Art of the Grimoire: An Illustrated History of Magic Books and Spells. Owen Davies. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. 256 pp. $35. Hardcover ISBN: 9780300272017.

The study of the history of magic is truly a fascinating phenomenon. At its core, debates emerge ranging from the very act of defining magic, to the intricate ways in which magic intersects other forms of thought respective to the society and period in question. This discourse, at times becomes enamored with a trichotomy which places magic, religion, and science into distinct, but parallel categories that emerge from the notion of a disenchanted modern world. Owen Davies, in *Art of the Grimoire: An Illustrated History of Magic Books and Spells*, examines this intricate relationship between these collections of knowledge and their expression. Looking both globally and chronologically from the earliest civilizations to the modern day, the focus of *The Art of the Grimoire* lays in the conflict that emerges from the progressive narrative of human history, standing in opposition to the view that civilization progresses through an age of magic, an age of religion, and an age of science. By examining the written text and visual images contained within these grimoires, Davies argues that "the global history of magic shows, in fact, how magic, religion, and science have always been interlinked" (7). In demonstrating this, Davies is keen to note the relationship between the three forms of knowledge is not as delineated as we might expect. Indeed, religion and magic often broke the boundaries that separated them and science, specifically in the form of technology centered on the medium of communication, that allowed for the recording and transmission of this information both temporally and spatially.

The book, itself a wondrous grimoire, is broken down into six chapters, each based on the respective communication technology in question. Taking a loose chronological approach, Davies starts his examination with the most ancient forms of written communication. From Sumerian clay tablets, the oracle bones and bamboo slips of ancient China, to the papyri of Egypt, Davies highlights the means by which this communication technology was made and the innovation of ink that allowed for its recording. Yet, at the heart of this discourse, is the cultural intersection of magic and religion. This can be seen time and time again. For the medieval world this manifests in parchment and early codices such as *The Testament of Solomon* and the *Key of Solomon*. It is here, during the medieval and early modern period, that Davies discusses how knowledge accumulates in key centers of exchange such as Toledo, which merged "ideas across faiths and cultures" (55).

During Europe's early modern period Davies highlights the impact that the printing press had upon both the production and the exchange of knowledge between cultural movements and magical print. Intellectual inquiries into things such as hermetic alchemy found itself blended with the Christian esoteric movements that emerged from the Protestant reformation. Davies notes that the fascination of handwritten manuscripts did not wane. Rather what emerged, primarily in Protestant regions of Northern Europe, was a new manuscript culture blending popular culture with the occult, as the folk gained access to this written knowledge. Similarly, it is here, amidst early colonization, that Davies highlights the impact of the manuscript and its associated technologies on a global scale. Often this was expressed in the form of cross-cultural exchange brought

about amidst European colonialism, as these Europeans came into contact with the "magical heritage" of indigenous religious practices (134).

This fascination with occult texts only grew as the world entered into a period of "modernity." Davies notes that wood-pulp paper had allowed for a growth in the dissemination of information through the medium of newspapers in the nineteenth century which resulted in "a global market for popular magic in all its forms in the mail-order age" (172). The circulation and interest in the commodity of magic, Davies notes, impacted the cultural movements from the nineteenth century to the modern day in profound ways. The emergence of esoteric organizations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as the Order of the Golden Dawn and its members such as Aleister Crowley serve as an archetype for the perceived "20th-century Magical Revival" (214). This revival, perhaps better known as Mysticism, Davies notes, would go on to serve as inspiration for the imagination that would shape the popular culture of the twenty-first century, ranging in mediums from music to manga. Davies draws a direct link between the two, "[t]he wider cultural influence of the Golden Dawn and Wicca starts to become noticeable during the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s" (215). There is of course, a point worth mentioning. There is an apparent misidentification of an image found within this work as Davies notes that accompany an illustration depicting an image from a *Necronomicon* that "[b]oth of these images are inspired by Lovecraft's god-monster Cthulhu, which he described as a huge malevolent beast with an octopus-like head, rubbery body, and a mass of feelers on its face" (233). However, the accompanying image which depicts a swirling mass of eyes and tentacles actually appears to be another being penned by Lovecraft which first appeared in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927, 1941) known as Yog-Sothoth. Similarly, one might be surprised that despite the reference to Lovecraft, there is little reference to other similar "weird fiction" authors that pulled heavily from the Grimoire traditions. Within these tales exist the fictional grimoires such as Robert Bloch's *De Vermis Mysteriis*, Clark Ashton Smith's *The Book of Eibon*, and Robert W. Chambers's *The King in Yellow*. Such inclusions could certainly have aided in tracing the cultural influence of grimoires and between the Mysticism movement and the mid to late 1900s.

In the end, there is little doubt that *Art of the Grimoire* is aimed at a popular audience or undergraduates. The work, though it possesses a bibliography, lacks footnotes connecting chapter content to source material. Though this might disgruntle some, the overall work itself gracefully balances generalization and specificity, resulting in a narrative that captures the nuances of the history of magic. This does, of course, result in *Art of the Grimoire* appearing as if it were a textbook and it is here that its true potential shines. Davies's overall writing style, coupled with the accessibility of the content and the stunning visuals can easily serve as a textbook for an undergraduate course over the history of magic. Anyone looking for a work that is bound to spark discussion in the classroom need look no further than *Art of the Grimoire*.

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