opposed, such as, on the one hand, operations designed to transform the operator into a receptacle for the gods, and on the other, operations designed to effect mundane goals such as obtaining money or a lover. In antiquity, this distinction was generally made via the utilization of distinct terminologies—with θεουργία (theurgy, divine work) referring to the former class, and γοητεία (sorcery) to the latter.[16] From the fifth century B.C. onward, γοητεία tended to be equated with the term μαγεία (magic),[17] though μαγεία was sometimes linguistically utilized in ways

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[14] Butler, "Making Magic Modern," 213.

[15] Ibid., 213.

[16] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries: Translated with Introduction and Notes*, ed. and trans. Emma C. Clarke et. al. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 3.25.160. For a fuller treatment of this particular dichotomy, see: Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," *Traditio* 41 (1985): 1–28.

[17] Gorgias, *Fragmenta*, in vol. 2 of *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 2nd ed., eds. H. Diels and W. Kraz, 4 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1952), fr. 10; Plato, *Respvblica*, in vol. 4 of *Platonis opera*, ed. John Burnet, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900–1907), 346b–c; Plotinus, *Enneads*, 6 vols, ed. and trans. A.H. Armstrong (London: William Heinemann, 1966–1988), 4.4.40.1–6.

which bore more resemblance to θεουργία than γοητεία.[18] While a thorough treatment of the ways in which these terms were adapted between antiquity and the emergence of the Golden Dawn is far beyond this article's scope, it will suffice to say that there is enough variability that the semantic equation of the contemporary term "magic" with any antique cognates is a dangerous simplification.[19] I find little value in projects to construct a universal definition of "magic,"[20] siding with those scholars—largely classical philologists and discourse theorists—who opt to distinguish practices by the specific vocabularies used by the practitioners themselves.[21] As such, references to "magic" throughout this article will strictly refer to the practices of the Golden Dawn. The earlier practices will either be denoted by the native terminologies wherein they are found, or by neutral terms (e.g. practice or operation).

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[18]   This is particularly evident in the use of the phrase "ἱερᾶς μαγείας" (holy magic) in the magical papyri: *Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, ed. and trans. by Karl Preisendanz, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928–1931), 1.127.

[19]   For discussions of these terminological transformations, see: Dorothy Hammond, "Magic: A Problem in Semantics," *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 6 (1970): 1349–56; Jan N. Bremmer, "The Birth of the Term 'Magic'," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 1–11; Michael D. Bailey, "The Meanings of Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (2006): 1–23.

[20]   Edward B. Tylor, vol. 1 of *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1920), 112; James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 12–14; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915), 42–44; Lynn Thorndike, vol. 1 of *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923–1958), 4; Bronislaw Malinowski, "Magic, Science, and Religion," in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Redfield (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1948), 8.

[21]   Alan Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, eds. R. van den Broek and Maarten J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 351; Hans Dieter Betz, "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, eds. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 244–47; Christopher A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in *Magika Hiera*, eds. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 20; John R. Gager, "Introduction," in *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, ed. John R. Gager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24–25; Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001), 18; Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 18–19; Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xviii–xix; Cf. Bernd-Christian Otto, *Magie: Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, eds., *Defining Magic: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

The *Vis Imaginativa*

Antoine Faivre defined the *vis imaginativa* (imaginative faculty) as "a particular aspect of this wider field that is the creative imagination, [which] is often rooted in a concept of divinity and of humanity as conceived as imagining powers."[22] It is important to note that Faivre's definition explicitly gives an *active* role to the imagination—a role which Butler relegates to the province of modernity. To clarify her position, Butler admits that the dipolar roles of will and imagination were crucial in late antique Platonism; however, she tells us that the use of the *vis imaginativa* within the theurgy of Iamblichus (as an example) was strictly passive and receptive rather than active and constructive as was its use in the Golden Dawn.[23] Butler's claim is that within antique theurgy, "the human will […] was under the control of the divine and the imagination was used by that divinity to produce visions,"[24] after which his will could be co-opted by the gods to effect the kinds of physical changes associated with "wonder-working" types of operations.[25] This was, her theory goes, radically altered with the magic of the Golden Dawn, wherein "the magical procedure is directed by the magician's will and imagination"[26] and that "the individual will and imagination are not subordinate to a divine will."[27] This active imaginative magical faculty, she claims, was then used by the order's magicians to "effect physical change."[28]

When investigating the source material concerning the Golden Dawn's magical practice, what we see in regards to the *vis imaginativa* is a distinction made between the ways in which it is applied to magic that is concerned with physical wonders versus that which is divine in nature. While the order's uses of the imagination directed towards actualizing material ends *do* conform to Butler's analysis, we will see that those methods of will-directed imaginative power were *also* common fare in past centuries. Additionally, it will become clear that the Golden Dawn's more divinely oriented uses of the *vis imaginativa* were *not* purely constructive, as per Butler's argument, but used the constructive

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[22]   Antoine Faivre, "*Vis Imaginativa*: A Study of Some Aspects of the Magical Imagination and its Mythical Foundations," in *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 125.

[23]   Butler, "Making Magic Modern," 225–56; Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 156–57.

[24]   Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 156–57.

[25]   Ibid., 121–22.

[26]   Butler, "Making Magic Modern," 225–26.

[27]   Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 156–57.

