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***Different Attitudes to Esotericism in Peter Ackroyd's and  
Dan Brown's novels***

Ph.D. Dissertation

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## Abstract

This doctoral dissertation primarily explores the literary representations of various esoteric currents in contemporary Anglo-American literature, namely in the works of two acclaimed authors, Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown. Through the analysis of selected novels by these writers, I will investigate how occult themes have been differently utilised; rendered less obscure, and more comprehensible to a broader readership within popular culture. These authors and their works have separately been the focus of numerous academic studies by scholars such as Susana Onega, Jeremy Gibson, Julian Wolfreys, David William Charnick, György Endre Szőnyi, Dan Burstein, Simon Cox, Darrell Block, Bart D. Ehrman, Sarah Newman, particularly in the field of esotericism studies. Ackroyd's novels are prime examples of historiographic metafictional works that employ esoteric discourses to convey transcendental and visionary traditions. In contrast, Brown's straightforward storytelling style incorporates a plethora of rational traditions presented in alternative ways. To better understand these esoteric conventions, I initially established a theoretical foundation for further analysis. I mainly focus on the historiography of esotericism and instances included in this category by different scholars. These chronological records demonstrate how the fundamental nature of esotericism is adjusted across studies, contingent upon socio-cultural and historical contexts, academic pursuits, and the disciplines of the respective scholars. Beginning with the origin of the term in usage, I highlight the importance of specific categorisations and underscore their crucial role in establishing esotericism as a distinct field of study and a topic of scholarly discourse. Additionally, I outline Wouter J. Hanegraaff's three models of the study of esotericism and highlight two of them that pertain to the modern application and re-enchantment of esotericism, as they form the theoretical basis for identifying the literary representation of esoteric conventions utilised in the selected novels. Concurrently, I also explore the fictional use of esotericism, introducing its presence as a longstanding tradition in literature.

The research questions addressed in this doctoral dissertation have mainly facilitated the intellectual, social, and cultural examinations of the literary representations of esotericism through the given novels. While the first part of the dissertation underlines the authors' stylistic differences in treating esoteric themes, the second part tackles their motivations behind it. For this reason, to draw a line between Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's esotericism writings, the former's visionary and the latter's rational profiles are addressed separately through a detailed analysis of the specific esoteric and occult conventions utilised in each of their texts. Ackroyd's occult configurations, such as the occult city, transcendental time, and mythical union, are built

into the novels by implementing esoteric motifs and blurring the rational perception of the usual for the readers. Similarly, Dan Brown's occult writing is demonstrated as overarching the esoteric genius of opposites completing each other and the quest for *gnosis* granting absolute power. His rationalistic interpretation of esoteric events and rituals contributes to their popularity as fast-paced, engaging reads without being overly complex.

Consequently, this doctoral dissertation delves into the motivations and types of literary impulses that drive authors to incorporate esotericism into their works. I contend that Dan Brown and Peter Ackroyd, regardless of their personal approaches to the occult, utilise esoteric themes as a potent literary device to subvert religious doctrines, establish alternative forms of rationality, communicate profound emotions like sublime and terror through mystical quests, manipulate historical events, and achieve commercial and marketing objectives. Therefore, they readily employ quest-like or visionary storytelling techniques or experiment with history to challenge conventional notions of time. This aspect can be regarded as one factor that erodes authors' resistance to the allure of the occult. In addition to the increasing demand, which serves as a lucrative source of income for writers, it prompts them to continually explore occult philosophies. The commercial value of esoteric narratives has transformed them into the products of popular culture, contributing to the growth of contemporary occulture and resulting in millions of copies sold. Additionally, the interplay between the sublime and the occult enhances the psychological appeal of these books for modern readers. Both the authors' desire to convey the sublime and the economic value of esoteric discourse within contemporary occulture play a role in their decision to incorporate esoteric themes into their works, a topic explored in this doctoral dissertation.

## Table of Contents

1.	Introduction: Bridging Ackroyd and Brown .....	7
1.1.	Unveiling esoteric literary landscape.....	7
1.2.	Unmapped areas of research and selection principles.....	9
1.3.	Research questions and arguments .....	11
1.4.	Research approach .....	12
1.5.	Navigating through the dissertation .....	13
2.	Theoretical Framework .....	15
2.1.	Defining esotericism.....	15
2.2.	Hanegraaff's models of esotericism .....	22
2.2.1.	Inner traditions.....	24
2.2.2.	Early modern enchantment.....	24
2.2.3.	Postmodern occult .....	26
2.3.	Fictional esotericism .....	28
2.4.	Theoretical poetics of novels' genres .....	33
2.4.1.	Historiographic metafiction.....	34
2.4.2.	Alternative historical novel.....	36
3.	Peter Ackroyd's Esoteric Narration .....	39
3.1.	Peter Ackroyd's visionary profile.....	39
3.1.1.	<i>Hawksmoor</i> .....	41
3.1.2.	<i>The House of Doctor Dee</i> .....	46
3.1.3.	<i>Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem</i> .....	50
3.2.	Complex historiographic metafiction.....	55
3.3.	Esoteric constructs.....	58
3.3.1.	Occult city.....	59
3.3.2.	Transcendental time .....	63
3.3.3.	Mythical union.....	66
4.	Dan Brown's Occult Language .....	72
4.1.	Dan Brown's straightforward rationality.....	72

