

Mediterranean esotericism of Éliphas Lévi and English literature: A cartography of influence

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Abstract: This study examines the important, yet underexamined, influence of Éliphas Lévi's Mediterranean esotericism upon English literature at the turn of the twentieth century by tracing the way his Hermetic philosophy was received and transformed by the literary imaginations of W. B. Yeats, Arthur Machen and Aleister Crowley. Fundamental to Lévi's venture was the rehabilitation of magic as a sacred science, which is grounded in universal correspondences, rather than superstition, a vision that is articulated through his doctrine of analogy and his symbolic reframing of the Mediterranean as a living matrix, linking theology, occultism and artistic creation. Through the dissemination of Lévi's ideas by A. E. Waite and their integration into the ritual practice of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, his cosmology of correspondences, Kabbalistic symbolism and Tarot hermeneutics entered directly into the creative practice of key modernist writers. Thus, Yeats's cyclical theory of history, Machen's reconfiguration of Pan as an instrument of cosmic revelation, and Crowley's Thelemic appropriation of Egyptian gnosis - each exemplifies the translation of Lévi's esoteric grammar into literary form. Hence, by employing a methodology that integrates textual analysis, hermeneutic interpretation (drawing upon Paul Ricoeur's theory of the symbol), and the intellectual history of Western esotericism (via Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff), the study demonstrates that Lévi's Mediterranean worldview provided an operative poetics based on a symbolic imagination, capable of accessing metaphysical truths through aesthetic means. This poetics, grounded in the Hermetic axiom 'as above, so below', enabled English writers to transform myth into ritual and poetry into invocation. By locating Lévi at the confluence of esoteric philosophy and literary modernism, the study posits that Lévi's Mediterranean hermeneutics anticipated modernist strategies of symbolic layering and mythic recurrence by establishing a persistent dialogue between the occult and the literary,

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which reimagined the Mediterranean as a spiritual topography and an enduring source of poetic renewal.

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Introduction

The Mediterranean has long occupied a distinctive position in European cultural and literary imagination, functioning simultaneously as a site of historical memory, a philosophical reflection and a point of mythic resonance, inspiring authors, from classical antiquity to modernism, to invoke its seas, cities, mountain ridges and landscapes as symbolic sites, in which human experience intersected with the divine, the mysterious, the strange and the hidden. Within this cultural topology, Éliphas Lévi (1810-1875), born Alphonse-Louis Constant, emerges as a crucial figure, whose esoteric philosophy reframed the Mediterranean as a symbolic matrix, which linked theology, magic, occultism and artistic imagination. Lévi's writings, particularly *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1854), proposed a hermeneutic, in which "the sea, light, and celestial cycles operate as metaphors for spiritual knowledge and the interconnection of all things" (Faivre 1994, 15), thus marking the convergence of Enlightenment rationalism, Romantic mysticism and religious syncretism within a framework, which sought to recover, what he termed, the *haute magie*, or the "high science of divine correspondences" (Ibidem). As Lévi (1856, 1, 4) declared, "to practice magic is to be a quack; to understand it is to be a sage" - in this way, he encapsulated his project of philosophical rehabilitation of magic as a sacred science, grounded in universal law, rather than superstition, and envisioned the Mediterranean as the cradle and the continuum of this wisdom tradition, with its symbolic geography stretching from Egypt and the Levant to Greece and Rome and encompassing the sources of Western civilization and spirituality alike.