[28]   Ibid., 121–22.

faculties in tandem with imaginative receptivity—a technique which also has an exceedingly long lineage. Tanya Luhrmann provides a succinct account of how fundamental creative visualization is to modern magical praxis: "visualization is explicitly part of the magical technology, the means by which the magic works […] so that the skill in 'bringing the power through' depends directly on the ability to visualize."[29] Although Luhrmann is specifically referencing the practices of a group which emerged from the wreckage of the Golden Dawn's tumultuous dissolution in the first years of the twentieth-century—specifically, the "Western Mystery" groups of Dion Fortune's (1890–1946) student, Gareth Knight (b. 1930)—her statement on the tremendous importance of visualization does indeed hold true for the original order as well as its offshoots.[30]

In describing the mechanics by which the order's materially oriented magic operates, one of the Flying Rolls (a class of instructional documents circulated within the order) paints the following picture: "when a man imagines he actually creates a form on the Astral or even some higher plane; and this form is as real and objective to intelligent beings on that plane, as our earthly surroundings are to us."[31] This underscores not only the objective way in which the order's magicians believed imagined forms to exist, but also conveys the fact that such forms were constructs of the individual magician's will.[32] William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925) expands on this position, telling the student that the creative faculty of the mind is the imagination, and that by empowering the imagination with the will, ideas can be externally manifested.[33] Perhaps the most concise statement on the order's teachings regarding materially oriented will-directed imaginative magic comes from Florence Farr (1860–1917), who gives the student of the order a practical method of instruction in its use:

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[29]   Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 191.
[30]   Hanegraaff similarly notes the tremendous importance that the imagination plays in the Golden Dawn's magical practice. He describes the "Middle Pillar Exercise"—a practice in which the magician visualizes his body coinciding with the macrocosmic Tree of Life (a visual representation of the Hebrew Kabbalah's emanative ontology which was utilized by the Golden Dawn)— as something which "epitomises the basic approach to 'magic' in modern occultism, which rests essentially on training the imagination by means of visualisation techniques." Hanegraaff, "How magic survived," 369.
[31]   William Edmund Berridge and William Wynn Westcott, "Flying Roll No. 5: Some Thoughts on the Imagination and Supplementary Remarks," in *Astral Projection, Ritual Magic, and Alchemy*, ed. Francis King (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1987), 47.
[32]   Ibid., 47: "to practice magic, both the Imagination and the Will must be called into action, they are co-equal in the work."
[33]   Ibid., 51.

1. To visualize one's head as a globe like center from which radiate "rays" of thought.
2. Strongly visualize the desired change one wishes to effect.
3. Concentrate the mental rays on this image until it is felt as a "glowing ball of compacted force."
4. Then, project it outward, onto the subject which is to be affected.[34]

Paramount in Farr's description of the Golden Dawn's methods for materially oriented operations is that the desired effect is directly caused by the imagination as empowered by the individual will—and in this we see Butler's description of the order's method is quite accurate.

As accurately as Butler denotes the practices described above, such uses of the *vis imaginativa* were not by any means the only—or even the principle— ways in which the faculty was used. Rather, the specific usage that we see quite prominently discussed is one that combines active and passive modalities. Describing the latter portion of this constructive-cum-receptive usage, Westcott tells the student that one of the most important aims of the Adept is "the extension of our powers of perception so that we can perceive entities, events and forces upon the super-sensuous planes."[35] This mode of perception— called the "spirit vision" within order documents—and methods for obtaining it comprise a great deal of the order's instructional materials. Farr details the method as such:

1. The magician performs a banishing ritual.
2. He then visualizes some object, like a Tarot card.
3. This image is held until the magician seems "to see *into* it."
4. This then precipitates the vision, which the magician receives by "passing into a state of reverie."[36]

What is key to note in this method is that while the magician *does* begin the operation with the same active imagination detailed before, this constructive usage gives way to reception; the active mode is but a means by which

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[34] Florence Farr, "Flying Roll No. 2, Part 3: Three Suggestions on Will Power," in *Astral Projection*, ed. Francis King (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1987), 59–60.

[35] William Wynn Westcott, "Flying Roll No. 19: The Aims and Means of Adeptship," in *Astral Projection*, ed. Francis King (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1987), 115.

[36] Florence Farr and Elaine Simpson, "Flying Roll No. 4: An Example of a Mode of Attaining to Spirit Vision and What Was Seen by Two Adepti," in *Astral Projection*, ed. Francis King (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1987), 71.

the passive can be utilized. Moina (1865–1928) and S.L. MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918) drive home the importance of this second, receptive use of the *vis imaginativa* in one of the order's instructional papers—reminding the student that he "must be prepared to receive impressions of scenes, forms and sounds as vivid thought forms."[37] In this fashion, members would engage in experiments whose results were described both in terms of having visions of spiritual beings and in other cases of the magician's imagined form—the so-called "astral" body—passing through the visualized image to enter into the spiritual realm proper to it.[38]

These uses of the active-cum-receptive *vis imaginativa* were not limited to single-person exercises. William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) relays a notable anecdote in his *Autobiographies* whereupon MacGregor Mathers caused him to see a vision of "a desert and a black Titan raising himself up by his two hands from the middle of a heap of ancient ruins."[39] Mathers apparently did so by instructing Yeats to hold a piece of cardboard with the symbol of the Titan— identified by Mathers as "a being of the order of Salamanders"—although he later told Yeats that "it was not necessary to even show the symbol, it would have been sufficient that he imagined it."[40] Discounting the question of the story's objective veracity, it demonstrates perfectly the dipolar use of imagi-nation in the divinely oriented magic of the Golden Dawn, with Yeats acting, in this instance, as the receptive party and Mathers as the active. Thus, we see that Butler's description of the Golden Dawn's imaginative practice as strictly active and constructive misses the mark. Rather, it appears that while there *were* strictly active uses of this *vis imaginative* within the order's ritual praxis, dipolar uses that blended active *and* passive modes predominated.

