

The Gnostic L. Ron Hubbard: Was He Influenced by Aleister Crowley?

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ABSTRACT: Scientology was defined by its founder himself, L. Ron Hubbard, as a “Gnostic religion.” In 1969, however, a Trotskyist Australian journalist and an opponent of Scientology, Alex Mitchell, disclosed in a *Sunday Times* article that Hubbard had been involved, in 1945–46, in the activities of California’s Agapé Lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis, an occult organization led by British magus Aleister Crowley. The article generated a cottage industry of exposés criticizing Hubbard as having been a member of a “black magic” organization. Some scholars also believe Hubbard to have been influenced by Crowley in his subsequent writings about Dianetics and Scientology. While conflicting narratives exist about why exactly Hubbard participated in the activities of the Agapé Lodge and his leader, the rocket scientist Jack Parsons, the article argues that Hubbard researched magic well before 1945, came to conclusions about the role of magic in Western culture that are largely shared by 21st century scholars, and created with Scientology a system that is inherently religious rather than magic.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, Babalon Working, Aleister Crowley, Jack Parsons, John Whiteside Parsons, O.T.O., Agapé Lodge.

Scientology and Gnosticism

Some weeks ago, I was visited by a leading Chinese scholar of religion, Zhang Xinzhang from Zhejiang University. Zhang is a scholar of Gnosticism and a critic of movements the Chinese government identifies as *xie jiao* (“heterodox teachings,” sometimes translated, less accurately, as “evil cults”). We discussed the Gnostic features he found in several new religious movements active in China. There, “Gnostic” may be used to criticize Christian movements as “heretic” or “heterodox.”

I told Zhang that not all new religious movements are offended when they are called “Gnostic.” A case in point I mentioned is Scientology. When, in 2017, Aldo Natale Terrin, an Italian scholar of religion of international fame (and a Catholic priest) published a book on Scientology, insisting it is basically a Gnostic religion (Terrin 2017), reactions by Scientologists were very favorable. Presentations of Terrin’s book were organized by the Church of Scientology itself in various Italian cities. Éric Roux, a leading European Scientologist, expressed his appreciation for Terrin in his own 2018 presentation of Scientology (Roux 2018). As early as 2006, an article by French sociologist Régis Dericquebourg, emphasizing the Gnostic nature of Scientology, had already been favorably received by Scientologists (Dericquebourg 2006). L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), the founder of Scientology, had claimed himself more than once that he had founded a “Gnostic religion” or a “Gnostic faith” (see e.g. Hubbard 1955, 152) and that Scientologists are “Gnostics” (Hubbard 1955, 158).

Nor does Scientology complain when it is claimed that it is part of Western esotericism. This is J. Gordon Melton’s interpretation of Scientology (Melton 2000; see Introvigne 2018), a scholar again often referred to favorably by Scientologists.

The Fall and Rise of Aleister Crowley

There is, however, an old literature connecting Scientology with Gnosticism that Scientologists traditionally disliked. It includes articles and portions of books mentioning California’s Agapé Lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.). Hubbard joined the Lodge in 1945 and lived shortly in the home of its most well-known member and leader (but not founder), rocket propulsion scientist John Whiteside (“Jack”) Parsons (1914–1952). The international leader (but, again, not founder) of the O.T.O., or at least of its largest branch, to which the Agapé Lodge was connected, was British magus Aleister Crowley (1875–1947).

Crowley was widely regarded as a sinister character and a Satanist. He contributed to this image himself and did what he could to scandalize both the media and the Christians by proclaiming himself “the Great Beast” of the *Book of Revelation*, “Master Therion” and “To Mega Therion” (i.e. “the Great Beast” in Greek), and not denying, at times even embracing, his popular press’ designation as “the wickedest man in the world.” One label Crowley did not accept, however,

was “Satanist.” He was radically anti-Christian and believed Satanists were playing in the hands of Christianity by accepting the Bible as true, since it was in the Bible that they had found the story of Satan in the first place. While writing hymns to Satan in the tradition of “romantic Satanism” (Schock 2003; Faxneld 2017), Crowley always insisted that, for those who do not believe in the Bible, Satan obviously does not exist. Satanists, “for all their pretended devotion to Lucifer or Belial [are] sincere Christians, and inferior Christians as that” (Crowley 1979, 126), as they implicitly proclaim the truth of the Bible in the very moment they are condemning and blaspheming it.

Crowley’s dark fame as a black magician and a Satanist was all that was left of him when he died in 1947, except within the small circle of his disciples. That he was *not* a Satanist was not generally known then, and is still not generally accepted today (Introvigne 2016, 237–46). Few scholars took him seriously, until the revival of the academic study of contemporary Western esotericism, from the 1980s on, hit American and European universities through luminaries such as Antoine Faivre and, later, Wouter Hanegraaff and Marco Pasi. They quickly realized how important Crowley was for many subsequent esoteric movements. At the same time, the study of new religious movements also emerged as an independent academic subfield. Here again, from its very beginning, Crowley was studied as a significant influence (see e.g. Melton 1981).

By the 21st century, research on Crowley had emerged as a robust segment of the academic study of contemporary esoteric movements. Following a pioneer conference organized in 1997 by CESNUR, the Center for Studies on New Religions, in Cefalù, Sicily (where Crowley lived in an “Abbey of Thelema” between 1920 and 1923: Zoccatelli 1998), sessions on Crowley became routine at academic gatherings of scholars of Western esotericism. In 2017, the yearly Academia O.T.O. conferences, entirely devoted to Crowley and the O.T.O., were started in Ascona, Switzerland, and continued in 2018 in Barcelona, Spain. A new generation of Crowley scholars emerged, including Henrik Bogdan, Gordan Djurdjevic, Christian Giudice and Manon Hedenborg White, while older academics continued to explore the relevance of the British magus not only for the history of Western esotericism, but also of modernist art (Churton 2014), European literature (Pessoa and Crowley 2018), and the controversial relationship between esoteric movements and politics (Pasi 2014).

As those who attended the first Academia O.T.O. conference in 2017, included the undersigned, noticed, the presenters, most of them *both* academics and members of the O.T.O., did not avoid the topic of Crowley's personal shortcomings, from authoritarianism to the systematic manipulation of his female and male lovers and, possibly, racism. These aspects of Crowley's life are not ignored even in sympathetic biographies (see e.g. Kaczynski 2010).

