

How the Kabbalah Came to Britain: The Hebrew Roots of the Victorian Occult Revival

Liz Greene

There is no science that confirms to us the divinity of Christ more than magic and the Kabbalah.

– Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1486)¹

When I read that a stone consisted of trillions of molecules constantly in motion and that these molecules consisted of atoms and that these atoms were in themselves complicated systems, whirls of energy, I said to

myself, "That's the cabala after all!"

– Isaac Bashevis Singer (1984)²

The case of the missing Kabbalah

The purpose of this presentation is twofold. It is meant first to explore the use of the Kabbalah in the late nineteenth century upsurge of popular interest in esoteric spiritualities known as the Victorian occult revival. The term 'Kabbalah' is given to an extensive body of mainly Hebrew literature, developed over many centuries and initially appearing in the twelfth century in Provence. This literature expresses the esoteric currents within Judaism, and was believed to communicate the secret wisdom tradition given directly by God to Moses. Primarily composed not by an occult demi-monde opposing rabbinical authority but by rabbis themselves, Kabbalistic texts encompass theosophical doctrines, esoteric interpretations of Biblical texts, and a variety of mystical and magical rituals. The Victorian preoccupation with the Kabbalah and other older esoteric traditions engendered a proliferation of groups and societies sharing the conviction that their study and practice of abstruse forms of mysticism and magic could help to facilitate a dawning new age in which science and religion, which had been threatening to drift further and further apart, might achieve a new and glorious synthesis through the spiritual empowerment of the individual.³

The occult revival has enjoyed little serious research until recent decades, largely because scholarly interest in esoteric thought was shaped almost entirely by the evolutionist approach of

¹ 'Nulla est scientia quae nos magis certificet de diurnitate Christi quam magia et cabala.' 9>9, 'Twenty-Six Magical Conclusions', British Library, IB18857, reprinted in Farmer, S. A., *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses* (1486) (Tempe, AR: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, Vol. 167, 1998), pp. 498-499.

² Singer, Isaac Bashevis, *Love and Exile* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), p. 16.

³ On self-consciousness as the central insight of modernity, see Owen, Alex, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 118-20. For a general overview of intellectual currents in the last decade of the nineteenth century, including the idea of 'self-improvement', see Jackson, Holbrook, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1913), pp. 25-26, 132-33.

James Frazer and E. B. Tylor which emerged simultaneously with the very current it sought to dismiss as superstition. This school of thought, sometimes known as the 'religion as primitive error' school, espoused the idea that magic, when it grows up, matures first into religion and then, illuminated by the light of modern reason, transforms into science.⁴ However, the emergence, persistence, and increasing social, economic, and religious impact of what are now referred to as 'New Age spiritualities' or 'new religious movements' in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many of which derive their central doctrines from the Victorian occult revival, have raised serious questions about the validity of such a perception of the historical development of the human religious imagination.⁵ This has resulted in recent seminal works by Wouter Hanegraaff, Ronald Hutton, and Alex Owen, who explore the occult revival not as a reactive throwback to pre-Enlightenment superstition, but as the product of complex historical and social processes involved in the integration of older religious traditions with new social and scientific paradigms in the modern era.⁶ The Kabbalah is central to these older traditions. But there is as yet no substantial research into the ways in which this Jewish esoteric lore was understood and developed in the occult revival. The enduring influence of the Kabbalah on nineteenth century poets and novelists from Baudelaire to Yeats has long been recognised by scholars of modern literature.⁷ But a more thorough investigation

⁴ See Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, 2 volumes (London: John Murray, 1871); Frazer, James, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 12 volumes (London: Macmillan, 1890-1915). For an overview of Tylor and Frazer and 'religion as primitive error', see Thrower, James, *Religion: The Classical Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 99-125.

⁵ For sociological interpretations of 'New Age spiritualities' see, *inter alia*, Barker, Eileen and Margit Warburg, eds., *New Religions and New Religiosity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998); Tiryakian, Edward A., 'Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture', *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (November 1972), pp. 491-512; Heelas, Paul, *The New Age Movement: the Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Sutcliffe, Steven and Marion Bowman, eds., *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

⁶ Hanegraaff, Wouter J., *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Hutton, Ronald, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*.

⁷ For the influence of mid-nineteenth century French occultism on poetry and fiction, see Wilkinson, Lynn, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 19-54; Bowman, Frank Paul, *Eliphas Lévi, visionnaire romantique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), pp. 5-61; Carlson, Maria, 'Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia', in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 135-152; Saurat, Denis, 'Baudelaire, Rimbaud, la Cabale', *Nouvelle revue française*, Vol. 46 (February 1936), pp. 258-261; Pichois, Claude, 'Baudelaire en 1847', *Revue des sciences humaines* (January-March 1958), pp. 121-138; Richer, Jean, *L'Alchimie du verbe de Rimbaud ou les jeux de Jean-Arthur* (Paris: Didier, 1972); Meltzer, Françoise, 'On Rimbaud's "Voyelles"', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (May 1979), pp. 344-354. For Lévi's influence on painters, see, for example, Jullian, Philippe, *The Symbolists* (Oxford: Phaidon/Dutton, 1977), p. 16; Kosinski, Dorothy M., 'Gustave Moreau's "La Vie de l'humanité": Orpheus in the Context of Religious Syncretism, Universal Histories, and Occultism', *Art Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 1, *Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art* (Spring 1987), pp. 9-14.

needs to be made into the nature of this so-called 'occultist' Kabbalah. The Kabbalah is accorded primary importance in the writings of virtually every practitioner of the occult revival from Éliphas Lévi in the 1850s to Dion Fortune in the 1930s.⁸ Present-day occult groups continue to accord it the same importance. Yet the predominance of the Kabbalah in nineteenth century occult literature is usually either minimalised in scholarly works, generalised without any examination of its diversity, or simply not mentioned.⁹

The second purpose of this presentation is to examine how, why, and through whose agency 'occultist' Kabbalah arose first in France in the mid-nineteenth century and then crossed the Channel to captivate the esoterically minded seekers of Victorian Britain. Although modern occultism is usually perceived as a 'new' product of post-Enlightenment secularisation, 'occultist' Kabbalah may be an exception. From its earliest textual appearance, the Kabbalah has expressed perspectives deemed essential to 'modernity'.¹⁰ One of these perspectives is the internalisation of deity and the

⁸ See, for example, Lévi, Éliphas, *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, 2 volumes (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1855-56; reissued as *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie: Édition complète en un volume avec 24 figures dans le texte*, Paris: Éditions Niclaus, 1972), p. 50: 'All truly dogmatic religions have emerged from the Kabbalah and return there' ('Toutes les religions vraiment dogmatiques sont sorties de la cabale et y retournent'). All translations from this work are from the Niclaus edition and are mine unless otherwise indicated. See also Fortune, Dion, *The Mystical Qabalah* (London: Ernest Benn, 1935), p. 2: 'The mysticism of Israel supplies the foundation of modern Western occultism'. See also Mathers, S. L. MacGregor, 'Introduction', in *idem*, trans., *The Kabbalah Unveiled: Containing the following Books of the Zohar: The Book of Concealed Mystery, The Greater Holy Assembly, The Lesser Holy Assembly, Translated into English from the Latin version of Knorr von Rosenroth, and collated with the original Chaldee and Hebrew text* (London: George Redway, 1887; revised edition, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1926), p. 1: 'The Bible...contains numberless obscure and mysterious passages which are utterly unintelligible without some key wherewith to unlock their meaning. That key is given in the Qabalah.' See also Waite, A. E., *The Holy Kabbalah: A Study of the Secret Tradition in Israel as Unfolded by Sons of the Doctrine for the Benefit and Consolation of the Elect Dispersed Through the Lands and Ages of the Greater Exile* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1929), p. xxv: '[The Kabbalah] connects with other literatures which are included like itself under the general denomination of mystical, and there is a sense in which it has been thought, in its highest development, to stand at the head of all'.

⁹ See Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, p. 55, where she states that William Wynn Westcott, one of the founders of the Golden Dawn, 'was steeped in the study of Western Hermeticism, especially the Cabala'. The Kabbalah cannot in any sense be considered an aspect or branch of Western Hermeticism, since the two currents emerged from entirely different cultural matrices and developed their own highly distinctive forms of philosophy, theosophy, literature, and praxis. However, Hermeticism and Kabbalah have often travelled together (e.g. the Renaissance period, where they were combined in Pico della Mirandola's work), and early Jewish mysticism and Alexandrian Hermeticism appear to have influenced each other significantly in late antiquity (see, for example, Pearson, Birger A., *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990). Some excellent research on various aspects of the occult revival in Britain and on the Continent has overlooked the importance of the Kabbalah: see, for example, Harvey, David Allen, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), in which Harvey discusses in depth the esoteric current of Martinism as the primary source of the ideas emerging in mid-nineteenth century French occultism, without acknowledging either the emphasis on Kabbalah explicit in this current or the fact that Martinism itself is rooted in Jewish Kabbalistic texts. On this subject see Franck, Adolphe, *La philosophie mystique en France à la fin du XVIII-e siècle: Saint-Martin et son maître Martinez Pasqualis*, Paris: Elibron Classics, 2005; original publication, Paris: Germer Baillière, 1866).

¹⁰ For the thesis of modern occultism as a unique product of post-Enlightenment secularisation, see Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 411-513.

recognition of divine powers as natural attributes in both the world and the human soul. The precocious modernity of the Kabbalah may be related to the historical phenomenon of a culture in diaspora: a people whose sacred geographical centre – the Temple at Jerusalem – had been destroyed in the first century CE, and who gradually recreated that centre in ritualised imaginal forms that, six centuries later, proved peculiarly amenable to the increasing alienation and religious dislocation of a society in which, as William Butler Yeats put it, ‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold’.¹¹ The locus of the divine within the human psyche, and the use of individual and group magical practices to achieve self-transformation, are characteristic of what Wouter Hanegraaff calls the post-Enlightenment ‘psychologization of the sacred’.¹² But these perceptions, as I intend to demonstrate, are also a feature of some of the earliest Kabbalistic doctrines.

In mid-nineteenth century France, Éliphas Lévi, who is usually credited with the first modern use of the word ‘occultism’, did not have to reinvent the Kabbalah for the modern age.¹³ He appropriated and developed an existing Jewish tradition that was already uniquely suited to the scientific and social paradigms emerging in his time. ‘Occultist’ Kabbalah has been described as having ‘only the most superficial of connections to original Jewish kabbalah’, and occult practitioners are said to have perpetrated ideas about the Kabbalah that are ‘wildly fantastic’.¹⁴ Jewish Kabbalistic scholars since the pioneering work of Gershom Scholem in the mid-twentieth century are sensitive to the issue of Jewish religious identity and the pervasive presence in occult literature of the notorious Aryan-Semitic discourse that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and generated such horrific

¹¹ Yeats, William Butler, *The Second Coming*, c. 1921, in *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 211.

¹² On ‘the psychologization of the sacred’ as a component apparently unique to post-Enlightenment esoteric thought, see Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 224-255 and 482-513; Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, pp. 148-185.

¹³ For Lévi’s use of the word ‘occultism’, see the ‘Introduction’ in Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, pp. 37-53. Lévi probably acquired the term from Henry Cornelius Agrippa’s sixteenth century work, *De occulta philosophia* (*Three Books of Occult Philosophy*), ed. Donald Tyson, trans. James Freake (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004; first complete publication, Cologne: Soter and Hetorpius, 1533; first English translation, trans. James Freake, London: Gregory Moule, 1651), in which it designates the three ‘traditional sciences’ of astrology, alchemy, and magic. On the three ‘traditional sciences’ see Faivre, Antoine, ‘Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe’, in Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), pp. 6-8.

¹⁴ See, for example, Hanegraaff, Wouter J., ‘Jewish Influences V: Occultist Kabbalah’, in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ed., *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Hermeticism*, in collaboration with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 644. On the ‘brilliant misunderstandings and misrepresentations’ of ‘occultist’ Kabbalah, see Scholem, Gershom, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 2. On ‘occultist’ Kabbalah as a derivative of ‘Christian’ Kabbalah, see Decker, Ronald, Thierry Depaulis, and Michael Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot* (London: Duckworth, 1996), p. 190; Campanini, Saverio, ‘Recent Literature on Christian Kabbalah’, *European Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter*, No. 11 (October 2001-March 2002), available at www.lzz.uni-halle.de/publikationen/essays/nl11_campanini.pdf (Leopold-Zunz-Zentrum zur Erforschung des europäischen Judentums), accessed 28 August 2007.

consequences in the twentieth.¹⁵ They have understandably distanced themselves from the often overtly antisemitic texts of the occult revival and, preferring to present the Kabbalah as a theosophy rather than a magical lore, dismiss the Kabbalah of the occult revival as ‘supreme charlatanism’.¹⁶ Yet ‘occultist’ Kabbalah, when examined in greater depth, can be seen to derive virtually in its entirety, directly or indirectly, from Hebrew roots, and may present a rare exception in the diverse currents of modern Western esotericism: a tradition which is genuinely traditional.

The protean nature of the Kabbalah

The word ‘kabbalah’ means ‘reception’ or ‘received tradition’. Emerging in the medieval period but rooted in oral traditions and texts from late antiquity, the Kabbalah has never been a homogenous entity.¹⁷ However, certain themes are common to its loose amalgamation of doctrines and practices: a focus on the internal structure of deity, the dynamic relationship between human and divine realms, and the methods by which direct knowledge of and participation in the godhead can

¹⁵ On the history of the Aryan-Semitic racial discourse emerging from linguistic discussions on the Indo-European languages, see Poliakov, Léon, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1971), including an extensive bibliography of French and British nineteenth-century works on the subject; Arvidsson, Stefan, ‘Aryan Mythology as Science and Ideology’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (June 1999), pp. 327-354. For examples of nineteenth century English ‘scientific’ papers on the Aryan-Semitic discourse, see Heath, Dunbar L., ‘On the Great Race-Elements in Christianity’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, Vol. 5 (1867), pp. xix-xxxi; Jackson, J. W., ‘The Aryan and the Semite’, *Anthropological Review*, Vol. 7, No. 27 (October 1869), pp. 333-365. For nineteenth century French Jewish perceptions of belonging to an independent racial group, see Leff, Lisa Moses, ‘Self-definition and self-defense: Jewish racial identity in nineteenth-century France’, *Jewish History*, Vol. 19 (2005), pp. 7-28.

¹⁶ On ‘occultist’ Kabbalah as charlatanism, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 398-99; *idem*, *Kabbalah* (New York, NY: Meridian/Penguin, 1978), pp. 202-203; *idem*, *Alchemy and Kabbalah*, trans. Klaus Ottman (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2006), pp. 10-11. For contemporary challenges to Scholem’s dismissal of all forms of Kabbalah except the medieval theosophical/philosophical current, see Huss, Boaz, ‘Ask No Questions: Gershom Scholem and the Study of Contemporary Jewish Mysticism’, *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 25 (May 2005), pp. 141-158; Idel Moshe, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988). For a characteristic effort to exclude the Jews from their own creation in an occultist’s work on the Kabbalah, see Frater Achad (Charles Stansfield Jones, a disciple of Aleister Crowley), *The Anatomy of the Body of God, Being the Supreme Revelation of Cosmic Consciousness* (Chicago: Collegium ad Spiritum Sanctum, 1925; reprinted, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1969), pp. i-ii: ‘The Jews have neglected the study of their own “Chokmah Nestorah,” or Secret Wisdom Tradition, as transmitted in the Holy Qabalah, thus losing sight of their True Will as a nation and their essential Purpose in the Great Creative Plan. It has remained for the Gentile to discover some of the deeper mysteries of this Ancient Wisdom.’ See Beitchman, Philip, *Alchemy of the Word: Cabala of the Renaissance* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 198: ‘If one wanted to keep what the Jews brought one had to exclude the Jews, plus rename or not mention Cabala’.

¹⁷ On the emergence of the early Kabbalah, see Scholem, Gershom, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); *idem*, *Kabbalah*, pp. 8-86; Dan, Joseph, ed., *The Early Kabbalah* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986). On the Jewish *hekhalot* or ‘palace’ literature of late antiquity as the source of later Kabbalistic ideas, see Schäfer, Peter, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. Aubrey Pomerance (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992); Scholem, Gershom, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960).

be achieved. Also common to many Kabbalistic 'schools' is the idea that sacred texts may be read on multiple levels, the deepest being accessible only through complex forms of linguistic hermeneutics and ritual exercises designed to induce revelatory experiences. Kabbalistic thought encourages speculation, a constant re-evaluation of ideas, and an open-ended sequence of commentaries which each successive generation reinterprets, individually and according to cultural context.¹⁸ Tensions between philosophical, theosophical, mystical, and magical currents have characterised the Kabbalah from the time of its origins, themselves still hotly contested in both academic and religious circles.¹⁹

In its more extreme forms, Kabbalistic literature may be disengaged from the formal structures of Jewish belief and ritual, allowing many of its themes to be adopted by practitioners of varying religious persuasions.²⁰ Discourse on the Kabbalah between Jews and Christians has been an ongoing historical process, although those directly involved in such exchanges have often invoked

¹⁸ On the speculative, open-ended nature of Kabbalistic discourse, see the 'nomadological' style described by Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word*, pp. 57ff.

¹⁹ For two comprehensive overviews of the various streams within Kabbalistic lore, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. For conflicting views on the origins of the Kabbalah, see Ginsburg, Christian D., *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development and Literature* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1863); Dan, Joseph, 'Gershom Scholem's Reconstruction of Early Kabbalah', *Modern Judaism*, Gershom Scholem Memorial Issue, Vol. 5, No. 1 (February 1985), pp. 39-66; Tishby, Isaiah, 'General Introduction', in Isaiah Tishby, ed. and David Goldstein, trans., *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, 3 volumes (Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization/Oxford University Press, 1989; originally published as *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1949-61), Vol. 1, pp. 1-126.

²⁰ On the anomian Kabbalah utilised in the great messianic movement begun by Sabbatai Zevi in the seventeenth century, see Scholem, Gershom, *Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973 [1957]); Halperin, David, *Sabbatai Zevi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007); Goldish, Matt, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Idel, Moshe, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 183-211. On the anomian Kabbalah of Jacob Frank and the messianic 'Zoharists' of the eighteenth century, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 287-308; Lenowitz, Harry, 'The Charlatan at the Gottes Haus in Offenbach', in Goldish, Matt and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture, Vol. I: Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 189-202. For Frank's doctrines in his own words, see Frank, Jacob, *The Collection of the Words of the Lord*, ed. and trans. Harris Lenowitz (2004), at http://www.languages.utah.edu/kabbalah/protected/dicta_frank_lenowitz.pdf (University of Utah). Judaism itself has never been a homogenous entity, despite efforts on the part of scholars of the German-based *Wissenschaft des Judentums* ('Jewish scientific knowledge') of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to present it as a 'rational' religion whose magical and pantheistic components can be dismissed as mere 'foreign imports'. For examples of the theory of 'foreign imports', see Graetz, Heinrich, *History of the Jews*, 5 volumes, ed. and trans. Bella Löwy (London: Jewish Chronicle Office, 1901), Vol. 3, pp. 565, where he describes the Kabbalah as 'a false doctrine which, although new, styled itself a primitive inspiration; although un-Jewish, called itself a genuine teaching of Israel'. See also Ginzberg, Louis and Kaufmann Kohler, 'Cabala', in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1901-06, still available online at www.jewishencyclopedia.com, where magical elements in the Kabbalah are referred to as 'noxious influences'. For discussions on the untenability of this approach, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 1-34; *idem*, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 1-30 and 45-102; Huss, 'Ask No Questions', pp. 141-158. See also Dan, Joseph, 'The kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and its historical significance', in *idem*, ed., *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Library, 1997), pp. 55-95, in which he attributes the magical elements in the Kabbalah to Renaissance Christian Kabbalists.

hostility from their own communities,²¹ and thus it is difficult if not impossible to clarify how 'Christian' or 'occultist' Kabbalah differs from 'Jewish' Kabbalah except that it is interpreted and practiced by non-Jews.²² And as Alison Coudert has demonstrated, the Christianity of individual Christian Kabbalists may take surprising forms. In the late seventeenth century, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth and Francis Mercury van Helmont produced a massive 2600-page compilation of commentaries and Latin translations of Hebrew Kabbalistic texts called the *Kabbala denudata*, in which an interpretation of Lutheran Christianity is offered that is anything but normative.²³ These men

²¹ On the anger directed at the lawyer and Kabbalistic scholar Adolphe Franck in the mid-nineteenth century by the French Jewish press (in particular the usually liberal *Archives Israélites*) for his 'secularised' attitudes (including sympathy shown to occultists), see Graetz, Michael, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France: From the French Revolution to the Alliance Israélite Universelle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 57. Franck was caught between the proverbial hammer and anvil, as he was also accused of 'pantheism' by the ultramontane Catholics; see Berkovitz, Jay R., *The Shaping of Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-century France* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 233. On Jewish criticism of the British Kabbalistic scholar Joshua Abelson's involvement with the Theosophical Society in the early twentieth century, see 'Mentor', 'Missions to Jews', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 25 March 1927, p. 13. For an eighteenth century example of this dilemma, see Knorr von Rosenroth's 'letter' at the beginning of the *Kabbala denudata* (Knorr von Rosenroth, Christian, *Kabbala denudata, seu, Doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica: opus antiquissimae philosophiae barbaricae...in quo, ante ipsam translationem libri...cui nomen Sohar tam veteris quam recentis, ejusque tikkunim...praemittitur apparatus [pars 1-4]*, 2 volumes, Sulzbach/Frankfurt: Abraham Lichtenhal, 1677-1684) regarding the necessity of keeping secret the name of his Jewish teacher 'on account of the hatred of his relatives', in Coudert, Alison, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698)* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 106-107. My use of the term 'antisemitic' in this presentation is not anachronistic. It was first coined in France in the mid-nineteenth century and came into popular use in Germany in the 1870s; see Arvidsson, 'Aryan Mythology'. On the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth century France, see also Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France*; Herzberg, Arthur, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Antisemitism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1968).

²² For Jewish-Christian discourse in early modernity, see Popkin, Richard H., 'Christian Jews and Jewish Christians in the 17th Century', in Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner, eds., *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), pp. 57-72. For various perceptions of the 'Christian' Kabbalah, see Scholem, Gershom, 'The beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah', in Dan, Joseph, ed., *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Library, 1997), pp. 17-51; Dan, Joseph, 'Christian Kabbalah: From Mysticism to Esotericism', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, pp. 131-144; Blau, Joseph Leon, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1944); Benz, Ernst, *Die Christliche Cabala: Ein Stiefkind der Theologie* (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1958; English translation, *Christian Kabbalah: Neglected Child of Theology*, trans. Kenneth W. Wesche, St. Paul, MN: Grailstone Press, 2004); Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word*; Wirszubski, Chaim, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Masters, G. Mallary, 'Renaissance Kabbalah', in Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman, eds., *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 132-153; Secret, François, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance* (La Haye-Paris: Mouton et Cie, 1964); Idel, Moshe, 'The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance', in Bernard Dov Cooperman, ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 186-242. Also see Reuchlin's sixteenth century definition of a Kabbalist in Reuchlin, Johannes, *On the Art of the Kabbalah (De arte cabalistica libri tres)*, trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 63. On the impossibility of defining what constitutes a 'real' Kabbalist, see De Léon-Jones, Karen Silvia, 'John Dee and the Kabbalah', in Clucas, Stephen, ed., *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*, International Archives of the History of Ideas (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2006), pp. 143-158.