Throughout the preceding history of Western esotericism this same dipolar use of the imaginative faculty presents itself. Speaking of the mode of pure receptivity, Gregory Shaw details the ways with which the late classical Neopla-tonic theurgists utilized the imagination.[41] He notes Iamblichus's (c. 245–c. 325)

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[37]   Moina Mathers and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, "Of Skrying and Travelling in the Spirit-Vision," in *The Golden Dawn*, ed. Israel Regardie et al., 6th ed. (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), 467–68.

[38]   One of the clearest accounts of these practices, and the methodic distinctions between "skrying" and "travelling" in the spirit vision is in: Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, "Flying Roll No. 11: Clairvoyance," in *Astral Projection*, ed. Francis King (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1987), 75–83.

[39]   William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan Press, 1961), 185–86.

[40]   Ibid., 185–86.

[41]   Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: The

statement that the gods are seen through the "ψυχῆς ὀφθαλμοῖς" (eyes of the soul)[42]—i.e. the imaginative medium—as well as Proclus's (412–485) description that the gods tend to be seen with closed eyes through the "αὐγοειδέσι τῶν ψυχῶν περιβλήμασιν" (luminous garment of the soul).[43] As these descriptions of pure imaginative receptivity do comport to Butler's description of antique practices, let us broaden our scope and examine two striking instances of the active-cum-receptive use. We find our first example in Plotinus (c. 204–270), whose imaginative praxis bears a striking similarity to certain techniques of the Golden Dawn described above. He instructs the reader to begin by creating an image of the universe in its totality within their imagination. This visualization is to be as realistic and life-like as possible, so as to be a most suitable receptacle for the vision that is to follow. If properly constructed, Plotinus tells us that God may descend into it—filling this microcosmic image of the cosmos with the macrocosm and all its gods.[44] In this example we see a clear instance of the imagination being first used in the active mode, to create an image, and second in a receptive mode, to channel the vision into the constructed image. In a similar vein, we find a technique utilizing the *vis imaginativa* described in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.[45] Under this set of instructions, the operator is instructed to envision himself *as* God; this is to say that he is to visualize his own form as being identical with the body of God (i.e. the cosmos). In doing so, he is able to obtain νοῆσαι τὸν θεόν (understanding of God). Again, what we have here is a clear instance of the same type of active-cum-passive imaginative operation that was the hallmark of the Golden Dawn's praxis.

Moving forward to the Middle Ages, we see a similar picture with the types of imaginative exercises found in instructions and descriptions of imaginative practices running the full gamut from pure receptivity, pure constructivity, and the mixture detailed above. One of the clearest medieval examples of the active-cum-passive uses of the imaginative faculty is the *Liber visionum* of John of Morigny (fourteenth century).[46] Referencing the visualization exercises Luhr-

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Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 220–21.

[42] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 2.6.82.

[43] Proclus, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Rem publicam commentarii*, ed. Wilhelm Kroll, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899–1901), 1.39.9–11.

[44] Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.8.9.

[45] *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A.D. Nock and trans. A.J. Festugière, 4 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946–1954), 11.20

[46] *Liber visionum* is, itself, "the first part or book of John's three part work *Liber florum celestis doctrine*," a critical edition of which is currently being prepared by Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson. Claire Fanger, "*Libri Nigromantici*: The Good, the Bad, and the Ambiguous in John

mann describes "as central to the meditative programs of modern pagans," Frank Klaassen notes that "explicit visualization exercises also occur," in this text, "in which the operator must contemplate scenes from the life of Christ or the virgin."[47] In other words, as with the uses of the *vis imaginativa* we saw in Plotinus and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, John's method begins with active visualisation which then transforms into the passive reception of visions. The prologue to *Liber visionum* is quite clear in its assertion that the receiving of visions from the divine is precipitated by willed visualizations performed by the operator. He is instructed to "cogita hic quod tu sis in itinere paradisi" (think about being on the road to paradise)[48] Moreover, this initial type of "ymaginatio" (imagination)—along with other, more specific exercises detailed later in the book—is further described as one of the key steps towards obtaining a theophany.[49]

In his analysis of *Liber visionum*, Nicholas Watson notes that this kind of "intellectual vision"—that is, willed visualization—was not at all uncommon in medieval works on mysticism and magic.[50] This fact is also noted by Faivre, who finds that "during the Middle Ages, there was no dearth of philosophers to expound this *vis imaginativa*."[51] Klaassen divides these visualization exercises into two broad categories: structured, guided visualizations (like *Liber visionum*) and less guided visualizations.[52] He notes the explicit rarity of the former in medieval texts, but demonstrates that visual imagery of the incantations and prayers as used in ritual practices during that period fall under the second category.[53] Klaassen further notes the "strong commonalities between the "visionary scripts" of medieval affective piety and those appearing in necromantic manuals."[54] He theorizes the passages in medieval necromantic texts which describe the visions that an operator is *supposed* to have after performing a specific ritual *actually* may have been a "visionary-script" which functioned

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of Morigny's *Flowers of Heavenly Teaching*," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7, no. 2 (2012): 165.

[47] Frank Klaassen, "Subjective Experience and the Practice of Medieval Ritual Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7, no. 1 (2012): 39.

[48] John of Morigny, "The Prologue to John of Morigny's *Liber Visionum*: Text and Translation," ed. and trans. Claire Fanger and Nicholas Watson, *Esoterica* 3 (2001): §50.

[49] Ibid., §45.

[50] Nicholas Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God*: Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 174.

[51] Faivre, "*Vis Imaginativa*," 100.

