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‘Mercury is in a Very Ape-Like Mood’

Frieda Harris’s Perception of Thelema

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Abstract

Frieda, Lady Harris, wife of Sir Percy Harris, Liberal M.P. and party Chief Whip, created the magnificent Tarot paintings that underpin Aleister Crowley’s *The Book of Thoth*. Harris conformed to the conventional appearance of a respectable middle-class lady until she was in her sixties. However, her unwavering commitment to Aleister Crowley and the Tarot project eventually threatened not only her social standing, but also her marriage. Despite her dedication to the Thoth Tarot, she never fully engaged with Thelema, which she anthropomorphised as the bossy and interfering ‘Miss Thelema’. Nevertheless, she progressed through the grades of Crowley’s magical orders and remained loyal to Crowley and the Great Work to the end of her days, endeavouring to secure a publishing deal for a general release of *The Book of Thoth* and the Thoth Tarot deck. Using extracts from Harris and Crowley’s correspondence and Crowley’s diaries, this paper will explore Harris’s personal involvement with Thelema, both in her collaborative activities with Crowley, and her endeavours to preserve his legacy after his death.

Keywords

Frieda Harris – Aleister Crowley – Thelema – *The Book of Thoth* – Tarot

1 Introduction

Historian Marco Pasi considers *The Book of Thoth*¹ to be Aleister Crowley's (1875–1947) final major endeavour, wherein he used the conventional composition of the esoteric tarot to present his magical interpretation of the correspondences and imagery of the individual cards.² Crowley described the work as 'an Encyclopaedia of all serious "occult" philosophy. It is a standard Book of Reference, which will determine the entire course of mystical and magical thought for the next 2000 years.'³

Although an accomplished artist in his own right, Crowley chose to commission Frieda, Lady Harris (1877–1962), a well-connected society lady, wife of Sir Percy Harris M.P., to execute his designs. Pasi attributes this seemingly strange decision to Crowley's intention to 'give the tarot images a more "neutral" form, which would not get in the way of their use in meditation'.⁴ Harris had been encouraged by her husband to develop her artistic skills and had exhibited her paintings publicly. She was also fascinated by mysticism and diverse spiritual paths. Accordingly, as Pasi states, she 'was easily able to meet the demands of maintaining neutrality while allowing immediate access to the symbolic content of the cards'.⁵

This article will examine the extent and nature of Harris's involvement with Thelema. Although Pasi describes her as 'Crowley's disciple',⁶ her correspondence reveals her issues with certain aspects of her magical instruction. My contention is that Harris's commitment was to Crowley and "the Work", rather than as a dedicated Thelemite.

2 Who Was Frieda Harris?

Marguerite Frieda Bloxam was born in 1877, the second of three children. Her father, John Astley Bloxam, was a no-nonsense, former military surgeon and, according to his grandson Jack Harris, a professed atheist. Jack Harris also men-

1 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth: A Short Essay on the Tarot of the Egyptians*.

2 Pasi; 'Aleister Crowley, Painting, and the Works from the Palermo Collection', 69.

3 Aleister Crowley to Mr. Pearson, Sun Engraving, letter, May 29, 1942, Box 1, Aleister Crowley Papers 1911–1944 and undated, Special Collections Research Center (SCRC), Syracuse University Libraries.

4 Pasi, 'Aleister Crowley in Cefalu', 12.

5 Pasi, 'Aleister Crowley in Cefalu', 11.

6 Pasi, 'Aleister Crowley In Cefalu', 12.

tions that his grandmother, Jessie Bloxam (née Porter), was 'deeply religious' but this statement is unqualified.⁷

Like many wealthy middle-class young ladies, Harris was raised in the expectation of making a good marriage, and educated accordingly. Instead of academic subjects, girls were taught 'accomplishments', such as music, drawing and painting, dancing and conversational French. Harris was fortunate to be sent to a small private establishment in Broadstairs, Kent, whose lady proprietor, Miss Osmond, had trained as an artist.⁸

Harris left school with an above average standard of French, and had already started to paint, but her lack of academic schooling haunted her throughout her life. She was intimidated by her contemporaries who had benefitted from the expanding educational opportunities available to women. She developed a voracious appetite for knowledge, exploring a wide variety of subjects including art, mysticism and alternative belief structures. Her catholic tastes in reading were of particular appeal to her future husband, Percy Harris: 'We exchanged books ... We also discussed every kind of subject from political economy to the newest form of poetry or play'.⁹

Percy Harris's father, Wolf, the son of a rabbi, had emigrated from Poland to New Zealand, where he established a trading company importing mining supplies. Through his English business connections, he became friendly with the Porter family, whose daughter Jessie subsequently married John Bloxam. The families socialised together, and Percy's friendship with Frieda ultimately developed into courtship.¹⁰ The couple married in April 1901, at a civil ceremony held at the Harrises' family home in South Kensington. Considering John Bloxam's atheism and Percy Harris's Jewish ancestry, this was a logical choice. However, it is worth noting that, according to Jack Harris, Percy 'always felt he was English not Jewish'.¹¹

The Harrises spent the first two years of married life in New Zealand, where Percy took up a post in the family business. On their return to England, Percy turned his attention to politics, favouring the more progressive aspects of the Liberal Party.¹²

7 Harris, *Memoirs of a Century*, 10.

8 1881, 1891 England Census data. According to the 1881 England Census, In 1881, Maud Osmond lived with her mother in Hackney and her profession is given as 'Artist.' UK Census Collection provided by ancestry.co.uk: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/categories/35/> [accessed 12 August 2019].

9 Harris, *Forty Years in and out of Parliament*, 26.

10 Harris, *Forty Years*, 26–27.

11 Harris, *Memoirs*, 76.

12 Harris, *Forty Years*, 30 ff.

Frieda Harris fulfilled her role as a politician's wife and mother of two sons, supporting Percy's election campaigns, entertaining their guests and running his household. In return, Percy actively encouraged his wife's artistic endeavours. Their diverse social circle included writers, actors, artists and politicians. They knew the social reformers, the Pankhursts,¹³ and attended theatrical performances at the actress Ellen Terry's home in Winchelsea, where the Harrises also had a small cottage.¹⁴

Through her mother, Harris had an early introduction to Buddhism, through what she describes as Jessie Porter's 'sentimental reading of the *Light of Asia*'.¹⁵ She was also involved in Christian Science, albeit briefly. Her son Jack describes being 'prayed over by a Christian Science practitioner' in an attempt to cure his tonsillitis.¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, the treatment failed to alleviate his symptoms and his tonsils were subsequently removed.¹⁷

Due to the paucity of available primary source material, it is difficult to establish the extent of Harris's esoteric knowledge at the time of her meeting with Crowley. However, she was acquainted with fellow esoteric artists, Ithell Colquhoun¹⁸ and Maxwell Armfield¹⁹ as well as the mystical writer and artist George Russell, better known as *Æ*.²⁰

13 The Pankhursts were family friends, but although both Frieda and Percy Harris were involved peripherally with women's suffrage, there is no clear evidence to suggest that Frieda Harris participated in any militant activities, despite Jack Harris's assertion to the contrary. For further information, see Harris, *Memoirs*, 17; Kate Frye's Suffrage Diary, <https://womanandhersphere.com/2012/08/23/kate-fryes-diary-paddington-pandemonium/>; Saturday June 13 1908, <https://womanandhersphere.com/2012/10/30/kate-fryes-suffrage-diary-banner-bearer-for-the-13-june-1908-procession/> [accessed 16 August 2019].

14 Harris, *Memoirs*, 27; Harris, *Forty Years*, 51.

15 Frieda Harris to Gerald Yorke, letter, November 16. 1957, NS76 Yorke Collection, Warburg Institute, University of London, referring to Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, a verse translation of the *Lalitavistara Sūtra* describing the Buddha's journey to enlightenment.