²³ See Coudert, Allison P., 'The *Kabbala Denudata*: Converting Jews or Seducing Christians', in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, pp. 73-96; Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*; Sutcliffe, Adam, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 148-164. Also see Petrie, Yvonne,

espoused a specific Kabbalistic current from a particular cultural milieu: the late sixteenth century Kabbalah of Rabbi Isaac Luria, which developed first in Palestine and eventually emerged as the dominant current in the Kabbalah of the Victorian occult revival.



Frontispiece of *Kabbala denudata, seu, Doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica: opus antiquissimae philosophiae barbaricae...in quo, ante ipsam translationem libri... cui nomen Sohar tam veteris quam recentis, ejusque tikkunim...praemittitur apparatus* [pars 1-4], 3 volumes (Sulzbach/Frankfurt: Abraham Lichtenthal, 1677-1684)

The Lurianic Kabbalah

Gershom Scholem suggests that Isaac Luria's Kabbalah represents a new movement in Jewish mysticism, arising directly from the catastrophe of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.²⁴ Certain themes common to earlier Kabbalistic literature are more fully developed in Lurianic Kabbalah: a complex cosmogony encompassing the idea of a primal light or ether from which the various levels of the universe emanate; an emphasis on exile and restitution; reincarnation and the gradual evolution of souls, individually and in groups; the redemptive power of the feminine dimension of the godhead; and finally, the correspondence between the macrocosmic spiritual man,

Gender, Kabbalah and the Reformation: The Mystical Theology of Guillaume Postel (1510-1581) (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 81-86, on the differences between Protestant and Catholic responses to the Jewish Kabbalah.

²⁴ For this influential perspective on Luria's messianism, see Scholem, Gershom, 'Isaac Luria: A Central Figure in Jewish Mysticism', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 29, No. 8 (May 1976), pp. 8-13; *idem*, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 43-48; *idem*, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 244-286. For a continuation of this perspective, see, for example, Lenowitz, Harris, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 125-147. See also Dan, Joseph, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1987), pp. 244-280. Moshe Idel argues that Scholem's purely historicist perspective on Lurianic Kabbalah ignores the internal, 'natural' developments in Kabbalah that came to flower in Lurianic messianism; see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 162-182, and Biale, David, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 71-93. On the dissemination of Lurianic Kabbalah, see Idel, Moshe, "'One from a Town, Two from a Clan' – The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbateanism: A Re-Examination', *Jewish History*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 79-104; *idem*, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 175-78.

called Adam Kadmon or 'primal Adam', and the microcosmic individual, resulting in an inherent godlike power in humans which, if developed, can facilitate the reintegration of the damaged cosmos and usher in a new age.²⁵ These themes are found in abundance in various forms in the literature of the Victorian occult revival.



The head of Adam Kadmon or 'primal Adam'
from Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata* 1.2

Although the messianic idea has always been a core theme in Judaism, messianism is given a peculiarly modern colouration in the Lurianic Kabbalah because it emphasises the power of individuals, through inner work, to transform not only themselves but also the damaged structure of the world. Perhaps most relevant to the 'modernism' of the Victorian occult revival, the messiah in Lurianic Kabbalah is often portrayed not as a literal person, but as a process of individual and

²⁵ These doctrines were adopted in France in the late eighteenth century by Martinès de Pasqually and his disciple, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, both of whom exercised an influence on Lévi as well as on fringe Masonic orders in France, Poland and Russia in the nineteenth century. See Martinès de Pasqually, *Traité de la réintégration des êtres dans leur premières propriétés, vertus et puissances spirituelles et divines* (Paris: Bibliothèque Chacornac, 1899; reissued, Paris: Éditions Traditionnelles, 1988). A manuscript containing one of Pasqually's quasi-Masonic Kabbalistic rituals is available on line: 'Discours d'instruction à un nouveau reçu sur les trois grades d'apprenti compagnon et maître symboliques', Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, Fonds Willermoz, Ms 5919-12, at www.Philosophie-inconnu.com, posted 2006. On Pasqually's rituals, see also Le Forestier, René, *La Franc-Maçonnerie Templière et Occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe Siècles* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1970), pp. 290-313. On Pasqually's Jewish Marrano background and incorporation of the Lurianic Kabbalah in his magical rituals, see Franck, *La philosophie mystique*, pp. 1-26; Wasserstrom, Steven M., *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 38-39 and 44-47; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 200-201. On Saint-Martin, see Franck, *La philosophie mystique*; Waite, A. E., *The Life of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, The Unknown Philosopher, and the Substance of His Transcendental Doctrine* (London: Philip Wellby, 1901; reissued, London: William Rider & Son, 1910, 1916); *idem*, *St. Martin: The French Mystic and the Story of Modern Martinism* (London: William Rider & Son, 1922; reprinted in *Three Famous Mystics*, London: William Rider & Son, 1939); Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*; *idem*, 'Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism, Politics, and Culture in France from the Old Regime to the Fin-de-Siècle', *The Historian*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (March 2003), pp. 665-694; Bates, David, 'The Mystery of Truth: Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin's Enlightened Mysticism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (October 2000), pp. 635-655.

collective transformation, psychological, spiritual, and social.²⁶ Lurianic texts provide a solution to the problem of Cartesian dualism by presenting spirit and matter as aspects of a single continuum, and emphasise the importance of a scientific knowledge of the physical universe, opening the Kabbalah to innovative approaches easily adaptable to the changing paradigms of modernity.²⁷ The centrality of this current in the Victorian occult revival is the direct result of a remarkable French ex-priest called Alphonse-Louis Constant, better known as Éliphas Lévi. Kocku von Stuckrad suggests that, in the history of Western esotericism, certain individuals, engaging in 'fields of discourse' that challenge the conventional notion of strictly demarcated religious identities, serve as 'junctions' for the transfer of religious traditions.²⁸ As a transmitter of late antique Jewish mysticism, medieval and Renaissance Kabbalah, and Kabbalistic currents in Rosicrucian, Masonic, and illuminist circles, Lévi may be seen as the primary 'junction' for the Kabbalistic ideas that infused the British occult revival.

Who was Éliphas Lévi?

Details of Lévi's life are given in various biographies, beginning with Paul Chacornac's definitive eulogy to the magus, published in 1926.²⁹ A few details relevant to the development of

²⁶ On the interiorisation of the divine in Lurianic Kabbalah, and thirteenth century precedents for this perspective, see Idel, *Hasidism: From Ecstasy to Magic*, pp. 227-238.

²⁷ On Lurianic Kabbalah as a solution to Cartesian dualism, see Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 124. On the scientific orientation of Lurianic doctrines, especially as they developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Robinson, Ira, 'Kabbala and Science in "Sefer Ha-Berit": A Modernization Strategy for Orthodox Jews', *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (October 1989), pp. 275-288. On the Lurianic Kabbalah, see, among an increasing number of scholarly works, Fine, Lawrence, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); *idem*, 'The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria's "Charismatic Knowledge"', *AJS Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 79-101; Jacobs, Louis, 'Uplifting the Sparks in Later Jewish Mysticism', in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 99-126; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 128-44, 420-28, and 443-448; Werblowsky, R. J. Zvi, 'Mystical and Magical Contemplation: The Kabbalists in Sixteenth-Century Safed', *History of Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 1961), pp. 9-36; Magid, Shaul, 'From Theosophy to Midrash: Lurianic Exegesis and the Garden of Eden', *AJS Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1997), pp. 37-75; Karr, Don, 'Notes on the Study of Later Kabbalah in English: The Safed Period and Lurianic Kabbalah', in *Collected Articles on the Kabbalah*, Vol. 2 (Ithaca, NY: KoM, No. 6, 1985), 23-31. Translations of Lurianic works into English have appeared only in the last decade. See Faierstein, Morris M., trans., *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies: Book of Visions and Book of Secrets* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999); Menzi, Donald Wilder and Zve Padeh, trans., *The Tree of Life: Chayyim Vital's Introduction to the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria*, Vol. 1: *The Palace of Adam Kadmon* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1999); Klein, Eliahu, trans., *Kabbalah of Creation: Isaac Luria's Earlier Mysticism* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000); Bar Chaim, Yitzchak, trans., *Shaar HaGilgulim: The Gates of Reincarnation by Rabbi Isaac Luria and Rabbi Chaim Vital* (Malibu, CA: Thirty Seven Books Publishing, 2003).

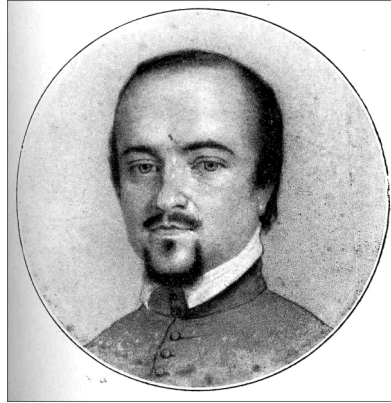
²⁸ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), 31. Von Stuckrad also asserts that Jewish mysticism 'has decisively influenced the development of European esotericism again and again since late antiquity'; see *idem*, 'Western esotericism: Towards an integrative model of interpretation', *Religion*, Vol. 35 (2005), 83-86.

²⁹ Chacornac, Paul, *Éliphas Lévi: Rénovateur de l'occultisme en France 1810-1875* (Paris: Librairie Générale des Science Occultes, Chacornac Frères, 1926). Chacornac relied primarily and uncritically on Lévi's autobiographical

Lévi's Kabbalistic system are worth noting here: that the young Alphonse-Louis Constant had trained for the Catholic priesthood but stopped short of taking holy orders, largely because of his heterodox religious views; that the early period of his life was spent involved in and writing about revolutionary politics; and that in 1853, at the age of forty-three, he abruptly abandoned the name Alphonse-Louis Constant and adopted the pseudo-Hebrew pseudonym of Éliphas Lévi Zahed, and began to publish his unique synthesis of the Kabbalah, the Tarot cards, and ritual magic.³⁰

preface to *L'Assomption de la femme*, written under the name of Alphonse-Louis Constant (Paris: Le Gallois, 1841). Chacornac also had access to some of Lévi's correspondence, and carefully selected letters from the magus to his Italian disciple Baron Spedalieri were published by Chacornac in the early 1930s: Lévi, Éliphas, *Cours de philosophie occulte: Lettres au baron Spedalieri, de la Kabbale et de la science des nombres*, 2 volumes (Paris: Chacornac Frères, 1932-33); English translation, *Letters to a Disciple: Letters from Eliphas Lévi Zahed to Baron Nicolas-Joseph Spedalieri on magic, numerology and the Tarot* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1980). It is interesting to note that the word 'Kabbalah' has been dropped from the English title. Miscellaneous letters were translated into English by the Theosophists in their various journals during the 1880s; see, for example, Lévi, Eliphas, 'A Suicide's After-State', a letter originally published in *The Theosophist* (October 1881) and later included as 'A Posthumous Publication' in Blavatsky, H. P., *Kabalah and Kabalism* (Los Angeles, CA: The Theosophy Company, 1912), pp. 44-48. However, most of Lévi's private papers have vanished. When, and from whom, he learned the basics of the Kabbalah is still unclear. Material that might have revealed this information with certainty, such as the correspondence between Lévi and his close friend, the occultist Alphonse Esquiros, has disappeared entirely; Anthony Zielonka, in his edited collection of Esquiros' letters (*Alphonse Esquiros (1812-1876): Choix de lettres: Textes réunis, présentés et annotés par Anthony Zielonka* (Paris: Champion-Slatkine, 1990), p. 3, ruefully complains that there is no trace of any letters between Esquiros and the Abbé Alphonse-Louis Constant, concluding: 'Certain archives, certain collections, no doubt still guard their secrets.' A biography of Lévi by Louis Chamaud had been promised at the end of the nineteenth century by Papus, head of the Neo-Martinist order based on Lévi's work, but this biography never materialised. For modern biographies in English, see McIntosh, *Éliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*; Williams, Thomas A., *Eliphas Lévi: Master of the Cabala, the Tarot and the Secret Doctrines* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975; Uzzel, Robert L., *Eliphas Lévi and the Kabbalah: The Masonic and French Connection of the American Mystery Tradition* (Lafayette, LA: 2006), and the PhD dissertation on which Uzzel's book is based: *idem, The Kabbalistic Thought of Eliphas Lévi and Its Influence on Modern Occultism in America* (Baylor University, 1995). For Waite's extensive biographical essays on Lévi in the early part of the twentieth century, see Waite, A. E., 'Biographical and Critical Essay on the Life of Alphonse Louis Constant and Notes on the Mysteries of Magic as expounded in the Occult Philosophy of Eliphas Lévi', in Waite, A. E., ed., *Mysteries of Magic: A Digest of the Writings of Eliphas Lévi, with Biographical and Critical Essay* (London: George Redway, 1886), pp. 1-41; *idem*, 'Biographical Preface' in Lévi, Eliphas, *Transcendental Magic*, trans. A. E. Waite (London: Rider, 1896), pp. xix-xxxi; *idem*, *The Holy Kabbalah*, pp. 487-494. Also see Underhill, Evelyn's eulogy of Lévi, 'A Defence of Magic', originally published in *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 82, No. 491 (November 1907), pp. 754-765; republished in Greene, Dana, ed., *Evelyn Underhill: Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 33-46. For chapters devoted to Lévi in other works, see Laurant, Jean-Pierre, 'Eliphas Lévi' in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, pp. 19-54; Decker et al., *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, pp. 166-193. For modern biographies in French, see Bowman, *Eliphas Lévi, visionnaire romantique*; Mercier, Alain, *Eliphas Lévi et la pensée magique* (Paris: Seghers, 1974); Buisset, Christiane, *Eliphas Lévi: Sa vie, son oeuvre, ses pensées* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel/Éditions de la Maisnie, 1984). A German biography of Lévi was published before Chacornac's work, but it achieved no recognition outside German esoteric circles: Laarss, R. H., *Eliphas Lévi: Der Grosse Kabbalist und Seine Magischen Werke* (Vienna/Berlin: Rikola Verlag, 1922). For further material on Lévi, see Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 384-85; Webb, James, *The Flight from Reason*, Vol. 1 of *The Age of the Irrational* (London: Macdonald, 1971), p. 164ff; Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, pp. 70-72.

³⁰ The name 'Eliphas Lévi Zahed' is usually assumed to be a Hebrew translation of Alphonse-Louis Constant. However, the first two names are not a translation; they are simply the closest phonetic match to his French names. *Zahed*, which bears no relationship with 'Constant' either phonetically or in terms of meaning, is a Persian rather than a Hebrew word, and is a title of respect given to a Sufi initiate. It is roughly equivalent to the term



Éliphas Lévi (1810-1875) at the age of 26: an unsigned portrait by one of his friends, reproduced in Paul Chacornac, *Éliphas Lévi, rénovateur de l'occultisme en France (1810-1875)* (Paris: Chacornac Frères, 1926), facing p. 28

As a self-professed Kabbalist, Lévi has been criticised for his poor knowledge of Hebrew; there is no original translation of any Hebrew work in his writings, only French renderings of Latin translations of Hebrew texts, and even his efforts to use the Hebrew alphabet appear to involve serious blunders.³¹ He was, in Frank Paul Bowman's words, a *petit romantique*, an artist and a poet whose work faithfully reflects the dominant ideas of the French Romantic movement in the first half of the nineteenth century.³² These ideas include the concept of correspondences between divine and human realms; a transcendent and unknowable deity from whom the cosmos emanates; various forms of numerological mysticism; and the belief in a universal primal revelation, subsequently corrupted but still secretly contained in language, symbols, and myths.³³ Post-Revolutionary France,

tzaddiq in Hebrew, meaning a holy man or sage. Lévi appears to be making a deliberate statement about the connection he believed existed between the Jewish Kabbalah and early Persian Zoroastrian doctrines.

³¹ For Lévi's claim to being a Hebraist from the age of eighteen, see 'Confession de l'auteur', the autobiographical preface of *L'Assomption de la femme*, pp. i-xxviii. See also Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, pp. 50-51. This claim is perpetuated in Chacornac, *Éliphas Lévi*, pp. 8-9. See the discussion of Lévi's linguistic incompetence in Secret, François, 'Éliphas Lévi et la Kabbale', *Charis: Archives de l'Unicorne*, No. 1 (Milan: Archè, 1988), pp. 81-89; see also Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah*, p. 490: 'He gives the three mother-letters of the Hebrew alphabet inaccurately, which for an accredited student of *Sepher Yetzirah* is almost as inexcusable as if an English author erred in enumerating the vowels of our own language....I need not dwell upon the miserable plight of every Hebrew quotation in those works which he may be supposed to have passed for press.'

³² Bowman, *Éliphas Lévi, visionnaire romantique*, p. 6.

³³ On these themes in French Romanticism, see Bowman, Frank Paul, *French Romanticism: Intertextual and Interdisciplinary Readings* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 125-154. On the Romantic current in popular French literature during Lévi's lifetime, see also Allen, James Smith, *Popular French Romanticism: Authors, Readers, and Books in the 19th Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981). On the relationship between the Romantic movement and Western esotericism, see McCalla, Arthur, 'Romanticism', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, pp. 1000-1007; *idem*, "'Eternal Sun/Black Sun': Illuminism and Disenchanted Romanticism', *Aries*, Vol. 7 (2007), pp. 3-19; Bowman, Frank Paul, 'Illuminism, Utopia, Mythology', in D. G. Charlton, ed., *The French Romantics*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Vol. 1, pp. 76-112; Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 415-421. For a classic overview of the development of the Romantic movement, see also Lovejoy, Arthur O., *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), pp. 288-314. On the links between occultism

plagued by political, social, and religious instability in the first decades of the nineteenth century, was a fertile breeding ground for revolutionary millenarianism with its accompanying train of prophets and messiahs.³⁴ Mesmerism, born in 1778 as a new contribution to medical science, spread in the next century to become a popular doctrine that united science and spiritualism, joining hands with 'irregular' Scottish Rite Freemasonry and its even more irregular cousin, the Rectified Scottish Rite with its thinly disguised Kabbalistic rituals.³⁵ Mystical socialists like Lévi wholeheartedly embraced theories of historical evolution promulgated by the German Idealist philosophers, and believed that a divinely impelled transformation of society was imminent.³⁶ Of the many esoteric currents swelling the stream of the Romantic imagination, Lévi chose the Kabbalah to form the basis of his own system because he believed it formed the basis of all the others. But despite his clumsiness with Hebrew, Lévi's understanding of complex Kabbalistic doctrines may be deeper than his critics have acknowledged, and his hermeneutics, although applied in surprising directions, remain loyal to those of the medieval Jewish Kabbalah.

Lévi's Kabbalah is sometimes presented as a theosophical exposition of the internal dynamics

and Romanticism, the classic work is Viatte, Auguste, *Les Sources occultes du Romantisme: Illuminisme et Théosophie* (1770-1820), 2 volumes (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1928).

³⁴ For the proliferation of prophets and seers during and after the Revolution, see McIntosh, *Éliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, pp. 17-69. For the recurrent phenomenon of 'revolutionary millenarianism' and the *prophetae* who tend to emerge from characteristic types of social struggle, see Cohn, Norman, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), especially pp. 281-86. The two classic works on the French occult currents of the time are Erdan, Alexander, *La France mystique*, 2 volumes (Amsterdam: R. C. Meyer, 1858) and Viatte, *Les Sources occultes du Romantisme: Illuminisme et Théosophie*.

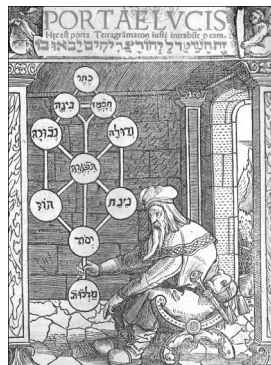
³⁵ On mesmerism as science, occultism, and political philosophy, see Darnton, Robert, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). On the Kabbalistic inclinations of 'irregular' Scottish Rite Freemasonry, see Schuchard, Marsha Keith, *Restoring the Temple of Vision: Cabalistic Freemasonry and Stuart Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). On the Strict Observance Rite and its links with Martinism and Lurianic Kabbalah, see Faivre, Antoine, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 147-162; Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie Templière et Occultiste*, pp. 533-706; Danilewicz, M. L., "'The King of the New Israel': Thaddeus Grabianka (1740-1807)", in Robert Auty and J. L. I. Fennell, eds., *Oxford Slavonic Papers, New Series, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 49-73; Webb, *The Flight from Reason*, pp. 146-47, 157-59. On the links between 'irregular' Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, see McIntosh, Christopher, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, ed. A. K. Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 39-58.

³⁶ Among the German Idealist philosophers, Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) seems to have exercised the greatest influence on French Romanticism due to the translation of his work by Pierre Laroux. For Schelling as the 'founder of speculative natural philosophy', see Von Engelhardt, Dietrich, 'Natural Science in the Age of Romanticism', in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, pp. 101-131; on Schelling as a theosophist, see Deghaye, Pierre, 'Jacob Boehme and His Followers', in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, pp. 210-247; on Schelling as a Kabbalist, see Cahnmann, Werner J., 'Schelling and the New Thinking of Judaism', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 48 (1981), pp. 1-56. On Schelling's influence on the French, see Breckman, Warren, 'Politics in a Symbolic Key: Pierre Laroux, Romantic Socialism, and the Schelling Affair', *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2005), pp. 61-86. See also Benz, Ernst, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans. Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul Pittsburgh Theological Monographs (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1983; original publication, *Les sources mystiques de la philosophie romantique allemande*, Paris: Vrin, 1968).

of the cosmic structure, in the visionary tradition of Jacob Böhme and Emanuel Swedenborg with their emphasis on the direct experience of spiritual truths, the immanence of the divine in Nature, and the close relationship between God-knowledge and self-knowledge. According to Lévi, the universe emanates from an unknowable divine source and reflects the substance of deity on all its levels from supernal to material. History unfolds through the dynamic interplay of opposites, the twin attributes of Mercy and Judgement, which Lévi envisages as male and female. For him, the achievement of equilibrium between these opposites is the purpose of magic. Applying this theosophy to social concerns, Lévi informs us:

In God...one must recognise two properties necessary one to another – stability and movement, necessity and liberty, rational order and volitional autonomy, justice and love, and consequently also severity and mercy. And these are the two attributes that the Jewish Kabbalists personified...under the names of Geburah and Chesed.³⁷

This description closely mirrors the theosophical Kabbalah found in a late thirteenth century work called *Sha'are Orah* or *Gates of Light* by Rabbi Joseph Gikatilia, translated into Latin as *Portae Lucis* and included among the texts of Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*.³⁸



Title page of Joseph Gikatilia's *Sha'are Orah* in Paolo Ricci's Latin translation, *Portae Lucis* (Augsburg, 1516), showing the Kabbalistic diagram of the Tree of Life with the ten *sefirot* or emanations of deity.

Gikatilia was a member of the circle of Kabbalists from which the *Zohar*, the great classic of

³⁷ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 111: 'En Dieu, c'est-à-dire dans la première cause vivante et active, on devait reconnaître deux propriétés nécessaires l'une à l'autre: la stabilité et le mouvement, la nécessité et la liberté, l'ordre rationnel et l'autonomie volitive, la justice et l'amour, et par conséquent aussi la sévérité et la miséricorde; et ce sont ces deux attributs que les cabalistes juifs personnifient en quelque sorte sous les noms de Géburah et de Chesed'.