4.1.1.	<i>The Da Vinci Code</i> .....	74
4.1.2.	<i>The Lost Symbol</i> .....	80
4.1.3.	<i>Origin</i> .....	87
4.2.	Alternative history telling .....	94
4.3.	Dan Brown's occult writing .....	102
4.3.1.	Complementary esoteric contradictions .....	104
4.3.2.	Quest for <i>gnosis</i> .....	111
5.	The Authors' Acquiescence to the Lore of Esotericism .....	115
5.1.	Sublime .....	116
5.2.	Economic values of esoteric narrations .....	124
6.	Conclusion .....	130
	Reference List: .....	135

## 1. Introduction: Bridging Ackroyd and Brown

A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead.

Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair*<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Unveiling esoteric literary landscape

The arcane belief systems and practices covering an expansive range of varying elements like magic, mysticism, astrology, cabbala, alchemy, theosophy, telepathy, clairvoyance, tarot, etc., serve as a pool of exhilarating ideas for an imaginative mind. Thus, esotericism's unavoidable forays into contemporary literary studies and the fictional world fuel the creation of an augmenting number of literary works nowadays. The recently modern rise of the New Age movement from the "counterculture and the popular occult explosion" of the 1960s, when "a return to an archaic enchanted world" seemed unreal, has strongly contributed to this fascination. (Asprem 2012, 7; Hanegraaff 1996, 10; Owen 2004, 244). However, this archaic fascination involving esoteric motifs is not characteristic only of New Age. As a form of returning to the past, nostalgia blended with esoteric admiration was present among Romantic writers like William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, John Keats, Peter Bell, and Walter Scott (Taylor 1977). Romantic poets were susceptible to an "intuitive mode of thought," which was "fusing, ecstatic, and open to unaccountable possibilities" through the "effective expression of a nonsectarian spiritual impulse" (Davies 1998, 10). The movement generated a perspective on esoteric conceptions as a "metaphor for poetry," or "the world view of Romantic movement is occultism... insofar as romantic poets expressed philosophical and cosmological ideas, those ideas were occult" (Taylor 1977, 100; Senior 1959, 50).

Contrary to Romantic nostalgia involving esoteric motifs, the neo-Victorian style of the contemporary revisit of the past—Victorian occult was "suffused with ghosts, revenants and spectral forms" (Arias 2006, 87). This spectral visitation of Victorian occult in contemporary literature should mainly be attributed to Sigmund Freud for his groundbreaking 1919 essay

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Greene, 1991. *The End of the Affair*. New York: Twentieth Centuries Penguin Classics, p. 4.

titled “The Uncanny.” In this work, Freud contends that the uncanny arises from “something familiar that has been repressed” (Freud 1919, 247). The return to this repressed and feared emerged in conjunction with occult practices in the “fictions of uncanny,” such as A. S. Byatt’s *The Conjugal Angel* (1994), Sarah Water’s *Affinity* (1999), Julian Barnes’s *Arthur and George* (2005), etc. (Arias 2006, 90). While Romantic writers were fond of the liberating power of esoteric conventions, Victorian novels were characterised by death, spirits, and ghosts. The New Age movement, on the other hand, embraces in itself anything that “could fit it” rather than categorising its content based on concealed bits of diverse emotions, knowledge, belief systems and the like (Hanegraaff 1996, 1).

The shift from religious paradigms to spiritual experiences and the emergence of occulture are other instances of the proliferation of esoteric conceptions. Occulture, born from occult practices within the realm of popular culture, has transformed the whole idea of authoritative aspects of faith, reshaping them into personal paths of self-discovery and self-development. The ubiquitous character of these ideas since the 1960s is rooted in the accessibility, growing appeal, and “respectability” of esotericism (Partridge 2013, 113). Consequently, esoteric, and occult ideas, spiritualities, religions and practices continue to maintain their popularity within contemporary fictional world.