Lévi's intellectual path was deeply influenced by his early training in Catholic theology at Saint-Sulpice and by his subsequent exposure to revolutionary socialist thought, reconciled in his later esoteric synthesis through the Mediterranean idea of unity-in-diversity, standing for the belief that multiple faiths and philosophies ultimately express one divine truth. "All symbols conceal the same mystery [Lévi (1856, 2, 87) writes] and the sages of Egypt, of Greece, of India, and of Judea spoke in parables of a single dogma". This notion of perennial philosophy, or *prisca theologia*, echoed the Hermetic tradition of

Alexandria and provided the platform for his esoteric system, in which the Mediterranean functioned as a cosmological metaphor, encircled by lands of revelation, including Egypt, Israel, Greece, Italy, and became an image of the universal circulation of wisdom. Lévi's own maps of correspondences between planetary forces, angelic hierarchies and mythic deities parallel the interconnected world of the ancient Mediterranean, in which religions and philosophies interpenetrated, while his engagement with the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Kabbalah reveals his conviction that Western knowledge was never truly divided from its Eastern origins. As Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2012) notes in *Esotericism and the Academy*, Lévi "proposed a new Christian Cabala in which ancient wisdom could be reconciled with Catholic orthodoxy" (190), thus reimagining the sacred as a living language of symbols accessible to poets as well as magi, and providing a reconciliation, which was aesthetic as well as theological.

It was through this symbolic language that Lévi's Mediterranean esotericism entered English letters, with his ideas, translated and disseminated by A. E. Waite in the 1890s, finding fruitful ground in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn - a society, the rituals of which explicitly drew from the diagrams of the Kabbalistic Tree by Lévi, his interpretation of tarot as the "alphabet of the mysteries" (Lévi 1856, 2, 112), and his assertion that "the Magus is the hierophant of universal analogies" (Ibidem). The members of the Golden Dawn, among them W. B. Yeats, Arthur Machen, and Aleister Crowley, absorbed Lévi's teachings into their creative practice, translating his Mediterranean syncretism into mythic and literary forms. Thus, W. B. Yeats in *A Vision* (1925), for instance, explicitly echoes Lévi's assertion that "history itself is the reflection of celestial cycles" (Lévi 1856, 1, 146), in this way fortifying his own cyclical theory of gyres, in which the Platonic and Hermetic ideals of eternal return coalesce with a poetic interpretation of cosmic law. Similarly, *The Great God Pan* (1894) by Arthur Machen reconfigures Lévi's symbol of Pan - "the Great All" (Lévi 1856, 1, 146) into a modern parable of the sacred and profane intermingled, while Aleister Crowley, who called Lévi "the master who first gave me the key to magic" (Crowley 1954, Letter XLVII), reanimated the Egyptian aspects of Lévi's Mediterranean esotericism, by situating his Thelemic revelation in the same mythic topography that had inspired Hermeticism two millennia earlier.

The centrality of the Mediterranean to Lévi's vision derives from its historical role as the crossroads of civilizations, with Egypt offering

him the archetype of initiatory science, Greece - the grammar of symbolism, Rome - the endurance of sacred order, and Judea - the revelation of divine unity. These cultures, Lévi believed, encoded a single esoteric grammar or 'alphabet of nature' that could be deciphered through analogy: "To know the law of analogy [he wrote] is to read the soul of the world" (Lévi 1856, 1, 23). The Mediterranean, in this light, became the ocean of correspondences, binding East and West through the harmony of hidden forms, and found resonances within English Romanticism and later within modernism. The Romantic fascination with the East, exemplified by Percy Bysshe Shelley's Hellenism, George Gordon Byron's Levantine imagery, John Keats's Greco-Roman syncretism, prepared the imaginative soil for Lévi's esotericism, yet, where Romantic poets idealized the Mediterranean as aesthetic inspiration, Lévi sacralised it as metaphysical matrix. His followers in English letters extended this sacralization, transforming myth into ritual and poetry into invocation, since "Lévi's rehabilitation of symbolism was decisive: he made the symbol the operative key of the imagination" (Faivre 1994, 39). That imaginative key would unlock new forms of literary modernism, in which the sacred past returned through esoteric allusion.