³⁸ Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudata*, 1.1.660ff. Paolo Ricci's Latin translation of *Sha'are Orah* (Augsburg, 1516) appeared later in Johann Pistorius' collection of Kabbalistic texts, *Artis cabalisticae hoc est reconditae theologiae et philosophiae scriptoum* (Basel, 1587), with which Lévi was also familiar; he recommends this translation for aspiring Kabbalistic students in *Dogme et rituel*, p. 50 and *Cours de philosophie occulte*, V. For an English translation see Gikatilia, R. Joseph, *Gates of Light: Sha'are Orah*, trans. Avi Weinstein, Bronfman Library of Jewish Classics (New York, NY/Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield, 1994).

the medieval Kabbalah, emerged in late 13th century Spain.³⁹ His is the only text in the *Kabbala denudata* that is not related to the teachings of Isaac Luria and his circle, apart from three sections of the *Zohar* itself,⁴⁰ and the inclusion of this work serves as a kind of 'skeleton key' to illuminate the later, more abstruse Lurianic material.⁴¹ Gikatilia is unusual because he reverts to late antique Hebrew sources and declares that the ten emanations of deity called the *sefirot*, basic to all theosophical Kabbalistic texts, are not equal in weight as primary creative forces, but are permutations of two central divine attributes, Mercy (*Chesed*) and Judgement (*Geburah*), male and female respectively and identified with God's right and left hands.⁴² Equilibrium between them is found at the centre of the Kabbalistic diagram known as the Tree of Life, in the divine emanation called Beauty (*Tiferet*), which Gikatilia calls 'the One that brings the Spheres together'.⁴³ Drawing on

³⁹ On the debate about the authorship of the *Zohar* and Gikatilia's involvement with Moshe de Leon in its 'redaction', see Wald, Stephen G., *The Doctrine of the Divine Name: An Introduction to Classical Kabbalistic Theology*, Brown University Judaic Studies, Vol. 149 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 3-31.

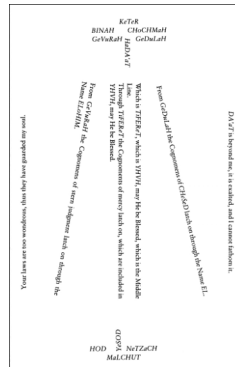
⁴⁰ The sections of the *Zohar* included in the *Kabbala denudata* are: the *Sifra Dzeniuta* (*Book of Mysteries*), found in *Zohar II* (*Kabbala denudata*, 2.2.1, 347-385), and the two *Idrot* (assemblies), *Idra Rabba* (*Great Assembly*) and *Idra Suta* (*Lesser Assembly*), found in *Zohar III* (*Kabbala denudata* 2.2.1-3, 347-598). Due to the importance of these works accorded by Lévi, they were translated into English in the late nineteenth century by Mathers as *The Kabbalah Unveiled*.

⁴¹ On the historical importance of the *Sha'are Orah*, see Idel, Moshe, 'Historical Introduction', in Gikatilia, *Gates of Light*, xxiii-xxxi; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 212; Wald, *The Doctrine of the Divine Name*, 17ff. The Lurianic texts in the *Kabbala denudata* include a number of works by Luria's chief disciple, Hayyim Vital: commentaries on sections of the *Zohar*, an exposition of Luria's views on reincarnation, *Sefer HaGilgulim* (*Book of Transmigrations*), fragments of his own main work, *Etz Hayyim* (*Book of Life*), and *Sefer HaDerushim* (*Book of Dissertations*). *Pardes Rimmonim* (*Orchard of Pomegranates*), a work by Moshe Cordovero, one of Luria's teachers at Safed, is also included. Later Lurianic exegeses are represented in the *Kabbala denudata* by Abraham Cohen de Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo* (*Gate of Heaven*) and Naphtali Herz Bacharach's *Emek HaMelekh* (*Valley of the King*). Luria himself left no written work. *Puerta del Cielo* has recently been translated into English from the original Spanish: De Herrera, Abraham Cohen, *Gate of Heaven*, trans. Kenneth Krabbenhoft (Leiden: Brill, 2002). On De Herrera, see also Altmann, Alexander, 'Lurianic Kabbalah in a Platonic Key: Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo*', in Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus, eds., *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1-37. *Pardes Rimmonim* has been partially translated: Cordovero, Moshe, *Pardes Rimmonim: Orchard of Pomegranates, Parts 1-4*, trans. Elyakim Getz (Monfalcone: Providence University, 2007).

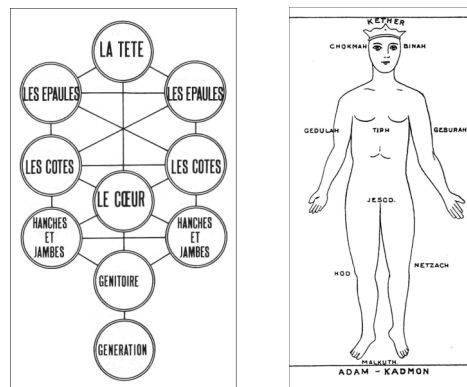
⁴² The source of this concept can be traced back to the Babylonian Talmud, compiled c. 150 BCE-500 CE; see Wald, *The Doctrine of the Divine Name*, 27-30. On similarities with the Empedoclean polarity of Love and Strife, see Wald, *The Doctrine of the Divine Name*, 43-46. For the development of the concept in the twelfth century *Sefer HaBahir* (*Book of Brightness*) which influenced the circle of the *Zohar* a century later, see Scholem, Gershom, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990; originally published as *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1962), 144.

⁴³ Gikatilia, *Sha'are Orah*, p. 147. On the polarity of *Chesed* and *Geburah*, and the balancing function of *Tiferet*, 'the middle attribute which includes all', see Gikatilia, *Sha'are Orah*, pp. 223-25. The 'Tree of Life' is first mentioned in the twelfth century Kabbalistic work called *Sefer HaBahir* (*Book of Brightness*). The Tree is both illustrated diagrammatically and described in detail in Gikatilia's *Sha'are Orah* (see, for example, the discussion on pp. 221ff), and a total of sixteen Lurianic versions of it are published in the *Kabbala denudata* (see Christopher Atton and Stephen Dziklewicz, *Kabbalistic Diagrams of Rosenroth*, Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks No. 23, London: The Hermetic Research Trust, 1987; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 417). Virtually all Kabbalists in subsequent centuries, including those of the British occult revival, have used one form or another of this diagrammatic structure. Lévi himself, surprisingly, rarely includes a diagram of the Tree in his work, although he would have been familiar

the idea of correspondences between upper and lower worlds, Lévi asserts that human beings can only know deity through its manifestations in Nature and in themselves. These manifestations always reflect the polarised powers of Mercy and Judgement, which the successful magician must attempt to balance through the equilibrating power of the heart.⁴⁴



A printed version of Gikatilia's Tree of Life (English translation), showing the importance of the 'trunk' of the central column with the two 'arms' of Chesed and Geburah on right and left (Gikatilia, *Sha'are Orah*, p. 229).



On the left, one of Lévi's versions of the Tree of Life, which follows Kabbalistic tradition in linking the ten *sefirot* with the human body. *Tiferet* is the heart at the centre; *Chesed* and *Geburah*, flanking it on left and right, are the arms and hands (Lévi, *Cours de philosophie occulte*, p. 269). On the right, the Victorian occultist William Wynn Westcott's adaptation of the figure of Adam Kadmon to the ten *sefirot* and the human body (Westcott, *Introduction to the Study of the Kabbalah* (1891), Plate III, facing p. 44)

Lévi's familiarity with Gikatilia's *Gates of Light* is also evident in a poem called *Les*

with the examples included in the *Kabbala denudata*. Lévi's application of the Tree to various aspects of biological, social, and spiritual life can be found in *Cours de philosophie occulte*, pp. 259-77.

⁴⁴ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 206-7: 'The alternate use of contrary forces, heat after cold, gentleness after severity, love after anger, etc., is the secret of perpetual motion and of the prolongation of power...Thus, in magic, it is necessary to temper works of anger or severity with works of beneficence and love' ('L'emploi alterné des forces contraires, le chaud après le froid, la douceur après la sévérité, l'amour après la colère, etc., est le secret du mouvement perpétuel et de la prolongation de la puissance...C'est ainsi qu'il faut, en magie, tempérer les oeuvres de colère ou de rigueur par des opérations de bienfaisance et d'amour').

correspondances, published under the name Alphonse-Louis Constant in 1845.⁴⁵ For Lévi, the law of correspondences is *the* primary Kabbalistic doctrine.⁴⁶ This poem once again presents Gikatilia's scheme of polarised male and female cosmic forces mediated by a central power which Lévi, as a Catholic, associates with Christ.⁴⁷ Lynn Wilkinson, discussing Swedenborg's influence on French

⁴⁵ Constant, Alphonse Louis (Éliphas Lévi), 'Les correspondances', in *Les trois harmonies: chansons et poésies* (Paris: Fellens et Dufour, 1845), pp. 297-301. This poem is sometimes compared with Charles Baudelaire's later poem, also called *Correspondances*; Lévi and Baudelaire had in fact been friends. See Bowman, *Éliphas Lévi, visionnaire romantique*, pp. 6-7; Boon, Jean-Pierre, 'Baudelaire, *Correspondances* et le magnétisme animal', *PMLA*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (May 1971), pp. 406-410.

⁴⁶ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 77: 'That which is in visible Nature, as we already know following the sole doctrine of the Kabbalah, reveals that which is in the domain of invisible Nature' ('Ce qui est dans la nature visible révèle, comme nous le savons déjà d'après le dogme unique de la cabale, ce qui est dans le domaine de la nature invisible, ou des causes secondes toutes proportionnelles et analogues aux manifestations de la cause première'). See also Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 62: 'The visible is the manifestation of the invisible, or, in other terms, the perfect word is, in things appreciable and visible, in exact proportion to things which are inappreciable by our senses and invisible to our eyes.' ('Le visible est la manifestation de l'invisible, ou, en d'autres termes, le verbe parfait est, dans les choses appréciables et visibles, en proportion exacte avec les choses inappréciables à nos sens et invisibles à nos yeux.') On the late antique *Tabula smaragdina* or Hermetic 'Emerald Tablet' which also presents the theory of correspondences, purportedly 'found' and incorporated in the early medieval Arabic *Book of the Secrets of Creation* by pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana (Balînâs), see Lory, Pierre, 'Hermetic Literature III: Arab', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, pp. 529-533; Faivre, Antoine, *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1995), pp. 89-92. On the theory of correspondences, Lévi also cites early modern alchemical writers such as Heinrich Khunrath, whom he understands to be a Kabbalist; see, for example, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 263, where he declares that Khunrath, in company with Raymond Lull and Nicholas Flamel, succeeded in making alchemical gold, and p. 282, where he relates Khunrath's alchemical androgyne to the polarised *sefirot* of *Chesed* and *Geburah*. See also *Histoire de la magie*, pp. 366-369, where Lévi calls Khunrath a 'sovereign prince of the Rosy Cross' and a messianist, and discusses Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae, solius verae, Christiano-Kabalisticum, divino-magicum, nec non physico-chymicum, tertriumum, catholicon...* (Hanover: Gulielmus Antonius, 1609) as a Kabbalistic-Hermetic text. For a general view of the alchemical/Rosicrucian/Kabbalistic current in Western esoteric thought to which Khunrath belongs, see McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, pp. 23-37; Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 115-130 and 247-275; Faivre, Antoine, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 5-15 and 171-190; Yates, Frances A., *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Kahn, Didier, 'The Rosicrucian Hoax in France', in Newman, William R. and Anthony Grafton, eds., *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 235-344.

⁴⁷ The poem comprises ten verses with ten lines each. On the Kabbalistic significance of the number ten, see Lévi, Éliphas, *La clef des grand mystères, suivant Hénoc, Abraham, Hermès Trismégiste et Salomon* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1861; reprinted, La Roche-sur-Yon: Éditions de la Maisnie, 1974; English translation, *The Key of the Mysteries*, trans. Aleister Crowley (London: Rider & Co., 1959; reissued, York Beach, ME: WeiserBooks, 2002), p. 44: 'The number ten is the absolute number of the Kabbalah and the key to the Sefirot' ('X: Nombre absolu de la kabbale. La clef des sephiroths'). *Les correspondances* probably follows Pico's injunction in the *Heptaplus* that writings about divine matters should be arranged numerologically, 'just as God, the almighty artificer, arranged them in themselves', so that the written work itself structurally reproduces 'the exact image' of the sacred theme (Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Heptaplus*, in *On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One, Heptaplus*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, Paul J. W. Miller, and Douglas Carmichael, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1985, 'Second Proem', p. 79). Pico also presents seventy-two Kabbalistic Conclusions in his *900 Theses*, which are meant to correspond with the sacred seventy-two letters of one of the Divine Names; on Pico's use of Kabbalistic numerological techniques, see Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, especially pp. 77-83. According to Farmer (*Syncretism in the West*, p. 30 and n. 81) the correlation of numerology with textual content is a characteristic 'pre-modern' medieval and Renaissance device. Lévi assumed that the *Apocalypse* of St. John was a Kabbalistic work because it has twenty-two chapters; for his efforts to interpret the *Apocalypse* Kabbalistically, see his posthumously published manuscript, *Les mystères de la Kabbale, ou l'harmonie occulte des deux Testaments*

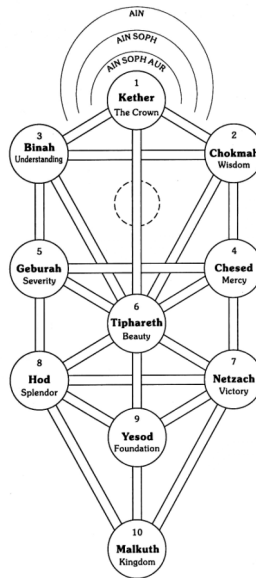
Romanticism, suggests that Lévi acquired his idea of correspondences from the Swedish mystic, whose work enjoyed great popularity in France in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ But the idea of correspondences is a motif of great antiquity and central to the medieval Kabbalah, and Lévi would have encountered it in a variety of older sources, including the *Kabbala denudata*.⁴⁹ When Lévi

contenus dans la prophétie d'Ézéchiel et l'Apocalypse de Saint-Jean, d'après le manuscrit autographe d'Éliphas Lévi, 1861 (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1920; English translation, *The Mysteries of the Qabalah, or Occult Agreement of the Two Testaments* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1974). Lévi also assumed a knowledge of the Tarot in the work of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, who divides one of his own books into 22 chapters (see Waite's footnote in Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, p. 4, fn. 2). Lévi attempts to present his own version of Pico's Conclusions in *La clef des grands mystères*, pp. 196-99, where he presents 'Axioms' on 'Dieu et la liberté', of which there are, not surprisingly, twenty-two. Lévi also utilises numerological structuring in *Dogme et rituel* (two books of twenty-two chapters each to correspond with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet) and in *Histoire de la magie* (seven books of seven chapters each). See especially the fourth verse of *Les correspondances*: 'Formé d'invisibles paroles,/ Ce monde est le songe de Dieu;/ Son verbe en choisit les symboles,/ L'esprit les remplit de son feu./ C'est cette écriture vivante,/ D'amour, de gloire et d'épouvante,/ Que pour nous Jésus retrouva;/ Car toute science cachée/ N'est qu'une lettre détachée/ Du nom sacré de Jéhova.' The poem is also quoted in its entirety in the *Dictionnaire de la littérature chrétienne* that Lévi compiled for the Abbé Migne in 1851 under the name of Alphonse-Louis Constant. For fear and love as Kabbalistic opposites, see Pico, *900 Theses*, Conclusions 28.38 and 28.39, in Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 360-61. For the use of the word 'fear' as a specific synonym for Geburah, see Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, Book III, p. 291. For Lévi's equation of *Chesed* and *Geburah* with the twin pillars of Freemasonry, *Jakin* and *Boaz*, see *Dogme et rituel*, p. 75: 'Malkout [the tenth *sefira*] appuyé sur Géburah et sur Chesed, c'est le temple de Salomon ayant pour colonnes Jakin et Bohas.' See also p. 65: 'Boaz and Jakin are the names of the two symbolic columns which stood before the main door of the Kabbalistic temple of Solomon. These two columns explain in the Kabbalah all the mysteries of antagonism, be they natural, be they political, be they religious, and they explain the generative struggle between man and woman' ('Bohas et Jakin sont les noms des deux colonnes symboliques qui étaient devant la porte principale du temple cabalistique de Salomon. Ces deux colonnes expliquent en cabale tous les mystères de l'antagonisme, soit naturel, soit politique, soit religieux, et ils expliquent la lutte génératrice de l'homme et de la femme').

⁴⁸ Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language*, p. 19-54.

⁴⁹ The first systematic exegesis of the idea of correspondences or 'sympathies' is usually credited to the first century BCE Stoic philosopher Posidonius; see John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism*, 80 BC to AD 220 (London: Duckworth, 1977), 106-113. For correspondences as one of the fundamental components of Western esotericism, see Faivre, Antoine and Karen-Claire Voss, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion', *Numen*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 1995), 48-77, esp. 60. For Swedenborg's various discussions of correspondences, see Swedenborg, Emanuel, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen*, trans. J. C. Ager (London: Swedenborg Foundation, 1952; originally published as *De caelo et ejus mirabilibus, et de inferno ex auditis et visis*, London: J. Lewis, 1758); *idem*, *Arcana coelestia: The Heavenly Arcana Contained in the Holy Scriptures or Word of the Lord Unfolded, Beginning with the Book of Genesis together with Wonderful Things Seen in the World of Spirits and the Heaven of Angels*, ed. John Faulkner Potts, 12 volumes (New York: American Swedenborg Printing and Publishing Society, 1909-1910); *idem*, *An Hieroglyphic Key to Natural and Spiritual Mysteries by Way of Representations and Correspondences*, ed. and trans. Robert Hindmarsh (London: Thomas Goyder, 1826). See also Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language*, pp. 55-106. For Swedenborg's millenarianism, see Clarke Garrett, 'Swedenborg and the Mystical Enlightenment in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (January-March 1984), pp. 67-81. For Lévi's view of Swedenborg, see Constant, Alphonse-Louis [Éliphas Lévi], *Le livre des larmes ou le Christ consolateur: essai de conciliation entre l'église catholique et la philosophie moderne* (Paris: Paulier, 1845), pp. 233-34: 'Through the science of correspondences, he [Swedenborg] organizes the great harmony of human knowledge.' Lévi seems to have first discovered Swedenborg's work when he was incarcerated for his revolutionary publications in the prison of Sainte Pélagie in 1841, along with his friend Alphonse Esquiros and the French cleric Hugues-Félicité de Lamennais. Either of these men might have introduced him to Swedenborg's ideas. Swedenborg himself seems to have been steeped in Kabbalistic ideas. Lévi declares Swedenborg to have been a Kabbalist in *Dogme et rituel*, p. 19, and *Histoire de la magie*, p. 413: 'Swedenborg's system is none other than the Kabbalah, minus the principle of hierarchy; it is the Temple without the key of faith and without a foundation'. For scholarly discussions on Swedenborg and the Kabbalah, see

presents Kabbalistic theosophy, it is a nineteenth century paraphrase of Gikatilia: the vision of a unified but dynamically polarised universe endlessly generating forms on multiple levels through the constantly shifting attractions, repulsions, and reconciliations of the great male and female forces called Mercy and Judgement.



A contemporary version of the Tree of Life derived from the later teachings of the Order of the Golden Dawn, showing the central 'pillar of equilibrium', in Cicero, Chic and Sandra Tabatha Cicero, *The Golden Dawn Journal, Book II: Qabalah: Theory and Magic* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1994), p. xii

There is nothing newly 'occultist' in this conception. Its syncretic roots draw on Hebraic, Greek, Gnostic, and Hermetic doctrines from antiquity, but it is most clearly formulated in the thirteenth century Kabbalah of Joseph Gikatilia, made available to Lévi through Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*.

Lévi cites a vast range of sources which British occultists later used as a bibliography: Kabbalists, alchemists, illuminists, Mesmerists, Catholic theologians, and medieval Christianised

Schuchard, Marsha Keith, *Freemasonry, Secret Societies, and the Continuity of the Occult Tradition in English Literature*, PhD Dissertation (University of Texas at Austin, 1975); *idem*, 'Yeats and the "Unknown Superiors": Swedenborg, Falk and Cagliostro', in Roberts, Marie Mulvey and Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, eds., *Secret Texts: The Literature of Secret Societies* (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1995), pp. 114-168; *idem*, 'Why Mrs. Blake Cried: Swedenborg, Blake, and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision', *Esoterica*, Vol. 2 (2000), pp. 45-93; *idem*, 'Dr. Samuel Jacob Falk: A Sabbatian Adventurer in the Masonic Underground', in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, pp. 203-226; *idem*, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried: William Blake and the Erotic Imagination* (London: Century, 2006); Williams-Hogan, Jane, 'The Place of Emanuel Swedenborg in Modern Western Esotericism', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, pp. 200-252; Katz, David S., *The Occult Tradition: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), pp. 86-98; Scholem, Gershom, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, ed. Jonathan Chipman (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1991), pp. 228-29; Idel, Moshe, 'The World of Angels in Human Shape', in Joseph Dan and J. Hacker, eds., *Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), pp. 1-66; Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 95-103.

grimoires based on older Hebrew magical texts. Although little importance is given to the *Kabbala denudata* in assessments of Lévi's writings, it is primarily the Lurianic Kabbalah acquired from this work that informed some of his most important ideas.⁵⁰ One of the most influential of the Lurianic ideas he appropriated is the importance of the feminine dimension of the godhead, first emerging in twelfth century Kabbalistic texts but but fully developed by Luria and his disciples. Lévi's bizarre apocalyptic epic, *La Mère de Dieu*, published in 1844, is redolent with images of the redemptive role of this feminine power, who for Lévi is simultaneously Mary, the 'true' primal Church before its corruption, and the Kabbalistic *Shekhinah* or feminine aspect of deity.⁵¹ Lévi's elevation of the

⁵⁰ Lévi seems to have discovered the *Kabbala denudata* during a stay at the Benedictine Abbey at Solesmes when he was twenty-nine and still struggling with his decision to leave the priesthood; see Lévi, 'Confession de l'auteur' in *L'Assomption de la femme*, pp. xxv. Chacornac (Éliphas Lévi, p. 129) mentions that after leaving Solesmes, the *Kabbala denudata* became Lévi's 'breviary': 'Préparé de la sorte, il aborda les Kabbalistes. La *Kabbala Denudata* devint son brévière'. Hebrew Kabbalistic texts had been utilised to demonstrate the truth of Christianity since the thirteenth century; for examples of the use of the Kabbalah to convert Jews during the medieval period, see Hames, Harvey J., *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Consequently, Christian commentaries on the Kabbalah were often included in seminary libraries. Even the most conservative clerics of Lévi's time cite the *Zohar* in the old argument that the messiahship of Jesus is foretold in Jewish sacred literature. De Lamennais, Hugues-Félicité, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, 4 volumes (1817-1823), in *Oeuvres complètes* (Brussels, 1839), i.399: 'La distinction des personnes divines et l'unité de nature est encore exprimée plus positivement dans le *Zohar*...par le fameux rabbin Siméon, fils de Jabai,' quoted in Ages, Arnold, 'Lamennais and the Jews', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (October 1972), p. 163. There is some scholarly disagreement about whether Lamennais derived his Kabbalistic knowledge entirely from Latin sources – e.g. the *Kabbala denudata* and the two translations of the *Sefer Yetsirah* by Postel and Rittangelius – or whether he was an accomplished Hebraist. See Ages, 'Lamennais and the Jews', p. 163; Le Hir, Yves, *Lamennais écrivain* (Paris: P. A. Colin, 1948), p. 225; Riasonovsky, Nicholas V., 'On Lamennais, Chaadaev, and the Romantic Revolt in France and Russia', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 82, No. 5 (December 1977), pp. 1168. Also see Reardon, Bernard, *Liberalism and Tradition: Aspects of Catholic Thought in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). On esoteric currents among the Catholic intelligentsia, see Paul, Harry W., 'In Quest of Kerygma: Catholic Intellectual Life in Nineteenth-Century France', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (December 1969), pp. 387-423. Luria's ideas permeate many British occult works on the Kabbalah. Even when he is not mentioned, it is clear that the British occultists knew of and used the Lurianic Kabbalah. For specific references, see Westcott, William Wynn, *An Introduction to the Study of the Kabbalah, With Eight Diagrams* (London: Watkins, 1910), p. 5, where he refers to Luria as 'the greatest of the wonder-working Rabbis'; Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, p. 15, where, for reasons best known to himself, he lists Luria's *Sefer HaGilgulim* (*De revolutionibus animarum* in the *Kabbala denudata*) as a section of the *Zohar*; Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah*, pp. 412-420, where he calls Luria 'a wild fantasist' but emphasises the great impact of Luria's *Sefer HaGilgulim* on Lévi. Blavatsky makes a number of references to Luria in her various works, mainly derived from Lévi's own comments; see, for example, 'Madame Blavatsky on Indian Metaphysics', *The Spiritualist*, 22 March 1878, pp. 140-41, where her discussion of the different kinds of souls is based on Lévi's summary of *De revolutionibus animarum* in *Dogme et rituel*, p. 164, and his lengthy paraphrase of Lurianic ideas in *La science des esprits* (Paris: Germer-Baillière, 1865), pp. 124-147. Many of Dion Fortune's presentations of ritual magic as the union of the great male and female cosmic forces are derived almost entirely from Lurianic ideas filtered through Lévi, Westcott, Mathers, Waite, and Crowley.