His success in influencing a significant portion of 20th and 21st century Western esotericism was not regarded as a reason to forget or forgive his multiple failures as a lover, leader, and human being. It remains that, by that time, Crowley, notwithstanding the unsavory traits of his personal life, had completed a journey from being regarded as a mere oddity to being studied as a significant thinker in academic courses in several universities.

Jack Parsons and the Agapé Lodge

But what exactly did Crowley have to do with Hubbard? To answer this question, another character should be introduced, Jack Parsons. Crowley spent several years in the United States, where he hoped to escape European controversies, raise the funds he badly needed, and gather some loyal followers. He was more successful than elsewhere in California. There, Wilfred Talbot Smith (1885–1957) had founded a Church of Thelema in 1934 and in 1935 the Agapé Lodge of the O.T.O., whose celebrations of the “Gnostic Mass,” a ritual Crowley did not invent but codified by insisting on its content of sexual magic, attracted the attention of the tabloids (Starr 2003).

In 1941, Marvel Whiteside Parsons, a scientist, engineer and expert in explosives, who had legally changed his name from Marvel to John and was normally referred to as “Jack,” joined Smith's lodge together with his wife Helen Cowley (1910–2003). The mother of the latter, Olga Helena Nelson Cowley (1885–1949), widowed since 1920, had married Burton Ashley Northrup (1872–1946), of Pasadena, who ran a credit recovery agency but was also an agent, or at least a trusted informer, for the U.S. military intelligence (Starr 2003, 254). From her second marriage, Olga had two daughters. One of them, Sarah Elizabeth “Betty” Northrup (1924–1997), joined the Smith-Parsons lodge at a very early age, on the impulse of her stepsister Helen, and took the magical name Soror Cassap.

Parsons became in that period a nationally (and later internationally) well-known figure in his profession (Carter 1999; Pendle 2005). He was a researcher at the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech), and worked both for the American government and for private companies. For the government, Parsons and his colleagues carried out the experiments of Arroyo Seco, which were at the origins of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and had a primary role in the American space projects. For the private industry, Parsons worked on a series of programs, which led to the incorporation of Aerojet General Corporation. In recognition of these merits, in 1972, twenty years after his death, a crater on the Moon will be baptized with his name. Perhaps the International Astronomical Union, which gave the name of Parsons to the crater, did not know the occult activities of the famous scientist—or, if it did, it did not care.

Parsons lived indeed two lives, one as the brilliant scientist and one as the occultist involved in movements of dubious fame. Parsons had always been attracted to radical and marginal groups. After having participated in the activities of a Communist cell at Cal Tech, he met Smith and joined the O.T.O. Smith's lodge was under attack from the press as a congregation of dangerous subversives, but this for Parsons counted as a recommendation. At the same time, Crowley and Smith were having differences on various topics, primarily on the money that the British magus, in deep financial troubles, believed he had the right to receive from his American disciples. Parsons thus attracted the attention of Crowley, who corresponded with him and became a source of inspiration for the writings of the Californian scientist (Parsons 1989; Parsons 2008).

In 1942, Parsons, who was well paid by Cal Tech, rented a rather expensive home, called simply "1003," at the address 1003, South Orange Grove Avenue, in Pasadena's "Millionaires' Row." It became the new "convent," or "profess house," where a group of Agapé Lodge members started living communally. Among these were Smith, Parsons, his wife Helen, and Helen's stepsister Betty. Then, a soap opera developed. Parsons had started having intimate relations with Betty when the latter, who was now eighteen, was thirteen. His wife Helen finally discovered what was going on, and gave him a taste of his own medicine by starting a relationship with their superior in the O.T.O., Smith. When the Agapé Lodge moved to the new convent in Pasadena, Smith was already living openly with Helen, and Parsons with Betty. Crowley sardonically commented that the number 1003, the address of the home, was probably chosen as it coincided with

the number of women conquered by Don Giovanni in the opera consecrated to him by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791: Starr 2003, 271–73).

Crowley was everything but a moralist, but was afraid that, between love triangles and even more complicated amorous polygons, things at 1003 would end up badly. He instructed two people he trusted, both his future successors at the guide of the main branch of the O.T.O., Karl Germer (1885–1962) and Grady Louis McMurtry (1918–1985), to keep him informed of what was going on in Pasadena. The latter, in particular, sent vitriolic reports, suspecting Smith of having an affair with his own ex-wife, who lived in the “convent” in Pasadena, and that he had persuaded her to have an abortion: a capital sin for Crowley, who was, in his own bizarre way, pro-life. In 1943, Germer, on behalf of Crowley, removed Smith from his office of superior of the Agapé Lodge, substituting him with Parsons.

But the latter had his own problems. Cal Tech worked for the military. During both World War II and the Cold War, it was kept under surveillance by the secret services. Parsons had already been investigated as a suspected Communist. In 1943, Betty eventually revealed to her parents that not only did she live with Parsons, but she had started sleeping with him when she was thirteen. Her father, as one can imagine, was not happy. Since he had connections with the military intelligence services, he put them on Parsons’ trail, not only as a Communist but also as a dangerous “black magician” (Starr 2003, 254).

Enter L. Ron Hubbard

It is in this context that Hubbard entered the story. One of the high-level initiates of the Agapé Lodge was pianist and composer Roy Edward Leffingwell (1886–1952). He was a friend of Hubbard and a fan of his fiction. At that time, Hubbard had not yet “discovered” Dianetics, but was well-known in California as a successful writer of fiction. It was through Leffingwell that Hubbard joined the Agapé Lodge, and in 1945, went to live at 1003. Parsons reported to Crowley that Hubbard was an excellent swordsman and well known in the California literary milieu, including for his science fiction stories. Invited by Hubbard, even the prince of American science fiction, Robert Anson Heinlein (1907–1988), came to 1003 for a swordplay. McMurtry, always the gossip, commented that Hubbard preferred to train with Betty Northrup, for reasons going beyond sport

(Pendle 2005, 256). Soon thereafter, as McMurtry had correctly predicted, Betty left Parsons and started a relationship with Hubbard.