[52] Klaassen, "Subjective Experience," 40.

[53] Ibid., 41.

[54] Ibid., 42–43.

as a sort of guided meditation in the same manner as the contemporary texts of affective piety.[55]

Stepping into the Renaissance, we begin with the patriarch of fifteenth century Neoplatonism, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). The constructive use of the *vis imaginativa* was integral to Ficino's praxis.[56] Indeed, Ficino's use of the imaginative faculty was not purely receptive, as is evidenced by the fact that his principal method of invoking planetary intelligences relied heavily on active visualization done in tandem with—but potentially in the absence of—a variety of physical stimuli.[57] An example of this formula is found in Ficino's instruction on "quomodo spiritus fiat Solaris" (how the spirit is made solar) where he implores the practitioner to "Solaria induas, habites, conspicias, audias, olfacias, imagineris, cogites, cupias" (wear, inhabit, view, hear, smell, imagine, think about, and desire solar things) so as to transform oneself into a suitable receptacle for the solar spirit.[58] D.P. Walker notes that Ficino would apply the forces of the imagination—alongside appropriate words and music—both in the manufacture and use of planetary amulets.[59] Ficino specifically notes that the active use of the imagination is the key factor in the use of telesic images, and that when it came to the use of such talismans—or of medicine—that the imaginatively empowered belief in the medicine's efficacy was vital to its efficacy.[60]

We also see a clear continuation within Renaissance esotericism of the aforementioned visionary scripts of medieval affective piety in the imaginative techniques of Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). Luhrmann draws a distinct connection between the visualization exercises of contemporary magicians and the system of Ignatius, noting that "the effect of imaging has been known

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[55] For affective pietist practices, see: Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

[56] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 103; D.P. Walker, *Spiritual & Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 76.

[57] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 79–80.

[58] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life: A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes*, eds. and trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clarke (Tempe: The Renaissance Society of America, 1998), 3.14.

[59] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 80. This Ficinian technique bears strong similarities to Don Skemmer's interpretation of medieval amulet magic. In describing the seals and sigils of amulets, he theorises that the magician would seek to enhance the amulet's magical efficacy by means of the active visualization of the sigil. Don C. Skemmer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 205, 225.

[60] Ficino, *Three Books*, 3.20.

for centuries" and "is particularly vividly illustrated in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius."[61] These close formal similarities between modern esoteric visualization and Ignatian techniques are also noted by Ann Taves, who compares the visualizations found in Wiccan rituals both to Catholic "lay practices of meditation and visualization" and Ignatius's more structured exercises.[62] The thrust of Ignatius's work, *Exercitia spiritualia*, is that these are not strictly visions that were received by the author, but rather are visionary scripts to be used by others so that they may derive a genuine religious experience from the practice. In a memorable passage from the *Exercitia*, Ignatius instructs the student to visualize his soul as being a prisoner inside his body.[63] The language used by Ignatius clearly demonstrates that the operator is to create these visions within his mind's eye—that these are cues for the operator's active imagination.

One of the clearest statements on the *vis imaginativa* in Renaissance *magia* is found in the works of Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535). Christopher Lehrich describes the imagination in Agrippa's *magia* as the faculty which bridges "the barrier between natural and celestial," and as the means by which "human minds can affect nature."[64] As Butler describes pre-modern practitioners using the imaginative faculty (and as we have seen in examples from antiquity), Agrippa does describe the imagination in terms of pure receptivity, noting that the "virtus imaginativa et cogitativa" (imaginative and cogitative powers) are the means by which man prehends all things.[65] However, in *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, we also find a strictly active use of the imaginative faculty that bears extremely strong similarities to Farr's methods for materially oriented operations. He explicitly tells us that an elevated soul may, by means of a "uehementi imaginatione accensa" (vehemently inflamed imagination) affect the health of its own body and those of others.[66] Neither was this belief in the efficacy of will-driven imagination a peculiarity of Agrippa's. Ficino's student, Francesco Diacceto (1466–1522) informs us that his teacher believed, for example, that the inflamed imagination can fly out through the eyes—and other bodily

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[61] Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 194.

[62] Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 154–55.

[63] Ignatius of Loyola, *Exercita spiritualia in sacra octo dierum solitudine* (Woodstock: Coll. SS. Cordis, 1892), 42.

[64] Christopher I. Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 42.

[65] Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, ed. V. Perrone Compagni (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 3.43.

[66] Ibid., 1.65.

channels—to influence the course of external events.[67] Similarly, Athanasius Kircher (c. 1602–1680) taught that the "magna & stupenda vis imaginativæ facultatis" (great and wonderful imaginative faculty) was capable of such wonders as bringing about disease or altering the appearance of a fetus.[68]

Finally, no tour of Renaissance utilization of the *vis imaginativa* would be complete without incorporating the techniques of active imagination which comprised the *ars memorativa* (art of memory).[69] It is not surprising to see how a practice involving this kind of imaginative construction of vast pieces of architecture containing images of items to be later recalled would have been very attractive to practitioners of Renaissance *magia*. The first man to make the connection between the two domains of praxis was Giulio Camillo (c. 1480–1544),[70] who did so by making use of the Hermetic axiom of the reflexivity of the microcosm and the macrocosm.[71] Camillo's "memory theatre" allowed the operator to, through visualization, construct an interior model of the universe through which he could come to know God—a practice which we saw made use of by Proclus and in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.[72] Thus, by constructing a mirror image of the cosmos within, he was able to receive the influence of the divine, transforming the previously rhetorical *ars memorativa* into a technique through which the microcosm could more aptly reflect the macrocosm.[73] This idea was carried forward by Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), who explicitly transformed the *ars memorativa* into an *ars magica*. Bruno built upon Camillo's use of Hermetic reflexivity to create an active imaginative

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[67] Francesco Diacceto, *Opera omni Francisci Catanei Diacetii* (Basil: Petri et Perna, 1563), 46.