⁵¹ Constant, Alphonse-Louis [Éliphas Lévi], *La Mère de Dieu, épopée religieuse et humanitaire* (Paris: Charles Gosselin, 1844; reissued, Paris: Elibron Classics, 2006). Lévi's description of his vision is found on p. 169. For an overview of this work, see Cellier, Léon, *L'Epopée Romantique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), pp. 209-220. Lévi was in prison at the time because of the revolutionary political sentiments expressed in *La Bible de la liberté*, published early in 1841; for details of his trial and sentencing, see Chacornac, *Éliphas Lévi*, pp. 161-62. Lévi describes the union of this figure with God in the 'solitude of the Temple', using a paraphrase of the *Song of Songs* – a favourite Lurianic metaphor for the union of male and female within the godhead that results in cosmic

feminine, usually explained in the context of his Romantic socialism, seems to be rooted in this amalgamation of the Virgin with the Kabbalistic doctrine of the feminine aspect of deity.⁵² Another important Lurianic idea is evident in *La Mère de Dieu* when Lévi informs us:

...Humanity, considered in the individuals who compose it, is, so to speak, the analysis of God, and that the idea of God is nothing more than the synthesis of humanity. I thus decided to seek men in God and to find God in men.⁵³

This statement emphasises that interiorised locus of the divine in the human which became one of the

restoration. On the juxtaposition of the Shekhinah and Mary, see Lévi, *Cours de philosophie occulte*, LXVIII, p. 117: 'Mary is the human personification of Chokmah, the divine wisdom, or of the holy Shekinah, light manifested through reflection. She is the feminine aspect of the Word made flesh' ('Marie est la personnification humaine de Chocmah, la sagesse divine ou de la Sainte Schechinah, la lumière manifestée par reflet. Elle est le côté féminin du Verbe fait chair'). For the exile of the Shekhinah in Lurianic Kabbalah, see the translations from Moshe Cordovero's *Tomer Devorah* and *Sefer Gerushin* in Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, pp. 59-60, and Fine's comment, p. 60. See also the extract from Corodovero's *Tomer Devorah* in Dan, Joseph, ed. and trans., *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 198-201; Werblowsky, R. J. Zvi, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America/Oxford University Press, pp. 148-49. For the return of the Shekhinah to the Temple and her union with the King, see Gikatilia, *Sha'are Orach*, pp. 11-54; see also Wolfson's translation of a relevant portion of this chapter in Wolfson, Elliot R., *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 63. For the theurgic practice of drawing down the Shekhinah into the Temple, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 166-69. For the Shekhinah as 'spouse of the King' and mother of the people of Israel who, because of the sins of the people, must go into exile, see the twelfth century *Sefer HaBahir* (*Book of Clarity*), 50-51, trans. in Schäfer, Peter, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God From the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 132, and Schäfer's comment on p. 128. The similarities between the themes of the *Sefer HaBahir* and Lévi's vision are particularly relevant, although he never mentions this early Kabbalistic text in his work. See also Schäfer, Peter, 'Daughter, Sister, Bride, and Mother: Images of the Femininity of God in the Early Kabbala', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (June 2000), 221-242; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 224-25, quoting *Zohar* 2.200b on the marriage of the *Shekhinah*. For an overview of the erotic elements in the Kabbalah, see Idel, Moshe, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), esp. Chapter 3, 'God's Wife and Concubine', 104-152. On the *Song of Songs* as the favoured Kabbalistic metaphor for the interplay of male and female potencies within God, see Green, 'Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the *Song of Songs*', e.g. 16-17, on the late thirteenth century Zoharic understanding of the *Song of Songs*: 'The Song of Songs is an epithalamium written by King Solomon, the mystic hierophant, to celebrate the marriage of male and female within God, blessed Holy One and *shekhinah*.' The erotic union of God with his *Shekhinah* is central to Lurianic thought; for translations of Luria's explicitly erotic descriptions of the 'divine coupling' of the King and 'the queen in gold of Ophir', see the text of Hayyim Vital's *Etz Hayyim* in Klein, *Kabbalah of Creation*, e.g. 98-99: 'When the Father and Mother are embracing, besides the graces and powers we have mentioned, the Father releases a droplet from his brain, and this is called Wisdom. The Mother releases a droplet (*tepa*) from herself, and this is called Intuition. All these are intermingling in the womb of the Mother.' Luria's quotations from the *Song of Songs* appear in *Kabbalah of Creation*, 36 and 206.

⁵² On Lévi's 'feminism' see Bowman, *Éliphas Lévi, visionnaire romantique*, 29-30; Andrews, Naomi J., "'La Mère Humanité': Femininity in the Romantic Socialism of Pierre Leroux and the Abbé A.-L. Constant", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2002), 697-716; *idem*, 'Utopian Androgyny: Romantic Socialists Confront Individualism in July Monarchy France', *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Summer 2003), 437-457. On the 'feminist' current in French utopian socialism, see Talbot, Margaret, 'An Emancipated Voice: Flora Tristan and Utopian Allegory', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 1991), 219-239. For the theme of androgyny in the Kabbalah, see Idel, Moshe, 'Androgyny and Equality in the Theosophico-Theurgical Kabbalah', *Diogenes*, Vol. 208 (2005), 27-38.

⁵³ Constant, *La Mère de Dieu*, 273.

hallmarks of the British occult revival,⁵⁴ articulated three centuries earlier by Isaac Luria himself:

The coming of the Messiah does not mean that we must wait for some individual to ride through the gate of Mercy in the Eastern Wall of the city of Jerusalem, mounted on a white donkey. Rather, the presence of goodwill towards men and peace on earth...is the Messiah. The Messiah is nothing more than the symbol of world harmony.⁵⁵

Lévi understands the Kabbalah as both a science and a doctrine of 'high' magic, and thus it is the great reconciler: the most sublime Western formulation of the primal revelation, through which all conflicting traditions can be shown to be rooted in a single universal truth. Although various forms of ur-religion were popular among French Romantics in the early nineteenth century, Lévi is convinced that it is most truthfully revealed in the Kabbalah.⁵⁶

All truly dogmatic religions have emerged from the Kabbalah and return there. All that is grand or scientific in the religious dreams of the illuminés, Jacob Böhme, Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, etc., is borrowed from the Kabbalah; all Masonic associations owe their secrets and their symbols to it.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See, for example, Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, 306: 'Viewed as a means of invoking the spirit of God, ceremonial is pure superstition; but viewed as a means of evoking the spirit of man, it is pure psychology, and that is how I view it'. On the identification of God with the inner self as a unique feature of contemporary spiritualities, see Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 204-229. For the appearance of this motif in the Jewish *hekhalot* literature of late antiquity, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 79; Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, pp. 150-57.

⁵⁵ Vital, Hayyim, *Sefer HaDerushim (Book of Discourses)*, in Rabbi Philip S. Berg and Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, eds. and trans., *Ten Luminous Emanations* (Jerusalem: Research Centre of Kabbalah, 1969), Vol. 1, p. 152. A shortened Latin version of the *Book of Discourses* is found in *Kabbala denudata*, 1.2.4, pp. 28-61: 'Tractus I. Libri Druschim, seu Introductio Metaphysica ad Cabbalam Autore R. Jizchak Loriense'.

⁵⁶ One of the chief perpetrators of the ur-religion, and an important influence on Lévi, was the Swiss pastor and Freemason Antoine Court de Gébelin (1728-1784); see his *Monde primitif, analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne, considéré dans divers objets concernant l'histoire, le blason, les monnaies, les jeux, les voyages des phéniciens autour du monde, les langues américaines, etc.*, 9 volumes (Paris, M. Robinet, 1772-83), Vol. 8, pp. xviii-xix. Another major contributor to this current of thought, often quoted by Lévi, was Antoine Fabre d'Olivet (1767-1825). Fabre d'Olivet was a prolific creator of esoteric 'metahistories' in which the ideas of a primal religion, a primal civilisation, and a primal language are all fused and form the esoteric basis of all subsequent religions. See Fabre d'Olivet, Antoine, *La langue hébraïque restituée* (Paris: self-published, 1815), in which he claims that the real secrets of the Book of Genesis, grossly distorted by poor translations, can be read at three different levels corresponding to body, soul, and spirit; and *Lettres à Sophie sur l'histoire*, 2 volumes (Paris: Lavillette et Cie, 1801), which presents the Atlanteans as the original inventors of science – an idea enthusiastically adopted by H. P. Blavatsky and the occultists of the Order of the Golden Dawn. For scholarly discussions on the theme of 'metahistories', see White, Hayden, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, pp. 35-61; Riffard, Pierre A., 'The Esoteric Method', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, pp. 63-74; McCalla, Arthur, 'Illuminism and French Romantic Philosophies of History', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, pp. 253-68.

⁵⁷ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 50: 'Toutes les religions vraiment dogmatiques sont sorties de la cabale et y retournent; tout ce qu'il y a de scientifique et de grandiose dans les rêves religieux de tous les illuminés, Jacob Böhme, Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, etc., est emprunté à la cabale; toutes les associations maçonniques lui doivent leurs secrets et leurs symboles. La cabale consacre seule l'alliance de la raison universelle et du Verbe divin; elle établit, par les contre-poids de deux forces opposées en apparence, la balance éternelle de l'être; elle concilie seule la raison avec la foi, le pouvoir avec la liberté, la science avec le mystère: elle a les clefs du présent, du passé et de l'avenir!' See also Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 39: 'Amène les esprits sérieux à la conciliation, regardée jusqu'à présent comme impossible, de la science et du dogme, de la raison et de la foi.' On Kabbalah as the great reconciler in the work of the Renaissance Kabbalists Pico and Postel, see Petry, pp. 78-93: 'For Christian humanists, Kabbalah would become an overarching system, a means of uniting Hebrew, Christian and pagan

The perception of the Kabbalah as a great reconciler was also shared by important figures in the French Jewish community, with whom Lévi had direct links. Adolphe Franck, the respected author of the only scholarly work on the Kabbalah available in French in the mid-nineteenth century, declares: 'It is in the province of Judaism...to reconcile science with God.'⁵⁸ In 1870, the rabbi Eliyahu Soloweyczyk, one of Lévi's many Polish emigré contacts, published a two-volume exegesis on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, in which he promulgates the possibility of the reconciliation of Judaism and Christianity through an understanding of the Kabbalah, and presents Jesus as a Jewish magus who performed his miracles through Kabbalistic magic.⁵⁹

Lévi's belief that a radical and even violent transformation of society would soon occur was not retained by the British occultists who adopted his work. By the last decades of the nineteenth century Darwinian evolutionary theories, with which Lévi was only slightly acquainted, had been transformed by the Theosophists into a form of spiritual evolutionism, 'teleological rather than mechanical'.⁶⁰ Lévi's literal messianism becomes progressively interiorised and individualised in the hands of the British occultists. Nevertheless, even after the devastation of the First World War and the

traditions.' On Kabbalah as the great reconciler for Knorr von Rosenroth, see Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 137-52. See also Lévi, *Le grand arcane*, p. 178: 'It is necessary that for the priesthood there should be a progressive initiation. That the occult sciences are studied by candidates for the sacred ministry, and above all that great Jewish Kabbalah which is the key to all symbols. Only then will the true universal religion be revealed' ['Qu'il y ait pour le sacerdoce une initiation progressive. Que les sciences occultes soient étudiées par les aspirants, au saint ministère, et surtout cette grande Kabbale judaïque qui est la clef de tous les symboles. Alors seulement la vraie religion universelle sera révélée'].

⁵⁸ Quoted in Baron, Salo W., 'The Revolution of 1848 and Jewish Scholarship: Part I: France, the United States and Italy', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 18 (1948-49), p. 16. For Franck's work, see Franck, Adolphe, *La Kabbale, ou la philosophie religieuse des Hébreux* (Paris: Librairie de I. Hachette, 1843; second edition, Hachette, 1889; first English translation, *The Kabbalah: The Religious Philosophy of the Hebrews*, trans. I. Sossnitz, New York: The Kabbalah Publishing Co., 1926).

⁵⁹ Soloweyczyk, Elie [Elijah], *Kol Kore (Vox Clamantis): La Bible, le Talmud et l'Évangile*, 2 volumes, trans. Lazare Wogue (Vol. 1, Paris: Imprimerie de E. Brière, 1870; Vol. 2, Paris: *Les Archives Israélites*). For Lévi's first encounter with Elie Soloweyczyk, see Chacornac, *Éliphas Lévi*, pp. 259-260, based on Lévi's correspondence, in which he states: 'I spoke with this venerable Israelite, and we saluted each other and said to each other: "Cholem, Rabbi!"' See Soloweyczyk, *Kol Kore*, Vol. 2, p. 135: 'Il est donc constant que Jésus opérait ses miracles au moyen de formules mystérieuses, de combinaisons du nom divin, dont il avait connaissance'. For Soloweyczyk's relationship with Adolphe Franck, see the list of the Rabbi's financial supporters in the autobiographical material included in *Kol Kore*, Vol. 1, p. 2, 'liste des souscripteurs', and Vol. 2, p. vii, 'ces généreux protecteurs de ma vieillesse'. The idea of Jesus as a Kabbalistic magician has enjoyed a long life; for a late twentieth century presentation, see Smith, Morton, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1978).

⁶⁰ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 466. See *idem*, pp. 470-82 for Darwin's impact on Blavatsky's doctrines. Lévi seems to have disliked what he knew of Darwin's theories, and equated the idea of natural selection with the power of the strong to oppress the weak: 'What Darwin calls natural selection is the triumph of might' (Lévi, *Éliphas, Paradoxes of the Highest Science, In Which the Most Advanced Truths of Occultism Are For the First Time Revealed (In Order to Reconcile the Future Developments of Science and Philosophy With the Eternal Religion)*, trans. 'A Master of the Wisdom', in *Theosophical Miscellany*, Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Co., 1883; reissued, Adyar: Madras Theosophical Publishing House, 1922, p. 165). Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in Britain in 1859, was not translated into French until 1873 (*L'origine des espèces au moyen de la sélection naturelle*, Paris: C. Reinwald, 1873).

looming shadow of the Second, Dion Fortune could still write about the adept's capability of transforming the 'mind of the race' through Kabbalistic ritual magic.⁶¹ By Fortune's time Lévi's Kabbalah had been reformulated through the language of the new psychologies, reflecting Freud's ideas about the *id* and Jung's theories of the collective unconscious and the androgynous nature of the psyche.⁶² But the Lurianic themes of exile and restitution, like the sacred union of the divine male and female potencies, remain intact in Fortune's own creative use of what she calls 'the mystical Qabalah'.

Kabbalistic magic and modernity

For Lévi, Kabbalistic magic is concerned with the development of 'the divinity of man', and comprises knowledge of and power over the hidden forces of nature.⁶³

⁶¹ See, for example, Fortune's *Moon Magic* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1956), p. 46: 'It was my task to bring certain new concepts to the mind of the race; not to its conscious mind but to its subconscious mind.'

⁶² The first English translation of Freud's 'The Psychic Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena' ('Über den psychischen Mechanismus hysterischer Phänomene', Leipzig/Vienna, 1893), trans. A. A. Brill, was published in 1909, in Freud, Sigmund, *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses*. A part of *Studies in Hysteria* (*Studien über Hysterie*), written with Joseph Breuer, trans. A. A. Brill, was published as a paper in the same volume; the complete work was published in English in 1936. Jung's work was translated into English earlier: 'On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena' was published in 1902; *Symbols of Transformation* (CW5), which marked Jung's break with Freud and the first expression of his theories of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, was published under the title *Psychology of the Unconscious*, trans. Beatrice M. Hinkle (London: Kegan Paul, 1917). 'A Review of the Complex Theory' and 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious' were both published as papers in 1934. It is worth noting that Jung himself was fascinated by the Kabbalah and was familiar with the *Kabbala denudata*; see, for example, C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, CW12, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), para. 313. See also Drob, Sanford L., 'Jung and the Kabbalah', *History of Psychology*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May 1999), pp. 102-118, in which Drob suggests that Jung's knowledge of the Kabbalah was acquired almost entirely from Knorr von Rosenroth. When Fortune encountered Jung's work she would have met familiar ideas.

⁶³ See, for example, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 126: 'The Great Work is, before all things, the creation of man by himself, that is to say, the full and entire conquest that he makes of his faculties and his future' (Le grand œuvre, c'est, avant toute chose, la création de l'homme par lui-même, c'est-à-dire la conquête pleine et entière, qu'il fait de ses facultés et de son avenir). For the equation of alchemy with Kabbalistic hermeneutics, see p. 283: 'The Great Work is something more than a chemical operation: it is a veritable creation of the human word initiated into the power of the word of God himself' (En sorte que le grand œuvre est quelque chose de plus qu'une opération chimique: c'est un véritable création du verbe humain initié à la puissance du verbe de Dieu même). This theme was taken up enthusiastically by British occultists: for example, William Wynn Westcott, one of the founders of the immensely influential magical group known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, describes his intention to encourage the study of 'the system of Philosophy founded upon the Kabbalah and the doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus' (William Wynn Westcott, 'Data of the History of the Rosicrucians', originally published for the S.R.I.A. in 1916 and reproduced in Gilbert, R. A., ed., *The Magical Mason: Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus*, Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1983, 39). See also Lévi, *Le grand arcane*, p. 61: 'The great secret of magic, the unique and incommunicable secret, has for its purpose to place in some way divine power at the service of the will of man' (Le grand arcane de la magie, l'arcane unique et incommunicable a, pour objet de mettre en quelque sorte la puissance divine au service de la volonté de l'homme'. See also Lévi, *Le grand arcane*, p. 362: 'Le grand arcane, l'arcane indicible, l'arcane dangereux, l'arcane incompréhensible peut se formuler définitivement ainsi: C'est la divinité de l'homme'). For Lévi, Kabbalistic magic, synonymous with alchemy, is both a Hermetic 'science of nature' and a means of spiritual transformation. For a sample of Lévi's views on alchemy, see especially the two chapters entitled 'Le Grand Oeuvre' in *Dogme et rituel*, pp. 126-29 and 259-63, and *Histoire de la magie*, Book 5, Ch. 4, 'Alchimistes', pp. 342-358. According to Jean-

Magical operations are the exercise of a natural power, but superior to the ordinary forces of nature. They are the result of a science and a practice which exalt human will beyond its normal limits. The supernatural is nothing but the extraordinary natural, or the exalted natural.⁶⁴

Pierre Brach, the juxtaposition of Kabbalah and magic/alchemy only occurs from the seventeenth century onward, becoming one of the mainstays of 'nature mysticism' or *Naturphilosophie* within Paracelsian and Rosicrucian discourses: the end product of the work of Pico, Reuchlin, and Agrippa with their emphasis on magic as the 'science of nature'. See Brach, Jean-Pierre, 'Magic IV: Renaissance – 17th Century', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, p. 733. On natural magic in Pico, see Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, pp. 1-34; 'Twenty-Six Magical Conclusions According to My Own Opinion', in *900 Conclusions (Opera, Garin, ed., De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno, e scritti vari*, Florence: 1942), trans. in Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 495-503. For scholarly discussions on Pico's natural magic, see, *inter alia*, Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 115-132; Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 84-116; *idem*, 'Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and magic', in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'umanesimo*, Vol. 1 (Firenze: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1965), pp. 159-204; Walker, D. P., *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 54-59. On natural magic in Trithemius, another of Lévi's favourite sources, see Brann, Noel L., *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999). For *Naturphilosophie* see Webster, Charles, 'Paracelsus, Paracelsianism, and the Secularization of the Worldview', *Science in Context*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2002), pp. 9-27; Williams-Hogan, 'Emanuel Swedenborg in Modern Western Esotericism', pp. 240-41; Debus, Allen G., 'Alchemy in an Age of Reason: The Chemical Philosophers in Early Eighteenth-Century France', in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, pp. 231-250. An early seventeenth century Hebrew alchemical text called the *Aesch Mezareph*, combining Kabbalistic theosophy with alchemical recipes, is included in Latin in the *Kabbala denudata*, apparently confirming Lévi's belief that the Kabbalah and the 'Great Work' are identical in their nature and goals; see Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudata*, Vol. 1, *Compendium Libra Cabbalistico-Chymici, Aesch Mezareph dicti, de Lapide Philosophico*. The *Aesch Mezareph* (also spelled *Esh M'saref*, 'Purifying Fire'), was first translated into English in 1714 by an anonymous author calling himself 'The Lover of Philalethes'. This translation was later included by William Wynn Westcott in *Collectanea Hermetica*, Vol. 4 (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1894). In the preface to the work, Westcott states that copies in Hebrew 'still exist in concealment', hinting that these copies are in the possession of none other than H. P. Blavatsky. A more recent translation of the *Aesch Mezareph* appears in Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 322-335. On the earliest evidence of the Hebrew version of the *Aesch Mezareph*, see Scholem, Gershom, *Alchemy and Kabbalah*, pp. 64-65. See also Waite's dating of the text to the early seventeenth century, based on the fact that it quotes the *Pardes Rimmonim* of Moshe Cordovero, published in the mid-sixteenth century and also included in *Kabbala denudata* (Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah*, p. 425). On Lévi's purported translation of the *Aesch Mezareph* into French under the title *Le livre rouge*, see Flamel, Hortensius, *Le livre rouge. Résumé du magisme, des sciences occultes et de la philosophie hermétique d'après Hermes Trismegiste, Pytagore, Cléopâtre, Artephins, Marie-l'Égyptienne, Albert-le-Grand, Paracelse, Cornelius Agrippa, Cardan, Mesmer, Charles Fourier, etc.* (Paris: Lavigne, 1841). Also see Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 321. On Hortensius Flamel as a pseudonym for Alphonse-Louis Constant, see Waite, 'Biographical Preface', in Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, p. xxii, fn. 1: 'There is reason for believing that he was the compiler of *Le livre rouge*, 1841, under the pseudonym of Hortensius Flamel.' Also see Waite's exegesis of the *Aesch Mezareph* in *The Holy Kabbalah*, pp. 424-28, in which he discusses with considerable scorn Lévi's purported 'discovery' and 'translation' of the fragments. In one of the voluminous footnotes to *Transcendental Magic* (p. 251, fn. 1), Waite points out the similarity between a passage by Lévi on the seven magical planets and one in *Le livre rouge*, p. 129. This hardly constitutes proof of Lévi's authorship, since statements declaring the analogies between planets and musical notes are ubiquitous in esoteric literature and may be found in a vast number of texts dating from late twentieth century occult treatises to the 'Orphic' literature of late antiquity. Also see Secret's argument in favour of Lévi's authorship of *Le livre rouge* in Secret, 'Éliphas Lévi and the Kabbalah'. On Lévi's purported 'discovery' of a manuscript of the *Aesch Mezareph*, see Scholem, *Alchemy and Kabbalah*, pp. 79-80. Lévi included his own French adaptation of the *Aesch Mezareph* as a supplement to the first edition of *La clef des grands mystères* (pp. 490ff), but this supplement, which bears little resemblance to either *Le livre rouge* or the *Aesch Mezareph* of the *Kabbala denudata*, was dropped from later editions as well as from the English translation by Aleister Crowley.