16 Harris, *Memoirs*, 22.

17 Ibid.

18 Harris and Colquhoun had both discovered Surrealism in Paris and contributed works to the 1942 *Imaginative Art since the War* Exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in London.

19 In a letter written in 1940, Harris tells Crowley that Maxwell Armfield has suggested a possible exhibition venue for the Tarot paintings (Harris to Crowley, letter [May 1940], NS37 Yorke Collection.)

20 In a letter to William Holt, Harris says she is sending him a book 'written by A.E. whom I knew & respected.' Russell died in 1935. (Harris to William Holt, letter, [June 1947], HO-62; General Correspondence, CC00628: William Holt, Author, Artist and Traveller of Todmorden, Papers, West Yorkshire Archives, Calderdale.) It has not been possible to establish when Harris first met Colquhoun or Armfield.

In 1926, Harris published her illustrated book, *Winchelsea*²¹ which, as historian Ronald Hutton observes, combines classical mythology with the type of nature mysticism popular amongst the British middle- and upper-classes during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.²²

The chthonic deities held a particular fascination for Harris, and she considered Gilbert Murray's verse translation of Euripedes' *Bacchae*, to be 'grand'.²³ *Winchelsea* describes the arrival of the god Dionysus on the East Sussex shores, where he falls in love with a local shepherdess. After an idyllic summer together, Dionysus asks her to return with him to Greece and when she refuses, he transforms her into the town of Winchelsea.

Not only is *Winchelsea* significant as tangible evidence of Harris's early esoteric interests, it demonstrates that, prior to meeting Crowley, she already believed in the mystical aspects of sexual union: Dionysus woos the nymph, 'teaching her the mysteries, both good and evil ... In restless ecstasy this magic summer passed until the light on the marshes dimmed.'²⁴

From her correspondence, it is evident that she was familiar with the works of both Mary Baker Eddy²⁵ and Madame Blavatsky,²⁶ and in a lecture on the Thoth Tarot, she made specific reference to P.D. Ouspensky's *New Model for the Universe*,²⁷ which describes various esoteric concepts, including the Fourth Dimension and the occult significance of the Tarot.²⁸

Harris's father was a member of the United Grand Lodge of England, and it is certain that Harris herself was a member of a Masonic Order: a catalogue of her effects listed for auction included two Masonic aprons and a sash from Simpsons, which were subsequently withdrawn.²⁹

Crowley's diary for 10 November 1938 reads 'Lady Harris & Miss Porter came on after idiot Lodge'.³⁰ Harris also produced a set of three Masonic Tracing

21 Harris, *Winchelsea: A Legend*.

22 Ronald Hutton to author, email, March 2, 2018.

23 Harris to Holt, letter, [September 1946], HO-62 Holt Papers, referring to Gilbert Murray, *The Bacchae of Euripedes*. Murray was a friend of Percy and Frieda Harris.

24 Harris, *Winchelsea*, np.

25 Harris to John Symonds, letter, July 9, 1958, John Symonds Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRHRC), Austin, Texas.

26 Harris to Yorke, letter, November 16, 1957, NS76 Yorke Collection.

27 Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*.

28 Script for Tomorrow Club lecture, [either late 1942 or 1945], OS L11 Yorke Collection, given after one of the exhibitions of the Tarot paintings at the invitation of the club chairman, Trevor Blackmore.

29 *Catalogue Lady Frieda Harris Archive*.

30 Aleister Crowley, diary, November 10, 1938, NS21 Yorke Collection. Frieda Harris met Madge

Boards.³¹ Although it has been assumed that Harris was a Co-Freemason, due to her involvement with Theosophy and women's suffrage, research at the headquarters of Le Droit Humain has failed to produce any evidence to support this. Taking into account John Bloxam's membership of the U.G.L.E., which refused to acknowledge Co-Freemasonry but tolerated women's Masonic orders, I would argue that it is more likely that Harris was a member of an order of Women Freemasons. However, I have been unable to find tangible evidence to support this theory.³²

3 Crowley's Magical Pupil

Harris and Crowley were introduced by their mutual friend Clifford Bax at a dinner at the RAC club on 9 June 1937, and by the following February, Harris was already preparing preliminary sketches for *The Book of Thoth*, and studying Crowley's magical writings: 'Your book is wonderful but I *cannot* understand most of it as I do not know the secret language'.³³ It is possible that the book in question was *Magick in Theory and Practice*.³⁴ Crowley mentions lending books to Harris,³⁵ and she subsequently purchased a copy of 'Magick' for a family friend.³⁶ Crowley was pleased to note in his diary that 'She is seriously on the Path',³⁷ and by 3 May she was 'quite definitely a pupil'.³⁸

As historian of religions Manon Hedenborg White explains, membership of Crowley's A.:A.: involved a one-to-one relationship between student and mas-

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Porter through their mutual interest in women's suffrage and the two women remained lifelong friends.

31 Tracing Boards were created by initiates as they passed through each of the three degrees of Freemasonry. For further information, see Rees, *Tracing Boards of the Three Degrees in Craft Freemasonry Explained*. When the original paintings were sold in 1976, the catalogue listed them as dated as c. 1945–1950, (R.A. Gilbert to author, email, November 15, 2016.)

32 Enquiries include reviewing London Lodge minutes and attendance books in the archives of the British Federation, International Order of Freemasonry for Men & Women, Le Droit Humain, conversations with the archivist for the United Grand Lodge of England and telephone enquiries to the Order of Women Freemasons. There is no evidence to suggest that Percy Harris was a Freemason.

33 Harris to Crowley, letter, [February 1938], NS37 Yorke Collection. Emphasis in original text.

34 Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*.

35 Crowley, diary, January 4, 1938, NS21 Yorke Collection.

36 '[Frieda] Bought a "Magick" for Tony Galloway,' Crowley, diary, May 17, 1938, NS21 Yorke Collection.

37 Crowley, diary, February 18, 1938, NS21 Yorke Collection.

38 Crowley, diary, May 3, 1938, NS21 Yorke Collection.

ter. The individual degrees of the order were mapped in ascending order against the *sephiroth* of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.³⁹ On 11 May, Crowley recorded in his diary, ‘[Frieda] chose motto TzBA (Heb) for A.:A.:’ Harris also ‘agreed to affiliate to O.T.O. £10.10.0.’⁴⁰ As a Freemason, Harris would have affiliated to the equivalent grade in the O.T.O., as itemised in her letter of 12 May.

Here enclosed cash £ 10. 10/- for the fee for initiation	
Minerval	1-1-0
I ^o “	1.1.0
II ^o “	1.1.0
III ^o “	1.1.0
Companion HRAE ⁴¹	2.2.0
Annual Subscrip.	4.4.0

£ 10.10⁴²

Companion HRAE indicates that Harris had attained the IV^o grade of Freemasonry and there is evidence to suggest that she subsequently reached VII^o (Sovereign Grand Inspector General) of the O.T.O.⁴³ Although there are no fees for the A.:A.:, Harris, aware of Crowley’s interminable financial difficulties, proposed that she paid for her magical instruction, ‘£1-1 every time we do work together which should be once a week.’⁴⁴

The two fundamental principles of Thelemic philosophy are, ‘Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law’⁴⁵ and ‘Love is the law, love under will.’⁴⁶ In Thelema, Will pertains to identifying one’s true path in life, rather than a hedonistic pursuit of one’s own desires irrespective of the needs and desires of others. Although it was customary to use these two phrases from *Liber AL* when greeting fellow initiates, Harris did not adopt the practice in her corre-

39 Hedenborg White, *The Eloquent Blood*, 46.

40 Crowley, diary, May 12, 1938, NS21 Yorke Collection. Note in pre-decimal sterling, one pound and one shilling constituted one guinea, therefore Harris paid Crowley ten guineas.