[68] Athanasius Kircher, *Scrutinium physico-medicum contagiosæ luis, qvæ dicitur pestis* (Leipzig: Schurerianor and Joh. Fritzschii, 1671), 64.

[69] Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 2–3: The *ars memorativa* was originally a rhetorical technique "by which the orator could improve his memory, which would enable him to deliver long speeches from memory with unfailing accuracy." This was achieved by first imprinting "a series of *loci* or places […] on the memory," by imagining a spacious building, complete with a multitude of rooms and ornaments, whereupon the orator would place "images by which the speech is to be remembered"—that is to say, that images relating to key sections of the speech would be placed in a specific order throughout the imaginal building. Once done, when wishing to remember a speech, the orator would "walk" through this building in his imagination, recalling his speech by means of the parade of images.

[70] Ibid., 148–49.

[71] This metaphysical position, that lower hypostases are reflections of higher levels, is a foundational point in Hermetic metaphysics: cf. *Asclepius* in vol. 2 of *Corpus Hermeticum*, §37.

[72] Yates, *Art of Memory*, 148–49. Giulio Camillo, *L'idea del Theatro* (Florence: 1550).

[73] Yates, *Art of Memory*, 157–58.

practice whose aim was "to establish this magical ascent within."[74] Bruno's system was a "magico-religious technique for grasping and unifying the world of appearances through the arrangements of significant images" that solely operated by means of the active use of imagination.[75] These techniques all bear strong formal similarities to the active-cum-passive utilizations of the imaginative faculty described in the Golden Dawn's instructional documents.

Unmediated Invocation

We now begin the second portion of our re-evaluation of the Golden Dawn's alleged newness: Butler's claims regarding invocatory techniques used by the order. In unpacking this point, Butler tells us that "medieval and early modern ritual magic traditionally involved three parties: the magician, the god or divine entity whose power is invoked and a spiritual intermediary."[76] She notes the Solomonic genre as typical of this formula, where the angelic or demonic beings function as intermediary spirits between God and the necromancer.[77] She contrasts this against the order's use of Mathers's translation of *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, a late medieval text written by Abraham of Worms (c. 1362–c. 1458) that contains a system of magic purported to have been taught to him by an Egyptian magician named Abramelin, as an "example of the exclusion of an intermediary" where "the magician's goal is to achieve direct communication with his guardian angel."[78] She claims that the Golden Dawn's invocatory techniques were strict, two-party operations involving only the operator and the god or spirit he was invoking. Her description of the order's praxis parses it as either "bringing the power or aspect of the deity, or spirit, into him/herself" or "bringing the power or aspect of the deity, or spirit, up out of the corresponding region of him/herself."[79] This process was one that Butler claims completely eliminated the traditional types of intermediaries (everything from lesser spirits to children) that abounded in pre-modern magic. She does note that this technique of direct, intermediary-less invoca-

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[74]   Ibid., 228. Bruno's system is outlined most clearly in: Giordano Bruno, *De umbris idearum*, in vol. 2 of *Jordai Bruni Nolani opera latine conscripta publicis sumptibus edita*, 3 vols. (Naples: D. Morano, 1879–1891), 1–55.

[75]   Yates, *Art of Memory*, 229.

[76]   Butler, "Making Magic Modern," 218.

[77]   Ibid., 218.

[78]   Ibid., 220.

[79]   Ibid., 220; Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 41.

tion was "a re-interpretation of Neo-Platonic theurgy," but maintains that the order was responsible for its reintroduction[80]—a claim which necessitates the absence of such techniques during the middle ages and the Renaissance.

In beginning our re-assessment of Butler's claim, as with our exploration of the *vis imaginativa*, we look first to examine the veracity of her assertions about the praxis of the Golden Dawn itself. One of the order's fundamental practices was the "vibration" of divine names. This involved a technique in which the operator—by means of imaginative visualization—draws down the "White Rays from above" into the heart of his microcosm, visualizes the letters of the divine name he is invoking in this light, and then proceeds to pronounce the name in such a way that his "whole system" begins to vibrate and will "spread out into space."[81] An example of this formula is found in the order's "Ritual for Transformation" where the magician—again, using the constructive-cum-receptive mode of the *vis imaginativa*—builds an imaginary image of Isis, petitions her to descend into this image, and then assumes this image into himself, thus "becoming" the goddess for a time.[82] We find yet another instance in the "Ritual for Spiritual Development," in which the operator uses the Hellenistic "ἐγώ εἰμι" (I am) formula (to be detailed below) to directly identify himself with the god invoked.[83] Finally, this technique is part and parcel of "The Bornless Ritual for the Invocation of the Higher Genius," [84] which is a pivotal example of a two-party operation between the operator and his genius being invoked.[85] As with the "Ritual for Spiritual Development," this rite begins with a direct petition to the genius and then culminates with a direct identification between the two parties.