⁶⁴ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 198: 'Les opérations magiques sont l'exercice d'un pouvoir naturel, mais supérieur aux forces ordinaires de la nature. Elles sont le résultat d'une science et d'une habitude qui exaltent la volonté humaine au-dessus de ses limites habituelles. Le surnaturel n'est que le naturel extraordinaire ou le naturel

For Lévi, the world is held together by an invisible primal substance which operates in Nature through chains of correspondences.⁶⁵ On this 'modern' understanding of magic, Wouter Hanegraaff bases his thesis of the 'newness' of modern occultism: magic, forced to adapt to changing worldviews, gradually took new, secularised forms, including a psychologisation of ritual and a replacement of the ancient idea of angelic hierarchies with that of 'subtle matter' mediating between the human psyche and the world.⁶⁶ This view of magic could not have existed before the Enlightenment because it is a reaction to the post-Enlightenment 'disenchantment of the world'.⁶⁷ Thus Lévi's 'new' Kabbalistic magic is aimed at 're-enchanting' an increasingly secularised society.

Just as Dion Fortune's Kabbalah borrows from Freud and Jung, Lévi's borrows from one of the main scientific discourses of his own day: Franz Anton Mesmer's late eighteenth century concept of the 'universal fluid'.⁶⁸ Mesmer's idea, itself considered to be borrowed from earlier alchemical ideas about the 'light of nature',⁶⁹ is transformed in Lévi's work into what he calls the 'astral light': the pervasive universal substance through which the trained will of the magus can accomplish miracles.⁷⁰

exalté...le merveilleux est ce qui émerveille, ce sont des effets qui surprennent ceux qui en ignorent les causes ou qui leur assignent des causes non proportionnelles à de pareils résultats.'

⁶⁵ See Von Engelhardt, 'Natural Science in the Age of Romanticism', pp. 101-131; Von Stuckrad, Kocku, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), pp. 62-104; Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, pp. 10-15, 74-77.

⁶⁶ Hanegraaff, Wouter J., 'Magic V: 18th – 20th Century', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, pp. 738-744; also see *idem*, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 411-513; *idem*, 'How magic survived the disenchantment of the world', *Religion*, Vol. 33 (2003), pp. 357-380.

⁶⁷ Hanegraaff, 'How magic survived', pp. 359-60; Hanegraaff, 'Magic V', p. 741. On Max Weber's influential theory of enchantment and disenchantment, see Weber, Max, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Mills Wright (London: Routledge, 1991 [1947]); *idem*, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1958 [1904-5]); *idem*, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963); Willis, Roy and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 77-92.

⁶⁸ For the claim that Lévi's idea of the astral light is entirely indebted to Mesmer, see McIntosh, *Éliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, p. 149. For an English translation of Franz Anton Mesmer's complete works, see *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Medical and Scientific Writings of F. A. Mesmer, M. D.*, ed. and trans. George J. Bloch (Los Altos, CA: William Kaufmann, 1980). On the spread of animal magnetism in pre- and post-Revolutionary France, see Darnton, Robert, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Ellenberger, Henri, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 74-83; Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, pp. 76-77. For Lévi's many references to Mesmer, see, for example, *Dogme et rituel*, 'Discours préliminaire', p. 33: 'Man is the thaumaturge of the earth, and through his speech, that is to say, through his intelligent word, he disposes of the forces of destiny...It is this that Mesmer, before us, revealed to the world: this is the terrible secret that was hidden with so much care in the shadows of the ancient sanctuaries.'

⁶⁹ On Mesmer's debt to Paracelsus, see Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, p. 66; Webb, *The Flight From Reason*, pp. 7-8; Margaret Goldsmith, *Franz Anton Mesmer: The History of an Idea* (London: Arthur Barker, 1934), 46-48; Schuchard, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*, pp. 206-209.

⁷⁰ On Paracelsus' alchemical 'light of nature' and interrelated ideas, see Paracelsus, *Selected Writings*, ed. Jolande Jacobi, trans. Norbert Guterman, Bollingen Series XXVIII (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1958), esp. *Astronomia magna* (1537-38), pp. 496-97. See also Jung, C. G., 'The Two Sources of Knowledge: the Light of Nature and the Light of Revelation', in *Alchemical Studies*, CW13, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 111-

The astral light, in constant flux between the two great poles of Mercy and Judgement, is responsible for all the phenomena of spiritualism, mesmerism, and magic.⁷¹ This important concept has dominated occultist doctrines to the present day, initially through its appropriation by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society and one of the most influential figures in late nineteenth century occultism.⁷² In his use of scientific language, Lévi may be considered modern.⁷³ But as Thomas Laqueur observes, 'Every age, and not just the modern age, has felt the need to make its religious beliefs comport somehow with the best scientific and philosophical learning of its day.'⁷⁴ The question remains whether Lévi's modernity is in fact a thin linguistic layer spread over an intact older tradition. The idea of a primal substance permeating the whole of creation and receptive to the power of the human will is common to Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and Gnostic texts from late antiquity. The primal substance as both formless matter and light is also the major theme of the creation process in Genesis, and can be found in Kabbalistic literature dating from the twelfth century.⁷⁵ Lurianic texts refer to it as the 'Endless Light'.⁷⁶ George Margoliouth, in a paper written in

132; Pagel, Walter, 'Paracelsus and the Neoplatonic and Gnostic Traditions', in Debus, ed., *Alchemy and Early Modern Chemistry*, pp. 101-142; Debus, Allen G., *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1977), pp. 229-30.

⁷¹ Lévi refers to the astral light in virtually all his work; see especially *Dogme et rituel*, pp. 102-107, in which he discusses the relationship between the astral light and the human imagination.

⁷² For Blavatsky's use of Lévi's idea of the astral light, see the many references in *Isis Unveiled* (2 volumes, London: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1875), e.g., Vol. 1, pp. xxv-xxvii, where she credits Paracelsus and Neoplatonists such as Porphyry, but does not mention Lévi, and Vol. 1, pp. 125-26, where she lists Lévi among many other sources (including Bulwer-Lytton) and, following Lévi, relates the astral light to the Kabbalah. For her choice of a Hindu name for a Western concept (she refers to the astral light as the *akasa*), see Bevir, Mark, 'The West Turns East: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Autumn 1994), pp. 747-767; Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 454-455. For further Theosophical borrowings from Lévi's astral light, see Off, Louise ['Nizida'], *The Astral Light: An Attempted Exposition of Certain Occult Principles in Nature With Some Remarks Upon Modern Spiritism* (London: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1889); around half of this work is comprised of quotes from *Dogme et rituel*.

⁷³ Lévi's 'modernity' was already recognised in the late nineteenth century by the occultist A. E. Waite, who comments: 'He is actually the spirit of modern thought forcing an answer for the times from the old oracles.' See Waite, 'Biographical Preface' in Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁷⁴ Laqueur, Thomas, 'Why the Margins Matter: Occultism and the Making of Modernity', *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2006), p. 119.

⁷⁵ For the primal light as ether in the twelfth century *Sefer HaBahir*, see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 73.

⁷⁶ There is a large body of scholarly literature on the interpenetration of ideas between Jewish, Gnostic, Neoplatonic, and Hermetic currents in late antiquity; see, for example, Van den Broek, Roelof and M. J. Vermaseren, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1981). The chief Platonic source of the idea of the primal substance as the carrier of both light/good and darkness/evil (also present in Lurianic Kabbalah and in Lévi's understanding of the Astral Light) seems to be Plotinus (see *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1992, III.2-3, pp. 181-208), but Plotinus' teacher Numenius was apparently familiar with early Jewish sources, hence his famous quotation, 'What else is Plato but Moses speaking Attic Greek?' (quoted in F. E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1970, p. 585). On the nexus of primal light/primal substance/imagination in Neoplatonic, Gnostic, and Hermetic sources, see, *inter alia*, Pépin, Jean, 'Theories of Procession in Plotinus and the Gnostics', in Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman, eds., *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 297-

1908, discusses the exciting new 'ether theory' of Sir Oliver Lodge and notes with satisfaction, 'The Jewish Kabbalah has by a series of centuries anticipated one of the most essential ideas embodied in the latest scientific theory regarding the constitution of matter': a single primitive substance 'which fills the infinity of space in an unbroken continuity'.⁷⁷

Lévi deems Jewish magic to be superior magic because, unlike ordinary sorcery, it is divinely sanctioned.⁷⁸ Kabbalistic texts include a wide range of magical techniques, from the preparation of talismans to formulae enabling the control of higher entities.⁷⁹ The Lurianic practice of invoking a

336; Dillon, John M., 'Solomon Ibn Gabirol's Doctrine of Intelligible Matter', in Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 43-59; Fowden, Garth, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 77-78. The two primary images of the process of creation in Kabbalistic texts are light and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. See Scholem, Gershom, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 35-36: 'The process which the Kabbalists described as the emanation of divine energy and divine light was also characterized as the unfolding of the divine *language*. This gives rise to a deep-seated parallelism between the two most important kinds of symbolism used by the Kabbalists to communicate their ideas. They speak of attributes and of spheres of light; but in the same context they speak also of divine names and the letters of which they are composed. From the very beginnings of Kabbalistic doctrine these two manners of speaking appear side by side.' On the primal light as *hyle* or formless matter, see also Matt, Daniel C., 'Ayin: the Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism', in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, 67-108. For the Lurianic 'Endless Light', see Hayyim Vital, *Etz Hayyim*, 1.1, in *Ten Luminous Emanations*, Vol. 1, 3 and 9. For earlier Kabbalistic references, see, for example, *Zohar* II.166b-167a, trans. Isaiah Tishby, in *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 442. See also the partial English translation of *Shekel-hak-Kodesh*, a work by Moshe de Leon, the compiler of the *Zohar*: Moshe de Leon, 'From *The Doctrine of Ether*', trans. George Margoliouth, in Meltzer, David, ed., *The Secret Garden: An Anthology of the Kabbalah* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1976), 156-63. See also Margoliouth, George, 'The Doctrine of the Ether in the Kabbalah', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (July 1908), 825-861. For a biographical sketch and summary of De Leon's literary corpus, see Wolfson, Elliot R., *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses De Leon's Sefer Ha-Rimmon*, Brown University Judaic Studies Vol. 144 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 3-9. For earlier representations of the primal light in the twelfth century *Sefer HaBahir* (*Book of Brightness*), see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 51-52. The primal ether occurs as the first of all created things and the source of all images in the twelfth century work of the German Hasid Eleazar of Worms, from which Luria borrowed extensively; see Wolfson, Elliot R., *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 195-214.

⁷⁷ Margoliouth, 'The Doctrine of the Ether', p. 828. Lodge, the celebrated electromagnetic theorist who had made the first public demonstration of wireless telegraphy in 1894, later became involved in spiritualist experiments to confirm his belief, à la Lévi, that ether is the universal primordial medium through which all spiritualist phenomena are manifested. On Lodge's spiritualist proclivities, see Raia, Courtenay Grean, 'From Ether Theory to Ether Theology: Oliver Lodge and the Physics of Immortality', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 19-43. The Theosophists were also fond of claiming Lodge as 'one of us' because they could identify Lodge's ether with the astral light; see Annie Besant, *Theosophy and the New Psychology* (London/Benares: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1904), p. 11; Leadbeater, C. W., *Life After Death* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1912), p. 5. In his introduction to *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (p. 2), S. L. MacGregor Mathers also invokes Lodge for support.

⁷⁸ On the myth of Jews as magicians and sorcerers, see Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, pp. 1-24; *idem*, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1943).

⁷⁹ Magic is endemic to Jewish sacred literature from the Pentateuch onward, and Jewish attitudes toward magic differ considerably from Christian. For a comprehensive survey of the types of magic found in Jewish literature, e.g. linguistic techniques, demonic invocations, astral talismans, meditative contemplation, theurgical performance of the commandments, and blessing as transmission of power, see Idel, Moshe, 'Foreword', in Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York, NY: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1939; new edition, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. ix-xxx. Among many scholarly works on

disincarnate sage or *maggid* enjoyed currency in some Jewish Kabbalistic circles well into the twentieth century, and may be one of the prototypes for Blavatsky's disincarnate 'Masters'.⁸⁰ Talismans intended to attract supernal forces figure high on Lévi's list of magical priorities, acquired from a variety of sources ranging from Agrippa's sixteenth century *De occulta philosophia* to any medieval grimoire Lévi could lay his hands on.⁸¹ These sources in turn rely on late antique Jewish

the subject, see Schwartz, Dov, *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Torijano, Pablo A., *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, Vol. 73, ed. John J. Collins, Leiden: Brill, 2002); Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*; Janowitz, Naomi, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001); Klutz, Todd E., ed., *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003); Idel, Moshe, 'Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to Early Hasidism', in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, pp. 82-117; *idem*, 'The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance'; Abelson, Joshua, 'Jewish Magic', in *The Friday Night Book: A Jewish Miscellany* (London: Soncino Press, 1933), pp. 45-69; Bloom, Maureen, *Jewish Mysticism and Magic: An anthropological perspective* (London: Routledge, 2007); Bohak, Gideon, 'Hebrew, Hebrew Everywhere? Notes on the Interpretation of *Voces Magicae*', in Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Brannon Wheeler, eds., *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 69-82; Duling, Dennis C., 'Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David', *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3/4 (July-October 1975), pp. 235-252; Geller, M. J., 'Deconstructing Talmudic Magic', in Charles Burnett and W. F. Ryan, eds., *Magic and the Classical Tradition*, Warburg Institute Colloquia, Vol. 7, eds. Charles Burnet, Jill Kraye and W. F. Ryan (London/Turin: Warburg Institute/Nino Aragno Editore, 2006), pp. 1-18. For a useful summary of the various perceptions of 'natural' magic utilised by Pico and other Renaissance Kabbalists – including *spiritus mundi*, *anima mundi*, stellar rays, stellar *influxus*, intellectual and angelic powers, and cosmic correspondences – see Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, pp. 118-132.

⁸⁰ For seventeenth century instructions on how to invoke a *maggid* or disincarnate spiritual or angelic guide, see the revelation of Rabbi Joseph Taitazak in *The Heart and the Fountain*, pp. 175-180. For a description of an experience of a *maggid*, see Jacobs, Louis, ed. and trans., 'The *Maggid* of Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzato', in *The Jewish Mystics* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1990), pp. 136-147. For scholarly discussions on the *maggid*, see Werblowski, Joseph Karo, pp. 257-286; Bilu, Yoram, 'Dybbuk and Maggid: Two Cultural Patterns of Altered Consciousness in Judaism', *AJS Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1996), pp. 341-366. On Jewish ritual exorcism, see Petrovsky-Shtem, Yohanan, 'The Master of an Evil Name: Hillel Ba'al Shem and His *Sefer ha-Heshek*', *AJS Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004), pp. 217-248; Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism, and Hasidism*, pp. 67-134. For a discussion of the development of Blavatsky's concept of disincarnate 'Masters' (which does not mention any possible Kabbalistic sources), see Johnson, K. Paul, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). Lévi attempted on one occasion to conjure the spirit of the great pagan magician Apollonius of Tyana rather than Luria's favourite *maggid*, the prophet Elijah, perhaps fearing that the spirit of an ancient Jewish sage might not respond enthusiastically to a Catholic adept (Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, pp. 132-36). On Luria's invocation of the spirit of Elijah, see Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, pp. 96-98. On the popularity of Elijah as a *maggid*, see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 143-45. On the absorption of the *maggid* Elijah into Rosicrucian and Masonic currents as the messianic revelatory figure of 'Elie Artiste', see Faivre, Antoine, 'Elie Artiste, ou le Messie des Philosophes de la Nature', Part 1, *Aries*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (July 2002), pp. 120-152; Part 2, *Aries*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 25-54. For Paracelsus' view of Elijah as an alchemist, see Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 29. The Rosicrucian/Masonic current in Western esotericism is the most likely channel through which Blavatsky may have encountered the idea of the spiritual guide.

⁸¹ The grimoires comprise the literature of Western ceremonial magic, generally involving instructions for astral talismans and the ritual invocation of demonic and/or angelic entities. In the form with which Lévi was familiar, they are largely sixteenth to eighteenth century redactions of earlier medieval materials. For a comprehensive overview of the grimoires, including those Lévi favoured, see Waite, A. E., *The Book of Black Magic: Including the Rites and Mysteries of Goëtic Theurgy, Sorcery, and Infernal Necromancy* (London: George Redway, 1886). Among the many grimoires that Lévi cites, the most important are: the *Grimoire of Honorius*, published in 1629 in the form Lévi knew it, but its earlier form, *The Sworn Book of Honorius*, dating from the fourteenth century; the *Grand Grimoire*; the *Key of Solomon the King* (dating from the sixteenth century but based on the much older Hebrew

texts such as the Solomonic cycle and the third century *Sefer HaRazim* (*Book of Mysteries*).⁸² Lévi displays his modernity in his insistence that the implements of ritual magic are merely an external means of focusing the mind of the magus.⁸³ But this modern perspective is also expressed in certain Kabbalistic currents from the thirteenth century. The Divine Names are perceived as a symbolic focus, and even angelic guides offering prophetic visions are understood as projected reflections of the mind of the adept as it joins with the divine mind:

Know that the fullness of the secret of prophecy to the prophet is that suddenly he will see his own form standing before him, and he will forget himself and disappear from it, and will see his own form standing before him and speaking with him and telling him the future. Of this secret the sages said,

Testament of Solomon (see Mathers' translation, *The Key of Solomon (Clavicula Salomonis)*, London: George Redway, 1888); the *Lemegeton* or *Lesser Key of Solomon* (see Mathers' translation, *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King*, self-published with Aleister Crowley, 1904; on this work, also called the *Almadel*, also see Veenstra, Jan R., 'The Holy Almadel: Angels and the Intellectual Aims of Magic', in *The Metamorphosis of Magic*, pp. 189-230); *The Book of Abramelin the Mage* (dated to the early eighteenth century; see Mathers' translation, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, London: John M. Watkins, 1900); the *Heptameron* or *Magical Elements*, purportedly by Peter of Abano (1250-1316) but in fact pseudepigraphic and dating from the sixteenth century; and the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* (Marburg, 1554), purportedly by Cornelius Agrippa but now considered pseudepigraphic. Lévi considered any grimoire that incorporated Hebrew letters and claimed to be authored by Solomon a genuine 'old Hebrew Grimoire' (*Histoire de la magie*, p. 217). He is not entirely mistaken: the original forms of these grimoires seem to be Hebrew magical texts from late antiquity. On these texts, see Thorndike, Lynn, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1923), Book IV, pp. 279-289; Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*; Klutz, Todd E., *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005); Alexander, 'Sefer Ha-Razim'; Duling, 'Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David'. For a useful contemporary 'emic' survey of the grimoires, see Leitch, Aaron, *Secrets of the Magical Grimoires: The Classical Texts of Magick Deciphered* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2005).

⁸² For English translations of the third century CE *Sefer HaRazim* and its medieval derivative, the *Sefer HaRaziel*, see Karr, Don, trans., *Liber Salomonis: Sepher Raziel*, Parts I and II (British Library Sloane MS 3826, 2r-57r), at www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/Solomon/LibSal.pdf; Finkel, Avraham Yaakov, ed. and trans., *Kabbalah: Selections from Classic Kabbalistic Works from Raziel HaMalach to the Present Day* (Southfield, MI: Targum Press, 2002); Savedow, Steve, ed. and trans., *Sepher Reziel Hemelach: The Book of the Angel Reziel* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 2000). For scholarly discussions on this work, see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 106-107; Alexander, P. S., 'Sefer ha-Razim and the Problem of Black Magic in Early Judaism', in *Magic in the Biblical World*, pp. 170-90; Roling, Bernd, 'The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin', in Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, eds., *The Metamorphosis of Magic: From Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 231-266; Secret, François, 'Sur quelques traductions du Sefer Raziel', *REJ*, Vol. 128 (1969), pp. 223-45; Idel, 'The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance', pp. 193-94. On astral magic in the work of the philosopher Abraham ibn Ezra, see Schwartz, *Studies in Astral Magic*, pp. 9-24; Del Valle, Carlos, 'Abraham Ibn Ezra's Mathematical Speculations on the Divine Name', in R. A. Herrera, ed., *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 159-176.

⁸³ Lévi, *Le grand arcane*, pp. 62-63: 'I recognise the relative efficacy of spells, herbs, and talismans. But these are only minor means which are linked with minor mysteries. I am speaking to you now about great moral forces and not of material instruments...The initiate into the high science of the mages has nothing to fear from sorcerers' ('Je reconnais l'efficacité relative des formules, des herbes et des talismans. Mais ce sont là des petits moyens qui se rattachent aux petits mystères. Je vous parle maintenant des grandes forces morales et non des instruments matériels...L'initié à la haute science des mages n'a rien à craindre des sorciers').

'Great is the power of the prophets, for they make the form similar to the creator.'⁸⁴

This Kabbalistic idea – that the adept, through the power of imagination focused by will, creates a 'magical personality' that allows access to supernal secrets – appears without significant alteration six hundred years later in Dion Fortune's 'occult' novels.⁸⁵ The 'psychologization of the sacred' is perhaps not invariably the result of post-Enlightenment disenchantment, but is represented in this surprising element in the medieval Kabbalah, constituting one of its great attractions for late nineteenth century occultism.

The power of the letters

Lurianic Kabbalah, like earlier Jewish esoteric literature, emphasises the magical nature of language.⁸⁶ Linguistic magic depends on understanding the relationship between the cosmos and the Hebrew alphabet: the structure of reality and the Hebrew letters are seen as two expressions of the same unknown divine source. Utilising the magical power of language can thus make the adept godlike and can transform the cosmos itself.⁸⁷ The magus whose trained will can influence the divine order has been perceived as an idea that arose in the Christian world of the Italian Renaissance and heralded the spirit of early modern science.⁸⁸ But this theme is found in medieval Kabbalistic

⁸⁴ Quoted from *Shoshan Sodot*, Fol. 69b, MS Oxford 1655, written by an anonymous disciple of the thirteenth century 'ecstatic' Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, cited in Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 91-92. On the 'ecstatic' current of Kabbalah, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 35-59; *idem*, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988). On the relationship between the Kabbalistic *tselem* or magical personality and the Sufi idea of the angelic guide as an aspect of the Self, see Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 252-55; Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1980), pp. 90-91. For Sufi elements in Abulafia's Kabbalah, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 73-89.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Fortune, *Moon Magic*, pp. 198-199; *idem*, *The Sea Priestess* (London: Inner Light, 1938), 74.

⁸⁶ Jewish techniques of linguistic magic, first found in early rabbinic sources and articulated in the third century *Sefer Yetsirah* (*Book of Formation*), were most highly developed during the thirteenth century by the Spanish Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, whose work provided a major influence on Renaissance Christian Kabbalists. For Abulafia's influence on Pico, see Wirszbuski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, especially pp. 60-64, 100-104, 231-233 and *passim*. For Abulafia's influence on Isaac Luria, see Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, p. 276. For Luria's appropriation of magical techniques from the *Sefer Yetsirah*, see Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, pp. 154-55, 180-186.

