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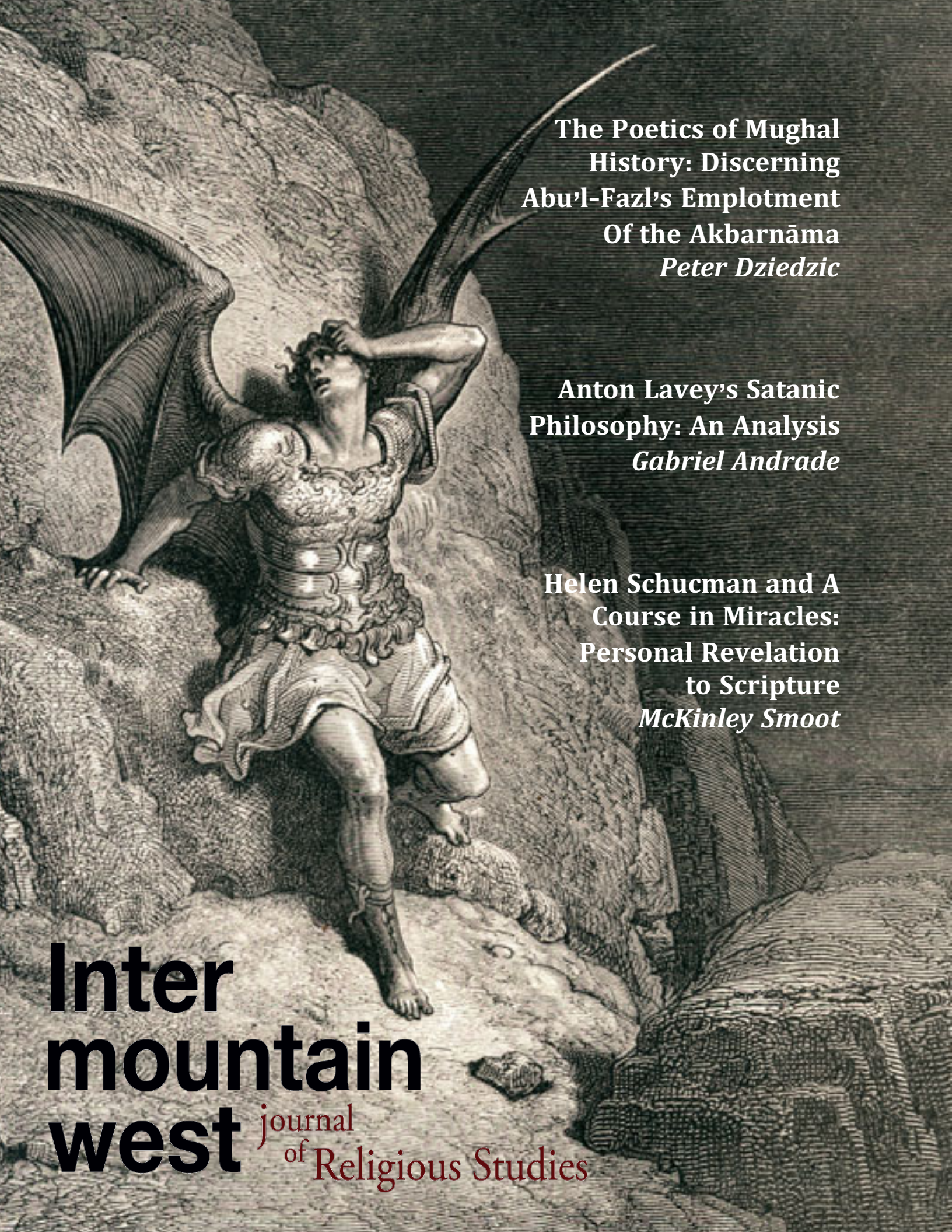
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**The Poetics of Mughal  
History: Discerning  
Abu'l-Fazl's Emplotment  
Of the Akbarnāma**  
*Peter Dziedzic*

**Anton Lavey's Satanic  
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Course in Miracles:  
Personal Revelation  
to Scripture**  
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**Inter  
mountain  
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of Religious Studies



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*Depiction of Satan*

Gustave Dore

Engraving, c1866





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*Peter Dziedzic*

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THE POETICS OF MUGHAL HISTORY:  
DISCERNING ABU'L-FAẒL'S EMPLOTMENT OF  
THE *AKBARNĀMA*

INTRODUCTION

The Mughal period has been appraised by scholars as one of the most prolific and creative eras of Persianate<sup>1</sup> literary and historiographical production.<sup>2</sup> Among the many works produced from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, Abu'l-FaẒl's *Akbarnāma* [The Book of Akbar] stands as an exemplary product of this epoch. As the

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "Persianate" rather than "Indo-Muslim" or "Indo-Persian" to emphasize an expansive discourse that included not only literature written in Persian and produced within the geographical boundaries of Persia, but also languages and cultures which were heavily influenced by Persian, such as Turkish and Urdu. Similarly, the restriction of Persian writing in South Asia as "Indo-Persian" limits the scope of its place in and contribution to a wider network of intellectual exchange. This expansive network is what Shahab Ahmad has referred to as the "Balkans-to-Bengal" complex. See *What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* by Shahab Ahmed (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Asim Roy, "Indo-Persian Historical Thoughts and Writings: India 1350-1750," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, ed. Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 158.

court-sponsored “biography”<sup>3</sup> and encyclopedic chronicle of the reign of the third Mughal emperor Jalal al-Dīn Akbar, its literary style was cherished and studied by Mughals and other scholars for generations. While the *Akbarnāma* is readily acknowledged as an Indo-Persian chronicle, little critical attention has been paid to the details or contours of Abu’l-Fazl’s historical project in the text. Empirical data – dates, places, events – is couched within Abu’l-Fazl’s elaborate, eulogistic prose, indicative of its location as a court-sponsored text which attempted to portray Akbar as the confluence of full political and spiritual authority on earth. What are the implications of this? How can we evaluate the historical material of the *Akbarnāma*, given its rich literary style? This calls for new, and creative, historical analyses of not only the text, but Abu’l-Fazl’s project of historical writing.

I propose a re-reading of the *Akbarnāma* with the framework developed by the contemporary historian, Hayden White. White’s project<sup>4</sup> emphasizes the narrative and literary nature of historical reflection and writing. This narrative analysis may be the most appropriate approach for re-considering the historiographical value of the *Akbarnāma*, as it echoes key intuitions of Persianate traditions of historical writing. Analyzing the *Akbarnāma* within a framework of narrative analysis allows us to consider the *Akbarnāma* as it was originally intended – not as a catalogue of empirical data, but a conscious blend of historical documentation and literary production that primarily valued the aesthetic quality of its consumption as text alongside a Mughal ideological project of Akbar’s apotheosis. This analysis will reveal new textures of the *Akbarnāma* as historical

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<sup>3</sup> The nature of the *Akbarnāma* as a biography in its conventional, contemporary sense will be problematized later in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> For readability, I name White’s project as “narrative analysis” throughout the rest of the paper. This does not exhaust White’s intellectual production. While it is reductive to limit White’s historical evaluations to mere “narrative analysis” this will necessarily restrict the scope and concern of White’s project for this particular paper.

writing and may serve as a model for other considerations of Islamic, Persianate, and South Asian historical writing.

### **SITUATING *THE AKBARNĀMA*: ABU'L-FAẒL AND THE GLORIOUS REIGN OF EMPEROR AKBAR<sup>5</sup>**

The *Akbarnāma*, at the time of its commission by Akbar (d. 1605)<sup>6</sup> in 1588, was already situated within the context of a long and rich Indo-Persian historical tradition. This literature was heavily indebted to the forms and concerns of earlier Persianate and Arabo-Islamic historiographical traditions,<sup>7</sup> having evolved from the time of the Delhi Sultanates.<sup>8</sup> The basic forms of medieval Indo-Persian historical writing - which expressed itself in the forms of genres of biography, chronicle, annals, and dynastic histories - was a direct inheritance of the classical forms of Islamic historiography.

The *Akbarnāma*, composed by Akbar's court historian Abu'l-Faẓl al-'Alimi (d. 1602)<sup>9</sup> is divided into three books. The first book presents Akbar's horoscope and lineage from Adam through Tamerlane on his father's side and Gengis Khan on his grandfather Babur's side to Akbar himself. It continues as a year-by-year chronicle of Akbar's reign from his accession in 1556 to 1572. The second book

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<sup>5</sup> As I have stated previously, much of this biographical, "factual" information is based on uncritical analyses of original sources or chronicles. This is not unproblematic, and is very much at the heart of the "crisis of historical scholarship" in South Asia. I move forward acknowledging the difficulty in accepting some of this information at face value, and I welcome further attempts to sift through this information with new historical methods. I use this information not to provide definitive details, but to offer the reader a sense of accepted conventions and ideas about Persianate historiography, Abu'l-Faẓl, and the *Akbarnāma*.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of readability, I will not include dates of the Islamic *hijri* calendar. All dates, while offered in the *Akbarnāma* as the Islamic calendar, will be presented in Gregorian equivalents.

<sup>7</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 66.

<sup>8</sup> Roy, "Indo-Persian Historical Thoughts and Writings: India 1350-1750," 148.

<sup>9</sup> Abu'l-Faẓl Allami, *The History of Akbar*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston. (Cambridge, MA; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2017.), vii.



continues this annual chronicle from 1572 to 1602. The third book, the *‘Ain-i Akbari*, is an ambitious and extensive survey of Akbar’s India, which is now treated as a work separate from the *Akbarnāma*.<sup>10</sup> As most administrative records were lost and destroyed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *Akbarnāma* and the *‘Ain-i Akbari* are often regarded as primary sources of historical information. It serves as essential source material for Mughal and early modern India, and it contains a wealth of information on the political and military affairs of the empire. There were several implicit goals in writing the *Akbarnāma*. First, it was to thoroughly present and detail Akbar’s reign, both diachronically and synchronically. The second aim was to present Akbar as the pinnacle of the Mughal Empire’s peace, stability, and splendor. The third aim was to define Mughal imperial ideology.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars consider Akbar’s keen interest in sponsoring biographical and historical writing as part of his larger political and social projects. He promoted new, pluralist historical narratives, which reflected a new concept of history developed by Abu’l-Faḡl. Moving away from earlier Indo-Persian chronicles, the *Akbarnāma* stresses the imperial interest of a multi-communal state.<sup>12</sup> Akbar aimed to shift the narrative of Muslims in India from one of perennial conflict with Hindus to to one of state-endorsed social harmony (*sulh-i kul*), stability, and good governance. This impetus was also informed by Akbar’s founding of the *Dīn-i Ilāhī*, a new, and short-lived, religious movement which was the result of Akbar’s interest in various religions. His court-sponsored projects are part of an effort to legitimize these eclectic interests despite a disagreeable, yet still-influential, class of religious scholars, the *‘ulema*.<sup>13</sup> These shifts were

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., vii-x.

<sup>11</sup> Dale, “Indo-Persian Historiography,” 590.

<sup>12</sup> Allami, *The History of Akbar*, vii.

<sup>13</sup> Roy, “Indo-Persian Historical Thoughts and Writings: India 1350-1750,” 160.

enhanced by Abu'l-Fazl's own innovations to writing and historical method.

