

# Tea, Scones and Socially Responsible Sex Magic: The Egalitarian Occultism of Dion Fortune

Georgia van Raalte

Student number: 10864105

vanraalte.georgia@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr. Marco Pasi

Second reader: Prof. Dr. Wouter J. Hanegraaff

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Department of Religious Studies,  
Faculty of Humanities,  
Universiteit van Amsterdam

## Table of Contents

1. Preliminaries	
i. Introduction	3
ii. Academic Work on Fortune	7
iii. Fortune's Biography	8
iv. The Occult Context	11
v. Fortune's Published Work	14
2. Audience	
i. Egalitarian Initiation	21
ii. Esotericism for (Almost) All	23
3. Sexuality	
i. The Problem of Repression	27
ii. Spiritual Sexuality	30
iii. The Use of Sublimation	33
iv. The Doctrine of Polarity	35
4. Ritual	
i. Ritual and Ambiguity	40
ii. The Ritual Method	43
iii. Ritual as Outlet	47

5. Applied Sex Magic	
i. Sublime Sex Magic	48
ii. The Magical Relationship	51
iii. The Group Soul	55
6. Epilogue: Everyday Esotericism	56
Bibliography	59
Appendix 1	61
Appendix 2	64
Appendix 3	66

## 1. Preliminaries

### 1.i. Introduction: Sexual Magic and Social Responsibility

Dion Fortune is a fascinating and neglected figure of 20<sup>th</sup> century occultism. In her lifetime, she published a prodigious number of books and articles on both occult and non-occult matters, and authored a number of novels. A full exploration of her work would take up many more pages than I have at my disposal, so I have limited myself to what I believe to be the most unique aspect of her work and the one which has the most significance for the modern study of Esotericism: her approach to sexual magic. In recent years academic work in the area of sexual magic has flourished. Hugh Urban's *Magia Sexualis* (2006), Hanegraaff and Kripal's collection *Hidden Intercourse* (2008), and John Patrick Deveney's biography *Paschal Beverly Randolph* (1996) have been instrumental in giving this previously neglected topic academic credibility. In the introduction to *Magia Sexualis* Urban defines sexual magic as "the explicit use of orgasm... as a means to create magical effects in the external world."<sup>1</sup> Urban refers to Fortune's work, albeit briefly, in chapter six of his book, entitled 'The Goddess and the Great Rite'. However the sexual magic explored by Fortune does not comply with Urban's definition, for it does not make use of the orgasm and only rarely seeks to affect the world external to the practitioner. So why refer to her work as sexual magic?

Fortune defines magic as "the practical application of a knowledge of the little-understood powers of the human mind."<sup>2</sup> This does not necessarily suggest an application in the external world; Fortune argues that magic acts most potently on the individual practitioner's emotional, psychological and spiritual worlds. Although one could label this understanding of magic as 'psychological' this would be to severely simplify the concept as it is used throughout Fortune's work. For her, magic is any application of esoteric principles that makes for any form of change. The reason that Fortune considers coitus incompatible with magic is because she understands sexual force to be "simply the life force on a particular level."<sup>3</sup> In her 1940 article 'Sexual Ethics in Occultism', Fortune states "there is no force available for magic

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Urban, *Magia Sexualis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Dion Fortune, *The Winged Bull*, (N.p.: Aziloth Books, 2014), 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

immediately after orgasm, and in magic rightly worked there will be no force available for orgasm either.”<sup>4</sup> This force may be used in coitus, or it may be used in magic, but it cannot be used in both. According to Fortune coital magic is a contradiction in terms. However, she argues “the actual physical reactions of sex form a very small proportion, and by no means the most vital portion of its functioning.”<sup>5</sup> As there can be coitus with minimal spiritual or emotional result, so there can be spiritual sexuality that has minimal effect upon the physical body. It is by the sacrifice of physical desires and the offering of the sexual forces thus frustrated towards a higher aim that magical power is evoked. This power may be directed toward changes in one’s personal psyche or, by those prepared for the task, toward greater social change. Fortune’s sexual magic involved the sublimation of sexual forces, not their physical fulfillment. Hers was a form of magic that made use of sexual force in an alternative way to coitus. She never advocated coital magic, nor do I think she ever engaged in it; however, because she believed that the physical side of sex was its smallest and least important aspect, I believe that I am justified in referring to her work in this area as sexual magic. In fact, I believe that Fortune’s work shows Urban’s definition to be unsatisfactory, limiting and simplifying the range of practices that might legitimately be said to constitute sexual magic.

Of the various practitioners who developed their own systems of sex magic in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Fortune was unusual in being one of the few women who delved into this contentious area, and possibly the only one to do so in an unerringly practical way. Her approach to sexuality, sexual power and sexual magic is truly unique in the history of esotericism, and was consistently directed at the greater happiness both of the individual and of society. Her work was defined above all by its sense of social responsibility. Fortune believed that knowledge of the occult work, in particular of the spiritual side of sex and of its practical application through ritual, was the key to undoing all the unhappiness she saw in the society around her. She believed that esotericism needn’t set people apart, but could be incorporated into everyday life. It could help keep people happy in their current situation, providing a better approach to healing than psychoanalysis because it operated on more levels than simply the

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<sup>4</sup> Dion Fortune, “Sexual Ethics in Occultism,” *The Inner Light Magazine*, 1940, reproduced in Dion Fortune and Gareth Knight, *The Circuit of Force* (Loughborough: Thoos, 1998), 160.

<sup>5</sup> Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1935), 263.

physical or the mental. While she recognized the hypocrisy and unhealthiness propagated by rules of contemporary society Fortune believed that change must come from within; she believed that every individual had the potential to affect the soul of the race, and thus contribute to the gradual change of society for the better. Fortune believed that the ultimate use of sexual force, through ritual, was to effect such social change, and it is to this end that she increasingly directed both her publications and her personal magical work in the later years of her life.

I will begin this thesis with a brief review of the secondary literature available on Fortune, the occult influences on her work and the influence she had on those following her. Her own writings have been my main source, and I will summarize the most significant examples of this, showing how a pattern of thought can be traced through her corpus. Above all Fortune sought to make occultism more accessible; egalitarianism was one of the key features of her work throughout her life. However, this openness had limits, which I will explore in the first part of the thesis. I will look at Fortune's enduring belief in the importance of initiation for those beginning on the occult path, and how she designed her occult fiction to act in an initiatory way that would be accessible to everyone but could be utilized only by the few who were prepared. I will consider Fortune's intended audience, and how her literary style was particularly oriented towards readers of a certain social class. Next I will focus on Fortune's teachings on sexual ethics and the practical advice she gives for dealing with sexuality. I will consider the impact Fortune's time as a psychoanalyst had on her thought, particularly as it influenced her understanding of repression, her dislike of asceticism and her unerring belief that people cannot deny their animal side. I will look at her understanding of the spiritual aspect of sex, and why she believed it was impossible to attempt magical work without first understanding and accepting one's own sexuality. I will explore Fortune's doctrine of sublimation, the direction of sexual force towards a higher aim, which she thought had potent therapeutic potential for the everyday person. In order to see how Fortune understood this process to work I will explore Fortune's theory of Polarity, which underpins all of her work and which she claimed had important social and ethical implications. I will then begin to explore Fortune's approach to ritual. I will question why Fortune, who wrote so prolifically in other areas, chose not to publish explicit ritual instructions for her readers. I will then consider how her implicit, do-it-yourself approach to ritual work was the ultimate

form of magical egalitarianism. Finally I will explore the relationship between ritual and sexuality in Fortune's work. I will begin by looking at how Fortune thought ritual could be used as an effective form of sublimation and an outlet for sexual forces. I will explore how Fortune believed that ritual could be put to use by the more advanced adept. I will explain how she understood the raising and sublimating of the sexual force in order to affect a greater external aim to be the ultimate expression both of magic and of sexuality. I will show how Fortune struggled with the complexities of the relationship between partners in sexual magic, failing to reconcile the future greater good with personal good in the present. I will explore Fortune's understanding of the 'group soul' in order to explain why Fortune believed that it was ultimately to the greater good that the adept<sup>6</sup> must bend. To conclude I will return to Fortune's use of idiom and her characters' preoccupation with tea and scones in order to show that the creation of an everyday form of esotericism was the defining feature of her work.

### Methodology

Attempting an accurate and thorough exploration of Fortune's biography is extremely problematic. Even very basic data about her life is contested; the four existing biographies of Fortune<sup>7</sup> all fall victim to their authors' preconceived agendas and the sources of biographical information are often falsely given, or else not given at all. It is generally believed that after her death Fortune's personal effects and papers were destroyed by the organization she had created, the Society of the Inner Light. Whether this was according to Fortune's wishes or not it is unclear. Whatever original unpublished material may still exist is jealously guarded by the present leaders of the Society. However, Fortune left behind her a huge and wide-ranging corpus of published material, ranging from Qabalah-inspired occult novels to racy pot-boilers, from scientific work on soya beans to psychological self-help books, from lofty tomes of occult metaphysics to practical guides to magic and ritual. There is a complex web

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of the adept is important to Fortune's thought, as it was to occultism in general. The adept is defined as one who had successfully devoted their life to the occult path, sacrificing selfish and worldly things for spiritual development and the greater good.

<sup>7</sup> *The Story of Dion Fortune* (1985) by Fielding & Collins, *The Magical Life of Dion Fortune* (1991) by Alan Richardson, *Quest for Dion Fortune* (1993) by Janine Chapman and *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light* (2000) by Gareth Knight.

of relationships between these texts, and through them one can come to an understanding of Fortune's network of ideas and how these evolved throughout her life. Thus I will explore the key biographical data about Fortune in so far as it appears accurate and unbiased, and I will address briefly some of the influences upon her and her legacy, remaining aware that both of these will inevitably contain a large amount of conjecture. However my chief focus will be on those the ideas and opinions one can know for sure that Fortune expressed, as recorded in the literature published by her own hand. Maintaining an awareness of the broader context within which Fortune was working, I have chosen to take Fortune's published texts as a concrete base for my work. I believe that focusing on a hermeneutic exploration of her corpus is the best way to provide an in depth study of her work, and indeed of its broader context.

### **1.ii. Academic Work on Fortune**

Other than Fortune's own published work there is little source material available to the modern scholar. It is possibly for this reason that academic work on Dion Fortune and her work has until this point been negligible. In 2007 Susan Johnston Graf produced a short essay titled "The Occult Novels of Dion Fortune" for the *Journal of Gender Studies*,<sup>8</sup> however the article was not well researched, and has many inaccuracies. Johnston Graf makes problematic assumptions about Fortune's work based on the later growth of feminism and of Wicca, which would have been avoided if she had been more familiar with Fortune's non-fiction.

In *Magia Sexualis* Urban gives a brief account of Fortune's sexual magic. However this seems to be a deliberate misinterpretation of her work, designed to make her ideas fit neatly into his historical narrative of influences. He quotes Fortune's *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, where she states, "at the point of junction between the two units the force can be tapped and rendered available for creation."<sup>9</sup> Urban implies Fortune is here referring to a physical sexual union, whereas in fact she is explicitly referring to a spiritual one. He quotes another passage

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Johnston Graf, "The Occult Novels of Dion Fortune," *Journal of Gender Studies* 16:1 (2007), 47-56.

<sup>9</sup> Dion Fortune, quoted in Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 168.

from *Love and Marriage*, “when the act of sexual union takes place the subtle forces of the two natures rush together and... [a] vortex is set up... [that] extends up the planes.”<sup>10</sup> While Fortune is here referring to a physical sexual act, she is not talking about a magical one. She is in fact describing how the process of the ensouling of a fetus at conception takes place.

Hutton includes a brief section on Fortune in his history of modern Paganism, *The Triumph of the Moon*. Hutton’s characterization of Fortune is inconsistent, alternately prone to unfair generalizations and interesting insight. He mocks her instructions on sublimation without attempting to engage with the process described, claiming she advised people “(hilariously) to engage in a sort of psychic masturbation,” however in the same paragraph notes Fortune’s exploration of “the extraordinary effects achieved by sublimating the current of erotic attraction between a woman and a man.”<sup>11</sup> Hutton admits that he has not had access to the work Fortune published in *The Inner Light Magazine*, which may explain, although does not excuse, his inaccuracy. Further, he attributes the end of Fortune’s literary output to personal factors, such as her separation from her husband, rather than considering them a natural result of the advent of the Second World War.

### **1.iii. Fortune’s Biography**

There are four biographies of Dion Fortune available today. While none of them have any claim to academic accuracy, they reveal much about popular attitudes towards Fortune, and by comparison between the texts we can begin to reconstruct some of the key events in her life. *The Story of Dion Fortune* was published in 1985. The cover of the book claims it has been published “as told to Charles Fielding and Carr Collins,” but nowhere does the text mention who this information was told by, and indeed the lack of any indication as to where the material of this book was drawn from remains its greatest limit, as it contains much interesting anecdotal information. One presumes that the source came from within the Society of the Inner Light and chose to remain anonymous, however the lack of confirmation of this makes the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 182.

book's academic use extremely limited. It was written for a specific audience: in the words of the back-cover copy "the serious student of the Esoteric," who wish to know 'HOW SHE DID IT'<sup>12</sup> (that is, how Fortune achieved her various magical accomplishments). It thus focuses on teaching the reader various magical processes, which are again given without any source.

*The Magical Life of Dion Fortune* by Alan Richardson, published in 1991, was originally published as *Priestess* in 1987. This is the most well known biography of Fortune. While it is detailed, and provides much valuable context to Fortune's work, it has many problems. Richardson rarely provides the sources of his information. Moreover the book is now out of date, as much of the information he gives, such as the identity of the training college Fortune attended, has been disproven by subsequent research. Further, Richardson set out above all to write a good story, not an accurate one. He describes Hugh Sexey's School, "lost within the once-drowned land of Somerset... where the soul is rich with the blood of warring races. If Fortune did not attend school there, he says, "then it can only be said that she *should* have done."<sup>13</sup> The book is full of poetic absurdities such as this, which largely obscure any academic value the book might otherwise have. It tells us far more about how Fortune is regarded in some circles than about the woman herself.

Janine Chapman's *Quest for Dion Fortune* was written as the result of research undertaken by the author in 1973 and 1974, but was not published until 1993, after Chapman encountered Richardson's *Priestess* in 1989. The book is not strictly a biography, but rather is an account of the author's discovery of Fortune's work and her subsequent trip to England in an effort to find out more about the mysterious occultist whose work had had such an impact on the author. Chapman has a clear picture in her head of who Fortune is, or rather, who she wants Fortune to be ("modest, faithful and chaste... an example of super-achievement, self-sacrifice, and personal integrity"<sup>14</sup>). Chapman has little knowledge of the academic side of occultism, and appears relatively naïve and idealistic, qualities that make her account of her meeting

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Fielding and Carr Collins, *The Story of Dion Fortune* (Dallas: Star and Cross Publication, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Alan Richardson, *The Magical Life of Dion Fortune* (London: The Aquarian Press, 1991), 39.

<sup>14</sup> Chapman, *Quest for Dion Fortune* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1993), xvi.

with Kenneth Grant unintentionally comical. However, this book is valuable for the transcriptions of interviews with Helah Fox and Ernest Butler, as well as the research Chapman undertook in order to convincingly argue that it was at Studley Agricultural College that Fortune experienced the infamous psychic attack that led to her mental breakdown and the beginning of her exploration into occultism.