In contextual terms, Lévi's Mediterranean worldview also intersected with broader currents of nineteenth-century philology and comparative religion, as the emergence of Orientalist scholarship and the rediscovery of ancient Near Eastern texts reactivated interest in the spiritual prehistory of Europe. Lévi's part-theological, part-poetic synthesis offered an alternative to the disenchantment brought by scientific rationalism: "The materialist sees matter [he wrote] but the initiate sees God manifesting through matter" (Lévi 1856, 1, 92). This epistemological stance of seeing through rather than at phenomena found a literary analogue in symbolist aesthetics and in W. B. Yeats's (1928, 3) invocation of "the artifice of eternity", thus linking multiple discourses: theology, philosophy, mythography and literature, and positing the Mediterranean as a spiritual topology, in which divine revelation is perennial, cyclic and universal. By tracing Lévi's influence upon English writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the study simultaneously discerns the transmission of occult ideas to England and the transformation of English literature itself, since the Mediterranean ceased to be a mere backdrop of classical reference; it became, through Lévi's mediation, a site of initiation, symbol, as well as poetic renewal. As such, this study

contends that Lévi's esoteric hermeneutic served as a vital axis, around which modern literary imagination revolved - a hidden geometry linking Alexandria to London, and the mystic sea to the printed page.

This study explores Lévi's influence on key figures of English literature, including W. B. Yeats, Arthur Machen, and Aleister Crowley, and demonstrates how Mediterranean esotericism permeated art, poetry, fiction and occult practice in the late Victorian and modernist periods by means of the concept of the symbolic imagination - a creative method that functions epistemologically, enabling authors to access metaphysical truths through literary form. At the same time, Lévi's (1856, 1, 12) doctrine of correspondences, with its insistence that "all that is below is like that which is above", offers a theoretical bridge between mystical knowledge and literary aesthetics and provides a framework for understanding the recurrent motifs of cycles, water and spiritual ascent in English literature. What is more, in tracing Lévi's reception, this study situates the Mediterranean as both, imaginative geography and esoteric grammar, a space of mediation between visible and invisible realms within broader currents of Western esotericism, including Hermeticism, Neoplatonism and Kabbalistic cosmology, since for W. B. Yeats, the Hermetic sea becomes a symbolic passage from mortality to the immortal city of Byzantium; for Arthur Machen, the ancient gods of Greece resurface as instruments of psychological and cosmic revelation; and for Aleister Crowley, Egypt and the symbolic Mediterranean landscape serve as the stage for ritual enactments and theurgy. Furthermore, this study argues that Lévi's Mediterranean hermeneutics anticipate modernist literary strategies of symbolic layering, mythic repetition and cyclicity, as by integrating esoteric structures into literary form, these English writers enact what Gadamer (2004, 306) terms the "fusion of horizons", merging historical symbolic systems with contemporary aesthetic values. The paper examines these intersections and argues that Lévi's influence extends beyond the occult, so as to shape narrative technique, poetic imagery, as well as the very conception of artistic initiation in late-Victorian and modernist literature.

Methodologically, this research employs a combination of textual analysis, hermeneutic interpretation and intellectual history: textual analysis of W. B. Yeats's *A Vision* and *Sailing to Byzantium*, Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* and Aleister Crowley's *The Book of the Law* demonstrates how the symbolic universe engendered by Lévi was translated into English literary forms; hermeneutic interpretation draws

upon the theory of symbols by Paul Ricoeur (1967), brought forward in *The Symbolism of Evil*, while the intellectual history of Western esotericism contextualizes Lévi within broader Mediterranean and European traditions, scrutinised by Antoine Faivre in *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994) and Wouter J. Hanegraaff in *Esotericism and the Academy* (2012). Together, these approaches illustrate the ways, in which Lévi's Mediterranean vision informed the English literary imagination and created a symbolic ecology, in which history, myth and esoteric knowledge continuously intersect to provide a symbolic framework for English writers to direct questions of metaphysical knowledge, artistic creation and cultural memory, so as to establish a persistent dialogue between the esoteric and the literary.