Abu'l-Fazl al-'Alimi was the court historian, secretary, and close confidant of Akbar. He entered the Mughal court in 1574 thanks to the support of his elder brother, Akbar's poet-laureate Abu'l Faiz.<sup>14</sup> He is considered as a leading influence on Akbar's liberal religious and social programs. Abu'l-Fazl, who worked on the *Akbarnāma* for the majority of his courtly career, was murdered in 1602 and was never able to finish the text. The *Akbarnāma* was eventually completed by another author<sup>15</sup>, and painstaking care was taken to mirror Abu'l-Fazl's style and imitate a unity throughout the text, reflecting the great prestige which Abu'l-Fazl's writing had earned during his career.<sup>16</sup> Abu'l-Fazl, with the support and patronage of the emperor, is credited with introducing the concept of "official history" to Indo-Persian historical literature, which reflects a pivot in methodology. It has been portrayed as concerned with discerning rational causes of historical events. This new concept of history moved away from a strict focus on the court to inclusion of material beyond the political realm, including social, economic, and religio-cultural concerns.<sup>17</sup> This project was facilitated by a necessary methodological shift, which included extensive and careful consultation of a vast amount of archival material.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Allami, *The History of Akbar*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> While this is true, it does not impact this analysis, as all textual selections are extracted from the first volume of the *Akbarnāma*, which was entirely composed by Abu'l-Fazl.

<sup>16</sup> This act of authorial imitation as an act of obscuring traces of authorial difference is worth mention, as it may offer essential insights into Mughal notions of authorship and textual ownership, which may be a key difference separating Indo-Persian and modern (European) historical consciousness. Such a study is beyond the present scope of this paper.

<sup>17</sup> Roy, "Indo-Persian Historical Thoughts and Writings: India 1350-1750," 159-161.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

While he has been praised for his innovative methodology and consultation of a wide variety of sources, one must still grapple with this work as a royally-commissioned project. There is an implicit project, in the *Akbarnāma*, to portray Akbar as a divinely-sanctioned ruler, the source and culmination of both political and spiritual authority on earth. For this, Abu'l-Fazl draws heavily from the vocabulary of both popular and philosophical Sufism, taken both from Persian poetry and from theoretical works of Islamic mysticism and philosophy.<sup>19</sup> There is an apotheosization of Akbar in the text, and this is explicit in Abu'l-Fazl's linguistic and symbolic choices. This might strike contemporary academic historians as problematic and paradoxical. Does not Abu'l-Fazl's eulogistic writing obscure the facts of an official court-sanctioned history behind a veil of language and narration? Is not his then innovative historical methodology, in which he consulted a variety of sources, thus compromised? Rather, contrary to this assumption, Abu'l-Fazl's goal in historical writing is not the composition of an objective, disengaged chronicle, but a conscious, affective narration. Hayden White offers fitting theoretical support for considering Abu'l-Fazl's writing in this context.

## SITUATING HAYDEN WHITE: THE "FICTION" OF HISTORY

The late Hayden White (d. 2018) was an American historian<sup>20</sup> and literary theorist whose historical scholarship is situated within the context of postmodern intellectual developments in the wider academy. White has been considered the forerunner of the "linguistic turn" in the field of history since the publication of his seminal work,

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<sup>19</sup> Abu'l-Fazl was well-versed in works of Arabic, Greek, and philosophy alongside extensive formation with Sufi masters.

<sup>20</sup> Some of his academic peers consider White as a historian, others as a literary theorist, and others as a historian of literary theory. For the purposes of this paper, White will be named as a historian whose historical analysis is heavily informed by literary theory.

*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*.<sup>21</sup> As a forerunner of both literary analysis of historical texts and narrativist philosophy of history, his work challenged comfortable and oft sacrosanct lines of demarcation in the academy between “history-making” or “history proper,” philosophy of history, and literary studies.<sup>22</sup> With this understanding, and with an eye towards re-reading the *Akbarnāma*, it is important to consider two of White’s most important concerns – history as narrative and tropics of discourse.

### History as Narrative

White’s concern for the subjective nature of history led him beyond the realm of considering only historical, material objects such as maps and coins. He was also interested in the process of historical writing itself. Historical work, most manifestly, is a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse.<sup>23</sup> Intelligible accounts of historical “facts” are organized around a recognizable plot structure, with familiar narrative elements.<sup>24</sup> For White, all historical writing is a form of fiction-making. There is a value to narrativity, inherent in the moral project of history itself. It satisfies the desire to, “have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary.”<sup>25</sup>

With these proposals, White challenged conventional distinctions between philosophy of history (metahistory) and history “proper.” His analysis of the narrative nature of historical reflection upsets the separation between speculative philosophy of history, which often includes teleological assumptions such as those found in the works of Augustine, Hegel, or Marx, and analytical history, which

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<sup>21</sup> Doran, *Philosophy of History After Hayden White*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 2011), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), ix.

<sup>24</sup> Maza, *Thinking About History*, 214.

<sup>25</sup> White, *Content of the Form*, 24.



denies grandiose historical syntheses. For White, this speculative historical reflection makes explicit what the latter chooses to leave implicit, an artificial separation which only obscures the historical project.<sup>26</sup> Metaphysical neutrality in historical analysis is impossible.<sup>27</sup> In this context White is critical of historians who assume a privileged access with the goal of, “providing a precise and accurate reconstruction of the events reported in the documents.”<sup>28</sup> White challenges the historical *doxa* developed since the work of Leopold von Ranke, where historians had been taught to avoid all speculation and to stick to the “facts” derived from primary source material. Recognition of what history owes to fiction will allow historians to be more lucid and honest about their own practice. It is in adopting these familiar narrative structures and forms of language that historian accomplishes their goal of, “rendering the strange familiar and, of rendering the mysterious past comprehensible.”<sup>29</sup> There is always a moral impulse to the historical project.

*Tropics of Discourse, the “Poetic” Act of History*

The assumption of a narrative nature of history naturally sets the stage for White’s second major contribution, an analysis of the modes of argumentation and tropes of historical writing. This system stems from White’s analysis of nineteenth-century historical writing by figures such as Ranke, Tocqueville, Hegel, and Marx. The dominant tropological mode comprises the “metahistorical” basis of every historical work.<sup>30</sup> For White, discourse is “tropic” by nature, it is the process, “...by which all discourse constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively.”<sup>31</sup> White posits modes of emplotment, modes of argument, and modes of

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<sup>26</sup> White, *Metahistory*, xi.

<sup>27</sup> Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*, 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 52.

<sup>29</sup> White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> White, *Metahistory*, xi.

<sup>31</sup> White, *Tropics of Discourse* 2.

ideology as three levels of explanatory effect in a historian’s work, and tropes as the bases for deep structural forms of the historical imagination.<sup>32</sup> For clarity, I reproduce the chart<sup>33</sup> here:

<b>Trope</b>	<b>Emplotment</b>	<b>Argument</b>	<b>Ideology</b>
<i>Metaphor</i>	<i>Romantic</i>	<i>Formalist</i>	<i>Anarchist</i>
<i>Metonymy</i>	<i>Tragic</i>	<i>Mechanistic</i>	<i>Radical</i>
<i>Synecdoche</i>	<i>Comic</i>	<i>Organicist</i>	<i>Conservative</i>
<i>Irony</i>	<i>Satirical</i>	<i>Contextualist</i>	<i>Liberal</i>

The emplotments,<sup>34</sup> which specify the *type* of story conveyed, are taken from Northrop Frye. They include the satirical, the romantic, the comic, and the tragic. The satirical emphasizes “non-narrativity,” meaninglessness, and non-resolution of human affairs. The romantic emphasizes ultimate triumph of good over evil. The comedic emphasizes social integration and the harmonizable and productive elements of conflict. The tragic resigns to the labor and toil of natural and social conditions.<sup>35</sup>

The formal arguments, which explains the structure and progression of events in a narrative, are taken from Stephen Pepper. They include the formalist, the organicist, the mechanistic, and the contextualist. The formalist emphasizes the individuality and autonomy of historical entities. The organicist emphasizes the integrative nature of historical entities within a larger whole. The mechanistic emphasizes the laws of cause and effect in historical development. The contextualist explains historical entities or “threads” against a particular event or frame of reference.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> The original graph is present in White’s *Metahistory*, p. 29, the graph extended to include tropes is found in Paul’s *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination*, p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> I will not explain each trope in detail. An analysis of these can be found in White’s introduction in *Metahistory*.

<sup>35</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 7-11.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-19.

The ideological implications, which reflect ethical values and moral suppositions, are drawn from Karl Mannheim. They include the anarchist, conservative, radical, and liberal. The anarchist emphasizes the corruption of the system in question and need for communal reformation. The conservative emphasizes the natural rhythms of historical development. The radical presents a utopian vision at hand and a call for revolution. The liberal mode presents revolution in governance as key to the history of social progress.<sup>37</sup>

The four tropes are White's contribution to the graphic system; they are the fundamental ground structuring discourse and gives rise to the other three discursive levels.<sup>38</sup> The tropes of discourse are drawn from the four principle tropes of poetic language, the standard of the Western tradition as portrayed by Giambattista Vico. These tropes allow for the portrayal of objects in different kinds of figurative discourse. The four fundamental poetic tropes are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Metaphor is implied comparison, metonymy is a substitution of a part for the whole, synecdoche is used as a part for the whole, and irony emphasizes the manifestly absurd expression where literal meanings do not make figurative sense.

White argues that these tropics of discourse, "cannot be indiscriminately combined in a given work."<sup>39</sup> There are elective affinities based on structural homologies among the various modes of discourse.<sup>40</sup> The inclusion of tropes of discourse highlights a fundamental conviction of White – the poetic nature of historical writing. This is not a radically new proposal; rather, it is one White traces back to the origins of Western philosophy in Aristotle. Aristotle suggested the complementarity of history and poetry, connecting

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 22-26.

<sup>38</sup> LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 77.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>40</sup> These elective affinities are determined by a horizontal reading across the columns in the given chart. For example, a *romantic* argument often accompanies a *formist* mode of argument, an *anarchist* ideology, and employment of *metaphor* as trope.

them both to philosophy, “in the human effort to represent, imagine, and think the world in its totality, both actual and possible, both real and imagined...”<sup>41</sup> White traces the continuity of this thought into strands of nineteenth-century historical reflection, where Hegel, Droysen, Nietzsche, and Croce advocated for interpretation at the heart of historical reflection in the fact of Ranke’s myth of scholarly objectivity.<sup>42</sup> It’s also present inherently in the work of Vico, who saw not an opposition between the poetic (mythic) consciousness and the prosaic (scientific) consciousness, but a continuity.<sup>43</sup>

Before a given domain can be interpreted, it must be constructed as a ground inhabited by familiar figures. This is both the poetic and the linguistic pre-configuration of historical analysis. The historical process as prefiguring the narrative within a set of reported, documented events is the poetic act of history. The poetry of history occurs when the list of events of the chronicle becomes a story, the historical-poetic imagination has given breath of life to the events “found” in the historical record.

I do not propose to conduct a full critical analysis of White’s scholarship in this space. His thought remains controversial, and other scholars have listed their reservations elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> While I will explore the limitations of his framework later in the paper, I aim only to offer a brief presentation of White’s theoretical framework and main concerns, which will inform an analysis of Abu’l-Fazl’s historical approach and the *Akbarnāma* as historical writing. The following analysis will be limited to a narrative and tropological analysis of the *Akbarnāma* as a document of Mughal historical writing and reflection. In the spirit of thinking *with* White, and his “deeply felt questions” about history, I do not merely attempt to squeeze the *Akbarnāma* into

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<sup>41</sup> White, “Introduction,” 147.

<sup>42</sup> White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 31-33.

<sup>44</sup>See, for example, *Textures of Time* by Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam.



White's framework, but to think with White in considering the tropics of discourse in the *Akbarnāma*.

### ABU'L-FAẒL'S EMPLOTMENT OF THE AKBARNĀMA

What was Abu'l-Faẓl's emplotment of the *Akbarnāma*? Rather than pursuing an analysis of the tropes of the *Akbarnāma* in its entirety, I propose a close reading of the first half of the text, which details Akbar's birth, including an astrological and genealogical analysis of Akbar's auspicious reign, up through his ascension to the Mughal throne. Focusing on a particular section may reveal textual layers of discourse and tropes that would otherwise be missed in a broad analysis of the lengthy text. The rich texture of this prose deserves close readings.<sup>45</sup> This is also a necessary approach, as the text was never finished by Abu'l-Faẓl himself and it blends naturally into the *'Ain-i Akbari*, which is now treated as a separate work.<sup>46</sup> I will consider *how* these events are narrated by Abu'l-Faẓl, and what the textures of their narration may reveal about Mughal historical consciousness.