While these four examples certainly do support Butler's characterization of the order's praxis, further investigation proves that there are a number of

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[80]   Butler, "Making Magic Modern," 221.
[81]   "Talismans: The Formation of Talismans and Flashing Tablets," in *The Golden Dawn*, ed. Israel Regardie et al., 6th ed. (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), 491.
[82]   "Ritual for Transformation," in *The Golden Dawn*, 6th ed., eds. Israel Regardie et al. (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), 430–33.
[83]   "Ritual for Spiritual Development," in *The Golden Dawn*, 6th ed., eds. Israel Regardie et al. (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), 440.
[84]   "The Bornless Ritual for the Invocation of the Higher Genius," in *The Golden Dawn*, 6th ed., eds. Israel Regardie et al. (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), 442–45.
[85]   The "Higher Genius" with which this ritual is concerned is described by Wescott in page 115 of "Flying Roll No. 19 as the principal goal towards which adepts of the Golden Dawn should strive: "as regards Spiritual Development you promised in the Obligation to use every effort to purify and exalt the Spiritual Nature so that you may be able to unify yourself with what the Hermetists call his 'Higher Genius'."

instances in which the Golden Dawn's invocatory formulas *did* make use of intermediaries. Following Iamblichus's maxim, lesser entities are always to be evocated by means of the intermediacy of their superiors; the evocation rituals of the order summoned secondary spirits by virtue of the prior invoking of that spirit's superior in the hierarchy.[86] Among the order's various techniques, it is in the Enochian system that we see some of the strongest instances of mediated evocation.[87] The evocation of the angel Enochian Axir that Israel Regardie (1907–1985) presents follows this formula by first invoking the hypostasis of God which governs the angel,[88] and *then* petitioning God to "cause [Axir] to come swiftly."[89] Indeed, the magician even announces to the angel that he does not command him in his own name, "but by the majesty of Adonai Ha-Aretz and Emor Dial Hectega." Apart from official order materials like the rituals described above, we must also delve into two of the order's ancillary works on magic that, while not Golden Dawn material *sensu stricto*, certainly affected its members greatly. The first of these were the Solomonic grimoires translated by Mathers. Butler, as we saw above, contrasted the Solomonic grimoires against the Golden Dawn's technique of invocation; however, as Mathers's translations revived their usage within the order, we cannot treat them as wholly separate from the order's magic.[90] As such, two examples from Mathers's translations of these works serve to reinforce instances of invocatory formulas within the order that make use of intermediaries. *The Key of Solomon* has the operator begin the operation by directly invoking God prior

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[86] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 9.9.284.

[87] The Enochian magic described in the Golden Dawn documents represents the order's adaption of materials claimed to have been received by John Dee (1529–1608/9) and Edward Kelley (1555–1597) from various angels during a period extending from 1582 to 1589. For an examination of the Golden Dawn's adaption of this material, see: Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*, 43–68.

[88] "Evocation Ritual," in *The Golden Dawn*, 6th ed., eds. Israel Regardie et al. (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), 408–09.

[89] Ibid., 410–11.

[90] Apart from the connection with Mathers himself, Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and George Cecil Jones (1873–1960), while members of the Golden Dawn, are known to have made extensive use of the *Lemegeton clavicula Salomonis*. (Hymenaeus Beta, Editor's Introduction to the Second Edition of *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King: Lemegeton—Clavicula Salomonis Regis, Book One*, trans. Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, eds. and ann. Aleister Crowley and Hymenaeus Beta, 2nd ed. (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1995), xiv). For a comparison of Mathers's editions of the Solomonic grimoires with the medieval source material itself, see: Francisco Silva, "Mathers' Translation of the *Clavicula Salomonis*: The Relationship Between Translator, Text and Transmission of a 'Religious' Text" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2009).

to summoning the lesser spirits by God's intermediacy.[91] In an almost identical fashion, *The Goetia* proceeds with the operator explicitly conjuring the demon by means of God's power as well: "I do invoke and conjure thee O Spirit, N.; and being with power armed from the Supreme Majesty, I do strongly command thee."[92]

More important to our examination of Butler's claim is her use of the Abramelin system as being representative of the order's newness while at the same time using the Solomonic texts as exemplars of the medieval necromancy that the Golden Dawn was supposed to be superseding. As there is no doubt that the Abramelin book is a medieval work, whatever techniques we find in it are necessarily *not* indicative of any *true* novelty on the order's part, but speak of the Golden Dawn's willingness to assimilate the practices of past practitioners. The case cannot be made that one type of practice (i.e. the Solomonic genre) is strictly medieval and another (i.e. the Abramelin system) is modern when both types date from the same era and were used by the same Golden Dawn magicians. Thus, if we take the Solomonic texts as examples of ancient practice, then the Abramelin system must be relegated to that category as well—which weakens her argument that the order's invocatory methodology was principally intermediary-less. However, if we take both systems as being representative of the Golden Dawn's magical praxis, then that too weakens Butler's thesis, as the Solomonic formulas described above make copious use of intermediaries. In short, this cannot be an either/or proposition; it can only be both/and.

This issue is doubly compounded by the fact that Butler mischaracterizes the Abramelin system as being intermediary-less, when Mathers's edition makes explicit use of intermediaries throughout. Indeed, the operation is consistently described as a process in which the operator *first* invokes God, who then commands the angel to appear before the operator—a ritual mechanic which is fundamentally no different from the goetic conjuration of demons by means of God's intermediacy. The book describes the operation using stock phrases which are repeated throughout, such as: "a man who should deal with God by the intermediary of His Holy Angels,"[93] or "with God, by the intermediation of His Holy Angels."[94] When describing the actual steps by which the practi-

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[91]   *The Key of Solomon the King (Clavicula Salomonis)*, ed. and trans. Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000), 25–26.

[92]   *The Goetia*, 81.

[93]   Abraham the Jew, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage, as Delivered by Abraham the Jew Unto His Son Lamech, AD 1458*, trans. S.L. MacGregor Mathers (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 58.