The Mediterranean hermeneutics of Éliphas Lévi

The theoretical foundation for examining Éliphas Lévi's influence on English literature through Mediterranean esotericism requires an understanding of how the symbolic imagination functions as an epistemology and a creative method. In fact, Lévi's work stands at the crossroads of theology, philosophy and mythology, while his Mediterranean hermeneutic, his symbolic reading of the sea as a nexus of sacred exchange, unites these domains. For this reason, his thought can be read through the lenses of Western esotericism, symbolic hermeneutics and mythopoeic literary theory, each providing a different, yet convergent pathway to understanding how Lévi's system shaped the imaginative practices of English late-Victorian modernist and writers.

In *Access to Western Esotericism* (1994), Antoine Faivre defines Western esotericism through six fundamental characteristics: correspondences, living nature, imagination and mediation, transmutation, concordance and transmission. These categories, especially imagination and correspondence, are essential for understanding Lévi's theoretical method, whose approach places symbols as links between the visible and invisible worlds, since "the esoteric imagination enables the symbolic restructuring of reality itself, permitting both epistemic insight and aesthetic innovation" (Hanegraaff 2012, 49). Within this framework, the Mediterranean geography functions as an analogical and archetypal structure, a semantic field where spiritual and cultural meanings converge, described by Lévi (1856, 1, 27) as "the cradle of light, where divine knowledge first touched the waters of the world". In this way, the

Mediterranean becomes an epistemological metaphor and the visible manifestation of invisible truths – hence, to study Lévi through this framework is to study how esoteric symbols migrate, transforming from theological doctrines into aesthetic forms.

That said, first and foremost, Lévi's hermeneutics rests upon the doctrine of correspondences, the belief that "all that is below is like that which is above, to accomplish the miracle of the one thing" (Lévi 1856, 1, 12). This principle, which derived from the *Tabula Smaragdina* (c. 700-800) attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, became the structural foundation of Lévi's magical philosophy, yet, in his reinterpretation, this axiom becomes a linguistic and artistic law, as the poet, for Lévi, is a hierophant, who translates divine symbols into human language: "Every word is a sigil; every poem, an invocation" (Blackwood 1910, 214). This stance anticipates the symbolist notion of the *correspondence*, as articulated by Charles Baudelaire in *Correspondances* (1855) and transmitted into English literature through the aestheticism of the 1890s and the ritual poetics of W. B. Yeats, wherein the aesthetic "serve[s] as a medium through which the artist as well as the viewer can come in touch with the more fundamental level of being" (Lahelma 2018, 12).

From a theoretical standpoint, Lévi's Mediterranean esotericism is inseparable from what Hans-Georg Gadamer later termed in *Truth and Method* (1960) as the 'fusion of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*), or a process, by which past symbolic systems and contemporary "understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" ([1960] 2004, 306). For Lévi, the Mediterranean world provided precisely this fusing horizon, as Egyptian Hermeticism, Greek philosophy, Jewish Kabbalah and Christian mysticism were coalesced into a unified symbolic syntax. What is more, his reading of history was far from being linear; it was circular, anticipating the modernist fascination with recurrence and cyclicity, resonating with W. B. Yeats's *A Vision*, in which history unfolds through "gyres" (1925, 17) or spirals of repetition and transformation. Hence, Lévi's symbolic geography becomes a hermeneutic model for Yeats's historical imagination.

Yet, to approach Lévi theoretically is to encounter a philosophy of mediation, since symbols, for him, are ontological, rather than ornamental: "[The symbol] speaks by evoking thought" (Lévi 1856, 1, 3). This principle, drawn from Neoplatonism and reanimated by Lévi through his interpretation of the *Sepher Yetzirah* and the Kabbalistic

notion of divine emanations (*Sefiroth*), each corresponding to planetary and psychological states, underlies the concept of *imaginatio vera* or the ‘true imagination’ capable of perceiving the intermediate realm between matter and spirit. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Paul Ricoeur (1967, 347) observes that “the symbol gives rise to thought” - a claim that once again situates Lévi as a catalyst for metaphysical reasoning in literature, in which such mediation translates into the creative process itself, envisioning poetry as ritual, narrative as initiation, art as theurgy. Hence, W. B. Yeats’s claim that “poetry is the revelation of the self to the self” (1961, 509) can be read as a modern echo of Lévi’s (1856, 1, 65) maxim that “magic is the exercise of the will through symbols”, according to which the Mediterranean turns into a symbolic field, a cultural and imaginative ecology, in which meanings circulate, evolve, and, ultimately, return.