If we were to isolate the "bare events" of the chronicle in the first half of the *Akbarnāma*, it would be a recollection of the following events: visions of Akbar's birth and reign; Maryam Makani's<sup>47</sup> pregnancy; Akbar's birth; the casting of horoscopes which testify to his auspicious birth and future reign; a presentation of his genealogy and biographies of his ancestors up to the Prophet Adam and Alanqoa, the ancestress of Akbar through Gengis Khan; accounts of the victories, successes, and activities of his immediate ancestors; miracles performed by Akbar in his early life; and, his ascension and enthronement. However, there is much more to the text than a simple

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<sup>45</sup> Space is insufficient for a close reading of the full text in this paper, though the entire text deserves a close, meditative reading rooted in narrative analysis.

<sup>46</sup> These are essential restrictions, as this is an analysis of Abu'l-Faẓl's particular emplotment.

<sup>47</sup> This was Akbar's mother.

narration of these events. To begin, Abu'l-Fazl opens with pages of dedication that eludes any historical value as "event." Abu'l-Fazl, following precedent from Persianate literary and Islamic textual traditions, opens with praise and thanks to God, and to Akbar, for the opportunity to write this chronicle. This opening is Abu'l-Fazl's opportunity to demonstrate, from the very inception of the text, his linguistic skill and mastery.<sup>48</sup> He begins with divine praise and admission of human limitation in offering praise:

God is supreme. What a profound realization this is! Its profundity has not been fathomed by those who delve into the depths of reality and reach the minutest points. Those of enlightened minds with eyesight sharp enough to see the rulings of creation and those who wield the compass on the tablet of knowledge have found nothing but the moving breeze and billowing waves that is speech to express the elemental synthesis, the material body, and the exalted essence that cannot fit into the frame of evaluation and is beyond all measure.<sup>49</sup>

The prose then shifts into poetic verse to further elaborate the limitations of human ability:

*What speech is this which has become apparent? It has  
thrown off the veil from the eighteen thousand.  
There is nothing so drunk as it is in this banquet; there is no  
one to challenge its supremacy.  
It solves all problems in this workshop; it sits in the place of  
prominence in this court.  
The heart says with the tongue and speaks into the ear  
everything that comes into the minds of people of awareness.  
From heart to heart it has a path: the power of speech and the  
power of hearing is its arena.  
In the observatory of the mind the moon of speech rises and*

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<sup>48</sup> While I present the text in Wheeler Thackston's English translation for the general reader, this analysis is primarily based on a reading of the original Persian. Any striking disparities between Thackston's translations and the Persian will be addressed.

<sup>49</sup> Allami, *The History of Akbar*, 3.

*sets through the tongue and the ear.*<sup>50</sup>

It seems that, for Abu'l-Fazl, prose is an insufficient literary vehicle to carry particular thoughts at key moments in the text. A shift to poetic quatrains is necessary to convey particularly lofty thoughts. This interjection of poetry into prose is common in Persianate literature, but its presence at key textual moments highlights central events or affective reflections in Abu'l-Fazl's narration.

Abu'l-Fazl then narrates the process of accepting the task of the *Akbarnāma*. After wallowing in his imperfect ability to fully praise both God and Akbar, a divine suggestion encourages his writing:

A message of awareness reached my ear, saying, "O designer in the studio of intrinsic meaning (*naqṣṭarāz-i naḡāristān-i m'anī*)...You will write the history of the ruler of the earth, the jewel of the crown of monarchs...It is obvious that in the elemental world there is nothing more magnificent or noble than the precious existence of monarchs, on whose high-mindedness the external order of the world depends. It is certain that to entrust the world to one person and to place the affairs of the world in the hands of one individual is to put the world of meaning in him...particularly a monarch who can detect whiffs of breezes of spiritual spring and grace the throne of success, especially a lord of the age whose heart and mind are watered from an inner spring...who has become a painter in the study of meaning, a host of the banquet of reality...Rule of the material and spiritual and absolute authority over the external and internal are given to him...With the abundant goods of true praise that you possess [O Abu'l-Fazl], why are you standing perplexed in your search?" When I heard these encouraging words, the dawn of fortune broke, the foundation of eternal felicity was laid, the eye of hope became bright...and the countenance of the desired object came into view.<sup>51</sup>

This opening is steeped in language and images from philosophical Sufism and Persian literary symbols. Abu'l-Fazl interestingly identifies himself as, "a designer in the studio of intrinsic

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 13-15.

meaning" (*naqṣṭarāz-i nagāristān-i mʿanī*). Abu'l-Fazl is not merely identifying himself as a chronicler (*muwarriḥ, tariḥī*); he has appropriated for himself key Sufi terminology to describe his task, which is closer to the role of a perceptive seer than a court chronicler. He is honest that his task is not merely recording, but extends to a level of perception necessary for discerning the meaningful flow of events. This sets the foundation for Abu'l-Fazl's conscious *narration* of the events of the *Akbarnāma*.

Following this, Abu'l-Fazl introduces Akbar, the unification of spiritual and temporal power, with pages of flourish:

So long as the leadership of the people of isolation (which is called sainthood) and leadership of the world of reality (which is called sovereignty) were separate in the world, inner struggle was rife among human beings. Today, however, by virtue of high-mindedness...these two lofty ranks, which are the foundations of material and spiritual order, have been bestowed upon this opener of the storehouses of wisdom...Do you know by virtue of whose luminous self this worldwide splendor exists?...It is though the fortune and right of the world emperor of our age, king of kings surrounded by hosts of the renowned, manifestation of divine might, source of infinite generosity, unique at the court of eternity...<sup>52</sup> his regal ascendant is a preface to the felicity of the stars and the planets.

*That<sup>53</sup> king of kings on a level with the sky – the parasol of  
Whose fortune scrapes the heavens –*

...

*Heavenly in appearance, he is an earth of stability; possessor of universal  
intelligence, Jalaluddin.*

*Light of the sun of essence and shadow of God, jewel of the  
Crown and throne, Akbar Shah.*

*Be this ancient world new through him; may his star shed  
rays of light like the sun.<sup>54</sup>*

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<sup>52</sup> This elision represents no less than three full pages of panegyric to Akbar.

<sup>53</sup> The text here shifts from prose to quatrains of poetry to finish the eulogy of Akbar.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 19-27.

Abu'l-Fazl shifts to poetic stanzas to finish his pages of praise to Akbar, highlighting the great value of this event by couching it in the most cherished form in Persian literary culture - a perfectly crafted *qasida*.<sup>55</sup>

This praise spans over twentyfive pages<sup>56</sup> even before the first “event” of the *Akbarnāma* is narrated – Humayun’s vision and portent of Akbar’s birth. Looking at the value of the opening of the *Akbarnāma*, we can evaluate the elaborate nature of the prose, broken up by poetry at key – almost ecstatic – moments. Abu'l-Fazl turns to poetry when his inability to praise God runs short, and he seals Akbar’s apotheosization with a page of poetry, as if prose were insufficient to bear the name of Akbar.<sup>57</sup> The opening alone reveals the poetic nature of the text, the conscious value of its literary craft, and Abu'l-Fazl’s self-assumed role not as “historian” but as “designer of intrinsic meaning,” which mirror’s White’s concept of the narrator who strings together the “events” of the chronicle. In this opening, what a “professional” historian may gloss as mere filler and flourish before the historical events is key to understanding Abu'l-Fazl’s project. I propose to consider the opening sections, which detail the visions and event of Akbar’s birth, with particular attention to the literary nature of this historical account.

### Portents, Visions, and Birth

Abu'l-Fazl, relying on both oral narrations and sections from previous chronicles, offers accounts of portents and visions experienced by Akbar’s ancestors and parents, predicting his miraculous birth and noble reign. He offers accounts of the visions of

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<sup>55</sup> A genre of poetry intended for public, often courtly, narration.

<sup>56</sup> I am referring only to the text as it appears in the bilingual Murty Classical Library edition.

<sup>57</sup> After this key moment of poetic utterance, Akbar is simply as “His Majesty” (*haḍrat-i shāhanshāhī*). This restriction of the mention of Jalal al-Dīn Akbar’s name to this singular instance of poetry reveals aspects of the affective nature intended by breaking the prose with stanzas of poetry.

Emperor Humayun, Khan Ataka, Maryam Makani, and Bicha Jan Anaka, among others.<sup>58</sup> Humayun's vision is offered in detail:

On the fourth of Rabi' I in the year 947 [July 9, 1540]...Humayun placed his head upon a pillow to rest...Suddenly he saw on the stage of a dream, which is the private quarters of the unseen realm, that God would grant him a renowned offspring, from whose felicitous forehead would shine rays of magnificence, by whose guidance dark minds would be enlightened, and by the splendor of whose justice the pages of night and day would be brightened...When the emperor awoke, he prostrated himself in thanks and gratitude for this greatest of all good news and then told it to the confidants of his royal harem and loyal attendants.

*This dream, which tore the veil from the eye of the soul, cannot  
Be called a dream – it was wakefulness of the heart.*<sup>59</sup>

Can this event, which offers a precise date and is drawn from another “historical” source, be accepted as empirical data? A professional historian would perhaps disregard these as mere imaginary fancy, as the corruption of Abu'l-Fazl's fictive embellishment. Reading with a narrative analysis, however, we see that Abu'l-Fazl's very careful and embellished narration of this event adds immediate credibility to Akbar's divinely appointed reign. Abu'l-Fazl breaks once more into poetic quatrain to emphasize the reality and gravity of Humayun's vision, which is only understood with spiritual perception. Abu'l-Fazl weaves this event into his poetic narration of the Mughal lineage, it tells the “story” of the “events” in a way to make sense of Akbar's glorious reign within a larger context of perpetual Mughal sovereignty and divine guidance.

Later in the text, on the cusp of Akbar's birth, there is concern that his birth may not coincide with the auspicious time:

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<sup>58</sup> This list includes a strategic variety of Akbar's ancestors and others, include his wet nurse and strangers.

<sup>59</sup> Allami, *The History of Akbar*, 47.

The blessed event occurred when the elevation of the Syrian Dog Star was calculated at 36 degrees, after the elapse of eight hours and twenty minutes from the beginning of the eve of the eight of Aban 464 of the Jalali era, conforming to the eve of Sunday, the fifth of Rajab 949 of the lunar era, which was the sixth of Karttik 1599 of the Indian calendar, and the sixteenth of October 1854 in the Hellenic calendar...One of the strange events that took place near the time of the appearance of the luminary of fortune is that nature had determined the birth prior to the auspicious hour. The astrologer Maulana Chand, who has been commanded by the emperor to be at the threshold of chastity to determine the ascendant, said excitedly, "At present the hour is inauspicious. After several hours an auspicious hour will come, the likes of which does not come for thousands of years. Could the birth not be delayed?" ...at that time a local midwife hideous in appearance was brought to serve. Revolted by the sight of her, H.H. Maryam Makani's balanced temperament was affronted, and therefore the urgency of nature ceased. Then, when the chosen hour arrived...H.H. Maryam Makani awoke with birth pangs, and at that auspicious hour the unique pearl of the caliphate appeared with great fortune.<sup>60</sup>

It's tempting to trove this prose, rich with what appears to be precise dates and eye-witness accounts drawn from "trustworthy" sources,<sup>61</sup> but such an attempt proves elusive and disappointing. Abu'l-Fazl is narrating these *as historical* in a particular way to justify the auspicious nature of Akbar's very being. The particular emphasis on including several calendric systems – the Islamic, the Indian, and the Greek, reveals an attempt to portray Akbar as a universal sovereign. This account resembles a scene from a story, one filled with suspense, characters with personalities, and a peaceful resolution. There are distinct and consciously-crafted plot points in these accounts.