Basil Wilby, who writes as Gareth Knight, joined the Society of the Inner Light in 1953, left in 1965 to pursue his occult development independently, and returned in 1998 to engage in research into the Society's archives. As a result of this research Knight has published multiple collections of Fortune's articles, several books commenting on her work and, in 2000, a biography titled *Dion Fortune and the Inner Light*.<sup>15</sup> This biography draws heavily on the three previous biographies (though without acknowledging this debt) as well as the unpublished archive material, which seems to consist chiefly of records of trance sessions that Fortune participated in, usually as a medium. While I have treated this material warily, it provides much insight into Fortune's published work, particularly in the way it shows her creative ability in voicing disparate personalities. The material Knight supplies also provides further evidence of Fortune's irreducible practicality in all matters, even those of the highest occult purpose.

It is tempting to read Fortune's work chiefly in terms of her biography, as Hutton did. However this approach is problematic, particularly because we have so little reliable source material, and even the simplest details of her biography differ from one account to another. I have put together a tentative biography made from a comparison of the four published biographies, which is given in Appendix 1. However, here I have indicated a few key incidents in Fortune's life that pertain to the current discussion. Violet Mary Firth was born December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1890 in Llandudno, Wales. She attended Studley Agricultural College from 1911 until 1913, when she left after suffering a severe mental breakdown. As a result of this experience Fortune grew interested in occultism, and after the First World War ended she became involved with the occultist Theodor Moriarty. In 1919 she was initiated into Alpha et Omega, one of the splinter groups of the original Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In the

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<sup>15</sup> Gareth Knight, *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light* (Loughborough: Thoht, 2000).

early 1920s Fortune established the Fraternity of the Inner Light,<sup>16</sup> originally as an ‘outer court’ of the Golden Dawn, intended to attract new members to the group. In 1925 the Fortune’s Society purchased headquarters at 3 Queensborough Terrace in London and Fortune began to publish occult work under the name Dion Fortune. In 1927 Fortune was expelled from Alpha et Omega, ostensibly for the lack of spiritual progress evidenced in her aura. In the same year she married Dr. Penry Evans, who was both a practicing physician and a member of her Society. Throughout the 1930s Fortune saw to the development of her Society and its work. She delivered public lectures, initiated new members and published an array of occult essays, books and novels. In 1938 Dr. Evans left Fortune and the Society. Throughout the years of the Second World War Fortune led her group in an attempt to assist the war effort through group meditation. Fortune died of Leukemia on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1946, and was buried at Glastonbury.

#### **1.iv. The Occult Context**

It is possible to set Fortune’s work in the context of the literary, scientific and occult movements contemporary to her. Such an exercise is useful, however it is limited by the scarcity of sources. We know from explicit references in her work that in the psychological sphere Fortune was influenced first by Freud, then by Jung; that she had read Samuel Lidell MacGregor Mathers<sup>17</sup> and Aleister Crowley’s work on the Tarot, and had read and conversed with Israel Regardie; and that the Catholic saint Ignatius of Loyola had had a huge effect on her approach to mind-training. There are many other texts and authors whose influence on Fortune’s thought can be deduced. However with the lack of any concrete evidence of these influences, without even a book list from the Society’s lending library that Fortune was so proud of, this remains conjecture.

With regard to proven influences, Fortune’s relationship with Israel Regardie is particularly interesting. The pair were united by their dislike of unnecessary secrecy

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<sup>16</sup> The name was later changed to the more egalitarian Society of the Inner Light.

<sup>17</sup> MacGregor Mathers was the head of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn from 1891 until 1900, when he founded Alpha et Omega. He died in 1918, leaving his widow Moina Mathers as head of the group.

and their desire for clear, instructive work on occult topics, and seem to have valued the insight each gave into the others' work, exchanging letters from 1932 onwards.<sup>18</sup> However Regardie believed magic and ritual to be purely psychological in practice and effect, expressing frustration at the claim many esoteric societies made that there were hidden Masters<sup>19</sup> directing their work from the Inner Planes. Although in her published work Fortune often appears to present a similarly psychological account of occult phenomena, in her private magical work she was heavily influenced by her communication with her Inner Plane contacts. Knight, quoting an unnamed source, tells us that Regardie disliked the fact that these contacts hung as an unarticulated backdrop to all of Fortune's work, claiming it made of her a hypocrite.<sup>20</sup> Fortune, in turn, believed that Regardie was unnecessarily iconoclastic. Communication between the two occultists stopped in 1938, shortly after Regardie's return to America.<sup>21</sup>

Hutton and Urban both draw a comparison between Fortune and Aleister Crowley, as do each of Fortune's biographers in turn. This comparison springs chiefly from the ease of opposing Fortune, a great white magician, with Crowley, the century's most notorious black one. However reducing either of these figures to a moral pole is dangerously simplistic. Whatever she thought of his personal life or the popular allegations against him (the black magician Hugo Astley, the antagonist of *The Winged Bull*, is clearly a parody of Crowley), Fortune respected Crowley as a magician, referencing his Qabalistic work *777* as an authority throughout *The Mystical Qabalah*. The pair exchanged letters in the forties, although few of these survive, and according to Kenneth Grant (secretary to Crowley in his later years) she visited Crowley twice in his retirement at Netherwood, ostensibly to discuss the revival of the Pagan gods.<sup>22</sup>

Crowley left behind him a huge legacy of unpublished work, and the personality cult surrounding the Great Beast is potent even today. This was precisely the type of afterlife Fortune did not want. However, her ideas did not simply pass into

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<sup>18</sup> Knight, *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light*, 198-202.

<sup>19</sup> The Inner Plane Masters were an important part of Theosophical thought. Although Fortune did not discuss it in her publications, she believed that her work was directed by non-physical beings of a higher evolution, and she communicated as a medium with these beings throughout her life.

<sup>20</sup> *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light*, 203.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>22</sup> Chapman, *Quest for Dion Fortune*, 150-153.

oblivion, or disseminate slowly into the group mind; instead they were appropriated by occult movements without recognition of their source. Gerald Gardner for example seems to have drawn heavily on Fortune's work in his formulation of Wicca, however in his attempt to establish historical authenticity for his new movement he declined to provide any accurate sources for his ideas. He appears to have been particularly influenced by the relationship between nature and power as it is explored in Fortune's occult novels and by her work on the Green Ray.<sup>23</sup> The New Age movement also utilized many of the ideas that had been explored and placed before the public eye by Fortune. The magical power of crystals, the spiritual importance of Glastonbury and the belief that any woman may manifest the goddess were all popularized by Fortune's work before being appropriated by New Age culture in the decades following Fortune's death. Although Fortune certainly advocated the necessity of work in the Green Ray in order to restore equilibrium in the spiritual world, it is unlikely that she would have endorsed such counter-cultural movements as Wicca and the New Age. Fortune did not believe that the answer to any problem could ever be to flee to nature, abandoning social responsibilities. The integration of new spiritual discoveries into every-day life was always Fortune's ultimate aim. She would likely have disapproved of counter-cultural spiritual movements on the grounds that they had given up on the aim of greater social reform, as she understood it.

### **1.v. Fortune's Published Work**

Fortune's writing covers range of topics from a range of perspectives across two decades. Her ideas are complex and are subject to change from one text to another, however when we look across the whole of her published corpus we can see that many of the same themes are developed in her articles, explained in her non-fiction books and illustrated in her novels. As a writer Fortune always chose a persona appropriate to her subject and to the audience for which the work was intended. Each persona came with a different stylistic approach, literary voice, and each had a

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<sup>23</sup> The Green Ray was Fortune's name for aspects of occultism that related to nature and ancient pagan worship, particularly that of Pan and Dionysus, and were concerned with the integration of repressed sexuality through Divine Ecstasy. See Fielding and Collins, *The Story of Dion Fortune*, 21-24.

different *nom de plume* to go with it. In her psychological publications Fortune maintained her birth name, Violet M Firth even after she married. For occult writing, and any work associated with the Society of Inner Light, Fortune used her adopted occult name Dion Fortune. This was a shortening of her magical name, ‘Deo Non Fortuna’ (meaning ‘God, not with luck’), which was also the Firth family motto.<sup>24</sup> Fortune published her three non-occult romance novels under the name VM Steele between 1935 and 1937.<sup>25</sup> According to Knight these were written partly as a source of income for the Society and partly as a respite from occultism for Fortune herself.<sup>26</sup> Because the texts published by Fortune are the key evidence in my argument, it is helpful to have an overview of those that have proved themselves most pertinent to the subject of sexual magic. I have provided a full bibliography of books in Appendix 2, although a great deal of her work was published in articles, many of which have not been republished and are currently inaccessible to those outside of the Society of the Inner Light.

### *Fortune’s Articles*

Throughout her career Fortune engaged in discussion and published articles in the pages of *The Occult Review*. This was a “monthly magazine devoted to the investigation of super-normal phenomena and the study of psychological problems” published intermittently in London by William Rider & Son, later Rider & Company, from 1905 until 1951.<sup>27</sup> In October 1927 Fortune began to publish *The Inner Light Magazine*, filling it with articles largely of her own creation on a huge range of occult topics. The magazine ran until August 1940 when printing had to be stopped due to wartime paper rationing. According to Knight the magazine attracted a wide readership, with subscribers in “United States, Canada, South America, South Africa, West Africa, East Africa, India, China and continental Europe.” Access to the articles

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<sup>24</sup> *The Story of Dion Fortune*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> *The Scarred Wrists*, 1935, *Hunters of Humans*, 1936, and *Beloved of Ishmael*, 1937.

<sup>26</sup> The creation of alternative personalities, each with their own literary voice and opinions, was clearly something that came easily to Fortune. In the mediumistic communications recorded by Knight, her different contacts are clearly distinct from one another; one quickly knows by voice and literary style which Master she is channeling.

<sup>27</sup> Information from The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals: [http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/occult\\_review/](http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/occult_review/)

published in this magazine is difficult, for the remaining copies of the magazine are rare and expensive. However, Knight has undertaken to publish a variety of articles from the magazine across several separate volumes, usually interspersed with his own commentary. Although I am wary of the accuracy of his transcriptions, and am aware that these collections have been produced with a certain agenda in mind (and that Knight may have kept back any articles that were incompatible with this), the light these volumes shed on the development of Fortune's thought is valuable. While her books were dispensed to the general reading public, Fortune's magazine had a more select readership, one that was more likely to be educated in occult matters, and the form and content of the *Inner Light Magazine* articles reflect this. They provide more in-depth explorations of themes only lightly touched upon, or deliberately kept implicit, in her books.

One group of articles that is particularly interesting is entitled 'The Circuit of Force'. Knight claims that Bernard Bromage<sup>28</sup> and Dion Fortune met in 1938 to discuss the research Bromage had undertaken into Eastern religion, and that it was as a result of these meetings that this collection was written.<sup>29</sup> The articles were published during 1939 and 1940 in *The Inner Light Magazine*, and were republished by Knight in book form in 1998.<sup>30</sup> According to Knight the theme of these articles was "the recovery and practical application of 'the lost secrets of the West'... from tantric yoga to spiritualist development circles, from sexual conventions in current society to ceremonial magic."<sup>31</sup> Although Fortune is often quite vocal about the unsuitability of Eastern spirituality for the Western person, imputing it to differences in physical constitution, one must be aware that this was a response to the increasing Eastern focus of the Theosophical Society, and what she perceived to be the political dangers of occultists like B.P. Wadia.<sup>32</sup> In fact there are many places in Fortune's work where it is quite clear that she owes a debt to Eastern spiritual ideas. Her description of the process of sublimation in *The Problem of Purity* was clearly

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard Bromage (1899-1957) was an English journalist, university lecturer and writer on mysticism, who developed a close friendship with Dion Fortune.

<sup>29</sup> *Dion Fortune & The Inner Light*, 235-238.

<sup>30</sup> Fortune and Knight, *The Circuit of Force*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> B.P. Wadia (1881-1958) was an Indian theosophist and political activist. According to Fortune, Wadia was attempting to negatively influence the group soul of the British race as revenge for the British Empire's continuing occupation of India.

influenced by the tradition of awakening *kundalini*,<sup>33</sup> while the formulation of sexual magic in *Moon Magic* owes much to Tantric ideas as they had been transmitted to the West by the likes of Arthur Avalon. ‘The Circuit of Force’ illustrates Fortune’s approach to relationships, both personal and cosmic, and how this was influenced by the influx of new information about spirituality in the East.

In 2013 Knight published *Dion Fortune’s Rites of Isis and of Pan*, in which he claims to present and explain these rites, which Fortune performed throughout the 1930s and which formed the basis of her later occult novels. Although Knight doesn’t give the sources for his account and his evaluation is basic, lacking any attempt at in-depth analysis, the book is useful for its appendices. Knight includes six pieces of text by Fortune, four of which had previously been published in *The Inner Light Magazine* but were unavailable to a modern reader, and two of which had never been published. I am aware that these texts, particularly those that were previously unpublished, may have been subject to judicious editing. However they are all stylistically very similar to Fortune’s other occult work, and knowing that Knight has had access to the Society of the Inner Light’s archives I have elected to refer to these texts, albeit warily, in my argument. The previously unpublished texts have been particularly useful for they were never intended for a public audience and thus give a different effect to her published work, discussing some of the ideas that are often kept implicit a more explicit way.

#### *Fortune’s Non-Fiction Books*

Fortune’s occult texts take a restrained approach to their subject matter, counseling agnosticism and skepticism towards unconfirmed occult claims. This is unusual in an area that is often characterized by its over-zealousness. They draw upon her psychological work, which is in turn informed by her occult study. Her psychological texts, although old-fashioned, have proved extremely useful in exploring Fortune’s approach to sexuality, as they provide occult insight in a scientific context, explaining occult techniques and theories in terms of their psychological benefit.

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<sup>33</sup> According to yogic theory *kundalini* is the primal energy located at the base of the spine.

*The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage* (1923)

This small, unassuming tome brought great controversy into Fortune's life. Moina Mathers believed that in it Fortune had revealed to the general public some of the Golden Dawn's key inner teachings, reserved only for the highest grades of initiate. Fortune denied the accusation, claiming that she had not passed a high enough stage of initiation to be privy to these secrets, however she was ultimately expelled from the society. *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage* takes as its theme the spiritual side of sex. In it, Fortune is concerned with explaining that there is far more to sexuality than its physical aspects. In her view, the lack of this knowledge is responsible for the multitude of unhappy marriages in contemporary society. Fortune also begins to explore the greater potential that sexual force harbors. It is clearly this latter theme which offended Mathers, and it is perhaps in order to avoid further controversies that Fortune continued this exploration in fictional form, in her novels *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*.

*The Problem of Purity* (1928)

*The Problem of Purity*, like all of her psychological books, was published under Fortune's real name, Violet M. Firth. The last book she wrote under this name, it appears at first glance to be an old-fashioned and moralizing tome on the advantages of celibacy. It would be easy to cast it aside as a product of its time, and indeed Fortune's biographers unanimously feel it unworthy of note. However coming as it does from such a mind as Fortune's, and being written not in her early years or at the decline of her career but just as her society and work begin to flourish, it is worth closer study. It is in this book that we see Fortune apply her understanding of the spiritual side of sex to every-day problems; it is here that she places her occult research and intuitions in the reach of the general public, made accessible in the language of popular science.