What is more, Lévi’s Mediterranean esoterism proposes an archetypal topology that mirrors the Hermetic cosmos, which is animated by a polarity of light emerging from shadow - “In the beginning, water was the first mirror of the light; it was by the motion of the spirit upon the waters that the shadow was born” (Lévi 1913, 45); the generative union of opposites - “kabbalistic phallus/ cteis, vertical/ horizontal, masculine/ feminine, gnostic stauros” (Lévi 1856, 1, 123-126), and crowned by the endless circulation of “horizontal and vertical correspondences” (Lahelma 2018, 7) between visible and invisible worlds. This dual symbolism of creation and death permeates English modernist literature, particularly T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), in which the drowned Phoenician Sailor becomes a cipher for cyclical death and rebirth: “As he rose and fell/ He passed the stages of his age and youth/ Entering the whirlpool” (lines 317-319). Although T. S. Eliot’s direct engagement with Lévi is uncertain, his reliance on esoteric archetypes situates him within the same symbolic framework.

Lévi’s theoretical synthesis also offers a model of gnostic poetics, since his Mediterranean imagination reflects the Gnostic worldview of exile and return, in this way emphasizing knowledge (*gnosis*) as salvific illumination: “To know, to dare, to will, and to keep silent” (Lévi 1856, 1, 98). In fact, his famous magical maxim encapsulates both - the ritual discipline and poetic practice, with each verb corresponding to a mode of artistic creation: knowing (intuition), daring (imagination), willing (form), and silence (contemplation), thus providing a template for literary creation that integrates spiritual discipline and aesthetic practice, “orient[ing] an individual to the

dream consciousness level, which is the productive level [...] a creative consciousness" (Campbell 1990, 60-61). This fourfold structure reappears in W. B. Yeats's ritual poetics and in the discipline of symbolist aesthetics, in which revelation emerges from restraint.

In Lévi's cosmology, language itself becomes sacramental, since the Logos, the creative Word, operates as both a principle and a medium, with each Mediterranean culture holding fragments of this primordial Word: Egyptian hieroglyphs, Hebrew scripture, Greek philosophy, and Christian liturgy. Hence, Lévi's theory of correspondences transforms these into a single esoteric lexicon - a universal grammar of the sacred, with English writers, such as W. B. Yeats and Aleister Crowley, appropriating this esoteric grammar and translating Lévi's theology of language into poetic form. W. B. Yeats (1954, 210) explicitly linked his occult studies to poetic creation, remarking that "If I had not made magic my constant study, I could not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would *The Countess Kathleen* ever have come to exist". Indeed, the verse in these literary pieces deployed charged symbols and esoteric rhythm intended to evoke deeper states of consciousness. Yet, it was in the popular imagination of the First World War that this literary magic took on its own life, as it happened with the rapid mythologization of Arthur Machen's short story "The Bowmen" (1914), written in memoriam of the Battle of Mons (August 1914), as "within a week Machen's fictional bowmen had been transformed into real angels, and what he had written as palpable fiction was soon credited as fact" (Fussell 1975, 169). As a consequence, Lévi's Mediterranean esotericism furnished a technology of enchantment based on a lexicon of symbols - a poetics that, in the act of reading, re-enacts a creative mode akin to the divine fiat that speaks the stars.