41 HRAE: Holy Royal Arch of Enoch which corresponds to the Masonic IV^o Holy Royal Arch.

42 Harris to Crowley, letter, May 12, 1938, NS37 Yorke Collection.

43 Richard Kaczynski to author, email, August 5, 2020. Harris’s handwritten copy of her VII^o paper, ‘De Homunculo’ was an item listed for sale by Weiser Antiquarian—date and purchaser unknown.

44 Harris to Crowley, letter, June 7, 1938, NS37 Yorke Collection.

45 Crowley, *Liber AL*, 31, 1.40. *The Book of the Law* is commonly referred to as *Liber AL* and references cited by chapter and line.

46 Crowley, *Liber AL*, 34, 1.57.

spondence with Crowley until 1940.⁴⁷ However, in a letter written towards the end of 1938, when she went to Worthing 'to succour 2 friends who are at the point of starvation,' she told Crowley, 'My Law of Thelema kicks at the situation for my Will is to spread my finance on the necessities of Life & I don't really hold with High Living'.⁴⁸ Not only does this show that Harris was already assimilating Thelema into her everyday life, it illustrates her tendency to use mystical concepts in mundanity. It is also possible that Harris was drawing parallels with Crowley's insistence on maintaining a lifestyle he could no longer afford, and using Thelemic humour to deflect any potential backlash. Another such example is her outrage over Crowley's suggestion that she should emulate the artist Aubrey Beardsley in her design for the Adjustment Tarot Trump: 'Know what you *won't* do shall be the whole of my Law! ... I can bear many things, chilblains included, but I will *not* draw a lady like Aubrey Beardsley'.⁴⁹

Harris embarked on an intensive course of magical training in parallel with her work on the Tarot paintings. Crowley saw *The Book of Thoth* as 'the vindication of my life's work for the last 44 years; and will be the Compass and Power of the good ship Magick for the next 2000 years'.⁵⁰ Accordingly he 'instructed her in astronomy and astrology, mysticism, Yoga, geometry, algebra, history, literature, chemistry and what not'.⁵¹

Harris, with 'neither Latin or Greek ... no classical education, indeed no education',⁵² tackled the Greek and Hebrew alphabets, the kabbalah, and the Chinese I Ching, or Yi King as Crowley preferred to call it. From the outset, Harris struggled to incorporate her expanding mystical knowledge into her personal circumstances, especially following the outbreak of the Second World War.

In order to concentrate on the Great Work, Harris relocated to her small studio in the Cotswolds village of Chipping Campden, leaving her husband at the family home in Chiswick in the care of their servants. Crowley challenged her rationale for such a decision: 'to avoid external realities is the way of the Black Brothers and the way of death. The way of the Tao is to accept everything that

47 Harris's letter to Crowley [August 1939], NS37 Yorke Collection, ends with 'Love is the Law, Love under Will,' but the first apparent use of both salutation and ending is 17 October 1940, NS37 Yorke Collection.

48 Harris to Crowley, letter, [1938], NS37 Yorke Collection.

49 Harris to Crowley, letter, December 29, 1939, NS37 Yorke Collection. Emphasis in original text.

50 Crowley to Ben Stubbins, letter, April 22, [1942], NS117 Yorke Collection.

51 Crowley, Memorandum, [1942], Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC.

52 Harris to Crowley, letter, August 11, [1940], NS37 Yorke Collection.

comes your way, adjust yourself to it without emotion, and forget it'.⁵³ Nevertheless, once installed, she told Crowley:

... my spiritual state has been sadly neglected, perhaps because I have been trying to paint & live Percy's life at the same time. Now these circumstances are giving me a chance. I have had 3 days rest, the first in 2 years & I've even had time to read a bit of Magic & try to assimilate yr. book.⁵⁴

Far from escaping 'external realities', I maintain that Harris was all too aware of them, and she endeavoured to integrate his teachings into her diurnal activities, even though she doubted their practical efficacy. She told Crowley, 'I am most grateful for your teachings in magic but for all that, it won't alter how I wish to lead my life which is without speculation or grand use of powers'.⁵⁵ I would interpret this to mean that she had no desire to use magical ritual to achieve specific goals.

As an artist, Harris saw and felt everything both material and mystical and, from her correspondence, it is apparent that she found it difficult to separate the two. No matter who she encountered, their physical environment and character were of equal significance to their spirituality: Mary Baker Eddy and Madame Blavatsky were both deemed to be 'the epitome of early Vict. [Victorian]': the prose style of the former 'would kill you at sight' and Harris 'always had a good sleep on 'Isis Unveiled' & [Blavatsky's] many ponderous words'.⁵⁶ Similarly, when visiting an Indian holy woman at her ashram outside Delhi, Harris was appalled by the squalor of her surroundings, concluding that she was 'not the right sort of pilgrim'.⁵⁷

It is clear from her letters that she also considered herself as the wrong sort of disciple. Despite her fondness for Greek mythology, she confessed to Crowley, 'I do not love Tahuti or any of the Egyptian Deities I try all the same'.⁵⁸ She considered the 'rules of the O.T.O.' to be 'unnecessary'. 'All these I seem to have attempted to put into practise all my life without the interference of what seems to be the dangerous element of an inquisition or benevolent (or not) dic-

53 Harris to Crowley, letter, August 31, 1939, OS EE2.238 Yorke Collection.

54 Harris to Crowley, letter, September 14, [1939] Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC, assumed to refer to Crowley, *Magick*.

55 Harris to Crowley, letter, October 26, [1939], NS37 Yorke Collection.

56 Harris to Symonds, letter, July 9, 1958, Symonds Collection HRHC.

57 Harris to Gerald Yorke, letter, [late January 1956], NS76 Yorke Collection.

58 Harris to Crowley, letter, October 17, 1940, NS37 Yorke Collection.

tator'. She personified Thelema 'in the person of a Miss Thelema, who is very precise ... She always wears white & interferes with me & makes me work too hard & I hate her'.⁵⁹

Despite the rigidity of the O.T.O., Harris genuinely admired Crowley's writings, even though she struggled to articulate his teachings coherently.

... when it comes to your poetry or visions or notes, off we go in my own country & carried along by your living words, I do understand what you mean easily, tho, if you question me, I am so alarmed that it vanishes in a bleat or a baa.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, Harris endeavoured to incorporate her magical practice into her daily routine:

The invocation gets forgotten but I try. The discipline would do me a power of good. I can pull it off morning & night. I would like to work systematically but I fancy I have a bit of Karma to chew up about being a woman & the prey of the servant & domestic side of Life who peck at me.⁶¹

In order to progress through the grades of the orders, Crowley would have examined Harris on the theory and practical elements of each, but in her eyes, 'It does not appear that I am up to the standard of the 1st degree of O.T.O. or qualified to be the office boy of the Yi'.⁶²

Harris's magical instruction continued during her self-imposed exile in Chipping Campden and it is evident that practice as well as theory was incorporated into Crowley's occasional visits, treated as ever with Harris's irrepressible humour: 'I enjoyed your visit most awfully & the last evening attached to the Rite, was particularly succulent. I haven't seen Rite [sic] since but when I do, I will report on it'.⁶³

As Crowley was instructing Harris personally, he would have determined the nature and level of magical training she received. However, these elements

59 Harris to Crowley, letter, August 11, [1940] NS37 Yorke Collection. Note, I have corrected Harris's typing errors for clarity of reading: original text reads 'attented', 'preatise', 'inquisition' and 'Philosophy'.