Parsons suffered privately, but declared that in the O.T.O. women were free and there was no place for jealousy. He even asked Hubbard to help him accomplishing a series of rituals based on the Enochian system of magic, which have been reconstructed in great detail by Swedish scholar Henrik Bogdan (Bogdan 2016). As a result, Parsons expected the appearance of a “spirit” that might help him in his magical activities. On January 18, 1946, a sculptress and painter, Marjorie Cameron (1922–1995), who, under the simple name of “Cameron,” will subsequently become a well-known artist (Lipschutz, Breeze and Pile 2014; Parsons and Cameron 2014; Kansa 2014), appeared at 1003, joined the lodge and came to live in the home. Or so Parsons would later report. In fact, “Cameron had actually been at the house on South Orange Grove Avenue a short period before, but had not spoken with Parsons at that time” (Bogdan 2016, 22). Cameron quickly became the new lover of Parsons, and the latter concluded that the magical operations undertaken with Hubbard had been successful. Cameron had appeared, and Cameron was indeed the “spirit” promised to him.

Sexual magic was a core practice in Crowley’s O.T.O. and Parsons quickly began a new series of sex magic experiments with Cameron (Bogdan 2016, 29–30). The purpose, this time, was the birth of a *homunculus*, both “artificial man” and the vehicle for the coming Antichrist, a *positive* character for Crowley, who regarded traditional Christianity as evil and its demise as desirable. Crowley himself had written a secret instruction on the *homunculus* (King 1973, 231–39), and it was to this being that his novel *Moonchild* alluded (Crowley 1929). However, according to Crowley, not only the times were not mature, but also initiates of a much higher level than Parsons would have been necessary. Informed of the so-called “Babalon Working,” by which Parsons believed he could produce the *homunculus*, Crowley wrote back that Parsons was simply “a fool” (King 1987, 162–66). Parsons continued all the same, and went so far to produce an unauthorized fourth chapter of Crowley’s sacred scripture, *The Book of the Law*. He probably never dared to send it to Crowley himself (Bogdan 2016, 23), who regarded any innovation or addition to his canon as blasphemy.

Eventually, Parsons parted company with Crowley and concluded that Cameron herself, rather than the child she was supposed to produce with him,

was the incarnation of “the Thelemic goddess Babalon,” the “Scarlet Woman” of the *Book of Revelation* (Bogdan 2016, 29). If it did not produce a *homunculus*, the “Babalon Working” at least generated a schism in the O.T.O.

What was the role of Hubbard in the meantime? It seems that Parsons now mostly relied on him as a financial advisor. Between the spring and the summer of 1946, the two of them and Betty incorporated a company called Allied Enterprises. It should buy yachts in Miami, where they costed less, sail them to California through the Panama Channel, and sell them at considerably higher prices there. Soon, however, Parsons started protesting that Hubbard and Betty were cheating him. Crowley was informed by Germer, and believed the story was true (Pendle 2005, 269). On July 1, Parsons descended into Miami, where he obtained from the local court an order prohibiting Hubbard and Betty from leaving Florida. But they were already at sea, and Parsons decided to summon the demon Bartzabel to stop them. He wrote to Crowley that the summoning was successful. On July 5, a storm, that Parsons believed had been created by Bartzabel, forced the couple to return to Miami.

Parsons, however, was less successful in court. The court did not believe his story of fraud and cheating. He had to leave the yachts and most of the money to Hubbard, who signed a promissory note for \$ 2,900 only. One of Parsons’ biographer believes that the scientist did not protest, as Betty had threatened to inform the police about the sexual relationship he had started with her when she was still a minor (Pendle 2005, 270).

The Post-Crowleyan Parsons

Hubbard does not seem to have taken an interest in the post-Crowleyan activities of Parsons, but they are not uninteresting. Excommunicated by Crowley, Parsons undertook in his last years a personal journey, trying to launch an independent Gnostic Church and promoting the cult of Babalon and the Antichrist. In 1948, he swore an “Oath of Antichrist” in the hands of his ex-superior in the O.T.O., Smith, and changed his name into Belarion Arminuss Al Dajal Anti-Christ. This oath preceded an apparition, dated October 31, 1948, of Babalon, thanks to which Parsons discovered he was the reincarnation of Simon Magus, a sorcerer or perhaps a Gnostic of the 1st century C.E. mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* (8:9–24), of 15th century criminal Gilles de Rais (1405–

1440), and of 18th century esoteric master Cagliostro (1743–1795). After the oath, Parsons believed he had become himself the Antichrist.

The ideas of Parsons' latter period are summarized in the *Manifesto of the Antichrist* he wrote in 1949. It was a strongly anti-Christian text, yet curiously it proclaimed its respect for Jesus Christ, who, Parsons proclaimed, was not a "Christian" and in fact taught sexual freedom. Parsons also expressed a faith in the Trinity and an interest in a reformed Christianity, very much different from the teachings of the Christian churches. The Holy Spirit for him was Sophia, the female counterpart of Christ. God was manifested in the union of Christ and Sophia, and the latter was also identified with Babalon.

Parsons promised to "bring all men to the law of the BEAST 666, and in His law I shall conquer the world." As "Belarion, Antichrist," he prophesied,

Within seven years of this time, BABALON, THE SCARLET WOMAN HILARION will manifest among ye, and bring this my work to its fruition. An end to conscription, compulsion, regimentation, and the tyranny of false laws. And within nine years a nation shall accept the Law of the BEAST 666 in my name, and that nation will be the first nation of earth. And all who accept me the ANTICHRIST and the law of the BEAST 666, shall be accursed and their joy shall be a thousandfold greater than the false joys of the false saints. And in my name BELARION shall they work miracles, and confound our enemies, and none shall stand before us (Parsons 1980, 7).

Parsons the Antichrist promised the destruction of Christianity. Before his prophecies could come true, he destroyed himself in the accidental explosion of his chemical laboratory in 1952. Notwithstanding the old controversies, his writings are still popular in Crowleyan circles, and they remain in print thanks also to the fame of Cameron, who illustrated some of them, as an artist. A Cameron-Parsons Foundation was established in 2006 in California, and the scientific community still remembers Parsons as a significant pioneer of rocket science.

Exit Betty

A month after the Miami incident with Parsons, Hubbard and Betty got married, though the marriage was brief and ended in a bitter divorce. This, too, is a matter of controversy. Some deny that Hubbard was ever married to Parsons' ex-lover. Documents, however, indicate that the two were married on August 10,

1946 in Chestertown, Maryland. Hubbard himself, in a letter written on May 14, 1951 to the U.S. Attorney General, described Betty as a woman “I believed to be my wife, having married her and then, after some mix-up about a divorce, believed her to be my wife in common law” (Hubbard 1951b). The mix-up was about Hubbard’s own divorce from his first wife, Margaret Louise “Polly” Grubb (1907–1963). Hubbard may have not been legally divorced yet when he married Betty in 1946.