Hence, the Mediterranean ceases to be a mere geographical locus and turns into a linguistic archetype and a space, in which meaning is continuously born, submerged and born anew, privileging metaphor over definition and symbol over sign. In this sense, Lévi's Mediterranean hermeneutics foresees the modernist critique of positivism and foreshadows the twentieth-century transition toward mythic structures, as seen in the works of T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce, each, in different ways, inheriting Lévi's conviction that myth is perennial and is a living force within language itself. The theoretical framework, thus, positions Lévi at the juncture of esoteric philosophy and literary modernism, with his Mediterranean

imagination becoming the symbolic matrix, through which English writers re-envisioned history, identity, ontology and revelation, and in which art itself became a vessel of initiation. As a result, Lévi's influence illuminates the way esoteric hermeneutics and literary aesthetics can coalesce into a single intellectual enterprise, which is guided by the pursuit of hidden unity beneath the multiplicity of forms.

The Lévi heritage within the esoteric tradition in English literature

Éliphas Lévi's Mediterranean hermeneutic took root in English literature through the works of W. B. Yeats, Arthur Machen, and Aleister Crowley, with each author, working within overlapping yet distinct esoteric networks, engaged Lévi's philosophy of correspondences, magical symbolism and sacred analogy, reconfiguring it to suit their literary and ritual agendas. As has been mentioned above, the Mediterranean, in Lévi's symbolic system, functions simultaneously as literal geography, archetypal space and esoteric paradigm; hence, its representation in English literature illustrates a process, in which the esoteric imagination intermediates between historical consciousness, mystical insight, and, above all, literary creation.

For W. B. Yeats, Lévi's ideas entered through the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, under whose auspices he studied *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* under MacGregor Mathers, his magical mentor. Yeats himself described his purpose in such studies as the search for "a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul's" (Harper 1975, 25). Hence, in *A Vision* (1925), Yeats reimagines Lévi's cyclical cosmology, based on his assertion that "history itself is the reflection of celestial cycles" (Lévi 1856, 1, 146), as the metaphysical engine of history. The 28 phases of the lunar cycle in Yeats's system parallel Lévi's doctrine of the Sephiroth as emanations of divine consciousness: "All things are made from a conflict of opposites, and the cycle completes when those opposites are reconciled" (Yeats 1925, 57), reflecting Lévi's Mediterranean ideal of unity through multiplicity, in which ancient traditions converge into a single symbolic law.

The poem *Sailing to Byzantium* (1928) offers the most noteworthy expression of Yeats's Mediterranean esotericism, as Byzantium, historically situated at the crossroads of East and West, becomes a Hermetic city of transformation, in which "sages stand in God's holy

fire” (Yeats 1928, line 17). Indeed, the opening line, “That is no country for old men” (Ibid, line 1), initiates a symbolic voyage across the Mediterranean, from the sensual world of nature to the spiritual city of art, in this way mirroring Lévi’s magical ascent from the material to the divine plane, wherein the soul, purified through symbolism, becomes immortal: “The soul is a voyager upon the sea of the world, seeking the port of the Infinite” (Lévi 1856, 1, 23). Yeats’s image of the soul “fastened to a dying animal” (Yeats 1928, line 22) similarly dramatizes the Hermetic struggle for transcendence within material form. Hence, Yeats’s Byzantium poems transform Lévi’s doctrine of correspondences into aesthetic metaphysics, in which the golden bird, “set upon a golden bough to sing” (Ibid, line 30), functions as an emblem of Lévi’s *philosophical stone*, signifying the perfected synthesis of art and spirit. In this way, Yeats adapts Lévi’s concept of *haute magie* as “the science of divine harmonies” (Lévi 1856, 1, 19) into a poetics of transmutation, in which poetry itself becomes the alchemical vessel and “in actuality a process of initiation into ancient mysteries” (Psilopoulos 1995, 1).