60 Ibid.

61 Harris to Crowley, letter, October 22, 1940, NS37 Yorke Collection.

62 Harris to Crowley, letter, August 11, [1940] NS37 Yorke Collection.

63 Harris to Crowley, letter, [March 1940], NS37 Yorke Collection.

belong to specific degrees in the A.:A., and therefore it is possible to draw conclusions on Harris's progress. Following a probationary period, the student is initiated to the grade of Neophyte, $1^{\circ}=10^{\circ}$, mapped against Malkuth, the tenth *sephirah* on the Tree of Life. The primary focus is mastering the technique of ascending through the seven planets by astral projection. On successful completion, the Neophyte is initiated into the grade of Zelator, ($2^{\circ}=9^{\circ}$), wherein s/he is instructed in yoga and meditation techniques for posture and breath control. This is followed by Practicus, $3^{\circ}=8^{\circ}$, aligned to the eighth *sephirah*, Hod, and the planet Mercury, in which the student learns the kabbalah, philosophical meditation, and 'one mode of divination'.⁶⁴ As quoted above, Pasi argues that Crowley wanted Harris to create 'neutral' Tarot images that would not distract users when meditating. Therefore, it was agreed that Harris would study the Yi King rather than the Tarot as her designated mode of divination.

Initially she felt that, unlike Egyptian deities, 'Chinese Philosophy appears, at present easier, as it shows no sign of a mythology which I can contort into phantoms with the wrong names'.⁶⁵ However, she found the complexity of the Yi King overwhelming, writing numerous letters querying the structure of individual hexagrams and their correspondences, determined to understand every nuance.

Despite wartime rationing and restrictions, Harris battled on, trying to fit her studies around her work on the Thoth Tarot paintings and her husband's intermittent visits, essential as a refuge from his duties at Westminster and in his constituency, but by December 1940, she was close to abandoning the Yi altogether. She attributed her difficulties to a general antipathy to divination: 'I don't want it, it does not interest me'.⁶⁶ 'Divination is as much good to me as Chess'.⁶⁷ I want to express everything in colour & form & analysis does cramp the painter'.

'However', she assured Crowley, 'honorable sir, I bow before your heaven-sent wisdom & hope that O Son of the Great Horus, you may be able to open the spiritual eyes of your humble & dishonorable student'.⁶⁸

In his reply of December 17, Crowley reminded Harris that 'The Yi was your choice from several. I approved highly, because it is the key to the kind of paint-

64 Crowley, 'Liber XIII vel Graduum Montis Abiegni: A Syllabus of the Steps upon the Path,' 5–6.

65 Harris to Crowley, letter, August 11, [1940] NS37 Yorke Collection.

66 Harris to Crowley, letter, December 10, [1940], NS37 Yorke Collection.

67 Harris would have been well aware of Crowley's mastery of chess and may even have played unsuccessfully against him.

68 Harris to Crowley, letter, December 15, 1940, NS37 Yorke Collection.

ing after which you were groping when I first met you'.⁶⁹ The typed transcript of his diary for the same date reads 'Wrote Frieda re $8^{\circ} = 3^{\circ}$ '.⁷⁰ which equates to Magister Templi, a grade claimed only by Crowley, his former mistress and disciple Leah Hirsig (1883–1975),⁷¹ and his 'magical son' Charles Stansfeld Jones (1886–1950).⁷² Although the diaries were transcribed by people conversant with Crowley's magical system and the various degrees of the A.:A.:,⁷³ I would contend that the contents of Crowley's letter indicate that the numbers were transposed in error, and should read ' $3^{\circ} = 8^{\circ}$ ' or Practicus. However, as the original diaries were subsequently either lost or destroyed, my conclusions cannot be verified.

Crowley explains that 'You are doing divination when you ask me a question. Divination is ... a method of rendering the mind lucid, "opened unto the Higher"'. He maps Harris's difficulties with the Yi against the Tree of Life: 'You must raise the mind from Ruach to Neschamah'. In the kabbalah, *Ruach* is the intellect and *Neschamah*, intuition. The ultimate aim is to receive enlightenment from the Supernal Triad, the three highest *sephiroth*: Binah, Chesod and Kether: 'There are three ways of escape: the path of Gimel, the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel: the path of He, mysticism; and the path of Zayin, Inspiration or Divination. Ruach hates it all!'⁷⁴

The Practicus follows the path of Zayin, hence the rationale for Harris studying the Yi King: 'If you are to make a new mark in Art, you need a new mind, a mind enlightened from the Supernal Triad. Divination is the best way for you: that is why your Ruach hates it so much'.

You must practice *constantly*. When your eye is caught by a scrap of paper on the road, a cloud in the sky, a dewdrop on a leaf, *anything*, stop and wonder: 'All these ages have I travelled, and the worlds have rolled on, to achieve this climax: what is this Message to me?' Do this very constantly and earnestly, very lovingly, and one day, probably when you are in the depths of dryness, the answer will come.⁷⁵

69 Crowley to Harris, letter, December 17, 1940, NS117 Yorke Collection.

70 Crowley, diary, December 17, 1940, NS21 Yorke Collection.

71 For further information on Hirsig and her role as Crowley's High Priestess, see Hedenborg White, *Eloquent Blood*, 94–107.

72 For further information on Jones's progression through the A.:A.:, see Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 268, 295 and 308.

73 The transcripts are understood to have been made by Kenneth Grant, Crowley's former magical pupil. (Discussions with Richard Kaczynski, video call, July 25, 2020).

74 Crowley to Harris, letter, December 17, 1940, NS117 Yorke Collection.

75 Ibid. Emphasis in original text.

Harris, reassured by Crowley's response, continued her study of the Yi King, and came to appreciate its relevance to her painting. Years later, when she was living in Kashmir, she returned to the Yi, telling Gerald Yorke 'It seems my geometrical drawing leads me in this direction'.⁷⁶

The next grade is Philosophus, 4^o=7^o, involving further study of yogic practices, including Bhakti-Yoga, in which the devotee unites him/herself to a specific deity, as described in 'Liber Astarté'.⁷⁷ The devotee prepares a suitable magical environment for their chosen deity and develops their relationship through a series of invocations. As will be argued in the following section, Harris had a special affinity for the god Mercury. It is my contention, that having achieved the Practicus grade, Harris began working with 'Astarté' in 1941, selecting Mercury as her designated deity.

4 'The Abominable Mercury'⁷⁸

In the Hermetic tradition, the Roman deity Mercury equates to the Greek Hermes and the Egyptian Thoth, whose animal aspect is the baboon or Cynocephalus ape.⁷⁹ In addition to the planet and the Roman deity, Crowley and Harris also refer to Trump I of the Tarot, the Magus, as Mercury. In September 1939, Harris wrote to Crowley:

... what I am to do with Mercury after your description I can't think. Leave it like Michael Angelo did the face of Christ. But I wonder if those heavy arms are nearly right. He is a powerful god. Surely the Ape should move, not the Eternal Figure. What do you think?⁸⁰

Expressing her dissatisfaction with her work, Harris complained, 'Mercury is fussing dreadfully. How I should like to do them all again'.⁸¹ After receiving new design notes from Crowley she confessed, 'I'm worried about Mercury. I can only see him as I've drawn him not so tricksey as you seem to know him. How-

76 Harris to Yorke, letter, November 16, 1957, NS76 Yorke Collection.

77 Crowley, 'Astarté Liber Berylli Sub Figura CLXXV', 39.

78 Crowley, diary, August 4, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection.

79 The Latin name for the yellow baboon is *papio cynocephalus*, from the Greek word for dog-headed. The term Cynocephalus apes is used to refer to Egyptian statues of Thoth bearing the head of a baboon.