*Psychic Self-Defence* (1931)

Although unpopular with many of her more serious-minded admirers today, *Psychic Self-Defence* was very well received when it was first published. In it Fortune seeks to do something that was almost unheard of in occult circles; give simple, plain

advice on recognizing and dealing with occult phenomena. With her characterization of mental illness in terms of Vampires and Fairies, Fortune takes an agnostic stance on the occult in order to proscribe cures for ailments which, whether psychological, spiritual or occult, were rife in the wake of the First World War, and which, in her view, a purely scientific approach was failing to resolve.

### *The Mystical Qabalah* (1935)

Fortune's biographers agree that *The Mystical Qabalah* is Fortune's masterwork. It was written as a result of her intense study and meditation on the Qabalistic<sup>34</sup> Tree of Life, which had led to her having profound visions the like of which she had not experienced before. Qabalah is a system of Jewish mysticism that has been appropriated by Christian esoteric authors for centuries. Crucial to the Qabalistic mode of thought is belief in the correlation between microcosm and macrocosm, which Fortune utilized throughout her metaphysics. In *The Mystical Qabalah* Fortune uses the Tree of Life<sup>35</sup> as a structure upon which to hang all the greater occult knowledge which she has so far learnt, both as it applies to individual persons and to the cosmos. She provides her reader with many oblique statements, which she says will implant in the subconscious and unfold after meditation on the Tree, and advises the student how they may use the Tree to structure their own growing body of esoteric knowledge.

### Fortune's Fiction

Fortune's fiction contains the key to understanding the more oblique and confusing aspects of Fortune's metaphysics, and the books act practical guides to the integration of her complex moral code. Although Fortune is explicit about the design of her novels none of her biographers have explored this point. Knight, in both *Dion*

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<sup>34</sup> I have used Fortune's spelling of Qabalah throughout, although it is unconventional.

<sup>35</sup> Attached in Appendix 3 is one of the three Tree of Life diagrams Fortune provides in *The Mystical Qabalah*, illustrating how the Sephiroth are placed upon the tree.

*Fortune & the Inner Light* and in *Dion Fortune's Rites of Isis and of Pan*,<sup>36</sup> summarizes her fictional work, and yet fails to engage with it analytically.

*The Secrets of Doctor Taverner* (1926)

Fortune's first fictional publication was a collection of short stories based on occult situations she encountered in her work with Theodore Moriarty. Moriarty seems the most likely basis for the main character, Doctor Taverner. Many of the same stories are told more factually in *Psychic Self-Defence*, however, in *The Secrets of Doctor Taverner*, Fortune works to evoke the imagination and emotions of the reader in order to effectively convey the drama of the experiences she recounts. The stories in the book take place at the occult nursing home run by the mysterious and charismatic doctor. The young Rhodes, who takes Fortune's position in the events, describes the strange cases that are brought before the doctor, which often appear to be a combination of occult and psychological problems, and the cures prescribed. The stories include cases of vampirism, reincarnation, predestination and karmic revenge.

*The Occult Novels*

In order to explore Fortune's teaching on sexual magic, much of which was published in a form heavily veiled by metaphor and fantasy, I have made considerable use of Fortune's occult fiction. Her novels are a combination of occult instruction manuals and psychoanalytical self-help texts, offering occultism as a way to treat personal problems, and providing a constant reminder that Fortune believed that all of her work had direct practical implications. In her own article on the subject, Fortune explains that in her novels she is "taking the great problems of human life as I conceive them; analyzing them in the experiences of my characters; explaining them in their speeches."<sup>37</sup> She attempts to find "the ultimate happy ending" to these problems "in a definite, practical, psycho-magical solution," and show exactly how this was done, "so that anybody with a similar problem can go and do likewise."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gareth Knight, *Dion Fortune's Rites of Isis and of Pan* (Cheltenham: Skylight Press, 2013), 13-17.

<sup>37</sup> Dion Fortune, "The Novels of Dion Fortune," *The Inner Light Magazine* 1936, reproduced in Knight, *Rites of Isis and of Pan*, 102.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

Thus each of her novels acts as “a psychoanalysis,” effective in proportion with “the capacity for response of the reader.”<sup>39</sup>

Fortune’s occult novels were designed to convey occult truths, to prepare and lead the amenable reader through the process of initiation. In each of the books one of the main characters is entirely ignorant of occultism. This gives Fortune the chance to advise a course of study and to provide the reader with a huge amount of esoteric knowledge in manageable snippets. The books are designed to evoke a strong sense of place, and encourage the reader to identify with the hero or heroine, following them through the action. The novels all follow a similar structure. A man who is suffering psychological and emotional distress caused by circumstances beyond his control, and who is ignorant of the occult world, is drawn into a magical relationship with a woman who has experience with the occult. In *The Winged Bull* and *The Goat-Foot God* there is additionally a male adept who instructs the pair in their work, the aim of which is to heal the participants of their psychological problems, and through this their social ones. In *The Sea Priestess* the adept character does not appear on the physical plane, but is a priest of the ancient Atlantean religion. In *Moon Magic* the figure of the adept has disappeared altogether. The magical work in both these latter novels is aimed at creating change in society, spurring evolution in the group soul of the race, however the magical process with these lofty aims still has a potent healing effect on the damaged male partner.

Fortune’s final two novels also share a heroine, who is known by a variety of names throughout the books, but is most often called Le Fay. In *Moon Magic’s* “Preliminary Considerations” Fortune states that after *The Sea Priestess* she lost control of her character, whose “ghost persisted in walking... to such good purpose that it forced upon me the writing of this book.”<sup>40</sup> Fortune claimed that the book was not “merely written” but that she channeled Le Fay, who may have been a representation of her “Freudian unconscious.”<sup>41</sup> She uses this to excuse the poor quality of the writing, claiming “I have not a very high opinion of it as literature,”<sup>42</sup> but may have also been attempting to distance herself from some of the more radical

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>40</sup> Dion Fortune, *Moon Magic* (London: Aquarian Press, 1956), 9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

opinions held by the heroine of the book; whether she is a channeled spirit, unconscious manifestation or simply another pseudonym, out of the mouth of Le Fay comes some of Fortune's most radical ideas about sexuality, morality and magic.

## 2. Audience

### 2.i. Egalitarian Initiation

Fortune believed that esotericism should be available for all. She thought that it would provide a necessary counter-balance to Christianity, and provide an alternative direction of spiritual travel for those disillusioned by conventional religion. However this apparent egalitarianism was subject to various implicit conditions that defined the boundaries of what should be revealed, and whom she considered an appropriate audience. Fortune disliked the secrecy that prevailed in societies such as the Golden Dawn, complaining that, apart from the justifiable anonymity of its members, the only reason for keeping occultism secret is that "for purposes priestcraft and prestige a secret system is a useful weapon."<sup>43</sup> In her 1933 review of Israel Regardie's two books, *The Tree of Life* (1932) and *The Garden of Pomegranates* (1932), in which he claimed to reveal the Golden Dawn's magical system, Fortune aligned herself with both Regardie and Crowley with regards to this revelatory purpose.

I see from an article in the November number of this magazine that Foyle's are issuing Crowley's *Magick* in a cheap edition, thus rendering it available to for the general student, who has probably never heard of, or could not afford to purchase, the privately printed edition which appeared in Paris a couple of years ago. The third person of this unholy trinity of revealers of the Mysteries is my humble self, who have been doing much the same thing as Mr. Regardie in a series of articles on the Cabbala which has been running in my own magazine, *The Inner Light*.<sup>44</sup>

The articles she is referring to, published in *The Inner Light Magazine* between 1931 and 1935, were published in a book by Williams and Norgate in 1935 as *The Mystical Qabalah*. According to Fortune this book revealed to the public, if in a less irreverent

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<sup>43</sup> Dion Fortune, "Ceremonial Magic Unveiled," *The Occult Review*, January 1933, reproduced in *Rites of Isis and of Pan*, 83.

<sup>44</sup> Fortune, "Ceremonial Magic Unveiled," 86.

manner than Regardie's, many pieces of occult knowledge that had previously been the reserve of initiatic societies.

However, despite her claims to be a proponent of occult clarity, Fortune believed that there was certain occult information that should not be published, for it must be imparted personally. This secrecy was, she claimed, purely for the purposes of safety; the knowledge of certain aspects of occultism bestows power, and is not a thing to be lightly entrusted into inexperienced hands. She argues that although occult theory should be widely disseminated, "it is not advisable... for persons with no experience of practical occultism to make their first experiments with no other guidance than that of a book."<sup>45</sup> Fortune thought that initiation into an occult society was necessary for safe and effective development along the occult path. However, in her quest to solve what she perceived to be the spiritual crisis of the nation she seemed to recognize that this was not always practical. "There are a surprisingly large number of people in the world today who, though they have never seen the inside of a lodge, are of an advanced grade of enlightenment; and owing to the ill repute into which occultism has fallen... will have nothing to do with it."<sup>46</sup> She thus decided to "produce novels that should come as near an initiation ceremony as possible," in the hope that they would "produce in receptive persons something of the same results as produced by the experience of going through a ritual initiation."<sup>47</sup> Fortune understood initiation thus conferred to be initiation into the spiritual side of the world, not into any particular hermetic system.

Fortune believed that an occult novel could act as an initiation because "it speaks directly to the subconscious by the method of imagery, which is the only language the subconscious understands."<sup>48</sup> It is an "initiation drama," in which "the initiate is made to identify himself with the sufferings, death, and resurrection of some semi-divine person or avatar of a god."<sup>49</sup> Fortune's occult novels do not simply describe the ritual process; they are designed to invoke emotion as much as they are to inform. The novels are intended to act upon the reader in much the same way as a

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> Fortune, "The Novels of Dion Fortune," 98.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

ritual initiation would, concentrating their mind, stimulating their emotion and accessing the subconscious. The reader, like the participant in the initiation ritual, “is given a profound emotional experience, effectual in proportion to his powers of imagination and his sympathy with the divine character portrayed.”<sup>50</sup> The novels would have the effect of an initiation into occultism for those who were ready, however for those who were not ready for this experience they would remain mere curiosities. The novels were thus Fortune’s way of making esotericism safely available to a wider audience; but who, exactly, did she envision this audience to be?

## 2.ii. Esotericism for (Almost) All

Throughout her novels and non-fiction work Fortune’s writing style is heavily idiomatic. Her books are filled with popular slang phrases and contemporary references. The figure of Mrs Grundy appears frequently, this being a term describing a person/people marked by “prudish conventionality in personal conduct,” particularly in the context of sexual purity.<sup>51</sup> The effect of Fortune’s idiom for a modern Anglophone audience is comical. Her arch, tongue-in-cheek formulations, create *bathos*, an effect of absurdity stemming from the incongruity between lofty subject matter and informal style. Through this contrast Fortune intended to remind her readers that occultism was not something distinct from everyday life but must be integrated as a part of it. Thus, after a long passage in *Moon Magic* in which Le Fay is describing to Rupert, her magical partner, the mysteries of Egyptian priesthood, Rupert asks if he might be given some refreshment. In response Le Fay exclaims ““Good gracious... haven’t you had your tea?””<sup>52</sup> A similar moment can be found in *The Winged Bull* after the protagonists’ escape from the Black Mass, when Ursula, the victim of the mass, realizes Murchison, her rescuer, must be freezing dressed only in his ceremonial loincloth. ““Good gracious!’ she said, ‘you’ve got nothing on! You can’t sit like that for three or four hours. Here, have half my cape.””<sup>53</sup> These unexpected and comical touches of normality are some of the most striking moments

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Definition taken from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mrs.%20grundy>.

<sup>52</sup> Fortune, *Moon Magic*, 168.

<sup>53</sup> Fortune, *The Winged Bull*, 121.

in Fortune's novels. There is something distinctive about the self-conscious way Fortune moves between the ritual and the every-day, drawing attention to the intersection between esotericism and the physical realities of life.

Fortune resented asceticism, which claimed the body must be overcome in order to reach spiritual heights. She did not see occultism as an alternative mode of life, but wished to promote it as something that could take its place amongst the necessities of the every-day. In her novels characters are constantly pausing their esoteric exploits to take a break for tea and scones, or else complaining that they have not been fed, and the organization of basic practicalities such as warmth and cleanliness is a common theme. No matter what heights of spiritual consciousness her characters reach, they never forget about the basics of life; even her most 'esoteric' character, Le Fay, is constantly feeding herself and others. Fortune notes in *Psychic Self-Defence* that one recovering from psychic work or a psychic attack must keep well fed, and mention of a hot drink is ubiquitous after any trance mentioned in her work, fictional or real. It is clear that Fortune was not simply concerned that those involved in esotericism did not become social pariahs; only when the esoteric was firmly integrated into everyday life could it have the healing effect on the soul for which it was intended. She wished people to be able to fill the spiritual void they felt without having to devote their entire life to a spiritual quest.

Further, Fortune frequently describes complex esoteric concepts by making analogies with simple, every-day mechanical principles, such as water-pumps and lightning poles, thus making them accessible for an audience untrained in occult modes of thought. In *Moon Magic* Le Fay declares, "that the trouble lay in the fact that sex was a dual-purpose contrivance – so many dual-purpose gadgets give trouble, don't they?"<sup>54</sup> She thus brings a subtle note of comedy into what may have otherwise been a daunting discussion of sexual ethics, as indeed the whole novel is an entertaining and accessible way for an uninitiated person to learn a complex esoteric theory. The same technique is used in *The Mystical Qabalah*, where Fortune refers to the Sephirah Geburah as "the Great Initiation of the swollen-headed,"<sup>55</sup> explaining an abstract esoteric concept with the terms of everyday life. Thus Fortune's idiomatic

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<sup>54</sup> *Moon Magic*, 149.

<sup>55</sup> Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, 187.

style can be understood as an aspect of her attempt to make occultism accessible, of bringing esotericism back to earth.

However this apparent inclusivity has a limit. Britain in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was heavily divided by its class system. Fortune was firmly middle class. Her phrasing will have had particular resonance for a middle class readership; her style draws on the tradition of English social comedy, a genre written predominantly for the middle classes. Fortune's idiom is not merely one unique to her time and country, but also to her class, and it is clear that it is predominantly for the middle class that she is writing. The upper classes always appear in her novels as somewhat degenerate, and in need of saving by the stalwart middle class hero. This dynamic is abundant in *The Demon Lover*, where the hard working but poor Veronica saves the soul of the selfish, extravagant Justin Lucas. It is the central cause of the romantic conflict between Ursula and Murchison in *The Winged Bull*, with the upper class Ursula frequently complaining about the impoverished Murchison's tattered old coat, Murchison resenting Ursula for her aloofness and superiority, and Ursula's brother claiming that "there is nothing that could possibly do [her] more good"<sup>56</sup> than washing steps. It is an important theme in *The Goat-Foot God* too, where Hugh's upper-class ignorance is constantly mocked, and serves to make the practical but under-privileged Mona's life a nightmare, culminating at one point in her accidental starvation. Although Fortune's redeeming heroes and heroines are always down on their luck they are by no means lower class. Indeed across her novels the lower classes appear to be an entirely separate order of people, accented caricatures playing the part of the Shakespearean fool. Mr. Meatyard, Le Fay's housekeeper in *Moon Magic*, is a good example of this, with his thick accent and incongruous tarred bowler hat.<sup>57</sup> Lower class characters always play the parts of servants, and show no interest in the esoteric. Thus, although Fortune saw herself as somewhat of a pioneer, making the hidden field of occultism available for all, her understanding of this 'all' was quite specific. She wanted to make esotericism accessible for the middle class. In order to do this, she attempted to give her middle class audience a more positive way to think about their sexuality, so that they might understand it to be a positive force. She

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<sup>56</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 114.