Arthur Machen’s fiction reintroduces the Mediterranean’s pagan undercurrents into late-Victorian England, as in *The Great God Pan* (1894), he reconfigures Lévi’s symbol of Pan or “the Great All” (Lévi 1856, 1, 83) into a tale of terror that exposes the persistence of divine immanence beneath modern rationality. The novella’s central experiment, in which a woman is made to “see the god” (Machen 1894, 62), literalizes Lévi’s claim that to evoke a god is to awaken a power within oneself, thus demonstrating both the potency and peril of esoteric knowledge when being stripped of the discipline of initiation. Hence, Machen’s narrative “transposes Mediterranean mystical paradigms into Gothic horror, producing a liminal space where the sacred and the terrifying coexist” (Jackson 1981, 45). Lévi had described Pan as the visible form of the invisible life, which is directly reflected in Machen’s Pan, who serves as a manifestation of cosmic vitality that shatters human perception. The Mediterranean context of Machen’s work, Pan as a Greek god, ancient yet eternal, anchors Machen’s story within the continuum of esoteric revelation, while the oscillation of the novella between horror and transcendence parallels Lévi’s magical paradox, positing enlightenment as both illumination and annihilation.

Machen’s prose is saturated with esoteric syntax, and his invocation of “the infinite world that lies beyond the veil of sense” (Machen 1894,

41) transforms Lévi's metaphysics into narrative tension. Critical readings have emphasized that Machen's narratives perform a kind of literary theurgy, through enacting Lévi's concept of *haute magie* through text. Hence, by integrating classical deities, mystical practices and landscapes into the text, Machen transforms the Mediterranean into a repository of esoteric knowledge, accessible, yet perilous, while his Gothic sensibility underlines the liminality of esoteric experience and illustrates the tension between human perception and transcendent reality. As a result, the Mediterranean re-emerges symbolically through Machen's depiction of ancient ritual landscapes, groves, temples and mountains, in which the divine continually breaks through and "imbues the Victorian literary imagination with the residue of classical Mediterranean spirituality, a space where the uncanny remains ever-present" (Ellmann 1979, 78). Hence, Machen's "infinite world that lies beyond the veil of sense" (Machen 1894, 41) exemplifies a literary translation of Lévi's ontological Hermeticism, wherein the visible world reflects hidden cosmic realities and foregrounds the Mediterranean as both a historical and symbolic terrain, in which the psychic resonance of antiquity persists in contemporary narrative forms.

If Yeats and Machen spiritualized Lévi's philosophy, Aleister Crowley enacted it. Crowley's self-identification as Lévi's reincarnation, articulated in *Magick Without Tears* (1954), signalled both continuity and reinvention, as his Cairo revelation of *The Book of the Law* (1904) reactivates the Egyptian dimension of Lévi's Mediterranean esotericism. Hence, through Crowley, the Mediterranean turns into a functional space of initiation, ritual and, above and beyond, the manifestation of cosmic law. Even though Lévi had written that "Egypt is the mother of all initiations, where the science of divine correspondences was first perfected" (Lévi 1856, 1, 102), Crowley's encounter with the deities of Nuit, Hadit and Ra-Hoor-Khuit transforms this symbolic inheritance into a new religious dispensation - the Aeon of Horus.

Crowley's adaptation of Lévi's principles is most visible in his redefinition of will and love as cosmic laws, which are exemplified in his central axiom of *The Book of the Law* (1904): "Love is the law, love under will" (I, 57), and in a further statement, in which the Mediterranean imagery of solar deities and celestial cycles persists: "Every man and every woman is a star" (Ibidem), transforming Hermetic maxim of unity between the microcosm and macrocosm into

a moral imperative. Hence, where Lévi sought reconciliation between science and faith, Crowley radicalized it into a theology of individual sovereignty, “sacraliz[ing] the authority of the self, making individual will the ultimate spiritual principle” (Owen 2004, 221).