[94]   Ibid., 53.

tioner achieves communion with his angel, the Abramelin manual tells us that the practitioner is to entreat "the Lord God that He would deign to command His Holy Angels to lead you in the True Way."[95] This formula is repeated *ad nauseam* throughout the book.[96] Additionally, Butler's claim specifically noted that the Golden Dawn's magic was free from the "innocent" medium of medieval *magia*. However, in the Abramelin book, we find the innocent to be integral to the operation,[97] which serves to diminish further any claims towards the Abramelin system being free from "medieval" intermediaries.

Our investigation having, thus far, challenged Butler's assertion that the Golden Dawn's magic was bereft of intermediaries, we delve into the second part of this claim: that this intermediary-less formula was new. As she mentions, this formula originates with late Platonic theurgy. One of the largest repositories of antique spells is the collection known as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, wherein is found dozens of instances of the "ἐγώ εἰμι" (I am) formula of invocation, whose prominence is evidenced by a tremendous number of spells.[98] One of the most striking of these examples is the aforementioned ritual that was adapted by the Golden Dawn as "The Bornless Ritual for the Invocation of the Higher Genius." In its original form, the ritual announces itself as an invocation of the "ἀκέφαλος δαίμων" (headless daemon), and culminates with the operator identifying with that same entity: "σὲ καλῶ τὸν ἀκέφαλον […] ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἀκέφαλος δαίμων" (I evoke thee, headless one […] I am the headless daemon).[99] There are no intermediary beings between the operator and this daimon; it is a strict two-party ritual. Similarly, although Iamblichus describes varying degrees of divine invocation—ranging from μετουσία (participation) to κοινωνία (communion) and ἕνωσις (union)—*all* strictly involve the theurgist and the god invoked.[100] He also notes that it is the operator's use of the "ὀνόματα θεῖα" ("divine names") and "θεῖα συνθήματα" ("divine symbols") that are responsible for raising up the operator to the gods—not

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[95] Ibid., 69–70.
[96] Ibid., 64, 70–71, 83, 133.
[97] Ibid., 45.
[98] *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, 1.247–62, 3.282–409, 3.410–23, 3.633–731, 4.52–85, 4.88–93, 4.94–153, 4.296–466, 4.475–829, 4.930–1114, 4.1929–2005, 4.2241–2358, 4.2967–3006, 4.3125–71, 5.213–303, 5.459–89, 7.405–6, 7.423–28, 7.490–504, 8.1–63, 12.14–95, 12.453–65, 13.335–340, 14.1–92, 14.239–95, 14.295–308, 14. 309–34, 14.627–35, 14.701–5, 14.750–71, 14.772–804, 14.841–50, 14.1163–79, 36.161–77, 36.187–210, 36.283–94, 36.312–20, 61.1–30, 69.1–3, 70.4–25, suppl.60–101, suppl.162–68, suppl.168–84, and suppl.185–208.
[99] Ibid., 5.96–172.
[100] Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 3.5.111.

the intermediary beings.[101]

Although these examples from Late Antiquity do comport to Butler's thesis, her claim that the Golden Dawn's use of this formula was a direct revival of antique Platonic practices means that we should not find intermediary-less invocation present during the intervening centuries; this is, however, not the case. Coming back to *Liber visionum*, we see that John's visions were at times obtained by the direct invocation of the Virgin.[102] John also alludes to something very similar to the Neoplatonic idea of suitability, telling us that the practitioner who wishes to invoke the Virgin must first make himself a suitable vessel.[103] This bears strong similarities to the Neoplatonic ideas of ἐπιτηδειότης (fitness, or suitableness) and συμπάθεια (sympathy), whereby the operator consciously shapes his interior self into a suitable receptacle into which the divine can manifest. This notion of ἐπιτηδειότης is explained by Shaw as analogous to the way wood is dried to enhance its suitability for fire's actualization; in a similar manner the soul is gradually purified to make the operator fit for the manifestation of the gods within him.[104] Klaassen also notes that the direct invocation of the Virgin in *Liber visionum* "is a common feature of the Notory Art which sets it apart from works on conjuring" which deal with intermediaries.[105] Therefore, it comes as no surprise to find nearly identical invocations in the *Ars notoria* and *Liber iuratus Honorii* that directly invoke God for divinely oriented ends. The prayers from both texts begin with formulaic phrasing, invoking "Deus omnipotens" (God almighty) directly.[106] The *Ars notoria*'s prayer then asks for various degrees of divine "intelligentie, et intellectus" (intelligence and understanding),[107] while *Liber iuratus* petitions God for "facialem tiu […] visionem" (a vision of your face).[108] This brief foray into antique medieval techniques of

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[101] Ibid., 1.12.42. For a full treatment of Iamblichus' techniques of invocation, see: John M. Dillon, "Iamblichus' Theory of Prayer," in *In Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta*, 2nd ed. (Wiltshire: The Prometheus Trust, 2009), 407–11.

[102] John the Monk, "The Prologue," §31.

[103] Ibid., §48.

[104] Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 86.

[105] Frank Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300–1500: A Preliminary Survey," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 17.

[106] *L'Ars notoria au Moyen Age: Introduction et édition critique*, ed. Julien Véronèse (Firenze: SISMEL, 2007), 140–41; *Liber iuratus Honorii: A Critical Edition of the Latin Version of the Sworn Book of Honorius*, ed. Gösta Hedegård (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2002), 15.1–5.

[107] *L'Ars notoria*, 140–41.