<sup>57</sup> *Moon Magic* 63.

wanted to awaken sexuality in those in whom it had been repressed, and give them the chance to explore this new power in a positive and socially responsible way.

Understanding repression to be the tension that operated between the animal nature and social restrictions, Fortune considered that sexual morality to be particularly a middle class problem, recognizing that “people without private means cannot afford to outrage convention, and to advise otherwise is to plunge them into misery.”<sup>58</sup> This is even more true for young women of the middle classes, for whom there were already limited prospects in the post-war period, and who would find it impossible to secure a job or a husband if they acquired a bad reputation. Fortune herself was the victim of malicious, sexually focused gossip. In *Psychic Self-Defence* she mentions that she had been accused of seducing both husbands and wives,<sup>59</sup> while subsequently suspicion arose as to the nature of the relationship she had with her male magical partners.<sup>60</sup> Fortune had found that “no individual is strong enough to defy openly the social code under which he lives.”<sup>61</sup> Thus even Le Fay, Fortune’s rich, liberated priestess, who is free from family and social ties, finds it advisable to drop “Mrs. Grundy a curtsy whenever I saw her looking my way,”<sup>62</sup> before carrying on as she sees fit. Fortune’s conservative approach is a far cry from that of Aleister Crowley, and one may wonder whether her rejection of a more public denunciation of traditional morals may have been motivated by the scandal caused in the popular media by his flagrant disregard for conventional morality.

Although Fortune did not advise publicizing one’s transgression of social conventions, this did not stop her from publishing her own thoughts about the morality of the day, albeit in the disguise of fiction. Le Fay declares that traditional Christian sexual morality was nothing but “a savage system of taboos designed to propitiate an imaginary Moloch of a deity.”<sup>63</sup> She opines (and presumable Fortune agrees) that systems of morality should be “judged by the happiness or otherwise of

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<sup>58</sup> Dion Fortune, “Dangers of Faulty Development,” *The Inner Light Magazine*, 1940, reproduced in *The Circuit of Force*, 155.

<sup>59</sup> Dion Fortune, *Psychic Self-Defence* (London: Rider, 1932), 109.

<sup>60</sup> “Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity,” a trance address given via Fortune to the senior members of the Society of the Inner Light, December 16<sup>th</sup> 1940, reproduced in *Rites of Isis and of Pan*, 133-134.

<sup>61</sup> *Moon Magic*, 149.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>63</sup> *Moon Magic*, 125.

the societies they ruled,”<sup>64</sup> a Benthamite, utilitarian approach to right and wrong. Rejecting the idea that the definition of good and evil lay monumental and untouchable, outside the realms of human effect, Fortune states that she believes in “normality and simplicity and common decency.”<sup>65</sup> Observing that different societies and different ages had utilized different moral codes, she argues, “good and evil are not things in themselves, but conditions. Evil is simply misplaced force; misplaced in time, if it is out of date... misplaced in space, if it turns up in the wrong place.”<sup>66</sup>

### 3. Sexuality

#### 3.i. The Problem of Repression

In *The Problem of Purity*, which reflected upon her experiences in psychoanalysis some ten years previously, Fortune complains that because Freudians believe misplaced sexual energy to be the cause of all mental disturbances, they find sex everywhere.<sup>67</sup> In ‘Notes on ‘The Circuit of Force’’,<sup>68</sup> transcribed by Knight “From a Society of the Inner Light source, c. 1939,”<sup>69</sup> Fortune argues “there is no such thing as sex per se, it is life force manifesting on a particular level.”<sup>70</sup> She did not think that there was any innate problem with human sexuality, but that there was a huge problem with how society understood and dealt with it. From 1914 to 1916 Fortune worked as a lay psychoanalyst at a medical clinic in London,<sup>71</sup> which trained its practitioners according to the then fashionable Freudian model. The majority of the patients she saw were, in her view, suffering from psychic complaints which were the result of a misunderstanding of the sex drive, caused by a disjunction between

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>65</sup> Dion Fortune, “The Winged Bull: A Study in Esoteric Psychology,” *The Inner Light Magazine*, 1938, reproduced in *Dion Fortune’s Rites of Isis and of Pan*, 118.

<sup>66</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> Violet M. Firth, *The Problem of Purity* (London: Rider, 1928), 26.

<sup>68</sup> Dion Fortune, “Notes on ‘The Circuit of Force,’” c. 1939, reproduced in *Rites of Isis and of Pan*, 127-129.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>71</sup> The exact dates of Fortune’s psychological work and the location of the clinic differ from one biography to another. These are the dates claimed by Knight (*Dion Fortune & the Inner Light*, 31) which appear to be the most likely when considered in the context of other her other life events.

their natural functions and the inhibitions cultivated by their Victorian parents and by society. Fortune believed that the huge levels of unhappiness, and indeed psychopathology, that she witnessed were the result of the sexual repression that continued to permeate British society in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, she quickly became disenchanted with psychology as a way to rectify this, believing that an excess of Freudian psychoanalysis only made matters worse. Freud's work had focused on the inevitability of sexual complexes; Fortune rejected this view, believing that such an approach caused more problems than it solved. She wanted her audience to understand that sex was a natural, healthy human function, not something that needed to be repressed or cured. It was animalistic, but this was not something to be feared, because modern industrial society, divorced as it was from nature, needed the animal as a corrective. "Animal is our beginning, and animal our end, and all our sophistications are carried on the back of the beast."<sup>72</sup> Repressing sex was making the nation sick, and its re-integration was the only cure. Fortune thus sought to re-educate the public through occultism. This cause can be found throughout published work, as from her earliest psychological self-help books to her final novel she propounds the naturalness of the sex function and its spiritual significance, arguing that without a proper understanding of sex one could have neither a satisfying marriage nor make any spiritual or magical progress.

The composite symbol of the animal-god was a favorite image of Fortune's. The Babylonian winged bull, of the book of the same title, offers her most full exploration of this idea, and the goat-foot god himself, Pan, is another example. In these images Fortune expresses the idea that man's closeness to nature, his animal side and his sexuality, is his connection with the spiritual. This image of the animal-god is purposefully placed in opposition to the formula propounded by traditional Christian anthropology, in which it is man's distinction from the animals that makes him holy. Although in many places Fortune's views are concordant with Christianity, in the realm of sexual ethics she expresses anger at the fact that "we have a standard of living for normal people based on the counsels of saints and ascetics."<sup>73</sup> "St Frances spoke contemptuously of Brother Ass, but man is a centaur who is related to

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<sup>72</sup> Dion Fortune, *The Goat-Foot God* (London: The Aquarian Press, 1971), 293.

<sup>73</sup> Fortune, "The Winged Bull: A Study in Esoteric Psychology," 107.

Pegasus on one side of the family.”<sup>74</sup> Arguing that sexuality is an essential part of spiritual development, she claims that ascetics are utterly misguided; “the Kingdom of Heaven is to be sought in the normality of human life, not in any unnatural and far-fetched sainthood which is inevitably pathological because it is unnatural.”<sup>75</sup>

Fortune’s 1922 book *The Machinery of the Mind* was written as an introduction to Freudian psychoanalysis for the layman, an alternative to the heavy and imposing scientific tomes that had so far been the norm. In its pages Fortune describes the mechanism of repression with a largely conventional Freudian definition. “Repression is a refusal to permit an idea to enter consciousness,”<sup>76</sup> a mechanism resorted to when the idea is incongruous with our civilized conception of our self. As it is impossible to erase from the mind any idea which has entered it, we repress those ideas that we consider uncivilized into our subconscious. “Every child is born into the world a little savage,”<sup>77</sup> who achieves civilization only through education. “The untrained child is selfish and dirty,” and we ourselves, before our training took effect, “were also selfish and dirty;” “a merciful veil of forgetfulness” allows us to prevent this “unpleasant ghost” from intruding upon our self-esteem.<sup>78</sup> ‘A Daughter of Pan’ In *The Secrets of Doctor Taverner*<sup>79</sup> is Fortune’s fictional attempt to bring this forgotten truth back into the consciousness of her readers. Diana is brought to Dr. Taverner’s nursing home by her mother. A member of the local gentry, the woman is at her wits’ end, unable to understand why her daughter will not learn to be civilized. Freed by Taverner from the demands of social convention, and allowed to be her selfish, dirty, wild self, the girl is able to find a happy mode of life. Her wildness calls to Rhodes’ repressed subconscious in such a way that he increasingly forgets the shackles of social convention, and is tempted to join her in the wild. The short story is a parable, warning the reader that humanity is not as far removed from the animal kingdom as it likes to believe. Fortune wished to show that while it is not practical for the civilized person to live like an animal, neither is it healthy for them to repress that side of their nature, for it will manifest in unexpected and uncontrollable ways. In *The Goat-Foot God*, the connection between the stirrings of nature and of sexuality is more explicit.

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<sup>74</sup> *The Goat-Foot God*, 293.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>76</sup> Violet M. Firth, *The Machinery of the Mind* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1922), 63.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>79</sup> Dion Fortune, *The Secrets of Doctor Taverner* (San Francisco: Weiser, 2011), 100-122.

As Hugh works to evoke the god Pan the animalistic and uncivilized side of his nature, which is his repressed sexuality, comes to the surface, and the book is filled with allusions to the advent of the horned goat, the ancient symbol of unbridled sexual energy. It is this freeing of natural, uncivilised sexuality which is to be the cure for Hugh's psychological problems, which are caused by repression. For Fortune the sex drive is not only a natural and necessary function of the human, it is the key to our spirituality. The key to the animal-gods of *The Winged Bull* and *The Goat-Foot God* is their representation of the interconnectedness of nature, sex and spirituality. "The message of [these books] concerns the spiritualizing of sex.... by realizing its profound significance and far-reaching psychological values."<sup>80</sup>

### 3.ii. Spiritual Sexuality

In *The Problem of Purity* Fortune claimed that Freudian psychoanalysis could not be effective because it failed to recognize that "there is more in sex life than physical desire."<sup>81</sup> Fortune argues that "the sex instinct is not exhausted by the physical act of procreation,"<sup>82</sup> for "union is as much etheric as physical,"<sup>83</sup> in fact, for her, "the actual physical reactions of sex form a very small proportion, and by no means the most vital portion of it's functioning."<sup>84</sup> In the modern repulsion of the sex instinct as a natural thing, and in Christianity's declaration that the further something is from the physical and sexual, the closer it is to God, Western society has lost this precious knowledge. It is this lack of knowledge of "the etheric and mental interchange of magnetism" that is responsible for the nation's "unstable and unsatisfactory"<sup>85</sup> sex life. For Fortune, the "subtle, magnetic aspect" that lies behind physical sexuality is "God made manifest in nature."<sup>86</sup> Thus "a real marriage, which has a spiritual side as well as a physical, ought to put one in circuit with the whole universe, for one becomes a channel for the life of the race."<sup>87</sup> Becoming a "channel

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<sup>80</sup> "The Winged Bull: A Study in Esoteric Psychology," 119.

<sup>81</sup> *The Problem of Purity*, 23.

<sup>82</sup> *Machinery of the Mind*, 37.

<sup>83</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 263

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>85</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 228.

<sup>86</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 133.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

for the life of the race” does not simply mean physical reproduction; through ritualistic and magical use of the sex force in a pair great social good can be achieved. This process is called sublimation, which will be discussed in depth below. Fortune believed it was essential to teach the knowledge and use of the spiritual side of sex to as many as she could, as it was only with this knowledge that happy and fulfilling marriages could be maintained. This theme can be traced across Fortune’s work; it was the motivation for *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, and it is also the purpose of Fortune’s most popular occult novel, *The Sea Priestess*.

Fortune believed that not only was knowledge of the esoteric aspect of sex necessary for a happy marriage, but that it was absolutely essential if one was to have any success in pursuing a magical path. The “correlation of the natural with the spiritual,” in which sexuality is not considered a sinful thing but is maintained “*unfallen* and in a state of innocence, is a very important point in all practical working in any form of magic.”<sup>88</sup> Magic, for Fortune, is the exercise of esoteric knowledge. Sexual magic, therefore, is the exercise of the knowledge of the etheric or spiritual aspects of sex. Fortune is matter-of-fact in her formulation, and is determined to rescue sexual magic from its association with black magic, sin and the disruption of society, an aura cultivated by Crowley and popularized by the contemporary tabloids. “It must not be thought... that I advocate orgiastic rites as the Way of Initiation; but I may as well say plainly that without the right understanding of the esoteric aspect of sex, the path is a blind alley.”<sup>89</sup> Her sense of social responsibility is once again key to her work. She understands that overcoming social conventions and popular conceptions of sex and of sexual magic “is not only bewildering intellectually, but also confusing morally.”<sup>90</sup> However “even at the risk of being accused of fostering all manner of abnormalities,” despite being aware of the implications such explicitness might have for her career and place in society, “I must try to make the matter clear, for its practical implications are so far-reaching,”<sup>91</sup> with the potential to increase both personal and social happiness.

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<sup>88</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 209.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>90</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 152.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

For Fortune sexual force is merely one aspect of a much greater force, better understood as “the emanating influence of pure being rather than as a thing in itself.”<sup>92</sup> She sees sex as a “mysterious potency” that “pervades the visions of the seer.”<sup>93</sup> This understanding is based on Fortune’s study of the Qabalah. In order to perform practical esoteric work, she says, we pick up an “elemental force” from the “Earth Centre,”<sup>94</sup> the physical world (which is equivalent to the Qabalistic sephirah Malkuth). Transforming this into a magnetic force in the “Moon Centre,” the realm of sexuality and the unconscious (corresponding with the sephirah Yesod), this force is then raised into the “Sun Centre” (the sephirah Tipareth, which is also construed as the Christ center), “where the actual work begins.”<sup>95</sup> If the acolyte does not recognize his existence as a physical being on the plane of matter, he will not be able to access elemental force. If he is sexually repressed or frustrated then he will not be able to maintain thought control when the force is at the Moon level, for “sexual images will arise in the imagination and the force will short-circuit through sensual channels.”<sup>96</sup> Thus any attempt to flee prematurely from the world of form to the world of spirit is doomed to fail. “People who cannot deal with life successfully upon a single plane of existence are ill-advised to multiply their difficulties by expanding their consciousness”<sup>97</sup> for they will not escape their complexes but turn them into “demons and succubae.”<sup>98</sup> It is for this reason that “the history of saints reads like a treatise on psycho-pathology; it is, in fact, a horrifying chronicle of sick minds and sick bodies.”<sup>99</sup> If a person embarks upon the Path before he has fulfilled his earthly responsibilities they will find themselves in “the Kingdom of Chaos,”<sup>100</sup> the Qabalistic Kingdom of the Qlipoth, the reverse side of the Tree of Life. If, however, the acolyte has accepted his part in the world of matter and understands that sexuality is the friend, not foe, of spiritual development; if he has, moreover, become an expert

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>94</sup> Dion Fortune, “The Earth and Moon Centers,” *The Inner Light Magazine*, 1939, reproduced in *The Circuit of Force*, 71.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>97</sup> Dion Fortune, *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage* (London: Aquarian Press, 1967), 106.