Another passage worth interrogation are the celebrations which occur after the birth of Akbar, which are offered in rich detail and deserve quotation at length:

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<sup>60</sup> Allami, *The History of Akbar*, 65-67.

<sup>61</sup> A key, self-identified methodological principle in Arabo-Islamic and later Persian traditions was a reliance on only those oral sources who were proven to be trustworthy, based on a developed set of criteria.

Celebrations and rejoicing began in the ladies' tents, and a festival of happiness ensued...Fanners with arms of sandalwood perfumed the air, damsels with ambergris-scented locks made fresh the surface of the earth, rosy-cheeked nurses gave joy a new face by sprinkling rose water, laughing girls dressed in purple coated in gold those with silvery breasts by strewing saffron...golden braziers gave off incense on the edges of the carpets...playful dancers began to perform the magic of insensibility, melodic tune-singers muttered trance-inducing incantations.

*Women of delicate voice from Hind  
As beautiful as Indian peacocks  
Chinese instrumentalists of light hand intoxicated  
From wineless goblets.  
Dulcimer players from Khurasan easily stole  
The hearts of the difficult to please.  
Persian singers sang the glad tidings  
of eternal life. ...*

Trays of various fruits were served, tables were set with all sorts of delicacies...What can I say of this rapturous joy? There is no need to elaborate...Enchanting musicians and singers tuned their various instruments and adopted diverse modes; harpists plucked the right strings; lutenists strummed away the cares of the world; dulcimer players made strings from the locks of desire; hot-breathed flutists blew in correct pitch...After the conclusion of the celebration, in accordance with the divine instruction, the babe was given the most exalted and most magnificent name, as has been reported.<sup>62</sup>

The above description goes on for pages, including regular interjections of poetry at key moments of Abu'l-Fazl's narrative ecstasy. What is worthy of note here is the intimate level of detail offered by Abu'l-Fazl. Despite having access to these "events" from other chronicles, he does not simply list the event. He offers an account with rich, specific language. While this could very well be present in previous chronicles, and while it may be that this rich, precise detail was offered by oral sources, the flourish is very likely a

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<sup>62</sup> Allami, *The History of Akbar*, 67-77.



personal addition by Abu'l-Fazl,<sup>63</sup> a product of his own narrative freedom as the author of a text. This very readily displays Abu'l-Fazl's fictive framing of these events. The lushness of the detail in the narration – the well-played notes of the musicians, the trance-inducing tones, the precision of the harpists, the braziers placement at the edges of the carpets - seems to value its affective potential to transport readers to the scene of the event, to make them an aesthetic participant in the pleasure of Akbar's birth. This exemplifies White's intuitions of the narrative and affective nature of thinking about, crafting, and presenting "history." Relying on the quality of the narration, this well-told story, displaces the "events" as the matter of prime importance, for in the well-told (historical) narration, "the explanation of what had happened would figure itself forth from the narrative, in the same way that the structure of a landscape would be figured by a properly drawn map."<sup>64</sup> A transportation to this landscape of Akbar's birth is a conscious element of Abu'l-Fazl's writing. Given the apparent, conscious literary nature of this text, what are the possible emplotment of this opening section, indicative of the wider *Akbarnāma*?

### Emplotment of the *Akbarnāma*

Could Abu'l-Fazl's narration<sup>65</sup> of history fit into White's schema of tropics of discourse? It may be tempting to claim a romantic emplotment of the *Akbarnāma*, which celebrates the ultimate triumph of good in the world with Akbar's birth and reign. In Akbar, spiritual and temporal authority unite, and peace will spread by Akbar's universal reign:

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<sup>63</sup> Confirming the scope of Abu'l-Fazl's narrative flourish demands a close reading of the *Zafarnāma*, which is beyond the current scope of this paper.

<sup>64</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 142.

<sup>65</sup> To expand my analysis of potential emplotments, I consider the first tome of the *Akbarnāma* from the opening through Akbar's enthronement. Space was insufficient to deal with a narrative analysis of all this content in detail.

*Come, observation-making surveyor of the heavens, gaze  
 With a mind that pleases the celestial sphere.  
 Look upon the beauty of the ascendant of the lord of the  
 Conjunction, look upon the book of felicity in this world and the next.  
 See in this happy register  
 felicity upon felicity and light upon light.*<sup>66</sup>

...

It was clear and obvious to the emperor [Humayun], who was privy to heavenly secrets, that the gardener of the world of existence had brought this sapling of the garden of being into existence firstly for comprehending the various degrees of worth of the inhabitants of the world and secondly for healing all the rifts in the age.<sup>67</sup>

...

Thank God, the mention of this exalted dynasty, which is as divinely assisted as the continuum of the heavens, and one end of which is connected to the dawn of creation, Adam, and the other end of which is joined to the rising of the sun of [Emperor Akbar's] existence...<sup>68</sup>

From these passages and others, it seems that Akbar represents an age of felicity, peace, and divine guidance in the earthly realm. In White's system, there are natural affinities between the modes of discourse. If the *Akbarnāma* is written with a romantic emplotment, it follows that the other modes should be a formalist argument, an anarchist ideology, and a primary employment of metaphorical tropes. While the presence of metaphorical tropes seem natural, does it follow that the text presents a formalist mode of argument, which emphasizes the individuality of historical entities, or an anarchist ideology, which emphasizes the need for reformation of a corrupt system? These don't appropriately describe the tone or goals of the *Akbarnāma*, which, like other Islamic texts, emphasizes the continual guidance of divine decree. The anarchist ideology doesn't sit well, as

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<sup>66</sup> Allami, *The History of Akbar*, 81.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 515.

Akbar's birth builds upon his divinely-appointed ancestors from Humayun through Gengis Khan to Adam.

Perhaps Abu'l-Fazl did not write the *Akbarnāma* with a romantic emplotment, but with a comedic emplotment, which would highlight the social integration of Akbar's divinely-appointed reign, and his ability to harmonize the productive elements of the conflict of the world outside of his empire - under the auspices of *sulh-i kul* - with territorial expansion and the extension of his universal reign. It would follow, thus, that the *Akbarnāma* is also written with an organicist argument, a conservative ideology, and synecdoche as the main trope. The *Akbarnāma* displays elements of an organicist argument, with an emphasis on integrative role of Akbar as unifier of temporal and spiritual authority within a larger schema of divine destiny and prophetic history. Likewise, a conservative ideology, which emphasizes the natural rhythm of divinely-guided history, culminating in Akbar's auspicious horoscopes which reflect the cosmic harmony essentialized in his being and reign, seems feasible, along with the presence of synecdoche as a common trope of discourse. This seems like a logical emplotment of Abu'l-Fazl's historical writing.

Despite the sensible nature of this particular emplotment, which would allow the *Akbarnāma* a direct place in White's schema of tropological analysis, the *Akbarnāma's* clean projection onto this series of modes could be problematized. Perhaps the *Akbarnāma* projects more of a contextualist argument, where all of cosmic history leads to Akbar's birth and reign, and where history is interpreted against the particular "historical thread" of Akbar's birth. Additionally, it seems several tropes - metaphor, synecdoche, and metonymy - could be projected onto Abu'l-Fazl's writing. Lastly, does the *Akbarnāma* rather display a liberal mode of ideology? The text was supposedly written in a particular political context of legitimizing Akbar's liberal programs against the criticisms of the 'ulema, and the text is indeed a court-appointed document. Perhaps, then, there is a

liberal mode of ideology present, which presents Akbar's perceptive ability to reform society with his social and religious programs. Does the *Akbarnāma* need a descriptive mode of ideology? Arguably, these modes of ideology draw too heavily from White's analysis of nineteenth-century texts, and do not reflect particular political and ideological developments or concepts in early-modern South Asia. While White does admit that narratives which display tension are the products of genius, perhaps this tropological tension calls for an expansion of White's schema.

### DISCERNING PERSIANATE TROPICS OF DISCOURSE?

While the *Akbarnāma* could be seen as fitting into White's tropological schema – displaying a comedic emplotment, an organicist argument, a conservative ideology, and synecdoche as primary trope – there are ways in which the *Akbarnāma* could transcend these categories or fit into several feasible modes of discourse. Does this mean that White's project is insufficient for analyzing the *Akbarnāma*? Arguably, thinking *with* White in re-reading the *Akbarnāma* entails a potential, and necessary, expansion of his theoretical project.

To begin, was White's analysis always intended to be universal? Is White's analysis, developed primarily from close and extensive readings of nineteenth-century texts, pertinent and applicable to readings of sixteenth-century Persian texts? White himself called for more cross-cultural readings, and was open to the presence of other modes of emplotment beyond the stable four of his current schema.<sup>69</sup> As has been revealed, White's literary analysis bears deep and natural affinities with the Persianate literary evaluation of historical writing. I propose that White's system of tropological analysis would benefit from a creative consideration of potential indigenous Persianate tropics of discourse and modes of emplotment. Perhaps exploring the nuances of Persianate literature – historical and non-historical, poetry and prose – could reveal

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<sup>69</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 8.

indigenous and natural Persianate tropics of discourse that differ from White's developed schema.

The Persian canon is home to a dazzling array of literary genres.<sup>70</sup> Aside from the sub-genres of poetry - which include the *qasīda*, the favored poetic form of courtly performance, the *maṭnavi* as versified narrative, and the *gʿazal*, which represents a style of private, intimate poetry – well-known genres of Persian literature include the romance and epic.<sup>71</sup> Less-explored genres in Persianate writing include the *malfūzāt* (collections of Sufi conversations), *maktūbāt* (collections of letters and correspondence), *firmān* (royal decrees), *akḥbārāt* (official newsletters), *baḥar* (memoirs), and *tadkirāt* (biographical memoirs).<sup>72</sup> While there is some overlap among these genres, there is surely some variation present that distinguishes this tradition from the particular forms of nineteenth-century writing that formed the basis of White's theory. Perhaps these various genres could be explored for the way recurring symbols, tropes, or structures lend themselves to a tropological analysis similar to White's.

Potential indigenous modes of discourse can be discerned. One is the *faḍa'il*, which refers to a particular category of literature that exposes the excellences of particular things, persons, or places for the purpose of praise.<sup>73</sup> The *faḍa'il* could perhaps be considered an indigenous emplotment or ideology in the Persian tradition. The presence of various other devices, such as *murāt-i naẓir* (maintaining images of similar properties) and *ḥusn-i talīl* (fanciful reasoning)<sup>74</sup> in Persian literature could perhaps be considered as indigenous tropes which support other modes of emplotment, argument, and ideology.

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<sup>70</sup> Due to space restrictions, I will not enter into a lengthy discussion of the content or form of these genres and styles.

<sup>71</sup> Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1993), 897-898.

<sup>72</sup> Roy, "Indo-Persian Historical Thoughts and Writings: India 1350-1750," 155-159.

<sup>73</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, 92.

<sup>74</sup> Wheeler M. Thackston, "Literature," in *The Magnificent Mughals*, ed. Zeenut Ziad (Oxford, England; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90-91.

A particularly innovative expansion that the Persianate literary tradition may offer to rethinking White's analysis of the affective nature of historical narration would be the transcendence of the medium of writing as the primary vehicle for conveying affective, narrative meaning in historical narration. In Persianate cultures, poetry was one prized artistic medium alongside calligraphy and intricately painted miniatures. The most prized copies of the *Akbarnāma*, and other chronicles, in the Mughal archives, and those cherished and studied for aesthetic refinement, were those also adorned with masterful calligraphy and intricate miniatures, which informed and shaped the overall didactic experience of the text.<sup>75</sup> This points to affective aesthetic consumption which transcends the experience of the written text itself, and raises questions about the media and materiality of meaning-creation in historical narration. Such proposals demand further reflection and investigation.