80 Harris to Crowley, letter, [September 1939], Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC.

81 Harris to Crowley, letter, [September 1939], Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC.

ever I'll try'.⁸² Harris may not have seen the Tarot Mercury as 'tricksey' but her anthropomorphised image of the deity most certainly was: in December, she wrote

Just imagine what happened (Mercury is in a very ape-like mood). I found the waste-pipe from the fixed basin leaked. 'Aha' I said in the words of a well-known poet, 'I'll fix it by giving the nut a tap with the hammer!' And so I did & the whole porcelain basin cracked & has had to be wrenched from the wall by a horde of plumber-demons & I have spent a day of discomfort & displacement.⁸³

Mercury's planetary influence was also considered. Harris told Crowley,

I am beginning to believe that Life is another planetary symbol, just a materialization by Mercury & as solid as Matter probably working on the quantum principle in jumps & having a nucleus & electrons or 'something' working in the same way, so that in Death you leave the Body with the Life, like you leave a leg & arm behind you & if you are lucky you are so absorbed in contemplation, too happy to notice you are no longer living & conscious.⁸⁴

It is clear that Mercury was gaining significance in Harris's eyes, acquiring a very definite persona. Telling Crowley of her intention to bring some of the paintings to London for him to view, she wrote, 'I will get out Mercury only he is frozen—his legs are stiff I think'.⁸⁵

The intention was to exhibit the cards to attract potential sponsors. In May 1941, Harris informed Crowley, *Now about the Exhibition*. Mercury is evidently wishing to hold it—*Nicholson & Venn* High Street Oxford have offered me their Gallery'.⁸⁶

The Oxford exhibition was beset with challenges, which Harris tackled while Crowley resolved his latest accommodation crisis. Harris lamented to Crowley 'Mercury is prancing madly, I wish he would leave you a roof & me my repose of mind'.⁸⁷

82 Harris to Crowley, letter, [September 1939], Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC.

83 Harris to Crowley, letter, December 11, [1939], Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC.

84 Harris to Crowley, letter, [April 1940], NS37 Yorke Collection.

85 Harris to Crowley, letter, February 18, 1941, NS37 Yorke Collection.

86 Harris to Crowley, letter, May 11, 1941, Aleister Crowley Papers. Emphasis in original text.

87 Harris to Crowley, letter, June 2, [1941], NS37 Yorke Collection.

Nicholson & Venn's ultimate refusal to host the exhibition necessitated a last minute relocation to the Randolph Hotel. Crowley, initially only aware of Nicholson & Venn's cancellation, 'invoked Mercury all A.M. turning every thing [sic] that turned up into a mercurial symbol'. He also sent a telegram to Harris assuring her of a successful outcome.⁸⁸

By the time the exhibition was over, Harris was nearly prostrate with exhaustion. She and Crowley agreed that she should undertake a "Great Magical Retirement" or "G.M.R.", for which Crowley provided instructions.⁸⁹ Sadly, as Harris reported, 'I have not written, not because I have been successful in having a M.R. but because I have been unable'. She had spent two days resting at a friend's cottage before being obliged to attend to a succession of family crises. 'Returning Campden Monday to attempt M.R.'⁹⁰

It is feasible that Crowley's instructions for the magical retirement pertained to 'Astarté', and Harris was unable to complete the process to achieve appropriate unity with Mercury. My argument is supported by a letter Crowley wrote to Ben Stubbins in August 1942, following Harris's decision to hold two unsanctioned exhibitions of the Tarot paintings: 'F(rieda) H(arris) is in a bad way. She would not invoke Mercury properly, and got obsessed by the Cynocephalus—over a year ago, now—and has made blunder after blunder'.⁹¹

I would argue that Harris endeavoured to unite herself with Mercury during her "M.R." Although it is impossible to determine the outcome of the ritual, it is clear from the letter quoted above that Crowley believed Harris had offended Mercury deeply.⁹²

Harris began work on a new version of the Magus Tarot trump, and her letters refer increasingly to Mercury as a manifested entity. In September 1941, she told Crowley, 'I can't do Mercury. I have invoked Jupiter to call him off & he is coming to stay with me for 3 weeks. In other words Percy is going to have another holiday'.⁹³

Harris found Chipping Campden insufficiently remote from her domestic obligations: 'No time for Mercury yet. I feel he wants a special & private retreat & I see a possibility about Oct 25th of doing a flit for a fortnight if you think he

88 Crowley, diary, June 7, 1941, NS22 Yorke Collection.

89 Crowley, diary, June 18, 1941, NS22 Yorke Collection.

90 Harris to Crowley, letter, June 29, [1941], NS37 Yorke Collection.

91 Crowley to Ben Stubbins, letter, August 6, [1942], NS117 Yorke Collection.

92 Crowley's letter to Stubbins continues, 'The worst of it is that He will punish her most terribly; of all the Gods, Mercury is the easiest to offend, the hardest to propitiate. He has no human feelings at all; truth is the one virtue that appeals to him. I am very fond of F.H. and had hoped to make her a real artist; and I cannot even avert the wrath of the insulted God!'

93 Harris to Crowley, letter, September 11, 1941 OS L11 Yorke Collection.

will wait so long. I am itching to get at him'.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, she assured Crowley 'Mercury is flitting in & out so don't be God-jealous or God-zealous & I am in full flight on Tuesday & have got some new paints which I despaired of'.⁹⁵

It was not until November that Harris was finally able to retreat to Minehead, with Mercury personified as her travelling companion. Her first choice of hotel 'was apparently run by policemen who blew whistles & marshalled you into meals & forbade you to sit in your bedroom so I was sure Mercury would not like that.' Accordingly she relocated to:

... a vast & hideous edifice inhabited by dim beige ladies in $\frac{3}{4}$ skirts & splay feet & at the top I have found a chamber ... 4 storeys up, looks over the sea & I may have breakfast in my bedroom. So here we are, Mercury & his humble servant ... we are alone & can only be approached by miles of ... carpet.⁹⁶

The hotel clearly provided the environment she needed, as she told Crowley, 'Mercury is liking this place. I have been at him all day. What *bliss* not to be interrupted'.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, Crowley was working on his "War Aims", a concise summary of the Law of Thelema in twenty-two lines, ultimately named *Liber Oz*.⁹⁸ This would be issued as his 'anti-Christmas' card, and he commissioned a limited run of 200 cards, 150 of which would feature the Aeon Tarot trump, the remaining 50, the Devil. Harris protested vehemently against the use of the latter, believing that it would undermine the integrity of the Thoth Tarot as a whole, because the uninitiated would see the card as 'a pictorial representation of the male organ & your Christmas Greeting will be taken as a filthy postcard ... I think Mercury also has a joke with you sometimes'.⁹⁹

It is important to note that it was the use of the Devil card rather than the tenets of Thelema, as presented in *Liber Oz*, to which she objected. She subsequently used the Aeon *Liber Oz* card as a publicity flyer for an exhibition of the Tarot paintings in Chipping Campden.¹⁰⁰

94 Harris to Crowley, letter, [October 1941] NS37 Yorke Collection.

95 Harris to Crowley, letter, [late October 1941], NS37 Yorke Collection.

96 Harris to Crowley, letter, November 5, [1941], NS37 Yorke Collection.

97 Harris to Crowley, letter, [November 9, 1941]. NS37 Yorke Collection. Emphasis in original text.

98 Crowley, *Liber Oz sub figura LXXVII*.

99 Harris to Crowley, letter, [November 11, 1941]. NS37 Yorke Collection.

100 'Battleship Week card', Pennsylvania State University, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Frieda Harris Papers, 1923–1964 (3805).