<sup>98</sup> Fortune believed that negative thought-forms, fed with enough emotion, could become semi-independent. In *Psychic Self-Defence* she tells the story of her own creation of a wolf-demon. It is by this same mechanism that she believed and succubae and incubi are created.

<sup>99</sup> “The Winged Bull: A Study in Esoteric Psychology,” 107.

<sup>100</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 120.

in the act of concentration, then he may be able to maintain a rigid control as he directs energy through the realms of sexuality. If he is able to do this, “then the force rises out of the sexual sphere and gives no more trouble in that direction but becomes available for the purposes of higher magic.”<sup>101</sup> What Fortune is talking about here is sublimation, which is the spiritualization of sex and is the key to any magical use of sexual force.

### 3.iii. The Use of Sublimation

For Fortune the knowledge of the spiritual aspect of sex is only half of the story. This knowledge is the key to a happy marriage; however for those who choose (or are consigned to) chastity, it is the use of this knowledge in the practice of sublimation that is the path to happiness. Her instructions on how the chaste person is to achieve sublimation are given in *The Problem of Purity*. Fortune notes that, because of “the present disproportion in numbers between men and women, and the delaying of the marriage age for economic reasons... in the post-war epoch,”<sup>102</sup> people are increasingly left with no legitimate outlet for their sexual desires. Their sexual energy is either pent up, and becomes pathological, or the frustration proves too much and they resort to auto-sexuality, prostitution and “a welter of promiscuity and contraceptives.”<sup>103</sup> However a person, trapped in a chaste position, can sublimate their sexual energy so that it can be released and put to productive use outside of the realms of physical sexuality, “using on a higher level that which has to be denied expression on a lower level.”<sup>104</sup> Fortune gives clear instructions on how this is to be done: “as soon as the sex impulse makes itself felt, concentrate your attention on the base of the spine.”<sup>105</sup> You must picture a blockage in your spine, and imagine pushing it upwards. When the force you have gathered enters the brain you must direct it towards the intellectual centers in the forehead, picturing the third eye, “and with that third eye you must imagine yourself to be looking out on the world from a great

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<sup>101</sup> “The Earth and Moon Centers,” 71.

<sup>102</sup> *The Problem of Purity*, 60.

<sup>103</sup> *The Problem of Purity*, 60.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

altitude... so that you see it from a bird's eye view, remote from yourself."<sup>106</sup> You must then "choose some philanthropic movement that is of national service"<sup>107</sup> and focus this energy in a "radiant stream"<sup>108</sup> towards it.<sup>109</sup> This process was clearly inspired by the process of raising the *kundalini* force, although Fortune does not make this connection explicit nor indicate from where she drew this influence.

The successful sublimation and dedication of sexual force will convey "a curious buoyancy of the spirit" best described as "personal magnetism."<sup>110</sup> Those who are successful in this endeavor will draw others to them with their newfound magnetic quality, and though they may not have a sexual partner "will have little need to complain of a lonely life."<sup>111</sup> Fortune claims that sublimation does not simply provide an outlet for sexual energy. It also provides a necessary outlet for reproductive potential, as "the life-forces belong to the race, not to the individual, and it is to the race they must be returned."<sup>112</sup> It is for this reason that she advises one directs one's energy towards greater social causes. "If we do not have children of the flesh, we must have children of the spirit, else we shall suffer from sex repression."<sup>113</sup> She believed that the sublimation of the reproductive instinct could prove a powerful force of social improvement in the depression-ridden post-war era. Thus we can see that Fortune understands sublimation to work on three levels. The practice is beneficial psychically, being the best use of sexual force that has been denied a physical outlet and offering an exchange of unsatisfying relations for a quality of personal magnetism. It is of moral benefit, preventing resort to promiscuous relations and prostitution. Finally sublimation is of benefit for society as a whole, as force is directed toward the improvement of the lives and conditions of those already alive, rather than contributing to the problems caused by overpopulation. Fortune's teaching on sublimation is the key to understanding the relationship between sex magic and social responsibility. It is social responsibility that motivates the raising up of sexual force, and that it is to the improvement of society that this force is projected.

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> It may be interesting to note that the philanthropic movement Fortune chooses as an example is 'Save the Children'.

<sup>110</sup> *The Problem of Purity*, 69.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

### 3.iv. The Doctrine of Polarity

*Polarity is the key to all magical work.*<sup>114</sup>

Fortune's metaphysics and her approach to practical occultism are underpinned by the doctrine of polarity, which is one of the most distinct and original ideas that she developed in her work. "Polarity means the function of flow and return of force."<sup>115</sup> No body and no thing can operate in a vacuum; any force expended necessitates some form of return. In any given relationship, one aspect will be active, and one passive. The two aspects act as "the positive and negative poles of a battery, generating current,"<sup>116</sup> and force will flow between them according to this polarization. As long as the balance is maintained the force will be part of a circuit, and the relationship will be reciprocal. As illustrated in the Qabalah, the pillar of Mercy and that of Severity are held in balance in the central pillar, but this balance is not inert. "The weakness of Christianity lies in the fact that it ignores rhythm... its dualisms are antagonistic instead of equilibrating."<sup>117</sup> Polarity is the function of a dynamic duality. Fortune believed the law of Polarity operated on every level of existence. According to the logic of the Tree of Life, what applies to the macrocosm also applies to the microcosm; thus polarity was a physical fact, a spiritual truth, a cosmic law and an interpersonal rule.

The various planes on which polarity operates are not necessarily distinct. Thus, as we saw in the process of sublimation, a person can project personal sexual force, and does not necessarily have to receive a return force from another person. A circuit may be made in which the return for a person's output is karmic, or is experienced as a direct input from their surrounding environment. Fortune argues that we can receive the stimulating "Chokmah-force," the Qabalistic term for the active pole of force that makes us creative, "in books, in our racial tradition, in our religion," as well as from our "friends and associates."<sup>118</sup> We can make our environment active,

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<sup>114</sup> "Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity," 130.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>116</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 41.

<sup>117</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 180.

<sup>118</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 134.

so that it stimulates our passive potential; equally we can be the dynamic principle to a passive environment. This is one of the key principles underlying Fortune's understanding of ritual, in which personal force, particularly sexual force, is sublimated and projected towards the gods, and the advancement of the soul of the race. Energy is thus entered into a circuit, and the return for ritual work ideally comes in the form of the blessing of the invoked god, which inspires the practitioner with confidence and power; however for ritual work where the aim is to influence the group soul of the race return comes in the form of Karma, as the spirit advances higher in its journey towards the Inner Planes.

Polarity on an interpersonal level usually, although not exclusively, manifests itself in terms of sexual force. Fortune did not want her doctrine of Polarity to be reduced by the ignorant to a simple doctrine of sex and sexual difference; as observed above, she was determined to show that sex was not a simple matter, for it was but one part of a much larger energetic system. Sex, Fortune explains, "is simply a special instance of the universal principle of polarity," and she laments that when this is revealed "the immediate assumption is that polarity and sex are synonymous terms."<sup>119</sup> She complains, "if I say although sex is a part of polarity, there is a great deal of polarity that has nothing to do with sex, my explanation is ignored."<sup>120</sup> However, despite the dangers of elaborating on this Doctrine, Fortune thought her task was essential, as "this fluidic, ever-fluctuating subtle polarity is one of the most important points in the practical workings."<sup>121</sup> Without a proper understanding of the law of polarity and its practical implications one could not proceed with successful occult work, while effective use of this knowledge could lead to "an intensification of life on all its levels."<sup>122</sup>

For Fortune it is self-evident that "in all magical work... nobody can work alone, and according to the work you want to do you will work in polarity, or triangle, or circle."<sup>123</sup> She argues that "the most important work is done by the pair."<sup>124</sup> The action of the stimulating force upon the potential is most effective when the two

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>120</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 235.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>122</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 41.

<sup>123</sup> "Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity," 130.

<sup>124</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 94.

partners take the form of the two natural poles of humanity, man and woman, for the tensions of sexuality that exist between them will make the forces in the circuit particularly potent. The subconscious and archetypal images associated with the masculine and feminine poles, in which woman is man's "anima, his underworld contact, his link with most ancient earth,"<sup>125</sup> provide potent stimulus to the imagination, particularly when the emotions have already been worked up to a fever pitch by costumes, incense and music. The importance of gender in the magical pair is particularly significant in Fortune's occult novels, where each of her hero/heroine pairs must join forces in order to perform successful magic or ritual. Even Fortune's great adept Le Fay cannot work magic alone, and must wait until her priest appears, for it takes "two to bring through the power – Shakta and Shakti, as the Hindus call them."<sup>126</sup>

The most interesting ethical and social dimensions of the doctrine of polarity are not to do with its relationship to sex per se but rather with the essentiality of reciprocation in any relationship, magical or otherwise. Instances where energetic manipulation is misused, and forces are not returned, whether purposeful or otherwise, Fortune labels vampirism. This idea fascinated Fortune, particularly in the earlier part of her career. She explored it in a number of ways in her non-fiction, particularly in *Psychic Self-Defense*, and elaborated upon it in her fictional work, where it is the chief threat in 'Blood Lust', from *The Secrets of Doctor Taverner*,<sup>127</sup> *The Demon Lover* and *The Winged Bull*. Fortune distinguishes four different types of vampirism. First, a Black magician may deliberately draw the energy from a victim to increase his own power. This process is described in *The Winged Bull*, where with the help of Black Magician Astley, "Frank swells up like a bull-frog and Ursula is like a sucked orange."<sup>128</sup> Second, a deceased adept may deliberately draw energy from the living in order to maintain a presence on the physical plane. This is described in both *The Demon Lover* and 'Blood Lust', and is explored in *Psychic-Self-Defence*. Third, the leader of an occult group may, deliberately or accidentally, absorb the energy of those who surround him. Finally an untrained person may unintentionally draw the energy from another person whom they have a close relationship with. Both these types of

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<sup>125</sup> *Moon Magic*, 156.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>127</sup> *The Secrets of Doctor Taverner*, 1-18.

<sup>128</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 41.

vampirism are described in *Psychic Self-Defence*, where Fortune also includes advice on how to resist them. The unintentional vampirism of Wilfred's sister is also implied to be the cause of the negative state in which the hero finds himself at the beginning of *The Sea Priestess*. Fortune's interest in Vampirism is important because it illustrates that she did not simply understand polarity as being important in magical working, or in relationships between the sexes; she saw all relationships in terms of circuits of energy. Fortune believed that failing to gain some form of reciprocation for energy entered into a relationship was one of the chief causes both of unhappiness and of psychic illness.

Fortune's approach to gender was unique in her time. While she accepted the social norm of men being naturally active and women naturally passive in the physical world, she reversed this dynamic on the inner plane, arguing that it was women who were the active spiritual pole, and men who needed women's influence to stimulate their emotional and spiritual passivity. Fortune's acceptance of the idea that men were naturally more active on the physical plane than women seems to have come from a common-sense analysis of the realities of everyday life. It makes sense therefore that it is always men who are indicted in the cases of intentional vampirism which Fortune reports, as it is men who are more likely to be in positions of power, and more likely to be effective in asserting power. Fortune's unquestioning acceptance of an essentialist division between the genders is conventional, however the way she characterizes gender is not. Moreover, Fortune's doctrine of polarity actually contains the potential to overcome its own heteronormative implications, through a unique understanding of every individual as being inherently bisexual.

Fortune explains that Polarization operates upon all levels of the cosmos, between metaphysical forces, between human beings and also between levels within ourselves. "How many people realize that their own souls are literally bi-sexual within themselves, and that the different levels of consciousness act as male and female towards each other?"<sup>129</sup> It is self-polarization that is "the basis of all deliberate induction and control of the circuit of force."<sup>130</sup> Equilibrium within the self of the acolyte is essential and without this he cannot hope to form an equilibrious magical

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<sup>129</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 154.

<sup>130</sup> "Notes on 'The Circuit of Force,'" 129.

relationship with an other. As with all other levels of polarization, that which takes place within the self necessitates positive and negative poles. In Fortune's formulation, these are called the masculine and feminine aspects. Each of the layers of a person's existence, the physical, etheric, psychical and spiritual, act as alternating poles to each other. "The soul is two-sided, positive and negative, has a kinetic aspect and a static aspect, and is therefore male-female or female-male, according to the relation of "force" to "form" in its make-up."<sup>131</sup> Thus a person may be spiritually active and masculine, whether they were male or female on the physical plane, although she believed that it was more usual for women to be spiritually active. Fortune's understanding of gender in this multi-layered, bi-sexual is key to her approach to sexual magic and reflects something unique she brings to the occult tradition of sex magic as a woman of her time and social context. As a middle class woman Fortune was particularly aware of social pressure, of the dangers of offending Mrs. Grundy and of the necessity of integration in society for a successful life. She appreciated the need for a more nuanced understanding of gender and sexuality, but one that could be successfully integrated into the realities of everyday life. Her gender politics were revolutionary, but in a more subtle way than those being propounded by the feminists of her time. They contained the potential for revolution from within.

## **4. Ritual**

### **4.i. Ritual and Ambiguity**

Ritual is an important part of Fortune's approach to spirituality and is key to understanding the multiple ways that an awareness of social responsibility pervaded Fortune's work. Fortune believed that esoteric ritual could act as a corrective to modern, industrial Christianity by providing a type of experience the modern world largely lacked. She believed that the reduced religiosity in modern people did not mean that they no longer had spiritual needs, but that they did not feel Christianity could provide for them. "There is a minimum of spiritual experience without which the soul cannot keep its poise; by means of ceremonial we are able to ensure it at least

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<sup>131</sup> *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, 34.

that minimum.<sup>132</sup> Fortune believed that the failure of modern Christianity was closely tied to its industrialization in modern times; “since a return to nature is rarely socially acceptable, ritual may prove to be an effective corrective – at least better than nothing.”<sup>133</sup> For Fortune ritual was the physical aspect of spirituality. Without ritual spiritual advancement was extremely difficult; it was the false belief that physical operation and spirituality are opposed that is the reason the Christian mystic path is so difficult to traverse. According to Fortune, magical work could be a path to spiritual enlightenment superior to that of mysticism. Thus “all magical work is better carried out in the form of a ritual performed on the physical plane... than simply as a form of meditation operating on the astral plane only.”<sup>134</sup> Some form of action must take place in the mundane world, “even if it be no more than lines drawn on a talisman, or the writing of signs upon the air,”<sup>135</sup> to bring the spiritual process onto the physical plane (the Qabalistic sphere of Malkuth) – humans being, after all, inescapably physical creatures.