Perhaps in an extensive reading of Persian literary discourses, one may discern Persianate tropes of discourse to complement White's system, and to expand the *Akbarnāma* as a comedic, organicist, conservative text to include modes of discourse more familiar to the Persianate tradition. Such an enormous project demands a wide and perceptive engagement with classical Persian literature, something beyond the scope of this paper. I mention this proposal as one that may necessarily expand White's project and locate the *Akbarnāma* more fittingly into the narrative framework of historical writing in which it consciously places itself. This expansion has the potential to be immensely enriching for the study of history and historiography in South Asia and the wider Persianate world.

## CONCLUSIONS: MUGHAL (AND MODERN) POETICS OF HISTORY

An analysis of the *Akbarnāma* with the narrative analysis of White reveals the nature of Persianate historical writing, and Mughal historical writing in particular, as a conscious blend of historical

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<sup>75</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, 58.

documentation and cultivated literary expression which primarily emphasizes the aesthetic quality of its reading and the affective impact of its consumption. If by history we intend a project to cultivate and transmit an archive and record of empirical facts, we would be relying on a sense of history that was profoundly foreign to Persianate authors and historians. If we think, however, as White does, that the telling of history is ultimately a narrative strategy which weaves “events” of a chronicle into a meaningful story, then the *Akbarnāma* is doing that consciously, unabashedly, and with the full literary prowess of a skilled savant like Abu’l-Fazl.

While White’s system could be expanded to creatively include tropics of discourse indigenous to sixteenth-century Persianate writers and other well-developed literary traditions, re-reading the *Akbarnāma* within the framework of White’s narrative analysis reveals a complexity and texture to Abu’l-Fazl’s narration that would otherwise be out of reach if we approached the *Akbarnāma*, like past European historians and scholars, as a mere repository of historical fact obscured by its fictive framework. White’s project, particular among a range of contemporary theoretical lenses, makes the insights of Persianate historical consciousness more palatable to a contemporary academic audience, and perhaps echoes of White’s theory in Persianate historical documentation may help to reinforce White’s project, rooted in that ancient and indigenous strand of Western thought which readily admits the poetic nature of historical reflection, as a valuable contribution to contemporary historical methodology. This re-reading of the *Akbarnāma* reveals the rich dimensions of Persianate historical writing and offers interesting avenues for reimagining the study of history in South Asia.

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*Gabriel Andrade*

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## ANTON LAVEY'S SATANIC PHILOSOPHY: AN ANALYSIS

### THE SATANIC MYSTIQUE

The history of Satanism goes back to at least 2500 years. Yet, only in the seventeenth century, was the devil perceived in more sympathetic terms, in large part due to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.<sup>1</sup> In the twentieth century, Aleister Crowley assumed the name of "The Beast 666," as well as owning the title of "the wickedest man in the world."<sup>2</sup> But, it was during the second half of the twentieth century, when an openly Satanic movement arose and gained significant attention from mass media with the enigmatic and sensationalist Anton LaVey at its helm.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I examine the charisma and life of Anton Lavey and explore how he drew on philosophy and literature to create a religious movement that challenged Christian morality and systematic power.

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<sup>1</sup> Danielle St Hilaire, *Satan's Poetry: Fallenness and Poetic Tradition in Paradise Lost*, Duquesne University Press (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Marco Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* New York. Routledge (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Chris Matthews, *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture*, New York: Greenwood Publishing Group (2009).

LaVey was born in Chicago in 1930 to a middle-class American family. His family moved to San Francisco while he was a teenager. At the time, San Francisco was a booming metropolis, and would soon become the cradle of the counterculture movement from which LaVey's eccentric Satanic sect would rise. From an early age, LaVey displayed a skilled propensity for music, and his parents supported him in developing his gift.<sup>4</sup>

LaVey eventually took an interest in the organ, which he used to acquire employment throughout his young life. For a time, LaVey even played the organ in a circus. He purported that his playing tamed lions and other felines.<sup>5</sup> LaVey's eccentricities and interest in the carnivalistic developed during that era of employment.

Later, after he became famous, LaVey often exaggerated the details of his experience in the circus. For example, he claimed to have had a romantic affair with the young Marilyn Monroe. The veracity of this claim has never been verified and has been disputed by virtually every biographer who has written about LaVey's life. LaVey also claimed to have been a photographer and psychics researcher in San Francisco's Police Department. There are no records that confirm that claim either. In fact, many years later, LaVey admitted to embellishing the details of his life in talking with biographers to charm the public.

LaVey, however, did have a major presence in San Francisco, because of his charisma. He was similar to Aleister Crowley in that regard, but was arguably more successful in establishing a following. LaVey managed to accumulate social connections and important friendships within the community. He skillfully navigated counterculturalism and became the face to a major faction of the movement.

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<sup>4</sup> Blanche Barton, *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Authorized Biography of Anton Szandor LaVey*, New York: Feral House (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Maxwell Davies, "Self-Conscious Routinization and the Post-Charismatic Fate of the Church of Satan from 1997 to the Present". In *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jesper. Aagaard Petersen, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd (2009).

Followers began to flock to LaVey, and in 1966, he believed that he had enough resources to start a new religion. Thus, he founded the Church of Satan on April 30, the same night, according to the European imagination, witches held their *Sabbaths*. This was designed to be on *Walpurgisnacht*, the Medieval Christian festivity that celebrated Saint Walpurga from the sunset of that same day to the sunset on May 1.

From the very beginning, the Church of Satan garnered enormous media attention. LaVey had, by this time, begun to master his public presence, and used those techniques to create religious scandal, not only San Francisco, but eventually worldwide.<sup>6</sup> He shaved his head and proclaimed his titles as a high priest of the new Satanic religion. He invited journalists to attend Satanic rituals, such as those that imitated the ceremonies of witch hunters in previous epochs. Nude women served as altars, in emulation of various aspects of the Black Mass.<sup>7</sup> However, the ceremonies did not incorporate all the repugnant elements that some would later attribute to them.

LaVey did perform a Satanic wedding for two of his followers, and also organized a Satanic baptism and a funeral. He began a new calendar, making year 1 the same year his church was founded, which he referred to as the year of Satan (*Anno Satanas*). This recalendaring

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, only a secularized, democratic (but media saturated) country such as the United States, could guarantee that such a spectacle could be held. The most conservative religious groups, needless to say, were frightened by LaVey. But, the witch hunts were a thing deeply buried in the past (or at least, religious witch hunts; political witch hunts were still present, as there were some remnants of McCarthyism left). Therefore, someone openly claiming to be Satanic in a modern and democratic country could afford casting spells and invoking the Prince of Darkness, and still not be in risk of legal prosecution. LaVey, ever seeking attention, used this protection in order to exploit his creativity and imagination. On the other hand, the case could also be made that if the United States were truly a fully secularized country, the Church of Satan would probably have never arisen. For, it arose precisely as a reaction against the prevailing Christian worldview that dominates American life, especially politics and public opinion. It is precisely for this reason that, as opposed to Europe, studying Satanism still remains taboo in the United States.

<sup>7</sup> Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History* New York: Brill Publishing (2016), 40.

marked the beginning of the Age of Satan, similar to other religious traditions that have used a particular event to mark the beginning of a new era (e.g., the *Hegira* in Islam).

In addition to shaving his head, Lavey wore horns on his head to resemble the devil, and in front of cameras he frequently assumed a seductive and enigmatic gaze. Sometimes, he even walked around with a leashed lion. He adopted the title of the “Black Pope” (although, this title has also been used by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus).

The media ate his performance up.<sup>8</sup> Many spectators were curious or amused by the new religious movement. In fact, the fledgling Church of Satan was thriving largely based on public perception. Its members’ actual beliefs were less important than the stigma that developed from Lavey’s performance. Its jarring rituals, the unique attire, and the counter-cultural environment that gave stage to Lavey’s new identity were integral to its growing success. Television programs regularly dedicated air time to the Black Pope, and Roman Polansky even piggybacked on the attention the Church of Satan was receiving to promote *Rosemary’s Baby*, the cult film about a woman who gives birth to a child fathered by Satan. Infact, LaVey claimed that he was a technical advisor to the movie, and that he had played the role of the Devil in one of the film’s most memorable scenes.<sup>9</sup> Although, the truth was that he had no hand in the film’s production.

LaVey also drew on the broader occult and incorporated symbols frequently associated with Satanic groups, such as the pentagram—a sign that had been recurrently used by Eliphas Levi.<sup>10</sup> The five-pointed star has also been used by many other traditions.

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<sup>8</sup>Timothy Hall, *American Religious Leaders*, New York: Infobase Publishing (2014), 211.

<sup>9</sup> James Lewis, *Satanism Today* New York: ABC Clio (2001), 229

<sup>10</sup>Donald Tyson, *Ritual Magic: What it is & how to Do it* New York: Llewellyn Worldwide (1992), 128

Even early Christians adopted the pentagram for a time. While the traditional pentagram has one up-facing and two down-facing spikes, LaVey revised the symbol for his church. He was aware that, during early colonial witch hunts, witches were often thought of parodying Christian rituals and symbols. Following that tradition, LaVey inverted the pentagram (two spikes up and one spike down).

LaVey also appropriated the image of Baphomet. This was an idol supposedly worshipped by the Templars (this accusation led to their destruction). Some believe the name “Baphomet” may have actually been a corruption of “Mahomet,” reflecting the medieval fear of Christians that a time would come when they would have to renounce their faith and convert to Islam.<sup>11</sup> In the nineteenth century, occultist Eliphas Levi embraced this idol (although not necessarily to worship it; he remained a non-conformist Catholic his whole life<sup>12</sup>), and designed an icon to represent Baphomet, a human body with a goat’s head and an eagle’s wings. In the western imagination, the goat had a close association with the witches’ *Sabbath*. LaVey modified the image. This time, he incorporated the inverted pentagram with the Hebrew inscription “Leviathan” on it. Leviathan was a biblical monster that eventually became associated with the Devil. While contemporary religious movements that claim descent from the Templars reject the groups connection to Satanism, LaVey was sympathetic to it.

LaVey also adopted the inverted cross. While it is often interpreted as a Satanic symbol, the inverted cross was initially associated with Peter, Jesus’ disciple who asked to be crucified upside down, because he did not consider himself worthy of dying in the

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Newman, *The Real History Behind the Templars* New York: Berkley Books (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Julian Strube, “The “Baphomet” of Eliphas Lévi: Its Meaning and Historical Context”, *Correspondences* 4, 1–43 (2016).

same manner as Christ. However, Levay drew on the vernacular relationship between the symbol and anti-Christian sentiment.

### THE SATANIC PHILOSOPHY

Even though LaVey enjoyed performing for the public, he also had a philosophical agenda. He wanted his ideas to be taken seriously. Not surprisingly, many debated this. For example, Gavin Baddeley, a fellow Satanist, acknowledged that LaVey was wildly inconsistent in his views, especially when it came to personal morals. He paid a great deal of lip service to personal freedom, yet as a leader, he micromanaged the lives of his followers.<sup>13</sup> Others have asserted that LaVey's *The Satanic Bible* was commissioned as a marketing ploy to increase publicity for *Rosemary's Baby*.<sup>14</sup> However, over the years, LaVey also remained committed to his religious worldview.

LaVey's religion was rooted in Romanticism. Many Romantic literary scholars had embraced Satan as a misunderstood hero that, although, ultimately ruined by his pride, inspired sympathy among readers.<sup>15</sup> For example, Milton portrayed a charismatic Lucifer who opposed God's tyranny, Byron developed the "Satanic school", and Victor Hugo portrayed a very courageous Satan. While romantic authors did not intend to worship Satan, they did desire to lionize many virtues attributed to him: courage, individuality, audacity, and persistence. On the other hand, their works also warned readers that these traits could lead to tragedy. While LaVey was a marketing genius, I would argue that he had neither the literary talents nor the depth of his philosophical antecessors.