⁸⁷ On this type of linguistic magic in Lurianic Kabbalah, see Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, p. 211. For Lévi's understanding of it, see *Dogme et rituel*, p. 60: 'The word, in effect, or speech, is the veil of being and the characteristic sign of life. Every form is the veil of a word, because the idea that is the mother of the word is the sole reason for the existence of forms. Every figure is a character, every character emerges from and returns to its word' ('Le verbe, en effet, ou la parole, est le voile de l'être et le signe caractéristique de la vie. Toute forme est le voile d'un verbe, parce que l'idée mère du verbe est l'unique raison d'être des formes. Toute figure est un caractère, tout caractère appartient et retourne à son verbe').

⁸⁸ On the theme of man as magus, see, *inter alia*, Yates, Frances A., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964); Johannisson, Karen, 'Magic, Science, and Institutionalization in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus, eds., *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe* (London: Associated University Presses,

literature and late antique Jewish magical texts.⁸⁹ It is summed up by Moshe Idel, one of the most respected of contemporary Kabbalistic scholars:

The theurgical Kabbalist does not need external help or grace; his way of operating...enables him to be independent; he looks not so much for salvation by the intervention of God as for God's redemption by human intervention.⁹⁰

The idea is expressed in a more secularised form by Lévi when he declares: 'Do you wish to reign over yourselves and others? Learn how to will.'⁹¹

The manipulation of the Hebrew alphabet in Kabbalistic literature is intended to extract

1988), pp. 251-261; Vickers, Brian, ed., *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, eds., *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Borchardt, Frank L., 'The Magus as Renaissance Man', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 57-76. The theme is explicit in the Hermetic *Asclepius*, and Yates suggests that it is through the medium of this 'gnostic text' that emphasis on the divine potentiality of the human being infuses Pico's great declaration in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*; see Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 110-111. For a contradictory point of view, see Copenhaver, Brian P., 'The Secret of Pico's *Oration*: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 26 (2002), pp. 56-81, in which Copenhaver emphasises the Kabbalah rather than the Hermetica as the source of Pico's views on human potential and destiny. For the relevant text in Pico, see Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, in *On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One, Heptaplus* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1985 [1940]), p. 3: 'Man is the messenger between creatures, familiar with the upper and king of the lower; by the sharp-sightedness of the senses, by the hunting-power of reason, and by the light of intelligence, the interpreter of nature; the part in between the standstill of eternity and the flow of time; and, as the Persians say, the bond tying the world together, nay, the nuptial bond; and, according to David, "a little lower than the angels"'. For the Hermetic text, see *Asclepius* 1.6a, in *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, ed. and trans. Walter Scott (Boulder, CO: Hermes House, 1982), p. 295: 'Man is a marvel then, Asclepius; honour and reverence such a being! Man takes on him the attributes of a god, as though he were himself a god; he is familiar with the daemon-kind, for he comes to know that he is sprung from the same source as they; and strong in the assurance of that in him which is divine, he scorns the merely human part of his nature'.

⁸⁹ The theme is also explicit in third century Jewish texts in which, according to Peter Schäfer, 'the predominant magical moment is based on an automatism of cause and effect'; see Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, p. 165. On 'man's theurgic power over God' in late antique Jewish mysticism, see also Lesses, Rebecca Macy, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*, Harvard Theological Studies, Vol. 44 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998); *idem*, 'Speaking with Angels: Jewish and Greco-Egyptian Revelatory Adjurations', *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (January 1996), pp. 41-60. For the close relationship between the *Hermetica* and Jewish mystical doctrines, particularly evident in the *Asclepius*, see Idel, Moshe, 'Hermeticism and Judaism', in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, pp. 59-76. For an example of the Kabbalistic use of the human will to become like and even influence God (and the possible unpleasant consequences), see the legend of the fifteenth-century Kabbalist Joseph della Reina in *The Heart and the Fountain*, pp. 181-194; see also Alemanno, Yohannan (one of Pico della Mirandola's teachers), *Collectanea*, MS Oxford 2234, fol. 164a, quoted in Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 148: 'When a man devotes a great amount of time, the intermittent becomes habitual. When he immerses himself in these things, then such a great efflux will come to him that he will be able to cause the spirit of God to descend upon him and hover above him and flutter about him all the day. Not only that, but "the writing of God, the spirit of the living God" will descend upon the scroll to such a degree that the scroll will give him power to work signs and wonders in the world.' On Alemanno's view of man as magus, and its possible influence on Pico, see Idel, Moshe, 'The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences', *Topoi*, Vol. 7 (1988), pp. 201-210. See also the discussion in Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 173-199.

⁹⁰ Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 179. For an overview of Idel's work, see Eitan P. Fishbane, 'Jewish Mystical Hermeneutics: On the Work of Moshe Idel', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 85 (January 2005), pp. 94-103.

⁹¹ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 199: 'Voulez-vous régner sur vous-mêmes et sur les autres? Apprenez à vouloir.'

hidden knowledge from sacred texts, invoke mystical states, and draw down power through which the magus can perform godlike feats. Lévi often utilises these linguistic techniques, known in Renaissance Kabbalistic circles as the *ars combinatoria* (the art of combinations).⁹² Lévi derived the oldest and simplest of these forms of linguistic magic directly from Latin translations of a third century work called *Sefer Yetsirah* (*Book of Formation*), which he applies to great effect in his use of the Tarot cards.⁹³ The linguistic and numerological cosmogony presented in the *Sefer Yetsirah* inspired him to equate the twenty-two Major Arcana ('Trumps') of the Tarot with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and to work with them in a magical *ars combinatoria* that could imitate God's creative power. Lévi was not the first person to see potent recipes for magical manifestations in the *Sefer Yetsirah*; this work had been a favourite subject for Kabbalistic commentaries for many

⁹² Lévi probably derived his understanding of the techniques from Pico and Reuchlin. Pico in turn acquired them from a translation of Abraham Abulafia's thirteenth century exposition on their magical application to the Divine Names. On Pico's understanding of *gematria*, *temurah* and *notarikon* as 'Kabbalistic magic', see Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter With Jewish Mysticism*, 77-83 and 133-152. For Reuchlin's exposition of the techniques, see *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, especially Book III, 235-357; Zika, Charles, 'Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 39 (1976), 104-138; Dan, 'The kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and its historical significance', 55-95. Although the techniques originate in late antique rabbinic literature, by the medieval period they were associated almost exclusively with Jewish Kabbalistic magic. For a brief summary of these linguistic techniques, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 100. On *gematria* and its methods, see Horodezky, S. A., 'Gematria', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. VII, col. 170-79. On the appearance of *gematria* in early rabbinic literature, see Idel, Moshe, 'Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names', in R. A. Herrera, ed., *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1993), 99-103; *idem*, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, 14-15.

⁹³ Lévi calls this work a 'venerated primeval book' and a 'ladder of truth', written, according to tradition, by the patriarch Abraham himself. Several Latin translations were available to Lévi, including one by Postel: Postel, Guillaume, *Abrahami Patriarchae liber Jezirah sive formationis mundi, patribus quidem, Abrahami tempora praecedentibus revelatus, sed ab ipso etiam Abrahamo expositus Isaaco, et per prophetarum manus posteritati conservatus, ipsis autem LXXII Mosis auditoribus in secundu divinae veritatis loco, hoc est in Ratione, quae est posterior autoritate, habitus. Vertebat ex Hebraeis et commentariis illustrabat 1551, ad Babylonis ruinam et corrupti mundi finem, Gulielmus Postellus, Restitutur* (Paris, 1552). For Lévi's reference to this translation, see *Histoire de la magie*, p. 253, and Waite's fn. 2 in Lévi, *The History of Magic*, trans. A. E. Waite (London: William Rider & Son, 1913; reissued, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 2001), p. 82. Other Latin translations available to Lévi were one attributed to Johannes Reuchlin and Paolo Ricci and included in Johann Pistorius' *Artis cabalisticae hoc est reconditae theologiae et philosophiae scriptum*, Basel, 1587 (Lévi seems to have favoured this translation); and one by a Jewish convert to Christianity, Johannes Stephanus Rittangelius (Amsterdam, 1642), which was later used by William Wynn Westcott as a basis for his English translation of the work (William Wynn Westcott, trans., *Sepher Yetzirah: The Book of Formation and the Thirty-Two Paths of Wisdom*, Bath: Robert H. Fryar, 1887). On Westcott's use of Rittangelius, see Waite, A. E., 'Introduction', in Knut Stenring, trans., *The Book of Formation (Sepher Yetzirah) by Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, including the 32 Paths of Wisdom, their correspondences with the Hebrew alphabet and the Tarot symbols* (Philadelphia, PA: David McKay, 1923). For more recent English translations of the *Sefer Yetsirah*, see Hayman, A. Peter, ed. and trans., *Sefer Yesira: Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Aryeh Kaplan, ed. and trans., *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation, in Theory and Practice* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1997). For a complete bibliography of English translations of the *Sefer Yetsirah*, see Don Karr, 'Notes on Editions of *Sefer Yetzirah* in English', 1991, updated 2001-07, at <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/syie.pdf>. On the infinite possibilities of the *ars combinatoria* reflected in both religious mysticism and modern technology, see Zweig, Janet, 'Ars Combinatoria: Mystical Systems, Procedural Art, and the Computer', *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 3, 'Digital Reflections: The Dialogue of Art and Technology' (Autumn 1997), pp. 20-29.

centuries.⁹⁴ It later fascinated British occultists such as William Wynn Westcott, one of the founders of the immensely influential late Victorian magical order known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, who produced an English translation of it in 1887.⁹⁵ The *Sefer Yetzirah* presents the *ars combinatoria* in a concise and enigmatic style:

The twenty-two letters are the foundation: three primary letters, seven double (letters), and twelve simple (letters)⁹⁶...Twenty-two letters: he [God] carved them out, he hewed them, he weighed them, he exchanged them, he combined them and formed with them the life of all creation and the life of all that would be formed. How did he weigh and exchange them? – Aleph with them all, and them all with Aleph; Bet with them all, and them all with Bet. And they all rotate in turn...The result is that all creation and all speech go out by one name.⁹⁷

Thus the Hebrew letters, which are also numbers and divine potencies, are the instruments by which creation is accomplished through the dynamic relationships they form with each other in rotation. The sacredness of the letters resides in the idea that they emanate from deity and are the vessels through which the primal light is disseminated. If utilised correctly by the adept, the art of combinations was believed to activate the godlike creative potency within the individual.⁹⁸ Lévi

⁹⁴ For an example of the *Sefer Yetzirah* utilised for magical purposes in the creation of a *golem* or artificial anthropoid, see Idel, Moshe, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions On the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990); *idem*, 'The Golem in Jewish Magic and Mysticism', in Emily D. Bilski, ed., *Golem! Danger, Deliverance and Art* (New York, NY: The Jewish Museum, 1988), pp. 15-35; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 158-204. On the creation of the *golem* in Hasidism, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 99. For an early twentieth century occultist's literary rendition of the myth of the *golem*, see Meyrink, Gustav, *Der Golem* (original German publication serialised in *Die weissen Blätter*, 1913-14; published in complete form, Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1915; first English translation, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1928; reissued, trans. Madge Pemberton, New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1976). Meyrink (1868-1932) was involved in Theosophical and occult circles, and through his own publishing company, Rikola, issued the first biography of Lévi (Laarss, *Eliphas Lévi: Der Grosse Kabbalist*).

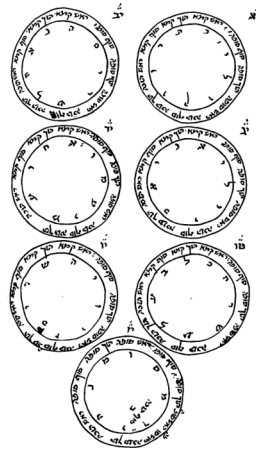
⁹⁵ An English translation by Isidore Kalisch had been released in America a decade earlier than Westcott's (Kalisch, Isadore, *Sepher Yezirah. A Book on Creation; or, the Jewish Metaphysics of Remote Antiquity*, New York, NY: L. H. Frank, 1877); this book was in Westcott's library, heavily annotated (Westcott's copy is now held in the Gerald Yorke Archives at the Warburg Institute), and he clearly relied on it to help his own translation.

⁹⁶ Hayman, *Sefer Yesirah* 9, p. 79. Compare Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah* 2.1, p. 95: 'Twenty-two Foundation Letters: Three Mothers, Seven Doubles, and Twelve Elementals.' See also Westcott, *Sepher Yetzirah*, 2.1, p. 18: 'The twenty-two sounds and letters are the Foundation of all things. Three mothers, seven doubles and twelve simples.'

⁹⁷ Hayman, *Sefer Yesirah* 19a-b, pp. 100-101. Compare Kaplan: 'Twenty-two Foundation letters: He engraved them, He carved them, He permuted them, He weighed them, He transformed them. And with them, He depicted all that was formed and all that would be formed...How? He permuted them, weighed them, and transformed them, Alef with them all and all of them with Alef, Bet with them all and all of them with Bet. They repeat in a cycle and exist in 231 Gates. It comes out that all that is formed and all that is spoken emanates from one Name' (Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah*, 2.2, 2.5, pp. 100 and 124). Westcott, taking a few liberties, offers the following version: 'He hath formed, weighed, and composed with these twenty-two letters every created thing, and the form of everything which shall hereafter be...For He shewed the combination of these letters, each with the other: Aleph with all, and all with Aleph; Beth with all, and all with Beth. Thus in combining all together in pairs are produced the two hundred and thirty-one gates of knowledge' (Westcott, *Sepher Yetzirah*, 2.2, 2.5, pp. 18-19).

⁹⁸ This theme informs the Hasidic idea of the 'Master of the Name' (*ba'al shem*), still extant in Poland and Russia in Lévi's own time. On the magical powers of the *ba'al shem* and the Hasidic *zaddiq* or holy sage, see Scholem,

returns to this theme repeatedly, and it later dominates the lectures given to neophytes in the Order of the Golden Dawn.⁹⁹



Wheels of the permutation of the letters, from Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer hayye ha-'olam ha-ba*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms hêbr. 763, c. 27v, late thirteenth century, reproduced in Busi, p. 145

Lévi created an ingenious system through which he could practice Kabbalistic hermeneutics in a fashion suited to his visual talents. Basing his own Tarot card designs on the traditional eighteenth-century French deck type known as the 'Tarot of Marseilles', which he believed to be of ancient Egyptian and Hebrew origin, he begins with 'The Juggler' ('The Magician') as *aleph*, and then applies the art of combinations to these images.¹⁰⁰

Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, pp. 98-103; Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, pp. 189-207; Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism, and Hasidism: The Supernatural in Jewish Thought* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994), pp. 1-31; Weiss, Joseph, *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, ed. David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 183-193; Rapoport-Albert, Ada, 'God and the Zaddik as the Two Focal Points of Hasidic Worship', *History of Religions*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (May 1979), pp. 296-325; Green, Arthur, 'The Zaddiq as Axis Mundi in Later Judaism', in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, pp. 291-314. On the most famous of *ba'alei shem*, the Ba'al Shem Tov, the 'founder' of Hasidism, see Dresner, Samuel H., *The Zaddik* (New York/London: Abelard-Schuman, 1960); Heschel, Abraham J., *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Stories of wonder-working *ba'alei shem* were still extent at the end of the nineteenth century: William Wynn Westcott, in a paper delivered to the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society in 1891, observes: 'In Central Europe, parts of Russia, Austria and Poland there are even now Jews, known as Wonder-working Rabbis, who can do strange things they attribute to the Kabbalah, and things very difficult to explain have been seen in England, at the hands of students of Kabalistic rites and talismans' (Gilbert, *The Magical Mason*, p. 85).

⁹⁹ See, for example, the lecture on the formation of the twenty-two letters by the wife of R. W. Felkin, the head of the Stella Matutina (a Golden Dawn offshoot) c. 1923, reproduced in Zalewski, Pat, *Kabbalah of the Golden Dawn* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1993), pp. 8-13.

¹⁰⁰ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, pp. 114-15. A Tarot designed by Jean Dodal c. 1712, and a deck designed by Claude Burdel in the early 18th century, are both of the Marseilles type, while Nicholas Conver created what is now known as the definitive 'Tarot of Marseilles' in 1760. For a more detailed history of the 'Tarot of Marseilles' see Huson, Paul, *Mystical Origins of the Tarot: From Ancient Roots to Modern Usage* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2004), p. 280; Decker et al., *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, pp. 36-37, 170-71. In pre-Kabbalistic Jewish mystical texts there is a sacred Name of God comprised of twenty-two letters, and it is possible that Lévi encountered this idea and saw it as further confirmation of his theory; see Idel, 'Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names', p. 101, fn. 115, referring to a text by R. Hai Gaon written in the eleventh century.



'Le Chariot', from the Tarot of Marseilles

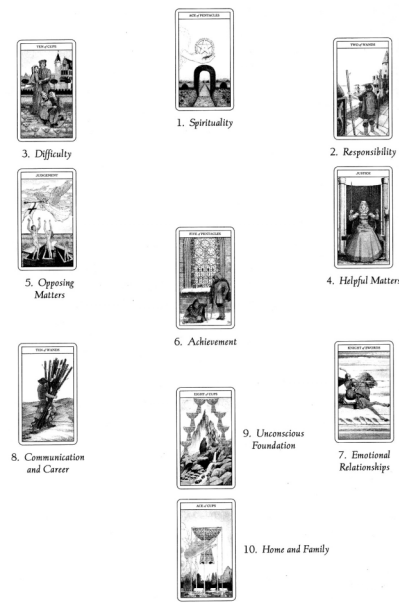


Éliphas Lévi's 'Le Chariot'

He did not generate this idea alone: two eighteenth century Masonic predecessors, Antoine Court de Gébelin and the cartomancer Etteilla, pointed the way, although neither created a system as refined and complete as Lévi's.¹⁰¹ This method of combining the cards provides the basis for most divinatory Tarot 'readings' to the present day, although Lévi has left us no record of a specific method of laying out the cards.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Antoine Court de Gébelin is generally credited with being the first to associate the Major Arcana with both the legendary Egyptian *Book of Thoth* and the Hebrew alphabet in a published work; see Court de Gébelin, Antoine, *Le Tarot, présenté et commenté par Jean-Marie Lhôte* (Vol. 8 of *Monde primitif, analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne, considéré dans divers objets concernant l'histoire, le blason, les monnaies, les jeux, les voyages des phéniciens autour du monde, les langues américaines, etc.*, (Paris: Berg International, 1983; original publication: Paris, M. Robinet, 1781), p. 83 [original publication, p. 365-66] and p. 155 [original publication, p. 400, in an essay by the Comte de Mellet included in Vol. 8]: 'These twenty-two primary cards are not only the same as the [Egyptian] hieroglyphics, which when placed in their natural order retrace the history of the first times, but they are also the same as the [Hebrew] letters'. Court de Gébelin was associated with 'irregular' quasi-Masonic orders such as Martinès de Pasqually's Order of the Elect Cohens, and the equation of the twenty-two Major Arcana and the Hebrew letters was probably already current in these circles in the late eighteenth century; see Lhôte, Jean-Marie, 'Esquisse pour un portrait de Court de Gébelin', in Court de Gébelin, *Le Tarot, présenté et commenté par Jean-Marie Lhôte*, pp. 9-68; Decker et al., *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, pp. 52-73; Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie Templière et Occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe Siècles*, pp. 518-19, 734-37; Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 8, 29, 32, 152. On Etteilla (Jean-Baptiste Alliette, 1738-1791), the 'first professional cartomancer', see Decker et al., *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, pp. 74-99. For a bibliography of Etteilla's work, see Decker et al., *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, p. 294. Lévi gives considerable credit to the 'science' of Court de Gébelin (e.g., *Dogme et rituel*, p. 340-41) but refers to Etteilla as an 'illuminated hairdresser' with a 'wearisome, barbarous style' (*Histoire de la magie*, p. 327; *Dogme et rituel*, p. 174). Lévi also borrowed heavily from the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652-54) of the Jesuit philologist and Kabbalist Athanasius Kircher, who equates the Hebrew letters with an entire hierarchy of angels, zodiac signs, planets, and elements after the fashion of the *Sefer Yetsirah* (see Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, p. 50; *Histoire de la magie*, p. 81). For Lévi's reliance on Kircher, see Decker et al., *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, p. 187; Decker, Ronald and Michael Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot 1870-1970* (London: Duckworth, 2002), pp. 16-19. On Kircher, see, *inter alia*, Godwin, Joscelyn, *Athanasius Kircher: A Late Renaissance Philosopher and Scientist* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979); Findlen, Paula K., ed., *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything* (London: Routledge, 2004); Stolzenberg, Daniel, *Egyptian Oedipus: Antiquarianism, Oriental Studies and Occult Philosophy in the Work of Athanasius Kircher* (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2004).

¹⁰² Credit for inventing the 'spread' – layouts of multiple cards which can be read as entire complexes of ideas – is sometimes given to Etteilla (Decker et al., *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, pp. 74-75; Huson, *Mystical Origins of the Tarot*, p. 59), but there appears to be no relationship between Etteilla's 'spreads' and the *ars combinatoria* of the *Sefer Yetsirah*, with which Etteilla does not seem to have been familiar. Etteilla is concerned with an astrological rather



A typical modern Tarot 'spread' of ten cards, known as 'The Tree of Life'.
The design of the cards is based on the deck designed by A. E. Waite in 1910.¹⁰³

Lévi's Tarot is thus an 'absolute kabbalistic alphabet' in the form of images: the twenty-two sacred letters emanated by God to create the manifest cosmos, which, if magically combined through ritualistic contemplation – the Juggler with everything and everything with the Juggler – will result in revelation and prophecy.¹⁰⁴

Scholars exploring the Tarot from a historical perspective tend to dismiss as mere coincidence the numerical correlation between the Hebrew alphabet and the Major Arcana of the Tarot.¹⁰⁵ The first

than a Kabbalistic understanding of the Tarot cards; see, for example, Etteilla, *L'astrologie du Livre de Thot* (1785), suivie de *Recherches sur l'histoire de l'astrologie et du Tarot par Jacques Halbronn* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1993).