[108] *Liber iuratus*, 15.1–5.

evocation and invocation is similar to our investigation of the methods of the Golden Dawn itself. We see that practitioners of that era made use of spiritual intermediaries at times, but at other times performed intermediary-less invocations—the general trend being that lesser beings were evocated by means of the intermediacy of their superiors, while those superiors themselves were invoked directly.

Stepping into the Renaissance, we find a similar arrangement. While the "magical" books and techniques of the middle ages still had a great deal of currency during the Renaissance,[109] the fifteenth century also saw a revival of the texts and traditions of late classical theurgy. As such, it is unsurprising to see that Ficino made extensive use of the Neoplatonic notions of "fitness" and "suitability," whose connection with intermediary-less invocation has already been noted.[110] However, similar to the magicians of the Golden Dawn, it appears that Ficino at some points invoked the planetary intelligences without intermediaries, but at others made use of angelic intermediaries.[111] Diacceto's description of Ficinian invocation is notably free from any intervening spirits, and simply opens a conduit between the Solar god and the operator—with no intermediary angels or demons involved.[112] The invocatory system of Agrippa too operated in such a fashion that it opened a direct conduit between the operator and God by means of the divine names—a technique which calls to mind Iamblichus' statement noted above.[113] Agrippa makes a further reference—drawing on the Neoplatonic idea of suitability—to the two-party

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[109] For an examination of this continuance, see: Frank Klaassen, "Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance," *Aries* 3, no. 2 (2003): 166–99; Claire Fanger, "Medieval Ritual Magic: What it is and Why We Need to Know More About it," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), vii–xviii; Frank Klaassen, *The Transformation of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); Julien Véronèse, "Magic, Theurgy, and Spirituality in the Medieval Ritual of the Ars Notoria," trans. Claire Fanger, in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 37–78; Claire Fanger, "Introduction: Theurgy, Magic, and Mysticism," in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 1–33.

[110] Ficino, *Three Books*, 3.14.

[111] Ibid., 3.22.

[112] Diacceto, *Opera*, 46: "Canit inquam primò diuinæ solis Henadi, canit dein menti, postremò canit animæ. . Siquidem unum, mens, anima, tria rerum, omnium principia sunt" (He first sings to the divine Solar Henad, then he sings to the Mind, and lastly he sings to the Soul. For, the One, Mind, and Soul are the three principles of all).

[113] Lehrich, *The Language*, 183; Agrippa, *De occulta*, 3.11.

invocation of God, telling the reader that the orations "dimoveatque tenebras" (dispell darkness) from our souls, allowing God to illuminate our minds.[114] We find further references still in *De occulta*, where Agrippa makes use of similar techniques to invoke God by means of fixating our thought on him—a technique which, again, makes use of no intermediaries, but is rather an operation solely between the operator and his God.[115] Again, we see a strong degree of morphological similarity between the invocatory techniques of the Golden Dawn and those of past practitioners.

Conclusion

In summary, what this study has demonstrated is that in both areas examined, Butler's thesis of the morphological novelty of the Golden Dawn's magical practice is misfounded. Regarding the *vis imaginativa*, contrary to Butler's claim that the Golden Dawn's use of active imagination was both their sole mode of utilizing the imaginative faculty and that this represented an innovation, it found that all three uses of the imaginative faculty—active, passive, and active-cum-passive—were prominent in the order's praxis, and that the uses of the imagination within selected pre-modern practices bore a remarkable degree of formal similarity to those of the order. It was also found that Butler's claims as to the use of intermediary-less invocatory formulas within the Golden Dawn were problematic. Not only did we find that the ways in which the order itself invoked spiritual beings were mischaracterized, but the techniques of pre-modern practitioners were similarly mistreated.

This being the case, where does this leave our understanding of the Golden Dawn's magic? As discussed in the introduction, the formal level treated in this study is but one component of a matrix through which the idea of sameness within a tradition can be analyzed. As such, to speak of the order's magic as being totally similar, within the context of homological-diachronic comparative analysis, to anything which came before is a position which cannot be argued based solely on this research. However, what I believe we *can* definitively say, within this same methodological framework, is that the ritual mechanics by which the members of the order practiced magic—the formal, morphological level of analysis—are characterized by a strong sense of similarity. In this way it is certainly meaningful to speak of the order's magic as being, in one

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[114] Agrippa, *De occulta*, 2.60.
[115] Ibid., 3.43.

sense, similar to some of the more commonly evidenced practices of centuries gone by. Thus, while there may very well be ways in which the order's magic was a fundamentally modern transformation, their ritual morphology does not appear to be an instance of magic being made modern.

The ramifications of this conclusion extend beyond the bounds of both Butler's study as well as the Golden Dawn itself. It is inarguable that the magical techniques of the order have, in the wake of Regardie's epochal *The Golden Dawn*,[116] been transferred to and filtered throughout the great majority of contemporary esoteric currents which concern themselves with the practice of ritual magic.[117] As such, if it is the case that—on the morphological level at least—the Golden Dawn's magic can be demonstrated along homological-diachronic lines to be similar to the practices of Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, then the claims of the connections made by these myriad modern groups to past traditions must similarly be re-evaluated.[118] Indeed, in terms of ritual mechanics at the very least, it may be that modern magic on the whole is a great deal *less modern* than it appears to be.

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[116] *The Golden Dawn: An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Order of the Golden Dawn*, ed. Israel Regardie, 4 vols., 1st ed. (Chicago: The Aries Press, 1937–1940).

[117] Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*, 38–41; Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived," 366.

[118] For the use of *tradition* as a discursive strategy in contemporary esoteric currents, see: Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 85–200; James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer, eds., *The Invention of Sacred Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Andreas B. Kilcher, ed., *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

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