From the outset, LaVey clarified that Satan symbolized his dedication to atheism and materialism and that he did not believe in the actual existence of the devil. Initially, LaVey was interested in the

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<sup>13</sup> Baddeley, *Lucifer Rising*

<sup>14</sup> Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2010).

<sup>15</sup> Carmen Casaliggi and Porscha Fermanis, *Romanticism: A Literary and Cultural History*, New York: Routledge (2016).

occult and magic. However, with time, LaVey moved away from occultist philosophy, and he became more interested in materialism and the reproof of the supernatural. For LaVey, Satan was a symbol of his central teachings and beliefs. Etymologically, Satan comes from the Hebrew *ha-Satan*, which means “the adversary.” And the adversary represented the counter-culture environment in which he was raised—the ultimate nonconformist.

The history of Satan, before he became the personification of evil as a result of Zoroastrian influence upon the Jewish religion and the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century B.C.E., Satan was simply an adversarial figure. That is also how he is portrayed in the Book of Job. LaVey sympathized with this early Hebraic figure. Thus, he drew on Satan to develop an adversarial ideology that rejected political systems and established orders.

For LaVey, the homage to Satan was not about committing deliberately evil acts—such as, human sacrifice—but about rebelling against an oppressive system. In this regard, LaVey’s Satan was much more similar to Milton’s Lucifer, than to the “Malign One” who Puritans perceived as making pacts with witches.

## PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES ON LAVEY

Philosophically, Lavey’s greatest intellectual influence was Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>16</sup> Similar to LaVey, Nietzsche had little regard for Christianity. He promoted a cult of ancient Greek gods. Nietzsche was especially fascinated by Dionysus, the god of wine.

In the cultural history of Satanic iconography, Dionysus is one of the antecessors of Satan in Greek mythology. To Nietzsche, Dionysus represented rage and hedonistic disinhibition, as opposed to the moral restrictions of Christianity. Nietzsche admired what Dionysus represented. During his battle with mental illness, Nietzsche even signed some of his letters as “Dionysus.” Nietzsche did not

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Flowers, *Lords of the Left-Hand Path: Forbidden Practices and Spiritual Heresies*, New York: Simon and Schuster (2012).

endorse the literal existence of Dionysus, but he did affirm the Greek god's values.<sup>17</sup>

Satan and Dionysus share similar attributes. As a result, LeVay and Nietzsche's philosophies have a number of parallels. Nietzsche believed that good and evil were concepts imposed by early Christians. He also considered the Christian ethical system that valued mercy and charity as a "slave's morality" and that Christianity limited humanity's potential for self-realization. By emphasizing mercy and denying people the pleasures of life, Christian morality had diminished human vitality. According to Nietzsche, but also LaVey, human instinct is geared towards domination, but Christian morality attempts to repress that instinct. In Nietzsche's view, in order to achieve self-realization, individuals must reaffirm aristocratic virtues and reject the herd mentality that Christianity attempts to instill. He proposed a new set of values that he believed would lead to eventual self-realization. He referred to these as the "master's morality" and centered on basking in the pleasures of life, domination, non-repressed vitality, and creativity.

LaVey took Nietzsche's philosophical worldview very seriously. He integrated these concepts into his own book, *The Satanic Bible*, which became the doctrinal foundation of his new religion. In this work, the Nietzschean influence is explicit. He repeatedly criticizes Christianity for diminishing man's potential, such as in this oft-repeated aphorism: "Behold the crucifix; what does it symbolize? Pallid incompetence hanging on a tree."<sup>18</sup>

LaVey's Bible often appears to mock Christian scripture. For example, instead of blessing the poor and the weak (as found in the gospel of Matthew) he writes: "Blessed are the strong, for they shall possess the earth - Cursed are the weak, for they shall inherit the

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Durno Murray, *Nietzsche's Affirmative Morality: A Revaluation Based in the Dionysian World View*, New York: Walter de Gruyter (1999).

<sup>18</sup> Anton LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, Createspace Independent Pub (2011), 17.



yoke!... Blessed are the iron-handed, for the unfit shall flee before them - Cursed are the poor in spirit, for they shall be spat upon!"<sup>19</sup>

Like Nietzsche, LaVey was not wholly a nihilist. He did not teach the death of morality, but instead, imposed a new morality. He replaced the Ten Commandments with a new set of rules. The following comes is referred to as the *Eleven Satanic Rules of the Earth*:

1. Do not give opinions or advice unless you are asked.
2. Do not tell your troubles to others unless you are sure they want to hear them.
3. When in another's lair, show them respect or else do not go there.
4. If a guest in your lair annoys you, treat them cruelly and without mercy.
5. Do not make sexual advances unless you are given the mating signal.
6. Do not take that which does not belong to you unless it is a burden to the other person and they cry out to be relieved.
7. Acknowledge the power of magic if you have employed it successfully to obtain your desires. If you deny the power of magic after having called upon it with success, you will lose all you have obtained.
8. Do not complain about anything to which you need not subject yourself.
9. Do not harm little children.
10. Do not kill non-human animals unless you are attacked or for your food.
11. When walking in open territory, bother no one. If someone bothers you, ask them to stop. If they do not stop, destroy them.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anton LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Matthews, *Modern Satanism*, 50

Surprisingly, LaVey's rules of conduct appear reasonable, especially for a proposed Satanist—it calls for human decency, respect for children and condemns sexual violence.

LaVey's hedonistic approach also seemed to draw on Epicurean philosophy that taught individuals to live life to the fullest through balancing pleasure and self control.<sup>21</sup> As one example, LaVey exalted life's pleasures, but also rejected the consumption of drugs, as opposed to Aleister Crowley, an early twentieth century occultist with whom LaVey is frequently compared. This is especially fascinating considering the counter-culture, from which LaVey's movement arose, was largely defined by experimental and recreational drug use.

LaVey was a major dissident of herd mentality.<sup>22</sup> LaVey rejected any collectivist attempt to regulate individuals' lives. According to LaVey's teachings, the truly virtuous person is not concerned about what others think; instead, they accept the consequences and do not evade responsibility. The link of LaVey's ideology with existentialism has seldom been explored by historians, but it certainly warrants further research.

His approach was often crude and retributive. Infact, LaVey did embrace Crowley's well-known slogan, "Do what Thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."<sup>23</sup> For this occult leader, it was not about applying the golden rule i.e., "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," but do unto others as they actually do unto you—as in, an eye for an eye.

One of the greatest defenders of enlightened self-interest—the philosophy in ethics that proposes individuals act in the interest of others ultimately as a means of serving one's personal self interest—

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<sup>21</sup> Tim O'Keefe, *Epicureanism*, New York: Routledge 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Anton LaVey, *The Devil's Notebook*, New York: Feral House (2000).

<sup>23</sup> Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley*, New York: North Atlantic Books (2010), 517

was twentieth-century novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand.<sup>24</sup> LaVey openly admired her work. This reasons seem clear, given the content and the style of her writings. While her ideas are not taken seriously by academic philosophers, in reading her work, it is easy to find parallels between LaVey and Rand's worldviews. For example, Rand proposed that "the purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and live."<sup>25</sup>

"My religion," LaVey once noted, "is just Ayn Rand's philosophy with ceremony and ritual added."<sup>26</sup> However, there were aspects of Rand's philosophy the he did not give much merit toward such as her belief that cooperation was needed, and generosity was the proper way to satisfy individual pleasures. His version of egoism was staunchly rigid in comparison. What becomes clear in studying LaVey's teachings is that there were numerous philosophical influences that shaped his belief system and that his rejection of Christianity played a major role in developing his religious identity.

## OTHER LITERARY INFLUENCES ON LAVEY

Another author who influenced LaVey was novelist Jack London.<sup>27</sup> London was an affluent writer whose work was popular in its time. However, I would argue that his success was based on his ability to adjust to the needs of the readers' market, because the quality of his works was inconsistent, and his philosophical views were, at times, unclear.

In some of his writings, London embraced Marxist views, and viewed himself as a representative of the working class. In other

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<sup>24</sup> Ben Burnane, *Ayn Rand and the Posthuman: The Mind-Made Future*, New York: Springer (2018), 180

<sup>25</sup> Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, New York: New American Library (1963), 123.

<sup>26</sup> James R. Lewis, "Who Serves Satan? A Demographic and Ideological Profile", *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Volume 6, No. 2 (June 2001), 18

<sup>27</sup> Ruben Van Lujik, *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2016).

writings, London portrayed individuals as heroes based on their charisma. London's *Sea Wolf* has been especially attractive to members of the Church of Satan. *Sea Wolf* tells the story of a philosophically-minded mariner that uses corporal punishment to discipline and gain the control of his crew. This narrative depicts a world that favors the strong and the elimination of weakness in the world.

LaVey was moderately educated but, he was not a scholar. In writing the *Satanic Bible* he plagiarized *Might is Right*, by an author under the pseudonym of Ragnar Redbeard.<sup>28</sup> If it were not for LaVey, that book would likely have been forgotten. The book is a Social Darwinist philosophy, typical of the late nineteenth century. LaVey's plagiarism was extensive. The book's main thesis is that the poor and weak will disappear based on their biological inferiority, asserting that the sooner they do, the better it will be for humanity. The book has strong classist and racist overtones. Redbeard also claims that slavery should be reinstated, because inferior races cannot govern themselves. It also condemns miscegenation. To his credit, however, LaVey removed some of the more offensive passages and there are no racist undertones in the *Satanic Bible*. Although, it has been used by some neo-fascist groups that explicitly embrace racist ideologies.<sup>29</sup>

## SATANIC PHILOSOPHY AND MAGICAL PRACTICES

LaVey also plagiarized part of a text that was popularized by Aleister Crowley known as the *Enochian Keys*<sup>30</sup>. In the sixteenth century, the English occultist John Dee attempted to recover the "Enochian" language. He alleged that the biblical patriarch Enoch was the last person to use the language and that it was the antediluvian tongue of

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<sup>28</sup> Per Faxneld and Jersen Petersen, "Introduction", in *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*, ed. Per Faxneld and Jersen Petersen, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2012), 12

<sup>29</sup> Gerd Bayer, *Heavy Metal Music in Britain*, New York: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. (2009), 83

<sup>30</sup> Introvigne, *Satanism*, 347.

angels. *Enochian Keys*, also discussed in the book, were songs sung to conjure spirits. Crowley used these songs in his magic, and LaVey incorporated them into the *Satanic Bible* and later, ritual.

While LaVey did not believe in a literal Satan, he did perform Pseudo Satanic rituals. He viewed these performances as a form of catharsis or psychodrama therapy. Ritual provided LaVey's followers with the opportunity to embody the virtues of Satan and to reject the cultural expectations placed upon them by religion or society.

Throughout his life, LaVey's relationship with magic and alchemy remained ambiguous. During one of his romantic affairs, LaVey developed an enmity with a man named Sam Brody, the partner of LaVey's lover.<sup>31</sup> Brody died in a traffic accident. However, LaVey insisted that it was his use of magic that hastened his death and brought on the fatal collision. Whether LaVey maintained his belief in the efficacy of magic is unclear.

LaVey seemed to be more concerned with the therapeutic purpose of magic. As it states in the *Satanic Bible*: "Visual imagery utilized for emotional reaction is certainly the most important device incorporated in the practice of lesser magic. Anyone who is foolish enough to say "looks don't mean a thing" is indeed deluded. Good looks are unnecessary, but "looks" certainly are needed!"<sup>32</sup>

### **LAVEY'S RATIONALISM AND LEGACY**

As rationalism became firmly established in the West, and hysteria over Satan diminished, most rationalist proposed that the best way to approach the devil was by mocking him. In the past, anxieties surrounding Satan gave rise to inquisitions and witch hunts. Through the lens of rationalism, humor was a tool for dismantling fear associated with the malign figure.