Knight’s *Dion Fortune’s Rite of Isis and of Pan* was written in response to a gaping omission in Fortune’s sizeable published corpus. Although she performed the Rite of Isis before a select audience in London in the 1930s and believed the ritual to be an important antidote to the pathologies of modern life, Fortune did not publish any explicit ritual instructions for the aspiring acolyte, neither in non-fiction form nor in her novels. It would be easy to attribute this to the continued influence of the Golden Dawn’s demands for secrecy, and threats of punishment for oath-breaking ex-members. While this may have been a factor, I believe the matter was far more complex than this. Fortune claimed her novels were written because certain things could only be shown, not told. Ritual practice was one of these. Fortune did not believe, as had been held by occultist organizations before her, such as the Golden Dawn, that the performance of a ritual according to a pre-ordained script, with specific objects, movements and speeches, was necessary for a particular experience. While she knew that the rituals enacted by the Golden Dawn were psychologically effective, she did not believe that they were the only way of achieving such effects,

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<sup>132</sup> Dion Fortune, “The Purpose of Magic,” reproduced in Dion Fortune and Gareth Knight, *An Introduction to Ritual Magic* (Loughborough: Thoth, 1997), 44.

<sup>133</sup> “Notes on the ‘The Circuit of Force,’” 127.

<sup>134</sup> *The Mystical Qabalah*, 283.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

nor were they the most suitable path for everyone. Those within the Society of the Inner Light could learn from Dion herself how to construct a ritual ideally suited to its purpose; for those outside the order, she provided crucial information on how one should approach the matter, and left the aspiring acolyte create a ritual which would best suit their purposes and by most appropriate to the means and time they had to give.

Fortune's clearest exposition of her ritual practice is in her occult novels; however the rituals that are presented in her novels appear as subjective glimpses, tantalizing and frustrating the reader as much as instructing him. They show, but do not tell, presenting only the process and leaving specifics to the imagination. Murchison describes the fertility rite whereby he exchanges magnetism with Ursula.

He had no very clear remembrance of that rite, either at the time or afterwards. He knew they danced together to slow rhythms. He knew they came up to the altar and drank together from the cup of dark, resinous-tasting wine, and ate together of the broken bread dipped in the coarse salt, for he felt the tang of it on his lips for long after. Together they inhaled the wafting fragrance of the pine-branches with their little dark cones. Then they danced again.<sup>136</sup>

The details of the outer trappings and process of the ritual are not the focus of the account. Instead Fortune draws attention to Murchison's inner experience during the ritual, to the impact that it has upon those involved; "they were two forces, not two persons. He was the sun in heaven bringing life to the earth. She was the earth, absorbing it hungrily, drawing it from him to satisfy her crying needs."<sup>137</sup> Anyone hoping to perform their own version of this magnetizing ritual would have had to resort to imaginatively filling in the more precise details of the ceremony. This was precisely Fortune's intention. The rituals presented in her novels were intended to be evocative starting-points, from which the reader could jump into the realm of fantasy. Imaging himself as a participant in the ritual, the acolyte could thus let his subconscious, expressed through his imagination in daydream, give the ritual its form. Fortune provided a general method for both this meditative fantasizing and for the physical aspects of ritual; she presented the reader with the appropriate symbolism and setting, and developed through the story the appropriate emotional pitch. Then she left the reader to do the rest. Fortune understood that ritual was different for

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<sup>136</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 62.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

everyone. Allowing each person to construct their own meant that the ritual thus created would be formed from the subconscious symbols most potent for the acolyte, and would thus have the strongest emotional and psychological effect on them. Fortune believed that allowing people to construct their own rituals could be, as it is for Hugh in *The Goat-Foot God*, a method of self-healing; in *The Goat-Foot God* we see that the process of construction is as important as the rite itself, the dredging of the subconscious acting as both psychoanalysis and catharsis. Thus I would suggest that Fortune did not publish explicit instructions for the Rite of Pan because the Rite of Pan was not something that could, or should, be formalized, as the goat-foot god himself defies the world of form. The acolyte chooses his place, gathers his props and begins to imagine. He sets free the emotional force inside him and sees where (and with whom) he ends up.

In addition to these reasons, which are associated with ritual per se, there are further reasons Fortune felt it appropriate to keep her proscriptions vague when the ritual she is talking about concerned the use and sublimation of the sex force. The first was Fortune's enduring awareness of the power of Mrs. Grundy. If Fortune had published any work, fiction or non-fiction, which detailed a magical or ritual practice that explicitly involved sex, particularly if she was advising others to act on these instructions, she would have been courting public infamy. She neither wished to call down the wrath of that influential figure on herself nor on her readers. Although she believed that a proper understanding of sublimation and of sexual ritual could greatly increase a persons' happiness, she knew that making a pariah of a person would lead to significantly more unhappiness. Equally, Fortune knew that if she affronted conventional morality and acquired a bad reputation, she would no more be able to complete her task, alienating precisely those timid readers she wished to attract. The second reason is that Fortune understood that sexual magic was an advanced and powerful teaching, and she did not want people experimenting with it who were not psychologically prepared. Within the Golden Dawn system teaching regarding sexual magic is available only to the most advanced initiates. Sexual forces are the strongest expression of life force in a person; it is for this reason that they are magically effective. However opening the floodgates of sexual energy before a person has properly integrated their repressed sexuality will lead may lead to psychological breakdown. The impact of sexuality is not simply mental and etheric, but it is physical

too. Further, this physicality has a social impact, particularly for women, in the shame that could come from both the loss of virginity, and from an illegitimate child. Fortune wished to present her understanding of sexual magic in novel form so that it would be accessible to those who needed it, but had been scared away from occultism by its bad public reputation. She kept the doctrine implicit so that it would only reach those who were ready for the teaching, and not harm to those who were not.

#### **4.ii. The Ritual Method**

Although her ritual proscriptions were not specific, neither did Fortune leave her readers to wander alone in the realms of their imagination; she was aware of the treacherous places this could take one, as the inexperienced may unintentionally give life to their own succubous thought forms. As well as self-awareness, and knowledge and acceptance of one's sexuality, Fortune advocated mind training as defense against such evils. However achieving spiritual progress "solely by means of meditation is like raising a wright by the unaided effort of our two hands." This difficult path is accessible only for the adept, and even the adept could not achieve social transformation by meditation alone. The employment of ritual "resembles the use of a lever, or a pulley and block. Our muscles are still the sole source of energy, but by the utilization of mechanical principles we have redoubled their power."<sup>138</sup>

Magical work, whether it was intended to promote personal spiritual development or the development of the race, was achieved by means of an intense and concentrated pitch of emotion. "The attention is held, the imagination is directed, a mood is achieved... [and] exaltation follows automatically."<sup>139</sup> The deeper levels of the mind, which are the realms of magical work, "are accessed by profound feeling and prolonged attention."<sup>140</sup> Both these methods of subconscious appeal are taken advantage of in ritual. The performance of a rite focuses the concentration, and emotion is generated by the use of evocative symbols and props. Emotion concentrate thus produces a mood, and by means of this mood "we are able to get into touch with

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<sup>138</sup> *Psychic Self-Defence*, 184.

<sup>139</sup> "The Purpose of Magic," 45.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

the corresponding spiritual force.”<sup>141</sup> Fortune thus understood the ritual mechanism to serve two roles: it focused the concentration and stimulated the imagination. This idea is elaborated on in *The Goat-Foot God*, where Hugh’s ritual method combines the lessons of two books; *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola* (published in 1548) and Joris-Karl Huysman’s decadent occult novel *Là-Bas* (first published in French in serial form in 1891). From St Ignatius Hugh learns the mental method of construction of place. Meditating frequently upon a scene that is wrought with emotion, and bringing each detail of it to life in his mind, he is quickly able to put stir up in himself very real emotion whenever he pictures the scene. St Ignatius’ method is a meditation exercise for beginners, designed to improve the faculty of concentration. This work is developed in her non-fiction, where Fortune gives a variety of instructions for the development and exercise of the concentration, with a heavy focus on meditation upon the Qabalistic tree of life. However, she stresses that ultimately it is the performance of a ritual in itself that is the best way to focus and maintain the concentration.

While the structure of rituals provides a means of focusing the concentration of the untrained mind, “the trappings and paraphernalia of ceremonial magic”<sup>142</sup> provide a potent means of stimulating the imagination and the emotions, and through these the subconscious mind. From Huysmans’s *Là-Bas*, Hugh takes the importance of setting, prop and costume for the imagination. He quickly discovers the potent effect the monk’s robe he dons and Mona’s Hellenistic green dress have on his mood, and even on his personality. In *The Winged Bull* Fortune describes the effect putting on a ceremonial robe has on Murchison, who has never been involved in occult ritual or ceremonial magic before this point.

Murchison surveyed himself in a long mirror, and perceived a startling figure... with the shedding of his everyday garments he had also shed his everyday personality. The man that looked back at him from the mirror was not himself; it was someone from the Oldest Land that had risen to the surface from the depths of his unconscious mind.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>142</sup> Dion Fortune, “Auto Suggestion and the Astral Light,” *The Inner Light Magazine*, 1939, reproduced in *The Circuit of Force*, 109.

<sup>143</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 57.

When one considers the popularity fancy dress still has among adults today, and the importance of costume to the performative arts it is hardly surprising that these ritual costumes have such potent effects of Fortune's characters. However the exoteric trappings used to prepare the acolyte and the temple do not have to be complex – Fortune stresses that, particularly with clothing, it is more important that they be home-made, and not used for any other purpose, than that they be expensive or matching any particular specifications. Simplicity and dignity are to be preferred to any amount of over-priced and over-gilded props. Although the ritual space must not be invaded by cooking smells or passing servants, it is perfectly acceptable for this space to be used to other purposes while ritual work is not taking place.<sup>144</sup> Here we see again the egalitarian nature of Fortune's approach to ritual. Even the simplest temple, and the smallest effort in dressing, will make all the difference. If one thinks of the effect that wearing one's 'lucky' hat can make, or of the simplest costume change in a play, then it is easy to imagine how much more powerfully a robe which the acolyte has made his or herself, and imbued with a purpose, will have on their imagination – and, by the resulting change stance and action, on their appearance and effect on to those around them.

Ceremonial trappings are not only useful aids for the acolyte, to stimulate his imagination and to reach the pitch of emotion that is necessary for successful ritual; Fortune understands such trappings to also be of value to the adept who, though she does not require them for herself, can use them in her work with the uninitiated. "One can suggest to [the once-born] through the eyes what one wishes them to believe;"<sup>145</sup> in *Moon Magic* Le Fay talks at great length about the magnetic, that is to say emotional, effect exoteric trappings can have, even outside of a specifically ritual context, acting as "auto-suggestion;"<sup>146</sup> "I... knew how little the true adept needs for his magic, but I had to work upon men's imaginations and for that I needed a stage setting. I had to make them see me as an adept, or I should never have been an adept in their eyes."<sup>147</sup> We are reminded once again of what we learnt with regards to polarity – that magic cannot be worked alone. Le Fay, powerful as she is, must have a priest if she is to work, even though this slows her progress greatly, for "someone has

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<sup>144</sup> "Auto Suggestion and the Astral Light," 109.

<sup>145</sup> *Moon Magic*, 57.

<sup>146</sup> *Moon Magic*, 56.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

to see the goddess in me, and then she manifests.”<sup>148</sup> Fortune conceived of ritual as a way that even those who had no experience of occultism could gain the benefits of spiritual progress. She believed rituals should not be reserved for any sort of elite, but offered them in a highly egalitarian form, where they could be designed by each person to fit around their life. She demanded neither special knowledge, nor special objects. It was only in this way that ritual could fulfill its huge therapeutic potential.

#### 4.iii. Ritual as Outlet

*A magical rite, properly worked, leaves the operators in the same harmonized state that follows coitus, and... can be used as most effectual and satisfying form of sublimation.*<sup>149</sup>

Fortune believed that ritual was an effective method for the acolyte of occultism to experience the powerful process of sublimation. Like sublimation as explored in *The Problem of Purity*, which was aimed at the general, non-occult public (although it was informed by Fortune’s understanding of ritual sublimation), ritual sublimation provided a satisfying outlet for sexual energy, one that satisfied the urge for procreation and was more effective at providing consistent happiness than the marital bed. Fortune argued that the creation and performance of a ritual had a huge amount of therapeutic potential for individuals struggling with their sexual instincts in a repressive and economically depressed social milieu.

In each of Fortune’s novels the psychological problems of the male lead are solved by ritual means. These problems are always caused by society’s restrictions on where force may be expended. Fortune provides various scenarios as to why a reasonably normal man might not have the chance to fulfill his sexual urges in the natural way.<sup>150</sup> Murchison is too down on his luck to marry; Wilfred is overshadowed by his mother and sister; Rupert’s wife is a convalescent. Fortune understood ritual to

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>149</sup>“Sexual Ethics in Occultism,” 160.

<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, although in her non-fiction Fortune states that psychosexual problems affect women every bit as much as men, in her novels it is almost always the men who are suffering from these problems. I would suggest that this is because Fortune’s desire to present women who are emotionally and spiritually superior takes pre-eminence over the need to explore women’s sexual problems, a subject that had been much (although unsympathetically) discussed in the psychological manuals of the day.

be an alternative to a physical sexual act; “sex is a function, not an emotion,”<sup>151</sup> which carries with it a physical force. “Orgasm earths the force; so does a properly worked magical ceremony.”<sup>152</sup> That the ritual is “properly worked” is key, for ritual is only therapeutic when the forces are entered into a circuit, and the participant experiences a return on his investment. As we noted above, polarity does not only operate on the interpersonal level, but on all levels, and the relationship between all the various levels of being is fluid. Thus, when in ritual the sex force is directed at a greater aim or force, it is upon this higher level that reciprocity is received. In ‘Channels of Sublimation’, an article she published in the Inner Light Magazine in 1940 Fortune’s explains, “the ancients had a method of dealing with sex force which has a profound psychological significance and could afford valuable lessons to our modern psychotherapists – they made use of these forces in the temple rites. Fortune explained that while in the past this was done “in crude ways that the civilized conscience could not tolerate, however the same outcome can be achieved by a ritual that takes a psychological approach. Force is put in circuit cosmically, “polarizing with the great Isis or primitive Pan as the case may be.” Force thus directed “does not remain in the aura and decompose, as in the case of sensual fantasizing, but is drawn into the stream of the cosmic circuit, and from the Archetypal Being thus constructed a ray of polarizing magnetism returns.”<sup>153</sup> In ritual sublimation one can thus receive a real, meta-personal return on forces expended. It can thus have a therapeutic effect on those bereft of a sexual partner.

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<sup>151</sup> Fortune, “Notes on the ‘The Circuit of Force,’”128.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>153</sup> Dion Fortune, “Channels of Sublimation,” *The Inner Light Magazine*, 1940, reproduced in *The Circuit of Force*, 166.

## 5. Applied Sex Magic

### 5.i. Sublime Sex Magic

*There are certain things that can be done with the mind if you know how, which give some very remarkable results, but which require a very steady nerve and considerable self-control to pull off successfully.*<sup>154</sup>

In addition to showing how ritual could be used to sublimate sexual energy in order to provide a therapeutic outlet, Fortune also propounded a further, more advanced, magical teaching about sublimation. By sacrificing physical pleasure, and focusing sexual force on the spiritual planes, a huge amount of force would be available for ritual magic that would otherwise be wasted on sensuality. By evoking sexual feeling until the tension was almost unbearable through inspiring and subtly erotic ritual, a great deal of power could be tapped into. When this force was directed through metaphysical channels, which manifest as gods, it would have a potent effect on the group soul of mankind, and the evolution of the race. The aim of this type of sexual magic was social therapy as opposed to personal therapy, and Fortune warned of the difficulty of this practice. It must only to be attempted by those who are free from pathology, for instead of ridding one of excess sexual energy, the process evokes it. Fortune advises that anyone attempting such a ritual should have a physical outlet available through which to channel the excess of force, for the levels of sexual tension it is necessary to evoke cannot be continuously borne, and without a “physical plane outlet...that can be used after the matter of a lightening conductor,”<sup>155</sup> there is a risk that the psyche will crack under the pressure.

