

The Principles of Ritual Logic

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Abstract: The practice of occultism is an alternative phenomenon in respect of the ordinary modalities of the dominant religious institutions in a given historical period. On occasion, however, this practice is not confined to the context of deviance but can lead to the commission of criminal actions. It is therefore useful to highlight the means of reasoning, even if seemingly incomprehensible, which forms the basis of the accomplishment of magical acts. Contrary to what one may think, the world of occultism is not something improvised and insensate, yet it is characterised by principles that govern what could be defined as a "ritual logic", endowed with its own peculiar internal coherence that guide the actions of those who still practice magic today. Considering primarily the occultist writings and the history of magic, this article seeks to identify such principles in order to begin to comprehend not only one of the most historically representative domains of deviance, but also the motivations of the offenders and victims involved in ritual crimes.

Keywords: Rituals, occultism, history of magic, deviance.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of occultism is an alternative phenomenon in respect of the ordinary modalities of the dominant religious institutions in a given historical period. Sometimes, however, this practice is not confined to the context of deviance but can lead to the commission of criminal actions (cf. Mongardini and Ugolini 2012). It is therefore useful to highlight the means of reasoning, even if seemingly incomprehensible, which forms the basis of the accomplishment of magical acts.

A preliminary distinction is required with regards to the terminological needs concerning the various subjects, at least those who are the most representative, able to practice magic. The occultist, heir to the Renaissance magician, is one who is able to recognise and master the forces of the entire universe, hence both Good and Evil. The Satanist, on the other hand, as well as the black magic cultist, chooses to know and practice only the way of Evil. Hence, in the eyes of an authentic occultist, a Satanist is to be abhorred not due to the ethical choice of Evil, but because of their inability to understand the true nature of the universe and the dynamics that sustain it, based on the equilibrium between opposing forces. This explains that which would otherwise be apparent contradictions: the magician, for example, invokes the names of divine powers even during evocations of demons. Such persons, in fact, are able to turn night into day, as J. Böhme (1925) pointed out, and may choose to employ both white and black magic and

resort, in any case, to the symbols of divine protection. Anglo-Saxon Wicca does not acknowledge any god that is wholly positive or negative, but venerates the forces of Nature that are expressed in two fundamental deities: the lunar goddess Mother and the male "Horned God". According to organised and systematic liturgical forms, Satanism, on the other hand (Introvigne 2016), venerates the figure of Satan, the fallen angel of the Bible. Compared to Satanists, the followers of the Left-Hand Path, present mainly in Northern Europe, are not so interested in venerating Satan in traditional ceremonies, but rather in the research for and intellectual development of a path of understanding and of knowledge based on a meeting with the various dark forces, including, but not limited to, Satan (Karlsson 2004).

First and foremost when dealing with the principles of occultism, it is necessary to recall the classification of the various types of magic based on their purpose. Black magic has destructive purposes. This kind of magic is used when it comes to harming a person (or less commonly, an animal). The most characteristic rite, and also the most famous, is undoubtedly spell, of which a classic definition is present in the *Compendium Maleficarum*: *maleficium* is that form of magic through which a man, with the help of the devil, causes harm to another (Guaccio 1998). White magic has by way of purpose to protect and/or heal a person. It is the kind of magic that is intended to cure illnesses with the use of herbs, concoctions, spells or prayers addressed to saints, angels or, in any case, spirits considered to be beneficial. Included in the context of white magic spells is also the propitiation concerning fortune, wealth and health, especially through talismans. Red magic or the magic of love is aimed at "binding" a person through a bond of erotic and emotional attraction that is

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considered irresistible. The binds of love predominantly use, in addition to the famous potions, the so-called knot magic, through which a tight and loving bond is symbolically reproduced. It is also necessary to distinguish love magic from the more specific sex magic in which coitus represents a veritable ritual act. The essence of this act consists in the possibility of formulating a desire and, once imaginatively visualised, to recall such in one's mind upon orgasm. Indeed, it is in this moment that, by exploiting the intensity of the erotic force, it can be consciously channelled and diverted in a magical sense. Sex magic, however, also has other and particular aims. In fact, it can be used to activate latent power in the individual, producing effects of inner illumination and enhancement of their own magic force. In addition, there is a variation of sex magic called "internal alchemy", known and practiced by ceremonial magic groups and also present in areas that are predominantly Satanist, aimed at obtaining permanent physical regeneration. Sexual alchemy contributes, in fact, to creating the so-called incorruptible and immortal "body of glory". It is the result of the inwardly diversion of sexual energy, obtained by consuming an Elixir formed from the male and female sexual secretions (cf. Cavendish 1972; Chocod 1979). These regard rituals already practiced in antiquity in certain gnostic groups, such as the Fibonites and Barbēlō-agnostics (Hutin 2007). Divinatory magic is proposed to predict the future. Today, the instruments used by occultists predominantly for divine rites are undoubtedly the Tarot and, to a lesser extent, the Runes.