The marriage between Betty and Hubbard quickly deteriorated, and the girl found a lover in one of Hubbard’s early associates in the activities of Dianetics, Miles Fenton Hollister (1925–1998). Betty later divorced Hubbard and married Hollister. Hubbard suspected that Communist infiltrations and Soviet-style mind control techniques may have been partially responsible for both his marital difficulties and problems within Dianetics. On March 3, 1951, he wrote to the FBI claiming that Hollister was “confessedly a member of the Young Communists,” and that Betty was “friendly with many Communists. Currently intimate with them but evidently under coercion” (Hubbard 1951a). He reiterated the same accusations in the letter to the Attorney General he wrote in May 1951 (Hubbard 1951b).

Betty’s father, possibly informed by Hubbard, had already reported to federal agencies his fear that Parsons had recruited his daughter into a Communist cell. Now, Hubbard concluded that Betty had succumbed to the sinister Communist technique of “pain-drug hypnosis” (see Introvigne 2017). He named several members of the early Dianetics circle as suspects of Communism, including Gregory Hemingway (1931–2001), the son of the famous writer Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961). Gregory, a transsexual medical doctor, was shortly associated with Dianetics but is better known for his later change of name into Gloria. He died in 2001 in the women’s section of the Miami jail, after his arrest outside a state park for indecent exposure (Conway n.d.).

In 1952, Betty attended Parson’s funeral service organized by the Agapé Lodge with her new husband Hollister, and reconciled with her stepsister Helen. Hubbard did not attend, as by 1952 he had lost any interest in Betty and her O.T.O. friends.

The Mitchell Incident (1969): A Trotskyist Against Hubbard

As told by subsequent critics of Scientology, the story of the relationship between Hubbard and Parsons was based on sources close to Parsons. They had a vested interest in depicting Hubbard as both an amateur occultist and somebody who defrauded Parsons of a significant amount of money, not to mention his girlfriend. As mentioned earlier, court records do not support the fraud narrative. They depict a business relationship gone sour, not a criminal fraud perpetrated by Hubbard. Rather than punishing Hubbard for stealing Parsons' money, the court did what courts of law normally do when partners in a company quarrel between themselves. They divided the assets of the company in a solomonic way, leaving the best part to Hubbard and greatly reducing Parsons' original claims. As for the girlfriend, Parsons himself was the first to realize that the bourgeois narrative of one lodge member "stealing" the girlfriend of another was hardly applicable to the free love milieu of the Agapé Lodge.

The relationship between Hubbard and magic is a much more complicated subject. As mentioned earlier, for decades Crowley was synonymous of evil, dark magic, and Satanism. Associating Hubbard with Crowley was an easy way to depict him as a sinister "cultist." An article in the London *Sunday Times* did just this in 1969 (Mitchell 1969). The article was written by Australian journalist Alex Mitchell (b. 1942), then a young man of 27, who later became the editor of the controversial London Trotskyist daily newspaper *Workers Press*, later renamed *The News Line*, the organ of the Workers Revolutionary Party (see his autobiography: Mitchell 2011).

As a Communist, Mitchell was strongly anti-American and hostile to Hubbard, who had repeatedly criticized Communism in typical Cold War terms (see Introvigne 2017). Mitchell was Australian, and what he knew about Scientology came from the controversial Victoria government's Anderson report of 1965, which he called "a landmark inquiry" into a "cult" (Mitchell 2011, 143). When he moved to London, he decided he should "uncover the operations of the Church of Scientology in the UK" (Mitchell 2011, 143). With other Australians, he enrolled in several courses at the London org of Scientology in Tottenham Court Road, where, as he later admitted, he paid more attentions to girls than to Hubbard's teachings: "We had suntans, we were lost in the London metropolis

and we were searching desperately for companionship—that is, sex” (Mitchell 2011, 143).

While Mitchell’s antipathy towards Scientology had obvious political motivations, the *Sunday Times* article reveals that it had access to original documents and letters by both Parsons and Crowley. He wrote that he used “a vast collection of papers owned by a former admirer of Crowley.” This “former admirer of Crowley,” as Bogdan noted, “could have been none other than the Crowley collector and former disciple Gerald Yorke (1901–1983)” (Bogdan 2016, 13). As the *Sunday Times* article shows, Mitchell had no knowledge of esotericism, did not understand Crowley’s ideas, and failed to recognize the background of Parsons’ magical operations in the Enochian magic of John Dee (1527–1608). Nor was he interested in understanding Crowley and Parsons. His aim was to expose Scientology by associating Hubbard with a lurid tale of magic and sex.

This was, after all, 1969. Only in 1976, with the publication of Mircea Eliade’s (1907–1986) *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions*, would most scholars of religion become acquainted with the fact that the ritual use of sexuality was part of the esoteric teachings of several religions (Eliade 1976, 93–119). And only from the following decade, scholars of new religious movements such as J. Gordon Melton would emphasize that sex magic was indeed a frequent, if often hidden, feature of several religious and esoteric movements that flourished in the West since the 19th century (Melton 1981; Melton 2017).

Mitchell did have access to original documents. But, as he did not “speak the language,” he read them outside of their context, and looked at Crowleyan magic as simply disgusting and weird. The same is true for professional anti-Scientologists, who learned the story of the Babalon Working from Mitchell and were only too happy to repeat it. John Atack devoted to the incident a whole chapter of his 1990 anti-Scientology summa *A Piece of Blue Sky* (Atack 1990, 89–102) Shortly thereafter, counter-cult Danish Christian scholar Helle Meldgaard, at that time an associate of leading Lutheran anti-Scientologist, Johannes Aagaard (1928–2007), brought the argument to the Vatican, at a conference where I also spoke (Meldgaard 1992).

Meanwhile, Mitchell continued his anti-Scientology crusade, and in 1969 tried to visit Hubbard’s ship *Apollo* when it was docked in Corfu, Greece. He was

refused access to the ship but was warmly welcomed by the local British vice-consul, Major John Knox Forte (1915–2012). Although Mitchell did not disclose it in his autobiography (Mitchell 2011, 144), Forte was both the local correspondent in Corfu of an international clique of anti-Scientologists, and the person entrusted by the British intelligence with the task of persuading the Greek authorities not to let Hubbard open a university in Corfu. He published his own version of the events and anti-Scientology diatribe in 1980 (Forte 1980). Why the British intelligence should interfere with Hubbard's activities in a foreign country is unclear, but beyond the scope of this article.