¹⁰³ Sharman-Burke, Juliet, *The Complete Tarot Pack* (London: Connections, 2007), p. 156

¹⁰⁴ In 1861, Lévi informed the British occultist Kenneth Mackenzie that he had arrived at his various inductions about the Kabbalah 'by means of the combinations presented by the twenty-two cards of the Tarot'; see Mackenzie, Kenneth, G.D. MSS V12, December 1861, Yorke Collection, Warburg Institute NS68(2), p. 38, and Lévi's statement to Baron Spedalieri (*Cours de philosophie occulte*, VII): 'The explicative text of talismans, letters, numbers, and the Tarot is the *Sefer Yetsirah*'. On the Kabbalistic tradition of ritual contemplation (prayer with 'intent'), see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 126, 133, and 145; *idem*, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 244; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 47 and *passim*; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, pp. 222-228; *idem*, 'The Contemplative Practice of Yihudim in Lurianic Kabbalah', in *Jewish Spirituality*, pp. 64-98; Werblowski, 'Mystical and Magical Contemplation: The Kabbalists in Sixteenth-Century Safed'; Kaplan, Aryeh, *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach, ME: WeiserBooks, 1982). On the relationship between ritual contemplation in Lurianic Kabbalah and the magical practices of eighteenth and nineteenth century Eastern European Hasidism, see Giller, Pinchas, 'Between Poland and Jerusalem: Kabbalistic Prayer in Early Modernity', *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2004), pp. 226-250; Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, pp. 149-170. For magical contemplation of the letters and Divine Names, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 103-169; *idem*, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 13-52. For an early thirteenth century anonymous text offering instructions in ritual contemplation, see *The Heart and the Fountain*, pp. 117-120.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Decker *et al.*, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*, p. 38: 'The correlation between trumps and Hebrew letters formed no part of any actual symbolic intent of the inventors of the Tarot pack'. See also Decker and Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot*, p. xii. Lévi declares (*Dogme et rituel*, p. 340) that the ancient Hebrew

extant set of cards – the Visconti-Sforza deck from mid-fifteenth century Italy – is a characteristically syncretic Renaissance product combining Judaeo-Christian themes with images from pagan myth, and given the cultural context of these cards, the numerical correspondence of Major Arcana and Hebrew letters is probably not coincidental.¹⁰⁶ But occultist theories of the Tarot's ancient origins do seem to provide a flagrant example of what Pierre Riffard calls the 'esoteric method': calling on the authority of an 'ancient' tradition, real or invented, to confer legitimacy on modern concepts.¹⁰⁷ There is, to date, no evidence of any ancient Tarot deck, and the Biblical prohibition against the making of 'graven images' would seem to exclude any Jewish involvement in the creation of the Tarot. Warnings against the visual portrayal of the godhead are also common in Kabbalistic texts, including the Lurianic Kabbalah.¹⁰⁸ However, such warnings were not universally obeyed. Giulio Busi's recent analysis of the visual imagery in unpublished Hebrew Kabbalistic manuscripts reveals a vibrant tradition of figurative portrayals of the divine dating from the thirteenth century, most of it diagrammatic but some of it unashamedly anthropomorphic.¹⁰⁹

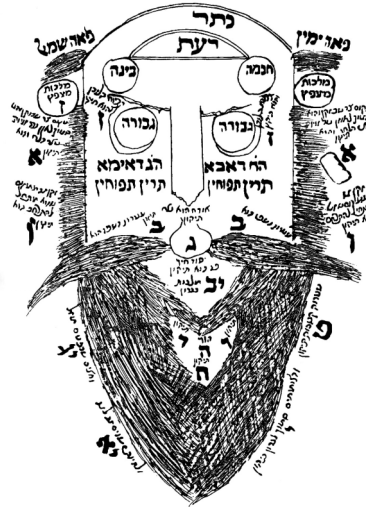
mysteries were 'written, or rather, drawn, by some wise Kabbalists on ivory, on parchment, on gilt and silvered copper, and, finally, on simple cards' ('écrits ou plutôt figurés par quelques sages cabalistes sur l'ivoire, sur le parchemin, sur le cuir argenté et doré, puis enfin sur de simples cartes'), thus providing the origins of the Tarot. He offers no sources for this information.

¹⁰⁶ See Wood, Juliette, 'The Celtic Tarot and the Secret Tradition: A Study in Modern Legend', *Folklore*, Vol. 109 (1998), p. 20: 'The intellectual background of the tarot undoubtedly reflects Renaissance interest in esoterism and symbolic systems, and in a readiness to synthesise theurgic practices with philosophical ideas.' A reproduction of the Visconti-Sforza deck is published by U. S. Games Systems (New York, NY, 1975).

¹⁰⁷ On the 'esoteric method', see Hanegraaff, Wouter J., 'On the Construction of "Esoteric Traditions"', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, pp. 11-62; Riffard, 'The Esoteric Method'; Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, pp. 62-90; Hjelm, Titus, 'Tradition as Legitimation in New Religious Movements', in Steven Engler and Gregory P. Grieve, eds., *Historicizing "Tradition" in the Study of Religion* (Berlin/New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 109-123; Hammer, Olav, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁰⁸ For example, Hayyim Vital warns that the rich and highly erotic imagery he and his master Isaac Luria use to describe the internal dynamics of the deity is not to be understood pictorially: Vital, Hayyim, *Etz Hayyim*, Hozaat Mekor Hayyim (Jerusalem, 1963), trans. Steven Louis Goldman, in Goldman, Steven Louis, 'On the Interpretation of Symbols and the Christian Origins of Modern Science', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 1982), 15. Solomon ibn Gabirol, one of the great medieval Jewish philosophers, also admonishes the student of the Talmud against literal interpretations of the many metaphors he uses to describe the levels of reality: see Solomon ibn Gabirol, *HaEmuynah Haramah*, Chapter 1, Essay 1, trans. Steven Louis Goldman, in Goldman, 'On the Interpretation of Symbols', pp. 1-20.

¹⁰⁹ Busi, Giulio, *Qabalah Visiva* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 2005).



The face of God, by the eighteenth century Kabbalist Sason ben Mordecai Sanduk. The right and left eyes represent the polarity of the two primary *sefirot*, Mercy and Judgement.¹¹⁰

Lévi, an inveterate browser of libraries and avid collector of Hebrew manuscripts, was well acquainted with this imagery, and appears to have made one of his bold imaginative leaps – misguided in terms of an ancient Hebrew origin for the Tarot, but valid in terms of a Jewish tradition of Kabbalistic visual art.¹¹¹



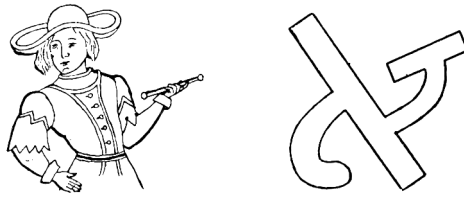
Lévi's version of the face of God: 'La tête magique du Sohar', in *Histoire de la Magie, avec une exposition claire et précise de ses procédés de ses rites et de ses mystères* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1860), facing p. 41

Convinced that the Tarot emerged from the lost magical tradition of Egypt and was passed on to Moses, Lévi linked the twenty-two Hebrew letters, the twenty-two Major Arcana, and the imagery he found in Hebrew manuscripts, and believed he had discovered proof of the continuity of the ancient

¹¹⁰ Sason ben Mordekay Sanduk, *Ilana de-hayye*, now in the Bill Gross Collection, MS 151, Tel Aviv, in Busi, *Qabalah Visiva*, p. 435. Busi describes this as 'a face that concentrates within itself a complex cosmic system' ('Ma è in realtà un viso che concentra in sé un complesso sistema cosmico').

¹¹¹ See Röstvig, Maren-Sofie, 'Renaissance Numerology: Acrostics or Criticism?', *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1996), pp. 6-21 for a discussion of this form of 'numerological mysticism'. For a demonstration of Lévi's predilection for copying images from Hebrew manuscripts, see his drawing of the Tetragrammaton reproduced in *Dogme et rituel*, p. 113 and *Cours de philosophie occulte*, LXV, p. 113, identical to those dating from the fourteenth century and included in *Qabalah Visiva* on pp. 124 and 439.

ur-religion.¹¹²



The numeric unity or the letter *aleph*...is represented in the Tarot through the symbol of the Juggler. The figure of this Juggler is the same as that of the letter *aleph*.¹¹³

There is no evidence of such a correlation in any known Hebrew text. But medieval Kabbalistic manuscripts do portray the letters with animate qualities:



‘Aleph of man and of the spirit’, from Ya’aqov ben Y’aqov ha-Kohen’s mid-thirteenth-century *Sefer HaOrah* (‘Book of Light’)¹¹⁴

Leslie Atzmon, discussing the anthropomorphic attributes of the Hebrew letters, suggests that, interpreted visually, they ‘look and act like living creatures – they are fleshy beings wielding

¹¹² On the ur-religion or *prisca theologia* in the Renaissance, see Walker, D. P., *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972); *idem*, ‘The Prisca Theologia in France’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 17, No. 3/4 (1954), pp. 204-259; Schmitt, Charles B., ‘Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October-December 1966), pp. 505-532; *idem*, ‘*Prisca Theologia e Philosophia Perennis*: due temi del Rinascimento italiano e la loro fortuna’, in G. Tarugi, ed., *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro* (Firenze: Olschki, 1968), pp. 211-236; Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 198-200; Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 160-65, 427-31, and *passim*; Von Stuckrad, Kocku, ‘Whose Tradition? Conflicting Ideologies in Medieval and Early Modern Esotericism’, in *Historicizing “Tradition” in the Study of Religion*, pp. 211-226. On the *prisca theologia* in Jewish Kabbalistic thought, see Idel, Moshe, ‘Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments’, in Allen, Michael J. B. and Valery Rees, eds. *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 137-158; *idem*, ‘Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560 and 1660’, in David B. Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 345-368; Lelli, Fabrizio, ‘“Prisca Philosophia” and “Docta Religio”: The Boundaries of Rational Knowledge in Jewish and Christian Humanist Thought’, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 91, No. 1/2 (July-October 2000), pp. 53-99.

¹¹³ Lévi, *Cours de philosophie occulte*, XI, p. 27: ‘L’unité numérale ou la lettre Aleph qui se rapporte à la onzième voie du *Sefer Jézirah* est figurée dans le tarot par le symbole du bateleur. La figure de ce bateleur est celle même de la lettre Aleph’.

¹¹⁴ From Ya’aqov ben Y’aqov ha-Kohen’s mid-thirteenth-century *Sefer HaOrah* (‘Book of Light’), in Busi, *Qabalah visiva*, p. 113, Figura 13; Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS S 13 sup., c. 79r. For a bibliography on this manuscript and its author, see Busi, *Qabalah visiva*, p. 109, fn. 222.

immense creative ability.¹¹⁵ It is unlikely that Lévi discovered a lost ancient Hebrew Tarot. But despite his Catholicism and his 'modernity', he is entirely within the tradition of Kabbalistic hermeneutics when he claims that the Hebrew letters have an animate life which can be magically manipulated through the art of combinations. Lévi's Kabbalistic Tarot system was adopted with only minor alterations by successive generations of British occultists, who have continued to promulgate his work into the twenty-first century.¹¹⁶ As of February 2008, a total of nearly 40,000,000 entries appear under the word 'Tarot' in Google's on-line search engine, including books, workshops, conferences, information web sites, schools, and on-line readings. Every contemporary Tarot practitioner who interprets the cards through combinations rather than fixed divinatory meanings owes a debt to Lévi's version of Kabbalistic linguistic magic, and through him to the third century Hebrew *Sefer Yetsirah*.

How the Kabbalah crossed the Channel

A current of Kabbalistic ideas and practices had existed in various streams of British esoteric thought from at least the sixteenth century, represented by figures such as John Dee (1527-1608), Robert Fludd (1574-1637), Henry More (1614-1687), and William Blake (1757-1827), and, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by Francis Barrett's influential magical treatise, *The Magus*.¹¹⁷ But

¹¹⁵ Atzmon, Leslie, 'A visual analysis of anthropomorphism in the Kabbalah: dissecting the Hebrew alphabet and Sephirotic diagram', *Visual Communication*, Vol. 2, No. 97 (2003), p. 97.

¹¹⁶ Quibbles about the precise numerical order of the Major Arcana does not obviate the fact that all the subsequent 'new' decks emerging from the British occult revival are based on Lévi's. For Westcott's Tarot sketches based on Lévi's deck, see Decker and Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot*, pp. 52-56. On the 'new' deck created by A. E. Waite and Pamela Coleman Smith, incorporating Rosicrucian, Masonic and 'Celtic' symbolism, see Waite, A. E., *The Key to the Tarot: What Tarot is and how to consult it* (London: Rider, 1910); Jensen, K. Frank, *The Story of the Waite-Smith Tarot* (Melbourne: Association for Tarot Studies, 2006); Decker and Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot*, pp. 127-141 and 157-160. On the 'new' deck created by Aleister Crowley and Frieda Harris, incorporating Egyptian and astrological symbolism but 'following the tradition of Eliphaz Levi', see Crowley, Aleister, *The Book of Thoth by the Master Therion* (London, self-published, 1944; reissued, New York, NY: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1969, and Stamford, CT: U. S. Games Systems, 1991); Decker and Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot*, pp. 142-156. For an overview, see Wang, Robert, *An Introduction to the Golden Dawn Tarot* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1978).

¹¹⁷ The work of these individuals was well known to the British Masonic and Rosicrucian circles that adopted Lévi's Kabbalah. On Roger Bacon's involvement with Kabbalistic ideas, see Schuchard, *Restoring the Temple of Vision*, pp. 66-69. On the Kabbalah in Britain in the Elizabethan period, see Yates, Frances A., *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979). John Dee's most influential work is *Monas Hieroglyphica* (Antwerp: William Sylvius, 1564; first English translation by J. W. Hamilton-Jones, London: Watkins, 1947; reissued, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 2000). Among the many scholarly works on Dee as a Kabbalist, see Yates, Frances A., *Theatre of the World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); French, Peter, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); De Léon-Jones, 'John Dee and the Kabbalah'; Walton, Michael T., 'John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*: Geometrical Cabala', in Allen G. Debus, ed., *Alchemy and Early Modern Chemistry: Papers from Ambix* (London: Jeremy Mills/Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry, 2004), pp. 178-185; Harkness, Deborah E., *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala,*

the particular manner in which Lévi utilised Jewish Kabbalistic texts transformed this current into the primary inspiration of the Victorian occult revival. In 1860, Lévi was known only to a small circle of British occultists through his recently published trilogy of works on Kabbalistic magic, but none of these books had yet been translated into English.¹¹⁸ Then, in the first week of December 1861, Kenneth Mackenzie, a brilliant, ambitious, and hard-drinking twenty-eight-year-old antiquarian scholar with a history of involvement in occult and spiritualist pursuits, journeyed to Paris to visit his father, and paid two calls on the French magus.¹¹⁹ Mackenzie was fascinated by Lévi's innovative interpretations of the Tarot cards,¹²⁰ and was particularly interested in discovering whether Lévi intended to issue his own hand-drawn set of cards, of which three examples had so far appeared in his published works.¹²¹

Alchemy, and the End of Nature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Robert Fludd's most influential Kabbalistic work is the *Mosaical Philosophy* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1659). For a brief but useful introduction to Fludd, see Godwin, Joscelyn, *Robert Fludd: Hermetic Philosopher and Surveyor of Two Worlds* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979); see also Debus, Allen G., *Robert Fludd and His Philosophical Key* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Watson Publishing International, 1979). For an overview of the development of the Kabbalah in Britain in the sixteenth century, see Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word*, pp. 209-292. On Henry More, Ann Conway, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and the circle of the Cambridge Platonists, see Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*. On Rabbi Samuel Falk, see Adler, Hermann, 'Dr. Falk: The Baal Shem from London', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England, 1902-1905* (London, 1908), pp. 57-60; Oron, Michal, 'Dr. Samuel Falk and the Eibeschütz-Emden Controversy', in Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan, eds., *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 243-56; Schuchard, 'Dr. Samuel Jacob Falk'. On Blake, see Spector, Sheila, *"Wonders Divine": The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Myth* (Lewisburg, KY: Bucknell University Press, 2001); Schuchard, 'Why Mrs. Blake Cried'; *idem*, *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*; *idem*, 'Yeats and the "Unknown Superiors"'. For Kabbalistic influences in Scottish Rite Freemasonry, see Schuchard, *Restoring the Temple of Vision*. For a general overview of occultist currents in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see also Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. Francis Barrett's most influential work is *The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer; Being a Complete System of Occult Philosophy*, London: Lackington, Allen & Co., 1801; reissued, York Beach, ME: WeiserBooks, 2000).

¹¹⁸ Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*; Lévi, *Histoire de la magie*; Lévi, Éliphas, *La clef des grand mystères, suivant Hénoc, Abraham, Hermès Trismégiste et Salomon* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1861; reprinted, La Roche-sur-Yon: Éditions de la Maisnie, 1974). On Lévi's description of his own visit to London in 1854, during which he attempted the notorious invocation of the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana, see Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, Chapter 13, pp. 133-136 (Niclaus edition). This episode was translated into English and appeared in *The Theosophist*, December 1882, four years before A. E. Waite translated it for his *Mysteries of Magic: A Digest of the Writings of Eliphas Lévi* (London: George Redway, 1886, pp. 446-450) and fourteen years before the complete *Dogme et rituel* was translated by Waite in 1896.

¹¹⁹ For biographical information on Mackenzie, see Howe, Ellic, 'Fringe Masonry in England, 1870-85', *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. 85 (1972), p. 242 and *passim*; Howe, Ellic, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887-1923* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 27-33; Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 185-86, 213-16, 218-19. Mackenzie's report on his two visits to Lévi (see Mackenzie, G.D. MSS V12) was later published in *The Rosicrucian and Red Cross*, Vol. 2 (1873), pp. 28-34.

¹²⁰ For Mackenzie's interest in the Tarot, see his report in King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, p. 31: 'I said that I had been, for some time, making collections in reference to the occult game of Tarot, and that I wished particularly to learn whether he proposed to carry out the intention expressed in the "Rituel et Dogme de la Haute Magie" [sic] of issuing a complete set of Tarot cards.' Also see Decker and Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot*, pp. 46-47; Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, pp. 29-30; Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 216. On the history of the cards in Europe, see Decker *et al.*, *A Wicked Pack of Cards*.

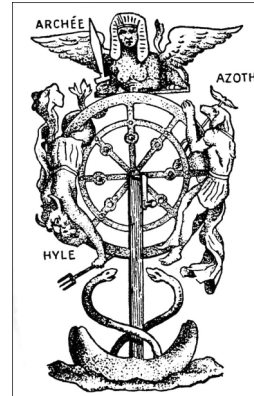
¹²¹ For Lévi's two Tarot designs in *Dogme et rituel*, see the figure of the Devil, used as a frontispiece for Part Two, *Rituel de la haute magie*, and 'Le Chariot d'Hermès: Septième clef du Tarot', in Part Two, Chapter XIII. For the



'The Chariot of Hermes'
(The Chariot)

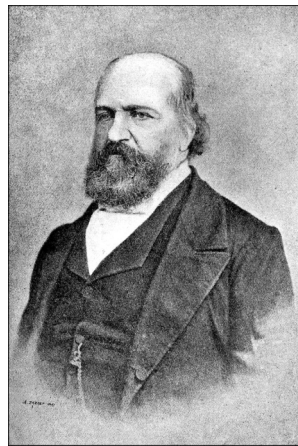


'The Sabbatic Goat'
(The Devil)



'The great Magical Agent'
(The Wheel of Fortune)

On the front door of Lévi's apartment was a small card on which his full pseudonym – Éliphas Lévi Zahed – was inscribed in Hebrew. Mackenzie found that the tiny, cluttered apartment was bedecked as a shrine to the Kabbalah. On every wall hung Kabbalistic diagrams, engravings, and paintings. Against one wall stood an altar at the centre of which lay a Hebrew roll of the Law, and on the adjacent wall hung a large picture of a woman adoring the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter Hebrew Divine Name, which appeared 'in a kind of glory'. Lévi informed Mackenzie that the woman represented 'the Holy Cabala'.¹²²



Portrait of Éliphas Lévi painted in 1862,

third of Lévi's Tarot images, see Lévi, *Le clef des grands mystères*, 'Le grand agent magique: Dixième clef du Tarot', p. 97 (known in English as 'The Wheel of Fortune'). No other images of the original deck appear in Lévi's published works, and the complete set of cards – the product of twenty years of work, according to Lévi's statement to Mackenzie in 1861 – seems to have been 'lost'. For Mackenzie's reference to the 'lost cards of Eliphaz Levi', see his letter to William Wynn Westcott dated 7 August 1879, quoted in Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, p. 30. Chacornac (*Éliphas Lévi*, p. 291, fn. 2) states that in the spring of 1914 he met Lévi's illegitimate son, referred to as 'M. A. C.', and was shown an unpublished manuscript by Lévi entitled *Le livre d'Hermès* which contained the designs for the cards. All trace of them seems to have vanished after M. A. C.'s death in 1916.

¹²² Mackenzie's description of this picture bears a close resemblance to the frontispiece of Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*. Lévi probably redrew the original engraving according to his own interpretation.

reproduced in Chacornac, *Éliphas Lévi*, p. 209

Whatever topic Mackenzie raised, his host kept returning to the Kabbalah. Lévi even criticised Lord Bulwer-Lytton on this basis, describing the British novelist and occultist as ‘a gentleman of versatile talents, but of little real knowledge in relation to the Cabala’.¹²³ Mackenzie, although acknowledging Lévi’s sincerity, considered him ‘an utter materialist’ in matters concerning spiritualism, against which the French magus had expressed strong opinions.¹²⁴ Despite this criticism, Mackenzie penned an unstintingly admiring eulogy after Lévi’s death, stating: ‘When he died, some two years ago, the Holy Kabbalah lost one of its most learned expositors’.¹²⁵

Mackenzie’s meetings with Lévi represent the first direct encounter between Lévi’s Kabbalistic system and the British occultists upon whom it exercised such enormous influence in the subsequent eight decades.¹²⁶ Lévi believed that, as a true Kabbalist, it was his destiny to reveal to the modern age the lost keys of ‘the great Hebrew doctrines of occult theology’:

These keys are described...in a book whose traditional doctrine arises from the patriarch Abraham, that

¹²³ Mackenzie’s published article on his visits to Lévi omits this slight on Bulwer-Lytton, possibly because, in 1870, nine years after Mackenzie’s encounter with the French magus, Lord Lytton had been elected an Honorary Member of the Societas Rosicrucianae in Anglia (SRIA), of which Mackenzie had briefly become a member, and was nominated Grand Patron in 1872 – a courtesy he declined. On Lord Lytton’s brief and ambiguous involvement with this group, see McIntosh, Christopher, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (London: Rider, 1972), p. 116; Decker and Dummett, *A History of the Occult Tarot*, p. 43; Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, pp. 31-32; Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 123-30.

¹²⁴ For Lévi’s negative views on spiritualism, see Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, Chapter 13, which includes the description of his invocation of the spirit of Apollonius. See also Waite, ‘Biographical and Critical Essay’ in *Mysteries of Magic*, p. 9, quoting Frau Gebhard, a German disciple of Lévi, who declares that the magus had ‘a horror of Spiritualism, and used to say that mediums and spiritualists were like children playing with lighted matches near a barrel of powder, which any moment might explode and destroy them’. A month later, Lévi returned the compliment in a letter to Baron Spedalieri. He found his English visitor ‘very intelligent but a little too carried away by magical and magnetic experiences’; moreover, the English in general are ‘curious to the point of puerility, and understand only facts and external realizations.’ Accusations of materialism are common expressions of rivalry among the occultists of the late nineteenth century, and do not necessarily reflect the importance and impact of an individual’s work; for example, Lévi’s objection to British materialism was in its turn countered in 1883 by Henry Steel Olcott, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, who, having seen a portrait of the magus in the home of a former disciple, states (Olcott, Henry Steel, *Old Diary Leaves, Third Series 1883-1887*, Chapter XIII: ‘German Experiences’, p. 172): ‘It was an intellectual face, but that of a man whose attractions were for physical rather than for spiritual things; a face totally unlike that of the type of our Indian Adepts, upon which the majesty of a divine aspiration is enthroned’ (available at <http://www.theosophy.ph/onlinebooks/odl/odl3toc.html>).

¹²⁵ Mackenzie, Kenneth, *The Royal Masonic Cyclopedia of History, Rites, Symbolism and Biography* (London: John Hogg, 1877), p. 450.