PRINCIPLES

The dynamics of magic are based on the presence and mobilisation of strength, energy, and occult power. Such force, which pervades the universe, must be managed and mastered by the occultist for the accomplishment of any magical act. The greater the ability of the occultist in acquiring energy, the greater the effectiveness of the magic. In the European tradition, Eliphas Lévi has clearly described this force with the name of "astral light". This term indicates a blind, neutral force that, in itself, is neither good nor evil. Its value depends on the will of those at the helm. Astral light also appears under another name: Lucifer. In Lévi's perspective, this is not one of the Devil's names, given that there is a clear distinction, accepted by much of the occult tradition, between Lucifer and Satan. Only the latter indicates the fatal irrationality that personifies evil. Lucifer, rather, is the angel who bears the light of occult knowledge that is usually concealed

and forbidden to mankind, with his symbol being that of the serpent in Genesis (Lévi 1996).

The more elevated the aim of the ritual, the greater the occult force that needs to be mobilised. "Elevated" in this perspective, does not have an ethical meaning, but refers to the degree of complexity of the ritual objective, being in regards to what constraints and natural limits the magic act must be able to coerce and deviate. Beyond common opinion, the confine of good/evil is something that magic is used to effortlessly overcoming. As has been noted, the occultist should be able - by definition - to manage both of these forces. It is more difficult, however, to force the confines between life and death. For this reason, it is believed, by way of illustration, that the rituals for the evocation of the dead and those that propose physical regeneration, being the prolongation of life beyond the normal extent, require large amounts of occult strength. This involves the use of practices that are characterised, for example, by particular brutality and violence, sacrifices of blood and of humans, of extreme and deviant sexuality - these are, in fact, the ceremonial modes capable of releasing greater intensities of energy.

To understand ritual logic, therefore, requires highlighting the principles that govern the management of occult strength. One of the best-known is the so-called "law of recoil" that, when a magical act is undertaken, especially if evil, must reach its objectives at all costs. If, for various reasons, the mass energy in play does not occur, it preserves its intensity and inevitably returns to the starting point. It can be said that, in magic, the nothing does not exist. This implies that if an evil spell does not impact upon the person to whom it was destined, it will return to the person who performed the incantation. In magical conflicts, therefore, those who launch a spell must be certain that those who receive it have a magical force that is inferior, or at least equal to their own, or that they do not have more powerful means of protection. What's more, this also signifies that the occultist must be able to master the energy invoked and which gives it form. Hence the reason why the magician tries to protect themselves within magical circles, through pentacles and other ritual constructions. The mechanisms of the law of recoil prove to be clearly in effect when combatting a spell with a counterspell, being with an equal and opposing magic action. The magician who destroys the spell must, of course, possess a magical power of such intensity that they can undo that undertaken by the magician who cast it. One of the

consequences of the law of recoil consists in that which Aleister Crowley, in *Magick* (1976:323), has effectively summed up thus: in magic, “nothing can upset the sum total of destiny: everything must be paid for the uttermost farthing. For this reason a great many operations theoretically possible cannot be performed. Suppose, for example, you see two men of equally unhealthy astral appearance. In one case the cause may be slight and temporary. Your help suffices to restore him in a few minutes. The other, who looks no worse, is really oppressed by a force incalculably greater than you could control, and you would only damage yourself by attempting to help him.”

The most commonly-known principles are the laws of “sympathy”, highlighted by scholars James Frazer (1997) and Marcel Mauss (1991). The type of rite in which they manifest themselves more exemplary is in *maleficium*. In death spells, for example, it is particularly evident how magic acts according to the principles of contiguity and similarity, as highlighted by Mauss. The law of contiguity is in operation in the moment in which, to achieve death, bones or human remains are used in the rite. In fact, every part of a corpse symbolically contains death and, consequently, propitiates all death-related rites. In addition, according to the principle for which like evokes like, a place of death will symbolically recall other deaths and as such, the graveyard would be the preferred site for such spells. The two recalled principles of sympathy also come into play when selecting the material and instruments used in the incantation. According to the law of contiguity, whereby the part is identified with the whole, in order to perform the rite, it is sufficient to possess something belonging to the person who is to be impacted, such as hair, nails, sweat or teeth. For a process of “contagion”, even an object that has been in contact with the person is enough, such as clothes, handkerchiefs, foods that have been bitten into, even footprints. According to the principle of similarity, any figure, drawing, portrait, or even the mere name renders a person present (Mauss). Consequently, acting upon an image that depicts, even in a simple and rudimentary way, the person to strike signifies already commencing with the death spell.