In her early days as an artist, Harris had created an alter ego, Jesus Chutney, probably influenced by her involvement in Surrealism. She used the name not only for her paintings, but for poetry, correspondence and even the telephone listing for her studio in Richmond.¹⁰¹ Harris occasionally wrote of Jesus Chutney as an independent individual, such as using him to explain the delay in producing her latest version of the Magus card. 'I understand from the messages he [Jesus Chutney] sends me that he has embroiled himself with a person called Mr. Mercury & that he cannot arrange matters to their mutual satisfaction for another week'.¹⁰² Despite her endeavours, neither Harris or Crowley were satisfied with the final result and further versions were produced during the course of 1942.¹⁰³

As mentioned above, Harris exhibited the Tarot paintings during Chipping Campden's Battleship Week in March 1942. Prior to this, Crowley and Harris had agreed to remain anonymous in case Crowley's controversial reputation deterred prospective sponsors. Harris also wanted to avoid any negative impact her association with Crowley might have on her social standing and Sir Percy's political career. As a resident of Chipping Campden, who received Crowley as a visitor, her involvement was already known and she had been specifically invited to exhibit the cards, therefore there was no question of withholding her identity.¹⁰⁴

However, in July 1942, she arranged an exhibition at the Berkeley Galleries in London, without Crowley's prior agreement, with a new and unapproved catalogue, and openly declaring herself 'Frieda, Lady Harris, wife of Sir Percy Harris M.P.' as the artist. Not only did Harris exclude Crowley personally, she glossed over the source of her mystical knowledge. Crowley's diary for July 8 includes a transcript of a newspaper review, under which he wrote: 'No word of credit to the Order. She has no self respect'.¹⁰⁵ Initially he considered taking

101 Crowley took over tenancy of the Richmond studio when Harris retreated to Rolling Stone Orchard. In a letter to Gerald Yorke, he writes, 'Please note the above address which is in the telephone book under the name of Chutney.' January 25, 1940, OS D5 Yorke Collection.

102 Harris to Crowley, letter, November 20, [1941]. NS37 Yorke Collection.

103 'Frieda brings Mercury', Crowley, diary, March 10, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection; 'I also enclose the Mercury—I suppose he will do. He squeezes thro but I wish I had done him better. I don't *hear* him like that at all', Harris to Crowley, March 29, [1942] NS37 Yorke Collection; 'Frieda brought Mercury', Crowley, diary, April 29, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection; 'the SHOW is superb. Everything exactly right—bar the abominable Mercury.' Crowley, diary, August 8, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection.

104 'This is Campden Battleship Week. I've been asked to show my pictures.' Harris to Crowley, March 22, [1942], letter, NS37 Yorke Collection.

105 Crowley, diary, July 8, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection. The original clipping is held in the Aleis-

legal action, keen to establish that *The Book of Thoth* was the result of over forty years intense study, and that he had commissioned Harris to create the Tarot images.¹⁰⁶

Although this is clearly evident from contemporary correspondence and diary entries, Harris now insisted that it was she who had engaged Crowley. Concerned about Crowley's plan to have the cards published through the O.T.O. in California, whom she deemed 'a collection of ecstatic idiots', she wrote to the writer Louis Wilkinson (1881–1966),¹⁰⁷ saying 'I can't do anything until I've established my claim as authorship, designer & painter of the cards as he now says I did them to his design (heaven help me!) & talks as if I had been commissioned by him when the truth is the reverse'.¹⁰⁸

Fortunately, Crowley and Harris were able to resolve their individual concerns face to face, and he subsequently visited the exhibition: 'Saw Berkeley Galleries. She had put A.S. [Ace of Swords] in window!!! She agreed to my plan of publishing illustrations'.¹⁰⁹

However, barely three weeks later, Harris opened a second exhibition at the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, again without alerting Crowley.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, Crowley went to confront her:

Frieda there: very surprised to see me, the low thief! She 'had just written to tell me about it'—I don't think. Told her I knew it on Saturday morning. But—the show is superb. Everything exactly right—bar the abominable Mercury.¹¹¹

As quoted above, Crowley attributed Harris's actions to her failure to 'invoke Mercury properly'.

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ter Crowley Collection, 1889–1989, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRHRC), Austin, Texas, believed to be from the London Evening Standard. The full title of the publication is missing from clipping. Date determined from moonrise and moonset times cited in article, either 8 or 9 July 1942. Kaczynski to author, email, July 22, 2019.

106 Aleister Crowley to Isidore Kerman, July 9, 1942, Aleister Crowley Collection HRHRC.

107 Louis Umfreville Wilkinson, author and biographer who wrote under the name of Louis Marlow. He was a personal friend of both Harris and Crowley, and Crowley is included in Wilkinson's book: Louis Marlow, *Seven Friends*.

108 Harris to Louis Wilkinson, [July 1942], Ordo Templi Orientis Archives O.T.O.

109 Crowley, diary, July 14, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection.

110 'Collin sends me notice that F.H. is showing the Cards again at Royal W.C. Painters Socy. In Conduit St—again she didn't tell me.' Crowley, diary, August 1, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection.

111 Crowley, diary, August 4, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection.

She has ended by a really foul insult to Mercury, showing as Trump I 'The Juggler', a horror most unspeakable instead of the one that I had approved. It is a vile thing. The worst of it is that He will punish her most terribly; of all the Gods, Mercury is the easiest to offend, the hardest to propitiate. He has no human feelings at all; truth is the one virtue that appeals to him.

I am very fond of F.H. and had hoped to make her a real artist; and I cannot even avert the wrath of the insulted God!¹¹²

Ultimately Harris and Crowley reached a formal legal agreement, but it was several months before relations between them improved. In a letter to Karl Germer (1885–1962), Crowley's representative for O.T.O. in the United States, Crowley reported meeting Harris for lunch: 'F.H. is decidedly cowed ... she is now rather powerless to resist me. She shouldn't have insulted Mercury'.¹¹³

Despite their conflict, Harris continued to pay her weekly fee for magical instruction, but by November her involvement with Crowley had finally caused a rift between Sir Percy and Frieda, and she was facing financial difficulties, obliging her to end Crowley's stipend.¹¹⁴

Although it was May 1943 before the Harrises resolved their differences, by December, Frieda and Crowley were once again on friendly terms. For Christmas, Crowley gave Harris 'the "Jungitur" mantra from Grimorium Sanctissimi to appease Mercury for her'.¹¹⁵ This mantra forms part of the 'Paris Working', a series of rituals undertaken by Crowley and his disciple Victor B. Neuburg (1883–1940) in January 1914, devised to invoke both Mercury and Jupiter.¹¹⁶ This invocation is particularly apt in view of Harris's tendency to refer to Sir Percy as Jupiter, whose appeasement was also needed. The definitive Magus Trump, however, still eluded them, and in June 1943, Crowley recorded in his diary that 'She may do a Magus based on the Paris Working'.¹¹⁷

112 Crowley to Ben Stubbins, letter, August 6, [1942], NS117 Yorke Collection.

113 Crowley to Karl Germer, letter, November 22, 1942, O.T.O.

114 '[Frieda] Says has only £17 p.m.! wants to stop stipend'. Crowley, diary, November 11, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection.

115 Crowley, diary, December 23, 1942, NS22 Yorke Collection. '*Jungitur en vati vates; rex inclyte rabdou/ Hermes tu venias, verba nefanda ferens*. (Seer is joined with seer:/Renowned king of the wand, come thou, Hermes, bearing the ineffable word.)' quoted in Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 269.

116 Crowley, 'Liber CDXV Liber Opus Lutetianum or The Paris Working'. For further detail, see Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 269–274.

117 Crowley, diary, June 16, 1943, NS23 Yorke Collection.

I can trace no further references to design work on the Magus after this date. It is the preserve of a magical practitioner to assess the ritual's efficacy. However, I would argue that Harris believed that she had finally appeased Mercury, enabling her to realise the Magus as he would wish to be portrayed. As mentioned above, relations between Harris and her husband were also improving, so in her eyes she had also placated Jupiter.