With the help of Forte, Mitchell tried to corner Hubbard in the toilets of the Achilleion Palace, a luxury museum-cum-casino he was visiting in Corfu, but was outsmarted by Scientology's founder, who knew who he was and refused an interview. As Mitchell later reported, Hubbard

left to visit the toilet and I followed. I found him leaning over the urinal so I took my stance next to him. 'Any chance of an interview with you, Mr Hubbard?' I asked. He turned his head and drawled, 'And who, may I ask, are you, sir?' I gave him my name and he lit up. 'Alex, you are a very persistent reporter. Haven't you got better things to do than write about me?' I replied that I found him and Scientology endlessly fascinating and that an interview would be eagerly read in Britain to clear up misunderstandings about the church. 'Alex,' he replied with patronising charm, 'you're wasting your time. I know where you're coming from, and it's been very nice meeting you. Goodbye' (Mitchell 2011, 144).

Mitchell's opposition to Scientology verged on the obsession. Later, he had to confront his Trotskyist comrades who doubted attacking Hubbard would really advance the cause of the proletarian revolution. In the end, he prevailed and his became "the first Trotskyist newspaper in the world to publish a full-page exposé of L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology" (Mitchell 2011, 228).

After Mitchell had written on the Crowley-Hubbard-Parsons connection, Scientology answered the *Sunday Times*, with a letter the London newspaper considered for a while and then deemed wise to publish, fearing litigation. There, Scientology explained that,

Hubbard broke up black magic in America: Dr. Jack Parsons of Pasadena, California, was America's Number One solid fuel rocket expert. He was involved with the infamous English black magician Aleister Crowley who called himself "The Beast 666." Crowley ran an organization called the Order of Templars Orientalis over the world which had savage and bestial rites. Dr. Parsons was head of the American branch located at 100

Orange Grove Avenue, Pasadena, California. This was a huge old house which had paying guests who were the U.S.A. nuclear physicists working at Cal. Tech. Certain agencies objected to nuclear physicists being housed under the same roof. L. Ron Hubbard was still an officer of the U.S. Navy because he was well known as a writer and a philosopher and had friends amongst the physicists, he was sent in to handle the situation. He went to live at the house and investigated the black magic rites and the general situation and found them very bad. Parsons wrote to Crowley in England about Hubbard. Crowley “the Beast 666” evidently detected an enemy and warned Parsons. This was all proven by the correspondence unearthed by the Sunday Times. Hubbard’s Mission was successful far beyond anyone’s expectations. The house was torn down. Hubbard rescued a girl they were using. The black magic group was dispersed and destroyed and has never recovered. The physicists included many of the sixty-four top U.S. scientists who were later declared insecure and dismissed from government service with so much publicity (Church of Scientology 1969).

According to Atack, the original of the statement was produced “during the Scientologists’ case against Gerald Armstrong in 1984” and “is in Hubbard’s handwriting” (Atack 1990, 90). Obviously, the founder of Scientology was confronted with the need of answering a newspaper article quickly by putting in writing his recollections of events that had occurred 23 years earlier. This explains mistakes such as calling the Ordo Templi Orientis “Order of Templar Orientalis,” giving a wrong address for the Agapé Lodge’s headquarters, and promoting Parsons to the position of “head of [its] American branch,” that in fact he never achieved. These are, however, mere details. The core of the letter is that Hubbard infiltrated the Agapé Lodge on behalf of American intelligence agencies.

Atack describes this claim as “ridiculous” (Atack 1990, 90), but the aim of his book is to attack Scientology, not to reconstruct historical facts and put them in context. Unlike authors in the O.T.O. tradition, he overlooks the connections of Betty’s father, Burton Ashley Northrup, with American military intelligence services (Starr 2003, 254), and the possibility that Hubbard informed him about Parsons. That Hubbard was commissioned to do so cannot be confirmed but, in the climate of the early Cold War years, would not have been particularly unusual either.

As J. Gordon Melton has noted, here we are confronted with two irreconcilable narratives (Melton 1981; Melton 2009). The O.T.O. claims that Hubbard was a member of the Agapé Lodge who later betrayed Parsons and cheated him out of his money (as we have seen, court documents *do not* confirm this accusation). For

Scientists, Hubbard worked undercover in the interest of U.S. intelligence services, and his mission was substantially successful because he put an end to Parsons' "black magic" activities. It is possible, as Melton concluded, that the two stories are both, from their respective different points of view, genuine perceptions of the same events (Melton 2009, 21).

Hubbard's View of Crowley's Magic

This is, however, only part of the story. Nobody would deny that Hubbard was a complex character, naturally curious about a number of things. Obviously, while participating in Parsons' activities, and irrespective of his motivations for doing so, he became familiar with the ideas of Crowley. In a speech of December 5, 1952, Hubbard explained that

Now, he could simply say, "I have action." A magician—the magic cults of the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth centuries in the Middle East were fascinating. The only modern work that has anything to do with them is a trifle wild in spots, but it's fascinating work in itself, and that's work written by Aleister Crowley, the late Aleister Crowley [sic], my very good friend. And he did himself a splendid piece of aesthetics built around those magic cults. It's very interesting reading to get hold of a copy of a book, quite rare, but it can be obtained, *The Master Therion*, T-h-e-r-i-o-n, *The Master Therion* by Aleister Crowley. He signs himself "The Beast"; "The Mark of the Beast, 666." Very, very something or other. But anyway, the—Crowley exhumed a lot of the data from these old magic cults. And he, as a matter of fact, handles cause and effect quite a bit. Cause and effect is handled according to a ritual. And it's interesting that whenever you have any of these things you can always assign a ritual to it and that ritual is what you do in order to accomplish this, or how you have to go through and how many motions you have to make to come into the ownership of that. And that's a ritual. Or how many motions or words you have to say in order to be something else. Now, that's a ritual. And that is a—each ritual is a cycle of some sort or another (Hubbard 1985, 12).

The language is quite convoluted and there are imprecisions. For instance, Hubbard never personally met Crowley. This is not an article but a literal transcription of a speech by Hubbard. However, some critics found mistakes where there are none. For instance, it has been claimed that Crowley did not write a book titled *The Master Therion*. But in fact, in 1916, he published in London a four-page flyer called *The Message of the Master Therion* (Crowley 1916). The text was later revised and published in the New York review *The International* in 1918 (Crowley 1918). In 1943, it was reprinted, with some variations, as a small

booklet, *Liber II: The Message of the Master Therion* by The Church of Thelema, Pasadena, and the cover even mentioned the address of 1003, South Orange Grove Avenue (Crowley 1943). It is surely this edition, undoubtedly “quite rare,” that Hubbard read in Pasadena, and calling it in short “The Master Therion” is understandable.