An important operating principle underlying the ritual logic is the famous hermetic saying “That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracle of the One Thing”. Engraved on the *Emerald Tablet* by Hermes Trismegistus (cf. Ruska 1926), this maxim indicates the chain of

correspondences, of similarities and oppositions that traverse and connect the earthly world with the higher worlds. In this perspective, the way in which the spheres of the stars govern and condition the various levels of the universe becomes essential. For example, the planet Venus will have stones, animals, colours, body parts, places and spirits that fall under its influence, and which the occultist will have to opportunely utilise in the case, for example, whereby red magic is to be performed. They would, rather, have to resort to the symbolic chain referring to Mars or Saturn for death or destructive ritual operations; for propitiatory rituals of glory or well-being, one would resort to all that falls under the symbolic sphere of Jupiter; and so on. Beyond the strictly-operational consequences, the said hermetic of the *Emerald Tablet* also brought to light the existing correlation between microcosm (human), represented by the symbol of the pentagram with the tip pointing upwards, and the macrocosm (universe) symbolised by the hexagram. Human beings, therefore, encapsulate and reflect the universe within. It is this principle that allows the occultist to act upon man to achieve an impact upon reality or, conversely, to act on reality to influence a subject.

Less well-known than the precedents, but more basic to understand the true essence of ritual logic, is the principle of union, or coincidence, of opposites. The human intellect manages to understand the world only through contrast, via pairs of opposites: good/evil, feminine/masculine, wet/dry, hot/cold, spirit/matter, active/passive, sun/moon. Beyond ourselves, therefore, we only perceive diversity and multiplicity. The antagonistic entities by which we perceive, however, exist only within us: in reality, there is only the absolute Unity that proves, in any case, elusive and incomprehensible to our intellect. Symbols of this force, unique in its essence, but with seemingly opposing manifestations that the occultist must know and master, are the *uroboros* (a snake biting its own tail) and the double intertwined snake. Another very famous symbol of the union of opposites is the *Baphomet*, also used in specifically Satanic environments as an image placed before an altar. This comprises both male and female characters, human and animal, light and dark, whilst also including the pentagram and the double intertwined snake. The principle of the union of opposites, especially considered by Freemasonry (cf. Wirth 1967), also implies that evil is an essential element, a just and terrible force, indispensable in forming the equilibrium on which the universe is

supported. For the magical mind, light only makes sense in relation to a shadow that it delimits and brightens, just as the shadow must exist to allow the light to stand out in the fulness of its radiance. Evil becomes part of this dialectic as a counterweight to the good that cannot be, nor not be otherwise.

If we have so far considered the principles relating to the objective sphere of ritual dynamics, the two subjective faculties at work in magical action must be highlighted: will and imagination. It is necessary, in fact, that the occultist is able to develop and strengthen these two faculties at the highest levels. At the base of each magical act there is, in fact, a fierce and implacable will in addition to a marked visual imaginative ability. It is no coincidence that, in rituals, the demand for bizarre ingredients, which are near on impossible to find or which are found with great difficulty, has a very precise meaning: it is a way to temper the will of the magician to the point of rendering them able to impact upon reality through the image that they have vividly visualised in their own mind and which depicts that which is intended to pursue.

Still within the subjective domain of occultist logic, two opposing modes can be identified in achieving the same ritual goal: the path of the dominion of passions, attributable to the teachings of the occultist Eliphas Lévi; and, the way of unbridled passions, which can be traced back instead to another famous occultist, Aleister Crowley. According to Lévi, the magician must be the absolute master of themselves: impassive, sober, disinterested, able to lead a life comprised of regular habits and to practice abstinence. If, for example, a magician in love is unthinkable, so an envious or greedy magician is equally unlikely. To the contrary, according to Crowley, the occultist must transcend their individual conscience, blindly abandoning themselves to passions. This involves a state of exaltation and explosive frenzy, an uncontrollable excitement that will allow the occultist to reach a dramatic summit during the ritual ceremony, in which the desired occult energy will be liberated. There are several ways to reach such a state of inebriation: alcohol, drugs, the use of certain types of words, mysterious aromas, obsessive ritual dances,

incantations, and, in particular, unrestrained sexuality.

CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to what one may think, the world of occultism is not something improvised and insensate, yet it is characterised by principles that govern what could be defined as a "ritual logic", endowed with its own peculiar internal coherence. There are several types of crimes that may be connected to occult practices: violation of tombs and corpses, tricks, killing and maltreatment of animals, sexual violence, incest, instigations of suicide and homicides. Identifying the fundamental principles of occultist activity becomes therefore useful in clarifying and explaining the ritual crimes and the motives of perpetrators and victims involved in such crimes.

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