¹²⁶ Lévi thought of himself primarily as a Kabbalist; the Hebrew name he adopted no less than the dominant themes of his books are testimony to this. It is only in current scholarly literature that Lévi’s lifelong commitment to the Kabbalah has been attenuated. See, for example, Butler, Alison, ‘Magical Beginnings: The Intellectual Origins of the Victorian Occult Revival’, *Limina*, Vol. 9 (2003), pp. 78-95, in which Lévi’s contribution to the British occult revival is limited to his ‘occult tarot system’, and in which no mention is made of his belief – adopted by later British occultists – that the Jewish Kabbalah forms the basis of all magical and religious doctrines.

is, the *Sefer Yetsirah*, and with the intelligence of the *Sefer Yetsirah* one penetrates the hidden sense of the *Zohar*...The Clavicles of Solomon, forgotten over time and said to be lost, we have rediscovered, and we have painlessly opened all the doors of the old sanctuaries where absolute truth seemed to sleep.¹²⁷

By the time of his demise in 1875, Lévi's name, largely through Mackenzie's agency, had become one to conjure with in British occult circles. When Helena Blavatsky's first work, *Isis Unveiled*, was published in the same year as Lévi's death, her critics, much to her annoyance, quickly identified the book as 'a paraphrase of Éliphas Lévi'.¹²⁸ Despite these 'base diatribes', she continued to refer to Lévi as 'the most learned Kabalist and Occultist of our Age in Europe'.¹²⁹ Blavatsky, whose Theosophical Society was later responsible for making Lévi's work widely accessible to an English-speaking readership, derived some of her most important concepts from him, including the idea of the astral light and the seminal doctrine of a gradual spiritual evolution of both individual and world through successive incarnations, borrowed almost entirely from Part Two of Lévi's *La science des esprits* – itself a virtual paraphrase of Knorr von Rosenroth's Latin translation of the Lurianic text *Sefer HaGilgulim* (*Book of Transmigrations*).¹³⁰ British occultists consistently offered Lévi the highest accolades. A. E. Waite, translator of some of Lévi's works into English and also his most severe critic, nevertheless conceded that he was 'the most fascinating interpreter of occult philosophy in the West'.¹³¹ William Wynn Westcott called him 'the greatest of modern French Magi'.¹³² Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, who co-founded the Order of the Golden Dawn with Westcott, referred to Lévi as 'that great philosopher and Qabalist of the present century'.¹³³ And Aleister Crowley, viewing Lévi as a genius

¹²⁷ Lévi, *Le clef des grand mystères*, p. 9: 'Ces clefs sont décrites et leur usage est expliqué dans un livre dont le dogme traditionnel remonte au patriarche Abraham, c'est le Sépher-Jésirah, et avec l'intelligence du Sépher-Jésirah, on pénètre le sens caché du Zohar, le grand livre dogmatique de la Kabbale des Hébreux. Les Clavicles de Salomon, oubliées avec le temps et qu'on disait perdues, nous les avons retrouvées et nous avons ouvert sans peine toutes les portes des vieux sanctuaires où la vérité absolue semblait dormir, toujours jeune et toujours belle, comme cette princesse d'une légende enfantine qui attend pendant un siècle de sommeil l'époux qui doit la réveiller.'

¹²⁸ Blavatsky, H. P., 'My Books', *Lucifer* (30 December 1879), pp. 242-43: 'It has been said at various times by my ever active opponents that...*Isis Unveiled* was simply a rehash of Eliphas Levi and a few old alchemists.' For an analysis of Blavatsky's plagiarism of Lévi and other sources, see Coleman, William Emmette, 'The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings', in Solovyoff, Vsevolod Sergyeevich, *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895), Appendix C, pp. 353-366. According to Coleman, Blavatsky, in *Isis Unveiled*, extracted *verbatim* a total of one hundred and two separate passages from a number of Lévi's works.

¹²⁹ Blavatsky, H. P., 'Editorial', *The Theosophist*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (October 1881).

¹³⁰ Lévi, Éliphas, *La science des esprits: Révélation du dogme secret des Kabbalistes, esprit occulte des Évangiles, appréciation des doctrines et des phénomènes spirites* (Paris: Germer-Baillière, 1865), Part Two, pp. 124-171.

¹³¹ Waite, A. E., 'Preface to Second Edition', in *Mysteries of Magic*, p. xiii.

¹³² Westcott, William Wynn, 'History of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn', quoted in Gilbert, R. A., *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (London: Quantum, 1997), p. 24. For Westcott's debt to Lévi's Kabbalistic Tarot, see Decker and Dummett, *The Origins of the Occult Tarot*, pp. 52-56.

¹³³ Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, p. 17. For Mathers' debt to Lévi in his introduction to this work, see pp. 17-18 and 35-37.

of the highest order, paid himself the ultimate compliment by declaring that he was Lévi's reincarnation.¹³⁴

Not only was Lévi's work freely plundered on both sides of the Atlantic,¹³⁵ he quickly achieved posthumous mythic status as the preceptor of innumerable secret societies, and occult groups claimed him as a member in order to enhance their own status.¹³⁶ Although Lévi was no scholar by any contemporary standard, he also received a posthumous scholarly mantle. When Mathers' English translation of the three sections of the *Zohar* extracted from the *Kabbala denudata* was given a scathing review in *The Jewish Chronicle*, partly because of Mathers' insistence that this great medieval Kabbalistic work had been written in antiquity, Mathers replied in an irate letter that his knowledge of the *Zohar* was based on the highest possible scholarly source: Éliphas Lévi.¹³⁷ Lévi's books even became protagonists in various works of occult fiction.¹³⁸ Nearly a century after the publication of his first Kabbalistic works, he was still presented as a powerful initiate of European occult societies, and Tarot practitioners today still accord him this position in their histories of the

¹³⁴ Crowley, Aleister, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (Paris: Mandrake Press, 1929; reissued, New York, NY: Bantam, 1971), p. 183, and *idem*, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (Paris: Lecram, 1929; reissued, Secaucus, NJ: Castle Books, 1991), pp. 51-53, where the parallels between Crowley's and Lévi's lives and thought are listed in eight paragraphs. See also Symonds, John, *The Great Beast: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (London: Rider & Co., 1951), p. 61.

¹³⁵ For an example of American plagiarism of Lévi without acknowledgement, see Pike, Albert, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Freemasonry, Vol. 1 & 2*, 1871; copyright, Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction, 1906; reprinted Charleston, L. H. Jenkins, 1949; reprinted, Kila, MT: Kessinger Publishing Co., 1999).

¹³⁶ See, for example, Westcott's declaration that Lévi was 'a Continental Rosicrucian Initiate' (Westcott, William Wynn, 'The History of the Rosicrucians', published for the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, Second Edition, 1916, in *The Magical Mason*, p. 35). In 1888, a year after Westcott's Order of the Golden Dawn was founded, Westcott, ignoring the minor time discrepancy between Lévi's death and the founding of the order, declared that Lévi had in fact acquired his occult knowledge from the Golden Dawn. Westcott was responding to a letter in *Notes and Queries* regarding Lévi's supposed involvement with the founding of the Golden Dawn. The original letter in *Notes and Queries*, 8 December 1888, p. 448, is from a gentleman called Gustav Mommsen, who had linked the 'secret society' with the Rabbi Samuel Falk, a notorious magician, alchemist and Kabbalist active in the late eighteenth century in London, and with an occult order purportedly founded by Francis Barrett in the early nineteenth century. Westcott's reply appears in *Notes and Queries* on 9 February 1889, pp. 116-117.

¹³⁷ The Editor, 'Review of Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 9 September 1887, p. 12; Mathers, S. L. MacGregor, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 22 September 1887, p. 6.

¹³⁸ See Huysmans, J.-K., *Là-bas* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1978; originally published in successive chapters in *L'Echo de Paris*, commencing February 1891), p. 95, referring to Lévi's purported 1841 translation of the Hebrew Kabbalist/alchemical work *Aesch Mezareph*; Blackwood, Algernon, 'The Nemesis of Fire', in Blackwood, Algernon, *The Complete John Silence Stories*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997), p. 118, quoting Lévi on the occult significance of blood; Bulwer-Lytton, Edward, *A Strange Story: An Alchemical Novel* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1892; reprinted, Berkeley, CA: Shambala, 1973), p. 386, fn. 2, in which *Dogme et rituel* – 'a book less remarkable for its learning than for the earnest belief of a scholar of our own day in the reality of the art of which he records the history' – is cited as an authority on the number of persons required to assist in an enchanter's experiments.

cards.¹³⁹ Lévi's most important work – *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, published in English in 1896 as *Transcendental Magic* – has never been out of print, and every new generation of aspiring magicians still turns to it as the 'Bible of occultism'.¹⁴⁰

Lévi's Catholicism, and his emphasis on the Western foundations of esoteric thought, offended Blavatsky's antipathy toward the Church and contradicted her preference for Eastern doctrines. She was also irritated by Lévi's philosemitism, which collided with her own well-developed antisemitism.¹⁴¹ In order to justify her use of the Kabbalah while denying the Jews any credit in creating it, she simply declared that the Kabbalah was Indian in origin, passed on to the Babylonians and Egyptians and thence to the Jews, who distorted and mutilated it.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ See, for example, Clymer, E. Swinburne, *The Book of Rosicruciae* (Quakertown, PA: Philosophical Publishing, 1946), Vol. 1, p. xv, in which Lévi is described as 'Supreme Grand Master of the Fraternitas [Rosae Crucis] in Europe'. For a contemporary presentation of Lévi as a Grand Master of the Rosicrucians, see Payne-Towler, Christine, *The Underground Stream: Esoteric Tarot Revealed* (Eugene, OR: Noreah Press, 1999), p. 6, and Payne-Towler, Christine, 'The Continental Tarots' at <http://www.tarot.com/pdf/continental.pdf>, downloaded 18 November 2007.

¹⁴⁰ Lévi, Eliphas, *Transcendental Magic*, trans. A. E. Waite (London: George Redway, 1896).

¹⁴¹ For an example of Blavatsky's occasional bursts of vituperative antisemitism, see her editorial for *Lucifer* (August 1890), in which she attacks articles written by Adolphe Franck and other Jewish intellectuals for *Les Archives Israélites*: 'In these the stagnation of all progress through fanaticism is so evident, that after reading some papers signed by such well-known names of *men of culture* as F. Crémieux (*Clericalisme et Judaïsme*), A. Franck, a member of the Institute (*Les Juifs et l'Humanité*), and especially an article by Elie Aristide Astruc, "*Grand rabbin de Bayonne, grand rabbin honoraire de la Belgique*", etc. – ("Pourquoi nous restons Juifs") – no one can detect the faintest trace of the progress of the age, or preserve the slightest hope of ever witnessing that which the Christians are pleased to call the moral regeneration of the Jews.' Her objection to Franck and Crémieux, known for their liberal and secularised Judaism, is apparently that they chose to remain Jewish.

¹⁴² For Blavatsky's assertion that Orpheus had brought the Mysteries to Greece from India, see Blavatsky, H. P., *Collected Writings*, Vol. XIV (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1985), p. 293: 'We know through Herodotus that the Mysteries were brought from India by Orpheus'; p. 308: 'For Proclus says that the doctrines of Orpheus, who was an Indian and came from India, were the origin of the systems afterward promulgated'. For Blavatsky's claim that the 'real' Kabbalah was misused and subsequently forgotten by the Jews, see, for example, *Collected Writings*, Vol. XIV, p. 194: 'But how can he tell what the Pentateuch contained before it had been recomposed by Esdras; then corrupted still more by the ambitious Rabbis in later times, and otherwise remodelled and interfered with?' Blavatsky also attempted to attribute the Hebrew language to an Indian origin: 'The Hebrew language, i.e., the extinct language called ancient Hebrew, never existed: it is a language without a single original root; it is a composite language formed of bits of Greek Arabic and Chaldean...And the Chaldean itself comes from Sanskrit' (Blavatsky, H. P., *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, Vol. 1, 1861-1879, ed. John Algeo, Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2003, Letter 88, pp. 319-20). The idea that all ancient wisdom had originated in India was a common perception among mid-nineteenth century scholars once Sanskrit texts became accessible to Western readers from 1788 onward; see Poliakoff, *The Aryan Myth*, pp. 183-214.



Her assessment of Lévi is not, however, entirely lacking in insight:

...Having been a priest, Éliphas Lévi could never rid himself to his last day of a certain theological bias – yet we are prepared to always lend a respectful ear to the teachings of so learned a Kabalist...Abbé Constant may be termed a Biblical or Christian Kabalist, though Christ was in his sight more of an ideal than of a living Man-God...Moses and Christ, if real entities, were human *initiates* into the arcane mysteries in his opinion...The mysticism of the official church, which seeks to absorb the human in the divine nature of Christ, is strongly criticized by her ex-representative. More than anything else Éliphas Lévi is then a *Jewish* Kabalist.¹⁴³

Lévi's 'occultist' Kabbalah thus remains, in Blavatsky's eyes, essentially Jewish, and its paradoxical blend of ancient authority with precocious modernity, psychology with mysticism, and religious devotion with human potency, fascinated Victorian occultists seeking a 'path of equilibrium' between the soulless aridity of scientism and the claustrophobic confines of orthodox faith.

Lévi founded no school or organisation and his ideas require no allegiance to any esoteric order, thereby allowing the British occultists complete freedom to set up their own. Ronald Hutton points out that Lévi 'stripped the secret tradition of identification with any one modern political programme; it now supplied a powerful implicit criticism of orthodox Christianity and an alternative history of Western culture which could be taken up by radicals on both the left and right'.¹⁴⁴ Eclectic and self-contradictory, Lévi's work, like the Kabbalah itself, encourages further speculation rather than obedient discipleship.¹⁴⁵ Although as a professed Catholic he could

¹⁴³ Blavatsky, H. P., 'A Posthumous Publication', in Blavatsky, H. P., *Kabala and Kabalism* (Los Angeles, CA: The Theosophy Company, n.d.; originally published in *The Theosophist*, 1881), p. 45.

¹⁴⁴ Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁵ Lévi's dislike of interference in his private beliefs is reflected in his brief and eventually hostile involvement with 'regular' Freemasonry, which only lasted for six months. He seems to have offended the brethren of the Lodge Rose of Perfect Silence, into which he was initiated in March 1861, through his insistence on the Jewish Kabbalah as the source of all Masonic rituals (his initiatory speech is reproduced in Lévi, Éliphas, *Le livre des*

hardly be expected to be sympathetic to the Protestant Reformation, he is clearly in harmony with its spirit:

Before the abuses of the Romish Church, protestation is a right and consequently a truth...Catholicity, that is to say Universality, is the character of true religion, it is therefore a truth, but Catholicism is a party and consequently a falsehood. When abuses have ceased, protestation will no longer have any reason to exist, and when Catholicity shall have been established throughout the world, there will be no more Catholicism at Rome.¹⁴⁶



Lévi in 1875, less than a year before his death

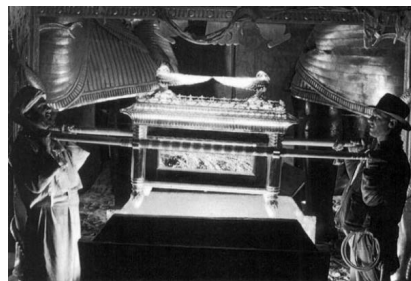
But Lévi's appeal as an individual cannot explain the power that his Kabbalah wielded over the endemically antisemitic middle-class social milieu of nineteenth century British occultism.¹⁴⁷ I would suggest four factors that contributed to this unusual preoccupation with Jewish esoteric lore. The first and most obvious factor is that the Kabbalah, although Jewish, was perceived by Christian

splendeurs, contenant le soleil judaïque – la gloire chrétienne et le étoile flamboyant: études sur les origines de la Kabbale, avec des recherches sur les mystères de la franc-maçonnerie suivies de la profession de foi et des éléments de Kabbale (Paris: Chamuel, 1894), p. 169; for its irritating effect on the brethren, see Caubet, Charles, *Souvenirs 1860-1889*, Paris: Cerf, 1893, p. 4). The brethren in turn offended Lévi through their opposition to his Catholicism (see Lévi, Éliphas, *Le livre des sages*, Paris: Chacornac Frères, 1912, p. 13: 'I ceased being a Freemason, at once, because the Freemasons, excommunicated by the Pope, did not believe in tolerating Catholicism; I thus separated from them to protect my freedom of conscience and to avoid their reprisals, perhaps excusable, if not legitimate, but certainly inconsequential, because the essence of Freemasonry is the tolerance of all beliefs'). For religious politics in the Rose of Perfect Silence at the time of Lévi's initiation, see Nord, Philip, 'Republicanism and Utopian Vision: French Freemasonry in the 1860s and 1870s', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (June 1991), pp. 213-229. It is entirely possible that Lévi was involved with 'fringe' or 'red' (higher degree) quasi-Masonic or Rosicrucian-type initiatic organisations such as the *Fratres Lucis* (into which Kenneth Mackenzie insisted Lévi had initiated him), although he does not claim membership of any group of this kind and no documentation has emerged to indicate such involvement. On the *Fratres Lucis*, the Asiatic Brethren, and other Kabbalistically inclined 'red' Masonic groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Katz, Jacob, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939*, trans. Leonard Oschry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 26-53; McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, pp. 161-178; Howe, 'Fringe Masonry in England'; Burmistrov and Endel, 'The Place of Kabbalah in the Doctrine of Russian Freemasons'; Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie Templière et Occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe Siècles*, pp. 936-75; Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 122-23, 220-22. For an 'emic' perspective on the *Fratres Lucis*, see Waite, A. E., *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London: William Rider & Son, 1924), pp. 503-528.

¹⁴⁶ Lévi, *Paradoxes of the Highest Science*, p. 117.

¹⁴⁷ On the predominantly middle-class element in British occultism, see Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 46, 61.

interpreters for many centuries as containing secret allusions to the Christian revelation, and can thus be accommodated to the heterodox but nevertheless broadly Christian sympathies of the British occultists. The second factor is the ongoing myth of the unique efficacy of Jewish magic, which first appears in texts such as Origen's reply to Celsus, who declares that the Jews 'worship angels and are addicted to sorcery, in which Moses was their instructor'.¹⁴⁸ This myth enjoyed continuing potency in the Christian world, from the medieval adulation of Solomon as 'king of the demons' to the Rosicrucian and Masonic currents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It even reared its head in the British political climate of the late 1870s, when Disraeli, having offended the Christian clergy by his pragmatic support of the Muslim Turks against Russian ambitions in the Balkans, was denounced as 'an extraordinary magician', a 'superlative Hebrew conjuror', and a purveyor of 'cabalistic sorcery' who had mysteriously bewitched the British public.¹⁴⁹ The myth of Jewish magical expertise can be seen in the writings of Golden Dawn disciples such as Arthur Machen, who expresses his hope that an 'Aryan' Kabbalah might be formulated that could prove as potent as the 'Semitic' Kabbalah, which 'tells all the hidden secrets of our beginning and our journey and our ending'.¹⁵⁰ Long after the Old Testament was relegated to the realm of literary myth, the imagined superiority of Jewish magic continued to exercise its fascination, reappearing in popular culture in the late 20th century through the film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*,



and the cult television series, *The X-Files*.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Origen, *Against Celsus*, trans. F. Crombie and W. H. Cairns, in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, IV, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), Book I, Ch. 28, p. 407. See also Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monohan, Book VIII, Ch. 19, in *Writings of St. Augustine*, VII (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1952), Book X, Ch. 8, pp. 129-30, in which Moses is said to have performed his miracles 'helped by the angels'.

¹⁴⁹ Jenkins, Edward, *Haverholme, or the Apotheosis of Jingo: A Satire* (London: William Mullan & Son, 1878), p. 51; Roth, Cecil, *Benjamin Disraeli: Early of Beaconsfield* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1952), pp. 84-85, quoting Carlyle, in Wohl, Anthony S., "'Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi': Disraeli as Alien", *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 'Victorian Subjects' (July 1995), p. 404; *Spectator*, 2 November 1878, p. 1357, in Wohl, "Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi", p. 404.

¹⁵⁰ Machen, Arthur, *Things Near and Far* (London: Martin Secker, 1926), pp. 23-24.

¹⁵¹ *The X-Files: 'Kaddish'*, written by Howard Gordon, directed by Kim Manners, with David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, and Justine Miceli (Episode 15, Season 4, 20th Century Fox, 1994). This episode centres around the



Such myths die hard, if they ever die at all.

The third factor in the Kabbalah's fascination for the British occultists is its messianic message. Alex Owen points out that the occult revival was 'intimately bound up with the desire for an immediate regeneration of society'.¹⁵² The messianic idea, although present in one form or another in all Kabbalistic literature,¹⁵³ is articulated in the Lurianic Kabbalah in a new form, easily incorporated into the secularised, disenchanted worldview of the late nineteenth century: the responsibility for facilitating the great restitution of cosmic harmony lies on human rather than on divine shoulders. First engendered by a people who had been severed from their primary religious locus and had lived in diaspora for twelve centuries, the Kabbalah has always presented the themes of painful exile, alienation, abandonment of and by God, and the yearning for personal and collective redemption. The poetic and mythic properties of the Kabbalah have had an enduring impact on writers from *fin-de-siècle* symbolist poets to postmodern philosophers such as Eco, Derrida, and Ricoeur.¹⁵⁴ Lurianic Kabbalah, emerging after the expulsion of the Jews from their European homeland in 1492, is particularly rich in these themes of isolation, collective suffering, and the longed-for restitution of a damaged cosmos through the power of the human will – themes that reflect modern and even postmodern philosophical and psychological perceptions of the world. The

magical creation of a *golem* through the use of the *ars combinatoria* of the Sefer Yetsirah by a group of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn.

¹⁵² Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁵³ For comprehensive discussions on the various developments of the messianic theme within Judaism, see Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*; Liebes, Yehuda, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993); Werblowski, R. J. Zwi, 'The Safed Revival and Its Aftermath', in *Jewish Spirituality*, pp. 7-33; Sharot, Stephen, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*.

¹⁵⁴ On the 'literary modernism' of the Kabbalah, see Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word*, p. 28; Beguin, Albert, 'Poetry and Occultism', trans. Robert G. Cohn, *Yale French Studies*, No. 4, Literature and Ideas (1949), p. 14. In Umberto Eco's novel, *Foucault's Pendulum* (trans. William Weaver, New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), the computer belonging to the character named Belbo is called 'Abulafia'; its owner, recognising its facility for the *ars combinatoria*, programmes it to calculate permutations of the Tetragrammaton. On the relationship between Derrida's thought and Kabbalistic hermeneutics, see Winslade, J. Lawton, 'Techno-Kabbalah: The Performative Language of Magick and the Production of Occult Knowledge', *TDR*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 84-100. On Ricoeur and the Kabbalah, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 247; Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word*, pp. 56-57.

hope of an imminent transformation of society through the ‘universal language’ of the Kabbalah drew the disillusioned Catholic Romantic Éliphas Lévi like a bee to a honeypot.¹⁵⁵ Two decades later, his Kabbalah exercised the same spell over British occultists in an era dominated by Darwinian evolutionary theories that had ejected humans from their central place in a God-created universe – encouraging Dion Fortune, as late as the 1940s, to believe that the Kabbalistic adept could alter the evolutionary progress of the human race and even help to win the war against Germany.¹⁵⁶ The Kabbalah has been precocious in its modernity since its first literary appearance in the twelfth century. Perhaps the disenchanted culture of late Victorian Britain simply caught up.

¹⁵⁵ For Lévi’s presentation of himself as a prophet, see, for example, *Dogme et rituel*, pp. 334-36, where, after presenting his own interpretation of a prophecy of Trithemius, he states that it is ‘confirmed by all our previsions’.

¹⁵⁶ On Fortune’s efforts to magically influence the outcome of the Second World War, see Richardson, Alan, *The Magical Life of Dion Fortune: Priestess of the 20th Century* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1991 [1987]), pp. 227-36; Fielding, Charles and Carr Collins, *The Story of Dion Fortune* (Loughborough: Thoos Publications, 1998), pp. 106-109.