The following week, on December 11, 1952, memories of discussing Crowley should have been fresh in Hubbard’s mind, as he mentioned him again within the context of an analysis of religious liberty. If we really believe in religious freedom, Hubbard stated, we should grant it even to a religion as far away from Christianity as Crowley’s. Religious liberty, Hubbard said,

is a very, very relative term. You, for instance, today sit here with a constitution which guarantees religious freedom but, by golly, what would happen to you if you started to worship Baal? Man! How that would ring in the tabloids. If you started to worship Lucifer, if you started to worship any of the various gods... One fellow, Allistair [sic] Crowley uh... picked up a level of religious worship which is very interesting—oh boy! The press played hocky with his head for his whole lifetime. The Great Beast—666. He just had another level of religious worship. Yes, sir. You’re free to worship everything under the Constitution so long as it’s Christian (Hubbard 1998, 152).

Here, Crowley’s religion is mentioned as an extreme case, a test for religious liberty, but the approach is not hostile. How can the two 1952 texts be reconciled with the late letter to the *Sunday Times*, where Crowley was described as an “infamous black magician,” practicing “savage and bestial rites”? One possibility is that, by 1969, Hubbard had read more material about Crowley’s less savory activities, and had developed a more negative opinion of the British magus. There is, however, an alternative I regard as both more likely and more interesting. One can argue that Crowley was capable of *both* “infamous” behavior towards his disciples *and* of producing “splendid pieces of aesthetics,” in more than one field. The *Sunday Times* letter clearly belongs to the literary genre of the press release, and served the purpose of answering dangerous criticism in a simple way. However, as mentioned earlier, a good percentage of contemporary scholars would agree that Crowley had, at the same time, some dark and extremely unpleasant traits and a unique capability of producing brilliant and aesthetically valuable texts on magic, as well as poems and paintings (although, on the quality of his paintings, opinions differ). One can be both a very unpleasant character and a genius in his field.

Critics of Hubbard also quote a text where, allegedly, he speaks favorably of Parsons. The context is a discussion on how schools for problematic and under-achieving students may produce very successful businessperson and scientists.

One chap by the way, who gave us solid fuel, rockets and assist take-offs for airplanes too heavily loaded on aircraft carriers, and all the rest of this rocketry panorama, and who formed Aerojet in California and so on. The late Jack Parsons, by the way, was not a chemist the way we think of chemists. He was not taught in the field of chemistry beyond this fact: There was a little professor who opened up a school. Nobody could do anything with Jack so they sent him over to this school and the professor found out he was interested in chemical experiments and turned him loose in the laboratory and gave him a lot of encouragement. He eventually became quite a man. It is interesting that this completely sloppy type of education is apparently quite workable (Hubbard 1957a, 31).

This text does not include any appreciation of Parsons' activities in the Agapé Lodge. It states the obvious, i.e. that Parsons, despite his difficult beginnings and his problems as a student, eventually became one of the leading rocket scientists of his generation. No expert of Parsons' professional field would deny this, and why Hubbard's statement should be regarded as controversial is unclear. Similarly, the fact that later occultists in the Crowley tradition such as the German Eugen Grosche ("Gregor A. Gregorius," 1888–1964) read and appreciated *Dianetics* (Popiol and Schrader 2007, 114) can hardly be used against Hubbard. They shared an interest in *Dianetics* with millions of other readers, and there is no evidence that Hubbard had any contact with them.

What is more questionable is Parsons' contribution to Western esotericism. Some of his literary texts have found a sympathetic audience, and he has been acknowledged for his association with such an increasingly recognized artist as Cameron. However, few would put Parsons in the same league as Crowley as an esoteric author. There are no conferences or academic courses on Parsons as an original esoteric thinker. Hubbard didn't think highly of Parsons either, except as a scientist, and never mentioned Parsons' occult ideas in his writings.

Hidden in Plain Sight

On the other hand, although in one lecture only, Hubbard did seriously discuss Crowley's theory of magic. Recently, Hugh Urban returned on this issue in an article about Hubbard's Gnosticism (Urban 2019, in turn largely based on Urban 2012, which expanded on Urban 2011, 39–42). Urban raises an important

issue, and correctly notes that Hubbard's core religious ideas bear "more than a passing resemblance to early Gnostic beliefs" (Urban 2019, 110), although he believes that they may be "best understood not so much as a unified, coherent system but rather as a wildly eclectic bricolage" (Urban 2019, 111). Personally, I find Terrin's reconstruction of Hubbard's ideas as a coherent and highly organized system of modern Gnosticism (Terrin 2017) as more persuasive, but this is beyond the scope of the present article.

Urban also discusses Crowley, although he does not mention the scope and magnitude of contemporary Crowleyan scholarship, and this despite the fact that he contributed to at least one important volume on the British occultist (Urban 2012). He simply repeats three times that Crowley was an "infamous" and even "most infamous leader" (Urban 2019, 99, 100, and 102), while Parsons was merely "the most infamous member of the [O.T.O.'s] California group" (Urban 2019, 105). Urban speculates about the sources of Crowley's "Gnostic" sex magic with some interesting comments (Urban 2019, 104). However, while he is aware of the flourishing in France and other countries, from the late 19th century on, of various self-styled "Gnostic Churches," with which the British magus was well acquainted, he does not mention that they also had an interest in sex magic and might have been a more direct source than ancient Gnostics for Crowley (see Introvigne 1993). Crucial for the story of these "Gnostic Churches" was the circle of Lady Caithness (Marie Sinclair de Mariategui, 1830–1895), where the magical use of sexuality was certainly not unknown (Pasi 2006), not to mention the late Belgian KVMRIS and a long sequel of sex magicians in the whole history of Western esotericism (Kripal and Hanegraaff 2008).

In a way, Hubbard's assessment of Crowley seems more in tune with contemporary scholars of the O.T.O. than Urban's. Crowley may well have been a quintessential bad guy, but his theory of magic deserves to be taken seriously.