There are only a few passing references to Mercury in subsequent correspondence, in which it is Mercury's divine intervention that features, such as Harris attributing the disappearance of some of the Tarot paintings to 'Mercury capering I fear'.¹¹⁸ She later likens his contribution to the Great Work to an alchemical process:

As far as Mercury is concerned the Alchemists would say we have attempted a mixture with impure gold or Mercury is not extracted with sufficient heat. Well I tried & so did you & if we haven't made the Philosopher's Stone I feel I have extracted something which is precious to me.¹¹⁹

Harris continued to study Magick with Crowley, occasionally acting as his scribe, despite his uncharitable view of her abilities: 'F.H. who can't spell and taps the ink into her nib with maddening irregularity! But she was a dear to do it!'¹²⁰

In January 1944, Crowley noted 'F.H. ... knows quite a lot about Dhyana: had something like it set 10–11 in a field of *gorse* (!)'¹²¹ *Dhyana* forms part of the meditation practices to master "Control of Thought", an element of the Philosophus grade. Successful achievement of *Dhyana* is said to enable the student to merge subject with object, transitioning from knowledge to realisation, bringing them closer to the supernal triad on the Tree of Life.

The Philosophus grade is followed by Adeptus Minor, whose sole task is to achieve 'knowledge and conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel,' the path of Gimel on the Tree of Life. The relationship with the Holy Guardian Angel is introduced in the training for Probationer. As early as January 1940, Harris was reading 'Liber LXV: Liber Cordis Cincti Serpenti',¹²² which Crowley describes

118 Harris to Crowley, letter, July 14, 1944, NS37 Yorke Collection.

119 Harris to Crowley, letter, November 8, 1944, NS37 Yorke Collection.

120 Crowley, diary, October 13, 1943, NS23 Yorke Collection. Fiat Yod was Mrs Macky's magical name.

121 Crowley, diary, January 3, 1944 NS23 Yorke Collection. Emphasis in original text.

122 Aleister Crowley, 'Liber LXV: Liber Cordis Cincti Serpenti'.

as 'An Account of the Relations of the Aspirant and his Holy Guardian Angel', telling Crowley, 'I do not pretend to apprehend it, only it is like music, and the only kind of writing I want to read, only it makes me feel as if I lived in a desert and I am mighty thirsty'.¹²³

It is not possible to establish from the available source material whether Harris was working towards Adeptus Minor. However, she later told Crowley, 'I am only clear about one thing ... I will die trying to see my own guardian angel & you are a wonderful help & guide & I am very grateful'.¹²⁴

Harris and Crowley's friendship continued until his death. Harris built a collection of his complete works, given pride of place on her 'Crowley Shelf' in her London studio in Devonshire Terrace, requesting manuscripts of missing documents which she could either copy or transcribe.¹²⁵

5 The Wrong Sort of Thelemite?

By 1947, the O.T.O. was virtually defunct in England, and as quoted above, Harris considered the members of the Californian lodge to be 'ecstatic idiots'. As already stated, progression through the A.:A.: was, at least theoretically, confined to the secret relationship between magus and disciple. With Crowley's death, Harris's magical training ceased. Unsurprisingly, her subsequent correspondence includes little or no reference to Thelema or the O.T.O., but it is apparent that her quest for mystical enlightenment continued. I would posit that Harris, who had struggled to assimilate Thelema into her everyday life, and suffered so cruelly through her devotion to Mercury, began to realise that her true path lay elsewhere. Nevertheless, it was Crowley's spiritual teachings that led her to this realisation, as acknowledged in her expression of gratitude quoted above.

Following their brief separation in 1943, Sir Percy's visits to Chipping Campden resumed, and although they continued to maintain separate London residences, they appear to have enjoyed a happy relationship, socialising and holidaying together. Frieda supported Sir Percy's ongoing political aspirations while continuing with her personal interests, but she missed the mystical stimulation and support she had received from Crowley. After returning from a holiday in Italy, Harris told Holt, 'I went to Worcester to stare at geometry &

123 Harris to Crowley, letter, January 7, 1940, Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC.

124 Harris to Crowley, letter, [December 1945], NS37 Yorke Collection.

125 Harris to Crowley, letters, June 12, 1947; [late 1947], NS37 Yorke Collection.

see if I could find my lost God there ... The Great Spirit left me—indeed it has still because I still wonder if just living is enough'.¹²⁶

This void was filled in part when she became acquainted with the Indian dancer, Ram Gopal, when he brought his ballet company to England in 1951. Sensing they shared an esoteric bond, he asked her to design some theatre sets and a stormy collaborative friendship developed, similar to her relationship with Crowley.¹²⁷

After Sir Percy's death in 1952, Gopal invited Harris to Ceylon, where he was choreographing dancers for the film *Elephant Walk*, ultimately released in 1954.¹²⁸ In Harris's words 'I went to Ceylon for fun and to India in search of a God'.¹²⁹ Through her own research and her studies with Crowley, Harris was acquainted with Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic mysticism and she now undertook the 'task of find a satisfactory God'.¹³⁰

Learning that Ouspensky had achieved *Samadhi*, the meditation state that follows *dhyana*, at a Buddhist shrine outside Columbo, Harris had entreated Gopal to take her there: 'I watched with envy the reverence of my companions and the attentive face of Ram Gopal and his friends, but I do not like distempered statues and no thrill overcame me'.¹³¹ Once again, Harris was incapable of separating the mundane and material from the mystical experience. Nevertheless, she was drawn to India and returned in 1955, again at Gopal's behest, to work on the designs for a new ballet to be premiered at the 1956 Edinburgh Festival. While Gopal endeavoured to secure sponsorship from the Indian government, Harris took the opportunity to explore and, as she told Gerald Yorke, 'I took a flight in the unknown Kashmir & have found Paradise ... peace & beauty & adventurous I feel I shall never come back'.¹³²

Harris was in search of a guru who could provide spiritual guidance, and she paid several visits to an Indian Holy Woman, known as the "Holy Mother", whose ashram was located outside New Delhi. As mentioned above, Harris's initial reactions were unfavourable but:

... on making inquiries I find the lady is a believer in the law of Thelema. She is a Tantric devotee. She has had lots of lovers and has certainly passed

126 Harris to Holt, [June 1949], HO-73/1 Holt Papers.

127 Harris, 'A Soufflé for Ganesha', 249–251.

128 Harris, *Odd Boy Out*, 197. Present day Sri Lanka.

129 Harris, 'Soufflé', 251.

130 Harris, 'Soufflé', 275.

131 Ibid.

132 Harris to Yorke, letter, Nov 11, 1955, NS76 Yorke Collection.

the 9th degree which accounts for the flick of recognition she bestowed on me when I was introduced 'Love! Love! love!['] & never mind what manner of expression.¹³³

Crowley incorporated aspects of Tantric philosophy into his Thelemic sex magical rituals.¹³⁴ However, as discussed with Richard Kaczynski, it is unlikely that the Holy Mother was a practising Thelemite; rather that the two women recognised a mutual understanding of Tantric sex.¹³⁵ Therefore, when Harris asked 'Did she think the sexual embrace was the first introduction to holiness?' she was somewhat dismayed to be told that it was 'a wrong path'.¹³⁶

Harris then asked if 'the inspiration, concentration & joy one experienced in painting was a real path'. The Holy Mother concurred, as long as it was not for fame or financial gain. She told Harris she 'should contemplate it every day & do daily exercises to reach it'.¹³⁷

Through Crowley, Harris had learnt to fuse together her mystical training with her painting, enabling her to create 'something completely new in art'.¹³⁸ The Holy Mother confirmed what Harris now realised, that art, rather than Thelema, was her true spiritual path.

In 1954, Harris declined an invitation from Alexander Watt, a Canadian disciple of Crowley's, to deliver a lecture tour of the women's universities in North America, including 'a short lecture and discourse on woman's place in the new Aeon'.¹³⁹

I do not think I feel prepared to lecture on Thelemic doctrines to 'Women only'. I am afraid I do not know much about them and if the lectures are to be a secret initiation into Magic and Tantric rituals, there is nothing in those cards to support those approaches to Wisdom and anyhow I am not the person to do it, being an artist with a simple understanding. It is alarming to be faced with an audience of over-educated women, all

133 Harris to Yorke, letter, [January, 1956], NS76 Yorke Collection.

134 For a discussion of the incorporation of Tantra and Yoga into Crowley's Magick, see Djurdjevic, 'The Great Beast as Tantric Hero'.