Crowley’s Egyptian symbolism also perpetuates Lévi’s aesthetic of sacred theatre. Thus, in *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Crowley (1929, 15) describes ritual as “the dramatization of the mysteries of the universe”, reflecting Lévi’s assertion that “words unconfirmed by acts are idle words [...] Thought formulated by speech and confirmed by acts constitutes a good work or a crime” (Lévi 1856, 1, 203). Both conceive of performance as revelation, in this way linking ancient initiatory rites of the Mediterranean to modern imagination. Hence, through Crowley, Lévi’s Hermetic Christianity metamorphoses into a “modern occult ethic grounded in cosmological law and personal sovereignty, accompanied by a turn toward pagan and solar symbolism” (Asprem 2014, 99), in which Mediterranean symbols, from solar deities to the cycles of the Nile and the Egyptian pantheon, function as operative signifiers, linking human consciousness to cosmic order. Consequently, in Crowley’s hands, Lévi’s Hermetic principles were transformed from a doctrine into a unified practice of writing, ritual, as well as spiritual self-realization.

As a result, Lévi’s Mediterranean esotericism functions across Yeats, Machen, and Crowley as an imaginative grammar uniting poetry and prose with ritual. Yeats transforms the Hermetic Sea into a voyage of artistic transmutation; Machen reawakens the buried gods of the Mediterranean as psychological and metaphysical forces; Crowley revives its Egyptian mysteries as instruments of self-divinization. Each author draws from Lévi’s doctrine of correspondences, based on the conviction that “analogy is the last word of science and the first word of faith” (Lévi 1856, 1, 23), yet rearticulates it according to the needs of their era: Yeats - through symbolism, Machen - through mystic horror, and Crowley - through ritual theurgy. Hence, English writers “invoked Lévi’s authority in [their] own occult project[s]” (Kaczynski 2002, 62) to elaborate a literary lexicon, through which they could negotiate the sacred in the modern world. The Mediterranean esoterism, thus, becomes an operative symbol and a dynamic horizon, in which the imaginative logic of myth, the transformative aims of magic and the formal concerns of literature intersect.

Conclusion

Lévi's Hermetic cosmology presents the Mediterranean as a locus, in which correspondences between the macrocosm and microcosm are manifest. At the same time, the Mediterranean in English literature, mediated by Lévi, functions as a Hermetic geography with an imaginative topology, in which spiritual and artistic insights are cultivated, providing both a literal and figurative horizon for the exploration of esoteric and mystical knowledge in modernist writing. Thus, through W. B. Yeats's *Byzantium*, the sea facilitates the transcendence of temporal decay into aesthetic immortality; through Arthur Machen's *Pan*, it harbours hidden, often dangerous forces of revelation; through Aleister Crowley, it structures ritual space and enactment - each writer, accordingly, enacts a different aspect of Lévi's esoteric geography, demonstrating the symbolic elasticity of the Mediterranean as a literary device. Furthermore, the Mediterranean operates as a temporal and cultural bridge, with its ancient civilizations, serving as repositories of esoteric knowledge, accessible to modern imagination through Lévi's symbolic framework. At the same time, the Mediterranean may be envisioned as a palimpsest of myth and ritual, with its waters carrying the sediment of centuries of occult thought and religious practice. Hence, by situating their literary and ritualistic work within this space, Yeats, Machen, and Crowley recontextualize it for contemporary spiritual and artistic aims. Lévi's Hermeticism emphasizes the performative and experiential dimensions of esotericism, making ritual, art and literature inseparable. As a consequence, Yeats transforms the Mediterranean journey into a metaphorical pilgrimage, in which artistic creation becomes an initiatory practice; Machen's fiction renders the supernatural into narrative tension, dramatizing Hermetic principles through Gothic form; and Crowley's ceremonial magic actualizes the Mediterranean's esoteric heritage, enacting correspondences between the microcosm of the practitioner and the macrocosm of the cosmos. Collectively, these authors demonstrate that the Mediterranean esoterism of Lévi operates as a unifying symbolic grammar and a stage, on which literature, art, culture and ritual intersect, and provides a perennial locus for the transformation of consciousness, the articulation of myth, as well as the realization of the sacred in modern English literature.

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