Urban also believes that Hubbard was influenced by Crowley when he elaborated the Gnostic worldview of Scientology. Some of the evidence he offers is not persuasive, such as that the cross used by Scientology resembles one used by Crowley (it resembles other crosses as well), and that "the key term for the Spirit or soul in Scientology is the *thetan*—symbolized by the Greek letter theta—which is also the central symbol in the O.T.O.'s sigil of Babalon and the first letter in Crowley's key term *Thelema*" (Urban 2019, 107). One can as well argue that "thetan" shares the initial Greek letter with "Theosophy," "theology,"

and “thermodynamics,” not to mention the Greek city of Thessaloniki, where the brothers saints Cyril (826–869) and Methodius (815–885), decisive for the formation of Slavic Christianity, were born. These arguments were also used by Atack, whose theories connecting Hubbard to the occult became increasingly preposterous. He found similar symbols among the O.T.O., Scientology, the Nazis, Freemasons, and all the usual suspects of countless conspiracy theories (Atack n.d.). As Umberto Eco (1932–2016) famously noted, the problem with conspiracy theories is that similar symbols may be found almost everywhere (Eco 1990).

Urban states that Scientologists try to conceal both Hubbard’s connection with Gnosticism and the Parsons-Crowley incident. Certainly, they do not advertise the latter, given the popular prevailing negative image of Crowley but, as Urban recognizes, they don’t deny it either. As for the Gnostic connections of Scientology, the secret is hidden in plain sight. Hubbard himself, in texts Urban quotes, described Scientology as a “Gnostic religion” (Urban 2019, 107–8).

My impression is that the story of Jack Parsons is such a sensational tale of science, magic, and sex that both anti-cultists and some scholars have been mesmerized by the mere fact that Hubbard mentioned Crowley’s occultism in his lecture of December 5, 1952, without focusing on the content of the lecture. The content, however, deserves attention.

The Washington Irving-Athanius Kircher Connection: An Early Text by Hubbard (1939)

Here, again, Hubbard appears as surprisingly modern, considering that the lecture was delivered in 1952. Well before scholars such as Wouter Hanegraaff insisted on this point (obviously in a much more systematic way: Hanegraaff 2012), Hubbard had noticed that magic and esotericism are an important part of Western thought that was rejected and censored. Hubbard didn’t discover this for the first time during his experience with the Agapé Lodge. As is true for other subjects (see Introvigne 2017), Hubbard’s fiction tells us a good deal about his pre-Dianetics interests, and those scholars who do not read his short stories and novels miss key elements of his background. Several pieces of fiction tell us that he was interested in the role of magic well before 1945 (see e.g. Hubbard 1939; Hubbard 1940).

Hubbard's sources were mostly literary, and included Washington Irving (1783–1859), the well-known author of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. As Arthur Versluis, one of the best specialists of esotericism in the United States, has documented, the novelists of the so-called American Renaissance avoided criticism by presenting occult themes with a certain levity, but in fact did believe in supernatural phenomena. Irving, for example, was in touch with Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–1899), a leading figure in British and American Spiritualism (Versluis 2001, 56).

One of Hubbard's most celebrated short stories was *Slaves of Sleep*, published in the July 1939 issue of the *Unknown* magazine (Hubbard 1939). It had a sequel, *Masters of Sleep*, which appeared in *Fantastic Adventures* in October 1950 (Hubbard 1950). *Slaves of Sleep* is about the accidental opening of a magic jar, which bears a Seal of Solomon. The Seal is in fact a talisman, which releases an *ifrit*, a nature spirit of the Arabic folklore (a type of *jinn*) and unfolds a sequel of events in which the main character, American millionaire Jan Palmer, is transported into a dimension where *ifrits* rule humans.

Hubbard introduced *Slaves of Sleep* with an “Author's Note” (Hubbard 1939, 9–10), which opens with a long quote from Irving's *Alhambra*:

A word more to the curious reader. There are many persons in these skeptical times who affect to deride everything connected with the occult sciences, or black art; who have no faith in the efficacy of conjurations, incantations or divinations; and who stoutly contend that such things never had existence. To such determined unbelievers the testimony of past ages is as nothing; they require the evidence of their own senses, and deny that such arts and practices have prevailed in days of yore, simply because they meet with no instance of them in the present day. They cannot perceive that, as the world became versed in the natural sciences, the supernatural became superfluous and fell into disuse, and that the hardy inventions of art superseded the mysteries of magic. Still, say the enlightened few, those mystic powers exist, though in a latent state, and untasked by the ingenuity of man (Irving 1871, 491–92, quoted by Hubbard 1939, 9–10).

Hubbard also refers to “Kirker's *Cabala Sarracenic*” as an authoritative source about the magic powers of the Seals of Solomon (Hubbard 1939, 10). German scholar Mario Frenschkowski comments that the quote “has puzzled many Scientology readers,” and in fact refers to “a work by Baroque scholar Athanasius Kircher” (S.J., 1602–1680: Frenschkowski 2010, 37). Frenschkowski is right in arguing that the quote came from Irving, as it appears in *Alhambra* shortly before the long passage Hubbard reproduced, with the same

spelling, “Kirker,” and as a source for “the Seal of Solomon” (Irving 1871, 491). The Seal has a central role in Irving’s story *The Legend of the Enchanted Soldier* (Irving 1871, 474–89), part of *Alhambra*, at the end of which a “Note to the Enchanted Soldier” was included (Irving 1871, 489–92). However, there is no book by Kircher with the title *Cabala Sarracenicæ*. In fact, Kircher’s magnum opus *Œdipus Ægyptiacus* divides the study of the ancient use of magic symbols and seals in twelve classes. Class V (to which a section of Kircher’s book corresponds) is called “Cabala Sarracenicæ” and includes the magical use, or misuse, of both Islamic and Jewish symbols by Muslims. One of the symbols discussed is, indeed, the Seal of Solomon (Kircher 1653, 397–98). Note that Hubbard mentions “Kirker’s *Cabala Sarracenicæ*” rather than “Kirker’s book *Cabala Sarracenicæ*.” Apart from the spelling of the last name of the Jesuit scholar, Hubbard was quite correct if his reference was to a *notion* or *a part of a book* by Kircher.