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<sup>31</sup>Joyce Mercer, *Behind the Mask of Adolescent Satanism*, New York: Deaconess Press (1991).

<sup>32</sup> LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 62.

From a similar vein, LaVey's beliefs developed. On one hand, Satan embodied attributes that, he believed, would enhance life and give way to autonomy and self-realization. On the other hand, in denying Satan's literal existence, LaVey challenged Christian morality. If Satan did not exist, furthermore, hell did not exist either—a provocative double entendre. Perhaps unwittingly, LaVey carried out an intellectual exercise that Michel Foucault might have referred to as “archaeology.”<sup>33</sup> LaVey, in his portrayal of Satan, unearthed the multifaceted depictions of Satan throughout history—an overzealous celestial prosecutor in the Book of Job, an archenemy of the Divine, a hero portrayed by authors throughout the era of Romanticism. In adopting Satanism as an ideology, LaVey proposed that rebellion in the face of despotism can be heroic.

While the value of LaVey's teachings are debateable. In examining his life and writings, we can see how the power of his charisma and how his use of philosophy and literature opened the door to a new, and widely spread, religious movement that challenged Christian ideologies and systematic power.

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<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York: Psychology Press (2002).

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*McKinley Smoot*

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## HELEN SCHUCMAN AND *A COURSE IN MIRACLES*: PERSONAL REVELATION TO SCRIPTURE

### INTRODUCTION

Since its initial publication in 1976, *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM) has sold over two million copies in 18 languages. Its vast circulation can be largely accredited to grassroots efforts.<sup>1</sup> This article examines the early development of this key “New Age” text and its significance in modern American spirituality and religion.

While the published *ACIM* was polished and made accessible for a central readership, it was initially a personal revelation to Helen Schucman and a small inner circle. *ACIM* was channeled in 1965 through Schucman who was, at the time, a research psychologist at Columbia University. She recorded in shorthand an “inner voice”<sup>2</sup> that she identified as the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Her original notes were later typed by Schuman’s department head Dr. William “Bill” Thetford. Then, in 1973, Schucman, Thetford, and an associate named

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<sup>1</sup> D. Patrick Miller, *Understanding A Course in Miracles: The History, Message, and Legacy of a Spiritual Path for Today*. EBook, Potter/TenSpeed/Harmony November 23, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> D. Patrick Miller, *The Complete Story of The Course: The History, The People and the Controversies Behind A Course in Miracles* (Berkeley: Fearless Books, 1997), 1-6.



Kenneth Wapnick edited the manuscripts into the three sections of ACIM—the *Text*, *Workbook for Students*, and the *Manual for Teachers*.

## HELEN SCHUCMAN AND BILL THETFORD:

### UNLIKELY AND UNWILLING SCRIBES

Schucman and Thetford were enmeshed in the cut-throat and competitive world of midcentury psychology. Schucman was employed under Thetford, who was the head of the Psychology Department at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. They were also consultants to Cornell University Medical Center. Each week, they scheduled hour-long meetings in which [missing subject] recalled that tension between her and Thetford were high. In one of these meetings, Thetford conveyed to Schucman the need for change. Helen recalled this event in her autobiography:

[Bill] had something on his mind, but he seemed to be quite embarrassed and found it hard to talk about. In fact, he tried unsuccessfully several times to begin. Finally he took a deep breath, grew slightly red-faced, and delivered a speech. It was hard for him, he told me later, because the words sounded trite and sentimental even as he said them. Nor was he anticipating a particularly favorable response from me. Nevertheless, he said what he felt he had to say. He had been thinking things over and had concluded we were using the wrong approach. “*There must,*” he said, “*be another way.*” Our attitudes had become so negative that we could not work anything out. He had therefore decided to try to look at things differently.<sup>3</sup>

ACIM becomes a major focus in Schucman and Thetford’s work following this quarrel. This brought about a considerable change in their professional relationship.

The making of *A Course in Miracles* and the events surrounding its development were well documented and reveal many fascinating

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<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Wapnick, *Absence from Felicity: The Story of Helen Schucman and Her Scribing of A Course in Miracles*, Roscoe (New York: Foundation for “A Course in Miracles,” 1991), 93.

insights about the personality and struggles of the book's creator, Helen Schucman. In her autobiography she described being raised in an affluent non-practicing Jewish and Lutheran home. She had little emotional attachment to her parents or their views on religion.<sup>4</sup> It seems Helen Schucman had a tumultuous relationship with religion. She had a distaste for it, but could never dismiss it entirely. This was complicated by the visions and mystical experiences that she purported to have in both her adolescence and adulthood. She attempted to explain away these experiences by drawing on logic and psychology during her undergraduate and graduate training.<sup>5</sup> She became an excellent and shrewd member of the academic community. According to Kenneth Wapnick, who was an influential member of the inner circle and who was well acquainted with Helen during and after the period that she channeled "the Voice," Helen was often angry and confused about the messages she received. What she relayed from "the Voice" was a non-dualistic worldview. Although the language of *ACIM* was highly Christian, it also forsook duality and with that, essential aspects of Christian doctrine, ideology, and practice. Concept such as good and evil, God and the Devil, sin and righteousness are examples of duality in traditional Christianity.<sup>6</sup> *ACIM* attempts to correct traditional Christian duality, referring to such concepts as "errors in perception" that have been instilled in humanity through inculturation. In Chapter 3 of the *Text of ACIM*, it explains how perception itself is a "misuse of mind."

Consciousness, the level of perception, was the first split introduced into the mind after the separation [from the Divine], making the mind a perceiver rather than a creator. Consciousness is correctly identified as the domain of the ego. The ego is a wrong-minded attempt to perceive yourself as you wish to be, rather than as you

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<sup>4</sup> D. Patrick Miller, *The Complete Story of the Course*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Pages 34-38.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent textual comparison that highlights the differences in Christian Theology and the theology of *ACIM* please refer to Dean C. Halverson's compilation on page 154 and 155 of D. Patrick Miller's *The Complete Story of The Course*.

are. Yet you can know yourself only as you are, because that is all you can be sure of. Everything else *is* open to question.<sup>7</sup>

Here, *ACIM*, in a somewhat psychological vernacular, purports that our conscious perception is the cause of our split with God. It is this split that is the cause of all human suffering.<sup>8</sup>

Later, many *ACIM* teachers and followers would extend this teaching to Schuman's process of inner dictation, which occurred over a seven-year period and resulted in *ACIM*. The process was lengthy, and her dictations underwent extensive editing with the message initially tailored to Schucman, possibly extending to Bill Thetford, and later revised for public consumption.

Helen Schucman was a prophet who introduced a unique worldview. In her dictations, however, she deviated from many other prophets of New Religious Movements (NRM). Len Oake, in his comprehensive psychological survey entitled *Prophetic Charisma*, writes "Without ever appearing frenetic, prophets show enormous *energy* for life and the goals they set. Most need only a few hours of sleep each night. Some work tirelessly for the welfare of others, perhaps even dying from exhaustion... They are not beset by the fears, shame, and guilt that limit others."<sup>9</sup> This was not necessarily true of Helen Schucman, who struggled against the weight of her prophetic mantle.

At times, Schucman appears harrowed by her own imperfections. In lesson 93 she channeled:

You think you are the home of evil, darkness and sin. You think if anyone could see the truth about you he would be repelled, recoiling from you as if from a poisonous snake. You think if what is true about you were revealed to you, you would be struck with horror so

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<sup>7</sup> *ACIM*, T-3.IV.4

<sup>8</sup> For more on the ideology/cosmology of *ACIM* and how humanity arrived into the ego state see T-27.VIII.

<sup>9</sup> Len Oakes, *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 12.

intense that you would rush to death by your own hand, living on after seeing this being impossible.<sup>10</sup>

ACIM reflected Schucman's personal journey with God, including her struggle to discard the ego and accept God's will. Continuing in lesson 93 she wrote:

Today we question this, not from the point of view of what you think, but from a very different reference point, from which such idle thoughts are meaningless. These thoughts are not according to God's Will. These weird beliefs He does not share with you. This is enough to prove that they are wrong, but you do not perceive that this is so.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the message that Schucman received, the prophetic figure increasingly isolated herself from society, eventually, suffering emotional instability when the "Voice" fell silent. Her health continued to decline until her death in 1981 due to advanced pancreatic cancer.<sup>12</sup>

## THE DIFFERENT TONES OF "THE VOICE"

In the thick of her initial experiences with "the Voice," Schucman turned to Thetford for relief. He encouraged her to record her thoughts on paper. One of the first things she wrote: "This is a course in miracles, please take notes."<sup>13</sup> Historian Doug Thompson compiled Schucman's extensive notes and the earliest versions of the texts, known today as the *Urtext Manuscript*. They reflect an intimate relationship between "the Voice" and Helen and Bill, although personal nuances were later removed. "The Voice" addressed issues such as sex, including Bill Thetford's homosexuality and, although

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<sup>10</sup> *A Course in Miracles*, (Mill Valley, California: Foundation For Inner Peace, 1996) W-p1.93.1

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* W-p1.93.3

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Wapnick, *Absence from Felicity*, 493-499.

<sup>13</sup> Doug Thompson, *The Shorthand Notes Manuscripts of Helen Schucman*, (compiled October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009), 1. [http://www.jcim.net/Images/Notes\\_Transcript.pdf](http://www.jcim.net/Images/Notes_Transcript.pdf) Accessed February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

omitted from the final version, the work of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, clairvoyant Edgar Cayce and religious leader Mary Baker Eddy.

Sacred texts have been heavily edited throughout time. This is often done to make the content of a revelation more understandable and accessible to individuals beyond those directly involved in the supernatural. As the texts are altered, the original content and context—how the event was originally perceived—is obscured by its revelators. The *Shorthand Notes*, the original dictation included the authoritative voice of Jesus of Nazareth. He addressed Schucman and Thetford's spiritual questions and personal concerns. In addition, the shorthand notes contained the recording of highly symbolic dreams that tend to lack the same sense of authority or wisdom that the modern *ACIM* contains. For example, the polished version of *ACIM* published in 1976 contained a poetic style and authoritative voice, such as found on page 138 of Chapter 8 entitled "The Journey Back:"

Knowledge is not the motivation for learning this course. Peace is. This is the prerequisite for knowledge only because those who are in conflict are not peaceful, and peace is the condition of knowledge because it is the condition of the Kingdom. Knowledge can be restored only when you meet its conditions. This not a bargain made by God, Who makes no bargains. It is merely the result of your misuse of His laws on behalf of an imaginary will that is not His. Knowledge is His Will. If you are opposing His Will, how can you have knowledge? I have told you what knowledge offers you, but perhaps you do not yet regard this as wholly desirable. If you did you would not be so ready to throw it away when the ego asks for your allegiance.<sup>14</sup>

This section described the state of being one must be in in order to gain knowledge and attain peace. If a person is unwilling to abandon conflict, then they cannot obtain inner peace. A person may be attached to that conflict and, in that way, ego becomes their desire. It is this tone of authority and mystical wisdom that dominates the

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<sup>14</sup> *ACIM*, T.8.I.1

1976 published version of *A Course in Miracles*, the 1,249-page version that devotees use and know.