The key difference between sublimation for the every day man and sublimation as used by the adept is that, while the every-day man must draw his focus away from sexual images, the adept must focus on them. This is extremely difficult to do without creating succubae, or meandering off into fantasy. Thus, although Fortune advocates the magical sublimation of sexual forces, she also recognizes the dangers that arise as one attempts to achieve this. “The risk lies in the fact that if a sensual thought intrude into consciousness at a time when the channels are open and the

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<sup>154</sup> *The Winged Bull*, 39.

<sup>155</sup> “Dangers of Faulty Development,” 159.

forces are flowing, those forces will immediately follow the focus of attention.”<sup>156</sup> The result will be an “outbreak of passion and sensuality.”<sup>157</sup> Once the point of danger has been passed, “the vital forces can be turned to magical purposes and no longer give trouble on the physical plane.”<sup>158</sup> However whilst this phase is being passed through, “the initiate who has no physical plane outlet in normal sex life... is in the position of an acrobat who is learning trapeze tricks without the use of a safety-net.”<sup>159</sup> This is one of the key themes of *The Goat-Foot God*, where Hugh struggles with the strong erotic feelings he awakens in himself as he attempts to evoke Pan, warning Mona of the danger she is in if the animal sex instinct, proves stronger than Hugh’s will. In Fortune’s typical style this danger is only alluded to, but it is clear that it would take the form of the “outbreak of passion” Fortune is so fearful of; the physical act of sex, in an unplanned, unmarried state. It is for this reason that Hugh is so insistent that he and Mona must marry.

Fortune believed that all ritual could be considered sex ritual, because there was “no such thing as sex force per se.”<sup>160</sup> Sex force is simply one level of the life force, and the force that one uses in ritual must pass this level every time it is evoked. However, “this does not mean that every magical act must culminate in orgasm.”<sup>161</sup> Far from it, for “orgasm is the earthing force; its expenditure like a flash of lightning.”<sup>162</sup> Magic and coitus were two different ways of using the same energy. “There is no force available for magic immediately after orgasm, and in magic rightly worked there will be no force available for orgasm either.”<sup>163</sup> Thus according to Fortune a sexual ritual could never contain any physical sex; coital magic was a contradiction in terms. It is interesting to note the disparity between this formulation and that of the great pioneer of sexual magic, Randolph, who believed that it was the moment of mutual orgasm that is “the most solemn, serious, powerful and energetic moment he can ever know on earth.”<sup>164</sup> Although in Fortune’s view “union on the physical plane” will not take place while “the life-forces are being used upon other

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<sup>156</sup> *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, 93.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>158</sup> “Dangers of Faulty Development,” 159.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>160</sup> “Sexual Ethics in Occultism,” 160.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>164</sup> Paschal Beverly Randolph, *Eulis! The History of Love*, as quoted in *Magia Sexualis*, 3.

levels,” when that work is not going on these aggravated forces “will tend to follow their natural channel, and if that channel is not open, trouble may ensue.”<sup>165</sup> This trouble will either take the form of inappropriate sexual conduct, or of psychological collapse.

Thus sexual magical work is ultimately aimed at subliming the sex instinct, while this work is being developed it is better to have some form of safety net, whether this be coitus with a partner or “auto-sexuality,” which, though dangerous when indulged in to excess, may be “used as a means of drawing off magnetism through magical images.”<sup>166</sup> According to Knight, Fortune rushed her wedding to Evans so that they could more quickly begin to explore the Greater Mysteries. Rather than assume that the Greater Mysteries had for Fortune a coital aspect in themselves, I would propose that she knew that working with the Greater Mysteries would involve the deliberate stimulation of sexual energies. Fortune feared that doing such work without an acceptable physical outlet would put too great a strain on her psyche and body. Despite her demand for a high level of thought control in anyone pursuing advanced ritual work, Fortune remained aware of the lesson she tried to teach in ‘A Daughter of Pan’; even the adept is only human. Fortune did not believe that it necessary to make the process of advanced sexual ritual any more difficult than it already was in the name of some unfounded standard of purity.

## 5.ii. The Magical Relationship

*The Goat-Foot God* and *The Winged Bull* have as their chief concern an attempt to teach the spiritual side of sex, the implications and effects of sexual ritual, and their potential for integration into the life of the every-day occultist. It is for this reason that the characters in these books are so concerned with marriage and social propriety. *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, while still having a social and egalitarian aim, take as their subject the greater task of the adept, the advancement of the group soul, which involves the sacrifice of selfish things, including personal

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<sup>165</sup> *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, 94.

<sup>166</sup> “Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity,” 133.

satisfaction and conventional and reciprocal human relationships. Through “the love that is laid upon the altar” one can “invoke the higher powers of the soul.”<sup>167</sup>

Appendix 6 in Knight’s *The Rite of Isis and of Pan* is “Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity,” a trance address which he claims was given through Fortune to the senior members of the Society of the Inner Light in 1940.<sup>168</sup> This text suggests that during her lifetime Fortune was criticized by members of her Society for the multiplicity of magical partners she worked with, the implication being that these relationships had a physical sexual aspect as well as a magical one.<sup>169</sup> If such accusations had been brought to the attention of the public, they may have had an irrevocably damaging effect on Fortune’s reputation. Given that Fortune had experienced these allegations, and her constant awareness of the necessity of social propriety, one would not expect her to advise others to act in a way that could bring about damaging social consequences. However in *The Sea Priestess* and in *Moon Magic* Le Fay does precisely this, recounting for Wilfred her previous magical relationships, with their implied sexual aspect, and refusing the marriage proposals made by both Wilfred and Rupert. Through the voice of Le Fay Fortune was illustrating a point she had earlier made in *Love and Marriage*; that the magical relationship is not a personal one, and “has nothing whatever to do with love or attraction as ordinarily understood.”<sup>170</sup> Personal desires and social ties such as marriage are irrelevant to this relationship, for it must be “motivated by service and nothing else; it is partnership entered into for the sake of the work to be performed.”<sup>171</sup> Although Fortune understands that some degree of personal involvement is unavoidable, Le Fay’s lengthy diatribe against jealousy explains that a magical relationship must be free from feelings of possession or jealousy, for these are irreconcilable with successful ritual work.<sup>172</sup>

According to Knight Fortune acted as a medium for a series of trance addresses from the Inner Plane Masters at a spiritual retreat in Letchworth between

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<sup>167</sup> *The Problem of Purity*, 126.

<sup>168</sup> “Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity,” 130.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

<sup>170</sup> *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, 96.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>172</sup> *Moon Magic*, 207-208.

1923 and 1925.<sup>173</sup> On one occasion Fortune's friend Netta Fornario and her married lover came to Fortune for advice on whether the pair could be taken on as students. While we cannot rely on the accuracy of this information, the account provides interesting insight into how Fortune may have advised members of her group to integrate this doctrine of personal sacrifice into their lives. Channeling her Inner Plane contact Lord Erskine, she told the pair "if you elect to follow the Path... you elect to forego the pleasures of the personality."<sup>174</sup> In the higher aspects of the magical work "the forces that a man and woman use for their mutual pleasure are sacrificed to lift the burden of humanity."<sup>175</sup> Therefore, she tells the pair that they must "meet as friends, but not as lovers, because you are not lovers, you are servants."<sup>176</sup>

Fortune recognized that although "no love may enter [the magical] union at the outset," and that it may in fact be "a union of complete strangers," love may grow out of the "deep harmony necessary for the formation of a circuit." She believed that a "curious magical bond" is formed even when sex is treated as a "simple animal function," or is bought and sold "in sordid indifference."<sup>177</sup> How much stronger must the bond be, she asks, "that is forged by such a sacramental rite as that of the pastos of Eleusis?"<sup>178</sup> Fortune thus recognized that her formulation of the magical relationship was dangerous, as it contained the potential for a string of used and damaged victims to be left in the wake of an adept who believes they serve a higher purpose. Fortune explored this difficulty in *The Sea Priestess*, thus showing that even when her concerns are of the most lofty magical kind, with the process being directed not at any personal good but the overarching good of society, she does not forget that the participants are people, and is careful to consider their human needs.

Any process of sacrifice and rebirth has a potent effect on the ego, whether it is the imaginative process of ritual initiation or the psychophysical one of sublimation. It can be difficult to re-integrate into society and to act as a cohesive social unit after experiencing oneself as another personality, particularly if this personality is a god. The struggle to remain a cohesive ego unit while in the thrall of intense occult

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<sup>173</sup> *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light*, 99.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>177</sup> *The Goat-Foot God*, 278.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

experiences is a central theme in *The Goat-Foot God*. It is also the reason for the apparent incongruity of last chapters of *The Sea Priestess*, in which Fortune attempts to illustrate the process of resurrection into a new and happy social life. The central rite of *The Sea Priestess* is one of sacrifice. Although on the physical plane the rite is chiefly one of meditation, Wilfred imaginatively and emotionally reenacts the ancient physical sacrifice on the sea-temple altar. In the historical fantasy of the ancient rite the victim demanded the Priestess give her virginity to him, however in the modern day reenactment this reciprocation is withheld. After the ritual Le Fay disappears into the sea and Wilfred is left distraught, unable to reconcile his occult experiences with his every-day reality. However, Fortune does not leave her hero, or her reader, there. Both are led through the process of reintegration. Wilfred finds a wife who, in the tradition of the romance novel, is the plain girl who has been under his nose all along. Wilfred emulates the ritual relationship by placing Le Fay's jewels, the costume of the Sea Priestess, onto the unassuming girl, and is thus able to integrate his occult experiences into every day life and have a fulfilling marriage. Le Fay tells Wilfred before they advance on their magical working that, although he will have to sacrifice much in order for Le Fay to achieve her aim (which is never stated explicitly, but is clearly some kind of effect upon the group soul), he will be rewarded. Here we are faced with something of a contradiction; although in her non-fiction work Fortune is adamant that advanced sexual magic is never to be done in order to receive personal benefit, in *The Sea Priestess* we are faced with a situation in which Wilfred is promised a reward for his sacrifice, and this reward is duly given.

In "Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity," Fortune claims that none of her magical partners were left uncompensated.<sup>179</sup> However she does not elaborate on what form this compensation took, and it does not appear that any of her magical partners, once discarded, were left with the kind of fairy-tale ending Fortune wrote for Wilfred. Charles Lovejoy separated from his wife, and was kept from assuming leadership of the group after Fortune's death even though he had been her closest and most long-term magical relationship. Fortune's husband, Penry Evans, left her after eleven years of marriage. In *The Sea Priestess* Fortune provides a parable of the perfect ritual relationship, however its resolution is one of coincidence, not of achievement or process; perhaps Fortune would have called it karma, or cosmic return. Fortune was

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<sup>179</sup> "Inner Plane Teaching on Polarity," 134.

clearly preoccupied with the potentially negative effects of the magical relationship. She seems to have struggled to come to a resolution to this problem, both in her literature and in her life.

### 5.iii. The Group Soul

In her article on Fortune's novels, Johnston Graf complains that Fortune did not engage with the social issues of her day.<sup>180</sup> This is not true; it is simply that Fortune was working on a different scale. Heavily influenced by Jung's exploration of the Collective Unconscious, Fortune believed in the existence of what she variously calls the 'group mind', 'group soul', 'the soul of society' and 'the collective unconscious'.<sup>181</sup> Fortune equates the phenomenon with the power of crowd psychology.<sup>182</sup> I would tentatively define the term as the collective mass of emotion, association and belief, as well as the unconscious assumptions and symbolism, which are developed and propagated by, and act upon, a given culture. Fortune believed that one could influence society as a whole by means of an individual ritual act. She illustrated this idea in *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic*, where the rituals designed by Le Fay aim to place something into the group mind which then "spreads like a ferment."<sup>183</sup> Le Fay claims "...with the power of the magic that was upon me... I cursed our modern Moloch to its face... There is freedom in the world today because of what I did that night."<sup>184</sup> Thus for Fortune a single act of sexual magic had the potential to accelerate the reform of social conventions and advance the spiritual evolution of the entire race.

Effects upon the group soul are not instantaneous; they take time to develop. Fortune believed her work to be stimulating a gradual process of social change. She did not expect to see the results of it in her lifetime, for "history is life seen in perspective. When history is in the making... it is impossible to assess it at its real

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<sup>180</sup> "The Occult Novels of Dion Fortune," 49.

<sup>181</sup> *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light*, 217.

<sup>182</sup> *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, 59.

<sup>183</sup> *Moon Magic*, 124.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

value. One can think of it only as it affects oneself.”<sup>185</sup> Nor did she expect society to understand the process that was taking place within itself, for “the world which does homage to the masterpiece does not see the smudged palette and the filthy smock that went to its making.”<sup>186</sup> Although she could hope for no recognition for her work upon society, it was precisely the foregoing of personal benefit in order to focus on what would advance the evolution of the race that distinguished the White Magician from the Black.<sup>187</sup> Fortune was able to put selfish motives aside because of her belief in reincarnation. Outward trappings were unimportant, for it was only spiritual development that would have any impact on her future lives. Fantasizing about her past lives allowed Fortune to experience time as a mode of consciousness. The esotericist “will see a future of many lives stretching out before him, and he will know that that future is under his control; therefore he does not feel that he must taste or forego any particular experience altogether before death shall overtake him.”<sup>188</sup> If aspects of her work remained incomplete in her present life, Fortune believed that she could return to finish them in her next incarnation, when the conditions are more favorable. It is the lack of any sense of hurry that makes Fortune’s work so unique. She believed that social change must take place slowly if it is to be successful. Fortune thought that one could not be a happy, functional individual without the fulfillment of the propagating function. However, she expresses through Le Fay her belief that, since there are plenty of children in Britain at the current time, it is not necessary for her to choose the path of the hearth fire; she may do such in another incarnation. Instead, she chose to direct her reproductive energies towards the greater good of society, both through her writing and in sublimation through sexual magic rituals with had the evolution of society as their aim.

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<sup>185</sup> Dion Fortune, *Avalon of the Heart*, London: The Aquarian Press, 1971, 65.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>187</sup> *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, 12.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

## 6. Epilogue: Everyday Esotericism

It is symptomatic of her focus on the social context of esotericism and the social responsibilities of the practitioner that throughout her work, from the practical moralizing of *The Problem of Purity* to the Qabalistic meditations of *Moon Magic*, Fortune remained unerringly conscious of every-day practicalities. Throughout all her complex and often confusing sexual metaphysics she never forgot that people are animals. The bull may have wings and a human head, but he remains a bull nonetheless. One phrase is repeated like a mantra across her work; take manhood up into godhead, and bring godhead down into man.<sup>189</sup> Although to modern eyes Fortune's insistence on purity and her desire to make of sex a spiritual thing may appear as a form of escapism from physical facts, she is ardent in her disapproval of ascetics. Man is an animal, and this does not only mean that he has sexual needs, but other physical needs such as food and warmth as well. In *The Winged Bull* Ursula notices that Murchison, in his ceremonial loin-cloth, must be cold, and shares her blanket; in *The Goat-Foot God* Hugh sees Mona shivering and buys her a coat. *The Goat-Foot God* is in fact filled with references to sausages, bacon and eggs cooked in Jelkes' ubiquitous frying-pan; while in *Moon Magic*, each passage of spiritual lyricism is followed by a break for tea and scones. Such moments give the reader much-needed respite from the emotional intensities Fortune has been evoking, and the complex doctrine she has been attempting to convey. By having her characters take a break, she reassures the reader that it is okay to be exhausted by these things; that even adepts are only human.