The author’s notes in both *Slaves of Sleep* and *The Legend of Enchanted Soldier* are important for understanding Hubbard’s research on magic, as it was unfolding as early as 1939. Scholars of Irving tell us that, when he wrote *Alhambra*, he wanted to produce a sellable book (González Alcantud 2009, 33), yet he also hoped to preserve old Spanish legends that would otherwise be lost. He relied on apocryphal tales fabricated in the 18th century by authors such as Cristóbal Medina Conde (1726–1798) and Juan Velázquez de Echeverría (1729–1804), taking from the latter the material he used in *The Legend of the Enchanted Soldier* (González Alcantud 2009, 34–5). Irving may have suspected the legends to be fabricated, but he still insisted they expressed the spirit of the people of Granada and of the city itself. He had an Orientalist approach to both the Islamic Granada of old and the contemporary inhabitants of the city, as simple and naïve but carrying at the same time reminiscences of an ancient wisdom. He approached magic through a strategy of “concealment and evasion,” “inner distancing and calculated nostalgia” (Delpech 2001, 122). He presented his matter lightly, yet invited his readers to respect the “honest credence” in tales of magic (Irving 1871, 492).

Hubbard’s *Slaves of Sleep* has obvious references to Irving’s *The Legend of Enchanted Soldier*. In both stories, magic is unfolded by a Seal of Solomon, and both texts are accompanied by notes where the authors discuss their attitudes to magic. Frenschkowski has noted that “Hubbard liked to speak on magic with

frivolous levity,” which however “does not mean his remarks on the subject should not receive attention” (Frenschkowski 2010, 35–6). As in the case of Irving, levity could have been a strategy.

In his note preceding *Slaves of Sleep*, Hubbard concluded that,

Man is a stubborn creature. He would rather confound himself with “laws” of his own invention than to fatalistically accept perhaps truer but infinitely simpler explanations as offered by the supernatural—though it is a travesty to so group the omnipresent jinn! (Hubbard 1939, 10).

Here, again, scholars of esotericism would perhaps agree with Hubbard that “supernatural” is a confusing label when used for lumping together several different esoteric and non-esoteric doctrines and practices. More importantly, the note to *Slaves of Sleep* shows that, by 1939, long before meeting Parsons, Hubbard had already researched magic seriously enough to reach some conclusions that would later inform his assessment of Crowley’s theories.

Hubbard had already concluded that something was wrong with the dominant mainstream culture. Relying on “laws’ of [human] invention,” many had become unable to solve their problems. The magic and esoteric style of thinking had offered for centuries an alternative, and it was still there. Its “explanations” had the advantage of being “simpler.” In some cases, “perhaps,” they were also “truer.”

But what was magic all about? Hubbard answered the question in the passage of his 1952 lecture where he discussed Crowley. In magic, “cause and effect is handled according to a ritual.” “You can always assign a ritual” to problems you need to solve, and “each ritual is a cycle of some sort or another” (Hubbard 1985, 12).

There is nothing weird in this discussion. Modern scholars would agree that, first, this is a valid description of the magical style of thinking and second, Crowley was an important theorist in this field (no matter how unpleasant his personal lifestyle might have been). Some of them would also dispute that the magical model is always less effective than the prevailing rational-scientific model of cause and effect for solving certain problems: perhaps, in some case, it may even offer better solutions (Kripal 2017 is a good example). If anything, Hubbard anticipated here conclusions that would become popular among some 21st century scholars. However, he did not believe that magic would solve the most

intractable problems of humanity. Neither the narrow rationalism of mainstream culture nor magic would solve them. Something new was needed.

Conclusion: Scientology as “Supermagic”

Unlike Urban, I do not believe that Crowley was a significant source (although, as Urban concedes, not the main one) for Hubbard’s mature worldview. On the other hand, it is certainly true that Hubbard did research the role of magic and magical traditions, and he started well before meeting Parsons or hearing of Crowley. However, the fact that he *studied* magic does not mean that he *accepted* it. In advance of his times, he recognized the historical role of magic as an important system of thought throughout Western history. But he concluded that it was not a system that would solve the basic human problems.

There is a very clear text about this, published by Hubbard in the *Ability* magazine in 1957. The premise is that humans perceive that they are trapped in a less than desirable condition and should escape it. “We knew all of us that we were in a sort of trap called physical universe.” In fact, “we’d gotten in ourselves” (Hubbard 1957b, 133). This is, of course, the Gnostic core of Scientology. According to Hubbard, at the beginning, there were the “thetans,” pure spirits who created MEST (matter, energy, space, and time), largely for their own pleasure. Unfortunately, incarnating and reincarnating in human bodies, the thetans came to forget that they had created the world, and to believe that they were the effect rather than the cause of physical universe. As a consequence, they remained entrapped in the MEST universe, unable to escape, yet maintaining a feeling that escape was needed.

All successful religions, Hubbard noted, persuaded their followers they knew the way to escape:

Tell me why Christianity won so well. Wasn’t it because of promised escape? Tell me why Buddhism won so sweepingly. Because it promised escape. Well, why not escape. If the great religions of all time became great on the promise of escape, we must assume that a lot of people want out and that there’s something wrong with in (Hubbard 1957b, 134).

However, many claimed religions had not delivered. Nor did rationalist science solve the most fundamental human problems. Some looked at magic as a way to escape. When Dianetics appeared, Hubbard reported, some believed that, since it “worked” and solved some of their petty practical problems, it was a sort of

magic. However, this was a wrong interpretation. Magic in itself does not “open the gate.” Scientology is a “gnostic religion” but is not magic. More precisely, it goes beyond both rationalism and magic. It claims to offer both a clear explanation of why we are in the “sort of trap called the physical universe” and the only technology offering a way out of the trap. In this sense, Scientology is not magic but “supermagic.”

Is there a way out? Yes there is. We have it in Scientology now. I have found it and charted it. I know exactly how to open the gate. For whom. Ah yes, that’s the news. We used to say—“if your case is in good shape” or “if you really want to.” Of course you want to. But it didn’t require magic to open the gate. It required a supermagic to let our friends go free (Hubbard 1957b, 134).

The magic ritual works, if and when it does, because of belief. The beauty of Scientology, Hubbard argued, is that the technology works “without belief and faith” (Hubbard 1957b, 135).

Hubbard researched magic because he regarded as interesting its claim that it was possible to transcend the normal relations of cause and effect, thanks to alternative forms of knowledge and ritual practices. Eventually, however, Hubbard concluded that an alternative to mainstream thinking was indeed needed, but should be based on a precise technology rather than on ritual, and elaborated a very different system. As Frenschkowski has noticed, “Scientology does not have magical evocations or rituals and does not deal in spells, occult paraphernalia or the power of the true will in a Crowleyan sense.” Scientology is a (Gnostic) religion, not a magic system, and “does not have more affinity with it [magic] than other new religions.” Scientology is “something very different from magic,” and magic “is no magical key to understand what Scientology is about” (Frenschkowski 2010, 37).

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