There is another, far more personal tone “the Voice” takes when questioned by Schucman or Thetford. The following example comes in response to Thetford’s concern with a section found in Chapter 1, “Principles of Miracles.”<sup>15</sup> The initial language was significantly altered in the 1976 version. In the *Urtext*, page 10 (T 1 B 18 & 18b), stated:

A miracle is a service. It is the maximal service that one soul can render to another. It is a way of loving your neighbor as yourself. The doer recognizes his own and his neighbor’s inestimable value simultaneously. (This is why no areas of hatred can be retained. If you retain them, your own value is no longer inestimable because you are evaluating it as X or infinity minus that amount. This is meaningless mathematically, which uses the term ‘inestimable’ only in the very literal sense. Pun intended especially for B[Bill], (who originally did not get it.) Intended as a special sign of love.)<sup>16</sup>

The lines contained in parenthesis were omitted from the published version in 1976 (T1 18b), and the line not contained in parenthesis (T1 B18) was included with some minor changes in the published version. The voice defines miracles not necessarily as supernatural event, but as expressions of love between human beings. These expressions of love, according to *ACIM* ideology, do not necessarily refer to acts of service, but as conceptualizing and accepting others as they “truly are.”<sup>17</sup> The following paragraph is found in the *Shorthand Notes*, as well as in the *Urtext*, but was omitted from the published version. Speaking to Thetford, “the Voice” exclaimed:

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<sup>15</sup> *ACIM*, T.1.I.18

<sup>16</sup> Doug Thompson, *A Course in Miracles: Urtext Manuscripts, Complete Seven Volume Combined Edition*, (Jaffrey, NH: Miracles in Action Press, 2009), T1 B 18 & 18b (page 10).

<sup>17</sup> For a more comprehensive understanding of *ACIM*’s view on miracles read pages 3-6 of the *Text* in *A Course in Miracles*.

I threw that in especially for Bill, because he does need special signs of love. He doesn't really but he does think so. Now tell him that homo sex is sinful only to the extent it is based on the principle of exclusion. Everybody should love everybody. It is wrong to deny the beauty of some souls because of body-structures of which you are afraid. This is essentially an unhealthy attempt to limit fear but fear cannot be limited, just as love cannot have limits. Heterosexual attitudes can be similarly distracted but do contain a more natural potential. Sex relations are intended for children. You and Bill have misunderstood sex, because you both recognize it as a way of establishing human contact for yourselves. This has led you to body-image problems. Children are miracles in their own right. They already have the gift of life and their parents provide them with the opportunity to express it. Nothing physical, mental or spiritual should be used selfishly. The pleasure from using anything should be in utilizing it for God's will. You should live so that God is free to arrange temporary human constellations as He sees fit. Do not interpret this in terms of guilt. Many children which are already here need spiritual parents. The poor are always with us, and many which are born have not been reborn. Human birth, maturation, and development is a microcosmic representation of a much larger process of Creation and development of abilities. It is subject to error as long as the real purpose of free will is misunderstood and misdirected. The real function of parents is to be wiser than the children in this respect and to teach them accordingly ((This upsets me)).<sup>18</sup>

On one hand, "the Voice" seems to promote polyamory, but on the other, confine sexual relationships to sole the purpose of procreation. However, in interpreting the passage, understanding the role of non-duality in ACIM clarifies the discrepancy. For example, in a marriage relationship it is likely that most people love (in the sense of companionship, respect, and appreciation) their spouse more than they would love a cashier at a grocery store. These "special relationships" have varying degrees of "special love" and are created

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<sup>18</sup> Doug Thompson, *Urtext Manuscripts*, Footnote 13 on page 10.

by humans to separate ourselves from God and ultimately each other. According to ACIM, this type of exclusion is a disadvantage to mankind.<sup>19</sup> Beyond content, the differentiation between this, the personalized tone, of “the Voice” and the more sanitized tone found in the published version is fascinating.

The third and final distinction of “the Voice’s” tone is found in Schucman’s personal dreams. Her dreams tended to be about people she knew, and while including vivid imagery and detail, were extremely vague and cryptic.<sup>20</sup> These experiences were common for Schucman, beginning in her early childhood. She was subject to numerous visionary experiences before she began dictating *ACIM*. These dreams were so vivid that she felt compelled to record them.<sup>21</sup>

Schucman’s extensive documentation of her personal experiences reveal that “the Voice” had varying tones. Whether authoritative, in terms of the polished publication, personalized, in terms of the Urtext, or cryptic, in terms of Schucman’s recorded personal dreams, they shed light on her revelatory process and the construction of *ACIM*. It also shows the human component of it all and the role and influence of Schucman and Thetford’s personal experiences.

## ***A COURSE IN MIRACLES: CLAIMS AND RELATIONS TO OTHER RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS***

*A Course in Miracles* makes no demand on its readership to believe. The only requirement is an orthopraxic dedication. Throughout *ACIM*’s *Text* and *Workbook* are metaphysical precepts,

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<sup>19</sup> For a fascinating and more comprehensive look on *ACIM*’s idea of “special relationships” and “special love” please refer to pages 357-361 of the *Text* in *A Course in Miracles*.

<sup>20</sup> If the reader has interest what these dreams actually say the transcription of the available *Shorthand Notes* is available at the website [http://www.jcim.net/Images/Notes\\_Transcript.pdf](http://www.jcim.net/Images/Notes_Transcript.pdf). This website was accessed on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Intermixed Pages between 5-58.

<sup>21</sup> For Helen’s transcribed dreams and visions see pages 53-82 of *Absence of Felicity*.



but there is no requisite of belief to practice its lessons or apply its teachings. While others would utilize *ACIM* in developing their own organizations, as discussed below, Schucman and her initial followers never established an official church. Instead, *ACIM* promoted individual practice, a unique aspect of the text. Another fascinating dimension to *ACIM* was its unorthodox representation of the Jesus of Nazareth.

It is difficult to reconcile *ACIM* has with Christianity. The *Text* and *The Workbook of A Course in Miracles* contain Christian vernacular. However, where Protestants, who make up 51% of Christians in the United States, emphasize belief, *ACIM* is a practice-based ideology and does not necessitate belief.<sup>22</sup> The following is an example of orthopraxy in *ACIM*:

Remember only this; you need not believe the ideas, you need not accept them, and you need not even welcome them. Some of them you may actively resist. None of this will matter, or decrease their efficacy. But do not allow yourself to make exceptions in applying the ideas the workbook contains, and whatever your reactions to the ideas may be use, use them. Nothing more than that is required.<sup>23</sup>

Statements such as theses caused *ACIM* to thrive uniquely among New Age and new American religious movements. No religious institutions formed around the book and a related hierarchy was never established. But despite this, the creation and dissemination of *ACIM* has been wrought with religious symbolism and ritual. Scholars Merlin Brinkerhoff and Jeffrey Jacob observed:

Those who subscribe to the principles explicated in *A Course in Miracles* often engage in sacred religious behavior such as faith healing, prayer and meditation, spiritual experiences that rival and perhaps even surpass the sacred nature of much formal religious observance... Quasi-religious movements like *A Course in Miracles* survive and thrive with minimum of organizational infrastructure,

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<sup>22</sup> "PewResearch Religion & Public Life Project: Religious Landscape Survey." Accessed April 12, 2015. <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#>

<sup>23</sup> *ACIM*: W-p1.Intro.Paragraph 9.

while naturally, a formal religion such as Catholicism would lose its identity without a dense organizational structure.<sup>24</sup>

Often *ACIM* has presented non-traditional representations of Jesus. For example, Schucman recorded the following, “Let me be to you the symbol of the end of guilt, and look upon your brother as you would look on me. Forgive me all the sins you think the Son of God committed. And the light of your forgiveness he will remember who he is, and forget what never was.”<sup>25</sup> This divergence from traditional Christianity has appealed to largely to individuals jaded by religion.

The Foundation for Inner Peace was the official publishing organization of *ACIM*, and consisted of the initial cast of players who brought *ACIM* to life such as Helen Schucman, Bill Thetford, Kenneth Wapnick, and Judy Skutch. Even today, the remaining organization continues to print, translate, and disseminate Schucman’s dictations for an international audience. While none of the original “inner circle” are alive today, there are numerous online organizations that use, even sacralize, *A Course in Miracles*. Others gather physically and have incorporated the manuscript into their spiritual retreats, family lives, and even in “monasteries” throughout the world. The way that these individuals and groups have adopted *ACIM* demonstrate how the text has evolved from its inception in 1965—from personal revelation into a universal text.

The Living Miracles Centers headed by David Hoffmeister has been quite prolific in its distribution of online materials and YouTube videos that discuss and promote *ACIM*. Living Miracles Centers consists of two facilities reside in rural Utah, and another retreat center in Mexico.<sup>26</sup> These groups are facilitated by full time volunteers known as Messengers of Peace who devote their lives to the teachings

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<sup>24</sup> Merlin B. Brinkerhoff and Jeffrey C. Jacob, “Mindfulness and Quasi-Religious Meaning Systems: An Empirical Exploration within the Context of Ecological Sustainability and Deep Ecology,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 38, No. 4 (Dec., 1999), pp. 524-542. Accessed April 5, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> *ACIM*: T-19.IV.B.6.

<sup>26</sup> Detailed information about Living Miracles Centers and their locations can be found at <https://livingmiraclescenter.org/centers.html>.

of *ACIM*. Many participants have been heavily influenced by the New Age movement and authors such as Wayne Dyer, Eckhart Tolle, and Marianne Williamson. In an interview that I conducted with Suzanne Sullivan, a Messenger of Peace of the Living Miracles Centers, and dedicated practitioner, she explained, "I would try to make it work in the world. I would try to do everything that I thought I was supposed to do as a person in the world. And yet there was always this feeling of being split, and that not quite working out... I think that is a very common thing with the human condition. We think we got it and then we don't, and we go after something else, then it falls." Sullivan described her introduction into the movement, "I joined with my sister and a girlfriend and we met once a week to try to see if we could start to understand...conceptually, a little bit more of what The Course was saying. We did that for a year. We read the book together, and believe me it was very helpful. We didn't know what we were doing, but we were there in prayer saying, 'okay, show us what this means.' And then it was like learning a language."<sup>27</sup> Overtime the text radically changed her life. Sullivan's story is not unlikely many others New Age seekers who have found purpose in *ACIM*.

According to Sullivan the primary role of *ACIM* in the Living Miracles Centers is community and application.

The Course has brought us all together. Its kind of the foundation of the awakening for us, but at a certain point... it says you lay it all down, and then you make a living demonstration. And I think that's where Living Miracles comes from... I mean we never sit around and study *A Course in Miracles* here, although there are many copies on the shelf. This is where you come and you literally apply the principles of *A Course in Miracle*. And so when you come here its like coming inside the book and living it.

In other words, The Living Miracles Center has made the orthopraxical nature of *ACIM* their foundational tenet.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Suzanne Sullivan with the author, conducted March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in the Metaphysical Center located in Kamas, Utah.

Also drawing from Schucman's work, devotees seem to emphasize their detachment from their formal organization. Sullivan continued,

Its just kind of a given thing. We're not trying to grow anything or grow an organization. We're not into that. We use this 'seeming' organization as a back drop for healing. End of story. If it rolled up tomorrow, none of us would care. Its not about what it looks like on the surface... for now, this is the way it looks, looks like having centers, publications, a lot of gatherings, a lot of traveling, but it could all disappear tomorrow and we would be just fine.<sup>28</sup>

Like Schucman, Sullivan perceived *ACIM* not as a product of institutional religion, but as a tool in accomplishing the work.

## CONCLUSION

*A Course in Miracles* influenced an important faction within the New Age movement. What started out as Helen Schucman's internal struggles evolved into a spiritual movement and worldwide acclaimed text. Helen Schuman was an unlikely vessel for transmitting the voice of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, it is not altogether clear when dissemination became the goal of documentation. What we do know is that her personal experiences laid the foundation for *ACIM*. Her initial channelings of "the Voice" were intimate correspondences regarding her life and interaction with others. Her scribes, most importantly Thetford, also played a role in directing the narrative and later revising the manuscript for greater applicability to a broader readership. In a closer examination of Schucman's earliest recordings, we can see that "the Voice" had multiple tones, which demonstrates processes of scripturalization. And while Schucman could not have predicted its growth, *ACIM* continues to be reinterpreted within new context and among new adherents.

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<sup>28</sup>Interview with Suzanne Sullivan with the author, conducted March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in the Metaphysical Center located in Kamas, Utah.