This attention to practicalities has an important social dimension. The only time in any Fortune's novels someone is underfed is when, the responsibility for cooking having been left to Jelkes at the beginning of *The Goat-Foot God*, neither the adept nor the upper class Hugh realize that the destitute Mona is starving. It takes her collapse and the arrival of another woman to tell them so. In Britain in this era the responsibilities for cooking, cleaning and related human practicalities fell to women; thus, Fortune's inclusion of these things in occult novels had particular significance for her female audience. One can hardly imagine MacGregor Mathers or Aleister

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<sup>189</sup> This formula can be found in *The Mystical Qabalah*, 285, *The Problem of Purity*, 73, and is repeated throughout *The Winged Bull*.

Crowley engaging in menial household chores in the midst of their Great Work, however Fortune was expected to care for her Society's spiritual welfare and the establishment of their work on the spiritual planes, the organization of the Society on the physical plane, the giving of lectures, and the day-to-day chores of the household, from which the male members of the Society were exempt. Knight notes that an appeal was made by Fortune in the May 1927 edition of the "Transactions of the Christian Mystic Lodge" for people to volunteer to make cakes and cut flowers for the lodge, as the group is busy and needs domestic help.<sup>190</sup> This same consideration for the everyday work of keeping a household running and people alive and fed fill the pages of Fortune's novels. Even Le Fay, who in so many ways is detached, empowered, and barely seems to exist on the physical plane, is expected by Rupert to make provide refreshments at the end of each magical session. Aware of the difficulties of juggling the physical and spiritual planes, Fortune illustrated to women who had worldly commitments that they could engage in occultism while fulfilling these; she made occultism accessible to women who would have to make their husband's supper after they had finished.

Fortune's esotericism can be characterized as the occult version of a weekend spa, as opposed to a 6-month desert retreat. This stands in stark contrast to the esotericism propounded by Aleister Crowley. It is not that Fortune believed the occult should not be taken seriously, but rather that one does not have to devote one's entire life to it. One may, of course, and this is the path of adept – but this is not an option for everyone, whether because of financial or familial considerations. Fortune's is thus an esotericism you can fit in on a Saturday afternoon, esotericism for 20<sup>th</sup> century London, one designed so that even those who could not afford to leave the world in pursuit of the spirit could bring the spiritual into their world. This was what Fortune meant when she complained that Westerners shouldn't flee to the East in search of spiritual enlightenment. What is needed in England is not more asceticism and withdrawal, but a way to bring god into the everyday. Fortune thought that egalitarianism and social responsibility were the key to successful occultism. Her development of this line of thought is Fortune's unique contribution to the occult world. The idiosyncratic idioms that follow her grand descriptions of ritual and fantasy in the novels – the breaks for tea and scones, the concern that one might be

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<sup>190</sup> *Dion Fortune & the Inner Light*, 142-143.

too cold in their ritual dress – are the practicalities which bring the esoteric back to earth, showing that Fortune is aware of the realities of day to day life, and that occultism can have its place there too. After all, as many of her characters express, you cannot do occultism on an empty stomach.

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## Appendix 1

### *A Brief Biography*

Due to the problems with the reliability of the four biographies written about Fortune, and because of the complete absence of any of her personal papers, the following biography is tentative and I make little claim for its accuracy. It has been pieced together from the differing accounts in each of the biographies, according to which facts and dates have the best supporting evidence, and which series of events seem most likely.

Dion Fortune was born Violet Mary Firth was born December 6, 1890 in Llandudno, Wales, where her father ran a hotel and hydrotherapy establishment owned by her grandfather. In 1906 the family relocated to London, where Fortune and her mother became involved with the Christian Science movement. In 1911 Firth entered Studley Agricultural College in Warwickshire, which specialized in educating girls who had mental or emotional problems. Upon graduating she was given a teaching position there, however in 1913 she left Studley after a serious mental breakdown. Fortune claimed that this was caused by the mesmeric ministrations of the college's warden, Dr. Lillias Hamilton. Described at length in *Psychic Self-Defence*, this episode is one of the only biographical stories Fortune ever offered to the public gaze, and she claims that it was the desire to understand her experience that set her on the path of occultism. Between 1914 and 1916 Fortune worked as a lay psychoanalyst at a clinic in London (which has yet to be convincingly identified). It was during this time that she first came into contact with the Theosophical Society.

After the onset of the First World War Fortune joined the Land Army in 1916. She was employed as a gardener before being transferred to a laboratory to study the potentials of the soya bean as a food source in 1917. She was engaged in this work until the end of the war, and it is during this time (which was one of great isolation) that Fortune seems to have had her first communication with the Inner Plane Masters. While Fortune rarely mentions her contact with the 'Masters' in her public work, and never elaborates on them, Knight claims that she was in almost constant contact with them from this point onwards. After the war Fortune became involved in the occult group led by Theodore Moriarty. In 1919 Fortune was initiated into the Alpha et Omega in London, one of two daughter lodges of the Golden Dawn Amen-Ra Temple

in Edinburgh. This lodge was under the direction of Moina Mathers, widow of Samuel Lidell MacGregor Mathers, one of the founders of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It was as a part of this initiation that Fortune first took the magical name 'Deus Non Fortuna'. Fortune published her first book, the psychological tome *Machinery of the Mind*, in 1922, the same year that her mediumistic communication with the Inner Plane Masters began in earnest. Frustrated with the lack of new membership in the Alpha et Omega Fortune formed the Fraternity of the Inner Light with the agreement of Mathers, to act as an 'outer court' to the Golden Dawn, intended to attract new members to the larger group. In 1924 Fortune published *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, the first book published under the name Dion Fortune. She was advised by her Inner Plane contacts to renew her association with the Theosophical Society, which eventually led to her becoming president of the society's Christian Mystic Lodge. In 1925 the Society acquired a London headquarters at 3 Queensborough place and Fortune began to publish articles in the *Occult Review*. Dr Penry Evans, among others, took up residence at the Fraternity's new headquarters. In 1926 Fortune published her first fictional work, a collection of short stories called *The Secrets of Doctor Taverner*, in which she fictionalized her former teacher Moriarty. In 1927 Fortune was expelled from the Alpha et Omega temple, ostensibly because Moina Mathers had failed to find certain symbols in Fortune's aura, although Fortune believed it was due to a continued anger about her revelations in *Love and Marriage*, and that the older woman felt threatened by the powerful young occultist. Fortune resigned from her position in the Theosophical Society and began to publish *The Inner Light Magazine*. She married Dr. Penry Evans in the summer of this year. In 1928 Fortune established her Society ritually with the inauguration of the Lesser Mysteries and published *The Problem of Purity* as Violet M Firth, the last book she would write under her real name.

Biographical data grows even sparser after this date. In the following years Fortune was engaged in organizing the Fraternity and the household in which they resided. She delivered public lectures every week and oversaw the teaching and initiation of new members. During this time she was also receiving instruction from her Inner Plane contacts, and working on creating rituals for the Society as well as developing her own magical practice. In the midst of this Fortune still found time to write and publish copiously, not only books and articles on a variety of occult topics but also a

series of novels, some on occult themes, others purely for commercial purposes. In 1938 Fortune's husband left her. During the Second World War Fortune staunchly remained at her house in London, despite the blitz going on around her, and concentrated the work of her Society towards psychically assisting the war effort, encouraging arranging for members across the county to perform daily meditations on a chosen selfless topic. In 1945 a divorce was granted to Evans, so that he would be able to remarry, and Fortune visited Aleister Crowley at Netherwood. At the Autumn Equinox Fortune performed her final entranced address. At the end of 1945 Fortune asked a visiting friend, 'Uncle Robbie', a retired dental surgeon, to look at an infected tooth. He diagnosed her with Leukemia and she died two weeks later, on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1946. She was buried at Glastonbury.

## Appendix 2

The following is, to the best of my knowledge, a complete bibliography of the books published by Dion Fortune, or under her name, with their original date and publisher. It also includes the recent collections of Fortune's work published by Gareth Knight.

<i>Machinery of the Mind</i> (as Violet M Firth)	Unwin	1922
<i>Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage</i>	Rider	1923
<i>Psychology of the Servant Problem</i> (as Violet M Firth)	Daniel	1925
<i>The Soya Bean</i> (as Violet M Firth)	Daniel	1925
<i>The Secrets of Doctor Taverner</i>	Douglas	1926
<i>The Demon Lover</i>	Douglas	1927
<i>Esoteric Orders and Their Work</i>	Rider	1928
<i>The Problem of Purity</i> (as Violet M Firth)	Rider	1928
<i>Sane Occultism</i>	Rider	1929
<i>Training and Work of an Initiate</i>	Rider	1930
<i>Mystical Mediations on the Collects</i>	Rider	1930
<i>Spiritualism in the Light of Occult Science</i>	Rider	1931
<i>Psychic Self-Defence</i>	Rider	1931
<i>Through the Gates of Death</i>	Inner Light <sup>191</sup>	1932
<i>Avalon of the Heart</i> (as Violet M Firth)	Muller	1934
<i>The Winged Bull</i>	William & Norgate	1935
<i>The Mystical Qabalah</i>	William & Norgate	1935
<i>Practical Occultism</i>	William & Norgate	1935
<i>The Scarred Wrists</i> (as VM Steele)	Stanley Paul	1935
<i>The Goat-Foot God</i>	William & Norgate	1936
<i>Hunters of Humans</i> (as VM Steele)	Stanley Paul	1936
<i>Beloved of Ishmael</i> (as VM Steele)	Stanley Paul	1937
<i>The Sea Priestess</i>	Inner Light	1938

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<sup>191</sup> The Inner Light was the press run by Fortune's own Society. She seems to have resorted to using this only when she could not find a publisher for her work.

<i>The Cosmic Doctrine</i>	Inner Light	1949 <sup>192</sup>
<i>Moon Magic</i>	The Aquarian Press	1956
<i>Applied Magic</i>	The Aquarian Press	1962
<i>Aspects of Occultism</i>	The Aquarian Press	1962
<i>Dion Fortune's Magical Battle of Britain</i> (Ed. Gareth Knight)	Thoth	1993
<i>An Introduction to Ritual Magic</i> (Ed. Gareth Knight)	Thoth	1997
<i>The Circuit of Force</i> (Ed. Gareth Knight)	Thoth	1998
<i>Principles of Hermetic Philosophy and The Esoteric Philosophy of Astrology</i> (Ed. Gareth Knight)	Thoth	1999
<i>Spiritualism and Occultism</i> (Ed. Gareth Knight)	Thoth	2000
<i>Practical Occultism</i> (Ed. Gareth Knight)	Thoth	2002
<i>Dion Fortune's Rites of Isis and of Pan</i> (Ed. Gareth Knight)	Thoth	2013

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<sup>192</sup> Fortune died in 1946; the following books were published by her Society posthumously.

### Appendix 3

Diagram of "the Tree of Life and the Thirty-Two Paths," taken from Dion Fortune's *The Mystical Qabalah*, (London: Williams & Norgate, 1935).

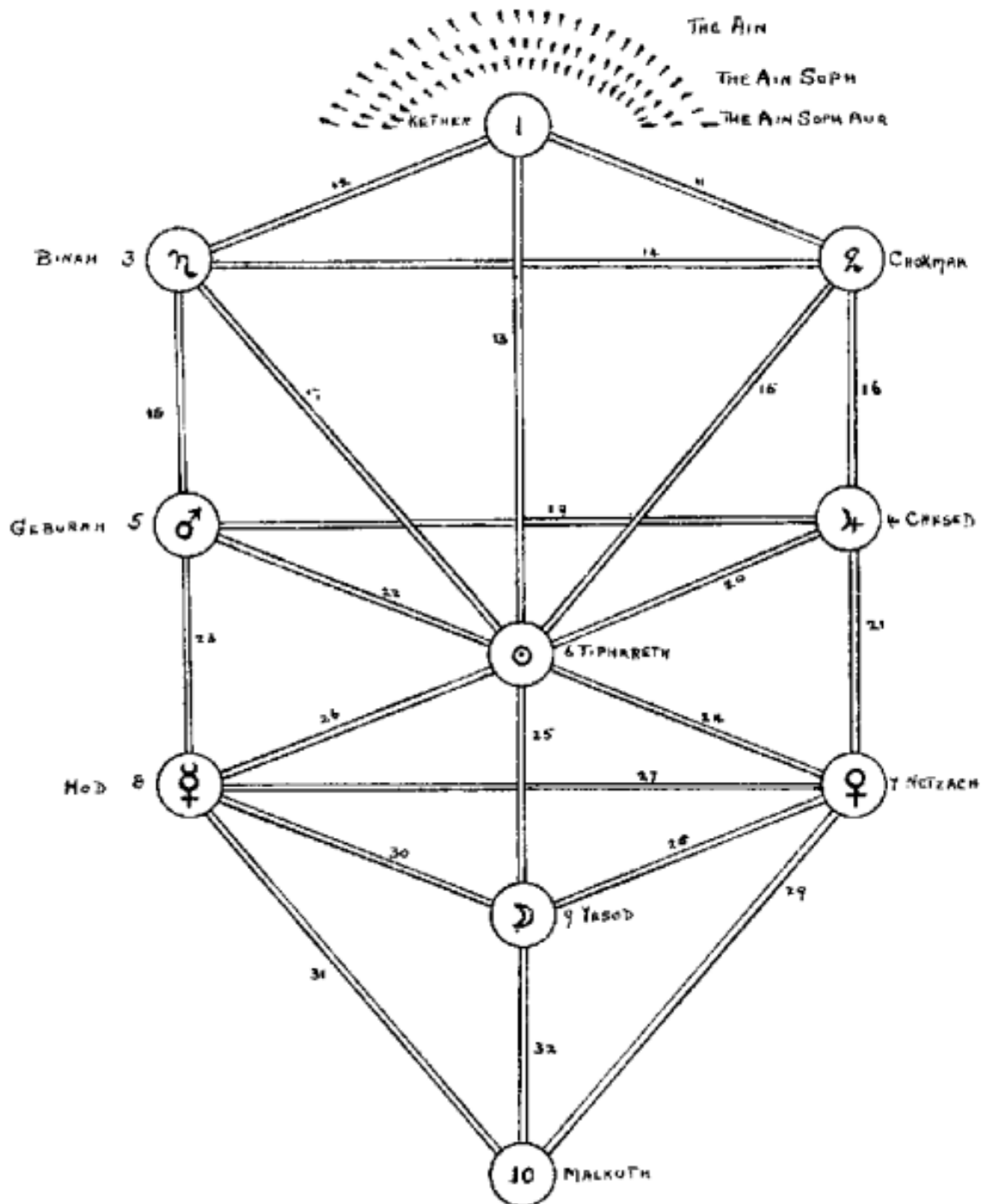


DIAGRAM III

THE TREE OF LIFE AND THE THIRTY-TWO PATHS