135 Kaczynski to author, video call, July 25, 2020. Sex magick of the 1X° pertains to vaginal intercourse. It is difficult to assess Harris's understanding of Tantra. The only other reference to Tantra in her correspondence is in her letter to Alexander Watt, quoted below.

136 Harris to Yorke, letter, [February, 1956], NS76 Yorke Collection.

137 Harris to Yorke, letter, [February, 1956], NS76 Yorke Collection.

138 Harris to Crowley, letter, December 10, [1940], NS37 Yorke Collection.

139 Gerald Yorke to Harris, letter, [July 1954], NS76 Yorke Collection.

anxious to have personal application of the meaning of the cards. I suffered from that during the War Exhibitions and I was younger and stronger.¹⁴⁰

Setting aside Harris's enduring insecurities concerning 'over-educated women',¹⁴¹ hiding behind the guise of the simple artist, her reluctance to proselytise clearly shows she did not consider herself to be a dedicated Thelemite. In her observations on her Battleship Week exhibition, it is clear that her focus was on the reaction to the cards and their symbolism, rather than the underlying Thelemic philosophy. She told Crowley that her initial visitors, 'look ashamed & a bit awed or else they want their silly fortunes told'.¹⁴² In her opinion, the most interesting reactions came from the children, whom she invited to choose their favourite picture, resulting in being asked to explain the meaning of the Lust card.¹⁴³

However, Harris was committed to safeguarding Crowley's legacy. She was genuinely concerned about John Symonds' biography of Crowley, telling Gerald Yorke, 'I suspected it of being superficial as I don't believe John's genius can understand Aleister. There is a dimension missing in John so he has to wallow in Aleister's pig-stye [sic] which was outside Aleister's private dwelling house'.¹⁴⁴ Harris's fears were well founded: Kaczynski describes *The Great Beast* as 'sensational and critical', riddled with inaccuracies, catalogued by Yorke in a 'lengthy and damning document'.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Harris to Alexander Watt, letter, August 3, 1954, NS76 Yorke Collection.

¹⁴¹ Harris describes an encounter with the 'distinctly alarming' Mrs. Sands, who claims to be a Rosicrucian and professes extensive knowledge of 'Right & Left Paths & Black & White Magic', although Harris clearly understands Mrs. Sands knows nothing about Rosicrucianism. Nevertheless, Harris was sufficiently intimidated to tell her 'it was impossible to me to talk about the cards as I had only done the drawings'. Harris to Crowley, January 6, 1941, NS37 Yorke Collection.

¹⁴² Harris to Crowley, letter, March 22, [1942], NS37 Yorke Collection.

¹⁴³ 'That's a knockout blow for a poor adult. So somewhat timorously I said "Well you must understand the feeling of it. Now how do you feel if you see nice chocolates & there, you get them & how good they taste. That is a picture of how you feel about those chocolates."'; Harris to Crowley, letter, March 25, [1942], Aleister Crowley Papers SCRC. A group of grammar school girls asked if she could deliver a lecture on the cards but Harris joked to Crowley 'I don't suppose the Campden authorities will allow that!'. I would argue that Harris's reluctance in this instance is again twofold: not wishing to address academically educated women and her perceived inability to proselytise Thelemic doctrine.

¹⁴⁴ Harris to Yorke, letter, June 25, 1958, NS76 Yorke Collection, referring to John Symonds, *The Great Beast*.

¹⁴⁵ Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 554.

She was also incensed by avant-garde filmmaker and Crowley enthusiast Kenneth Anger's portrayal of Crowley in his film *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954).¹⁴⁶ She attended the London premiere and accosted Anger afterwards. The director attempted to appease her but the argument ended acrimoniously.¹⁴⁷ In a letter to Gerald Yorke, Harris described the film as:

... a disease not a film, absolutely filthy & ought to be suppressed ... Why don't you all squash the nasty little pansy satellite. I don't think you should tolerate him or what he stands for even if you are amused by his gyrations as we are all still alive & he is tainting a friend's memory.¹⁴⁸

Her commitment to the Great Work was equally unwavering and as late as 1961, she was endeavouring to secure a publishing deal for *The Book of Thoth* and a complete deck of Tarot cards.¹⁴⁹

6 Conclusion

Harris's quest for spiritual fulfilment began at an early age but the fusion of the two most important aspects of her life—art and mysticism—only occurred during her collaboration with Crowley. Until this time, it would appear that she had been relatively contented with her life, but what Crowley offered was so significant that it became her primary focus regardless of the potential damage it might do to her marriage and social standing.

In her commitment to Crowley and the Great Work, Harris was prepared to jeopardise her marriage, even lamenting to Crowley 'I wish I had not married

146 Kenneth Anger, *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (United States, 1954).

147 Kansa, *Wormwood Star*, 122–123.

148 Harris to Yorke, letter, [February 1955], NS76 Yorke Collection. Harris's use of the word 'pansy' is indicative of homophobia. She uses the term in several letters to Gerald Yorke: she describes Crowley's son Attaturk as 'an attractive boy, too attractive, very sensitive handsome & a gentleman & also young, helpless & with no knowledge of the world not a pansy', Harris also reports asking an Indian holy man, 'What is the reason of all those "pansy" boys in the West', to be told that it was because Jesus had never married! Harris to Yorke, letters, [February 1955]; October 4, 1958, NS76 Yorke Collection. In her correspondence with Crowley, Harris's discussions about sex always pertain to heterosexual congress. Crowley's diaries from 1937 onwards indicate that his homosexual encounters had ceased. Therefore, Harris may have been unaware of this aspect of his proclivities or chose not to engage with him on the subject.

149 See correspondence between Yorke and Aries Press, Yorke and Carl L. Weschcke, Llewellyn Press and Harris and Weschcke, July–October 1961, NS76 Yorke Collection.

Jupiter!!!'¹⁵⁰ It was only Sir Percy's deep devotion to his wife, and the couple's enduring friendship that enabled their relationship to survive.

Harris's progress through the various degrees of the A.:A.: ended with Crowley's death. However, as early as January 1940, Harris told him, 'I do not think the ritual of Magic is much good to me, I seem to have to draw everything I want to understand'.¹⁵¹ Returning to Pasi's description of Harris as Crowley's disciple, Harris dedicated herself to her magical studies, endeavouring to progress through the grades of his magical orders. However, despite her Masonic connections, she found the structure of the O.T.O. too constricting, favouring a more natural approach to mysticism and meditation. I would argue that Harris was drawn more to the intellectual rather than the practical aspects of mysticism, and was happiest when she could express these aspects in her artwork.

Moreover, Harris was incapable of separating the mystical from the mundane, nor could she repress her sense of humour, despite potentially detrimental results. This is exemplified by her playful treatment of Mercury, a deity with whom she sought to create a magical bond. In Crowley's words, 'Mercury is the easiest to offend, the hardest to propitiate'.¹⁵² From a magical perspective, I would argue that Crowley and Harris believed that the *Jungtutur* mantra Crowley gave Harris to appease Mercury also secured Sir Percy's appeasement.

In conclusion, it is my contention that although Harris was totally committed to bringing *The Book of Thoth* to publication, overall it was Crowley's spiritual guidance, rather than Thelemic doctrine, that underpinned her personal mystical development. Under Crowley's auspices, Harris found 'the key to the kind of painting after which you were groping when I first met you'.¹⁵³ Instead of becoming a dedicated Thelemite, she finally understood that her true path was 'the inspiration, concentration & joy one experienced in painting'.¹⁵⁴

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