In this research, I explore two distinct approaches to the fictional utilisation of esoteric conventions in the selected novels by contemporary British writer Peter Ackroyd<sup>2</sup> and American writer Dan Brown.<sup>3</sup> Although they represent contemporary Anglophone literature and draw their inspiration from a similar pool of esoteric ideas, Ackroyd and Brown differ in many aspects, starting with their upbringing, education, career paths, writing styles, the literary traditions they represent. Peter Ackroyd’s profound obsession with Englishness and the English literary tradition positions him as a visionary literary figure among fiction writers. By employing “counter-realist strategies,” he offers brand new looks through his transcendental interpretations of both existent and non-existent events and characters from English literary history and culture (Wisner 2014). In contrast, Dan Brown, uses conspiratorial accounts of

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I am siding with the majority attributing Peter Ackroyd’s writings to postmodernism (Chalupský 2012; 2016a, 55–58; Miquel-Baldellou 2017; Wisner 2014; Farahmandfar 2022), even though he is not seeing himself in this or any other category (Chalupský 2016a, 20, 54–55; Onega and Ackroyd 1996; Vianu and Ackroyd 2006).

<sup>3</sup> In case of Dan Brown’s attribution to postmodernism (Liefeld 2005; Wagner 2007; Douglas 2016), here I am siding with the minority of scholars regarding his alternative storytelling as presenting a “postmodern paradox” in terms of blurring the line between fact and fictions, yet in line with the realist tendencies of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century literature, in Günter Leypoldt’s term “new realism ‘after’ postmodernism which recovers the interest in ‘experience’ and ‘social relevance’ that postmodernists had lost (2004, 19).



existent religio-cultural (hi)stories and presents them as alternative historical narrations.<sup>4</sup> I believe these variables underlie the authors' unique ways of representing occult ideas in their literary endeavours, addressing the readers on different levels. This difference arises from the distinct nature of Peter Ackroyd's intertextual texts and Dan Brown's traditional storytelling opposing in terms of comprehension, with the latter being an easy "lightning-paced,"<sup>5</sup> easily digestible reading experience, which is the major reason behind Dan Brown's ranking as the first at the top 100 bestselling books of all time in the UK, according to *The Guardian*.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2. Unmapped areas of research and selection principles

Scholarship abounds in the study of various perspectives on esotericism and all unorthodox practices associated with it. Esotericism, the occult, and occulture have been examined from diverse viewpoints, including mystical, religious, cultic, psychological, medical, and more. Although earlier literary texts have been widely analysed from the prism of esotericism, fictional esotericism has received relatively limited scholarly exploration in contemporary literature (Arias 2006; Brînzeu 2011; Brînzeu and Szönyi 2011; Faxneld 2017; Ligan 2006; Livers 2010; Mihály 2015; Parlati 2011; Szönyi 2010, 2017; Voicu 2011; Ziolkowski 2015). To the best of my knowledge, a comparative analysis of Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown, and their use of esoteric devices, has not been approached from this perspective yet despite they have separately been subject to numerous studies (Bock 2004; Champion 2008; Chalupský 2012; 2016b; Introvigne 2004; 2005; Lacy 2004; Prosser 2014, 2020; Sauerberg 1999; Szönyi 2004a; 2004b; Vernyik 2015a). Thus, the academic world would benefit from further investigation into the literary representations of such esoteric practices in the contemporary fiction, to which this work aims to contribute. The authors' motivations for incorporating esoteric philosophies, and the resulting structural, stylistic, and semantic changes that literary texts may undergo as an outcome, will also add to scholarly discussions about the place of

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<sup>4</sup> Dan Brown and Peter Ackroyd are mainly being regarded as low literature and high literature, respectively. By being evaluated as "macdonalized' writing, ready-in-2-minutes, offered to a global palate for whom natural flavours are the remnants of a forever-gone world" (Calabrese and Rossi 2015, 433), Brown's texts face significant amount of criticism alike about being at all an example of proper literature (Brown 2006). However, to stay within the premises of the primary academic focus on the subject matter of this dissertation, I am restraining myself only to discussing the author's use of esoteric motifs.

<sup>5</sup> The description is used by the official web page of the author, accessed on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 <https://danbrown.com/the-davinci-code/>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/aug/09/best-selling-books-all-time-fifty-shades-grey-compare#data> Accessed on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

esotericism in literature and the conceptualisation of fictional esotericism. These issues will be thoroughly addressed within the scope of the present study, based on a corpus of six novels, namely, *Hawksmoor* (1985), *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993) and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) by Peter Ackroyd and *The Da Vinci Code* (2000), *The Lost Symbol* (2009) and *Origin* (2017) by Dan Brown. Despite the subjectivity constructed by the authors in these novels, each book tells a captivating esoteric story conveyed and interpreted in a language and style accessible to readers. In the selection of these very novels specifically, I have mainly relied on their themes which deal with the essential conventions of esotericism as shown below. These themes have attracted numerous writers, including James Hogg, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Somerset Maugham, Aleister Crowley, Gustav Meyrink, Lindsey Clark, John Crowley, Jennifer Lee Carrell, Deborah Harkness, Philip Pullman, J. K. Rowling, and others, alongside Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown, for inspiration. This has later significantly contributed to the development of occulture as a “reservoir that is constantly feeding and being fed by popular culture” (Partridge 2013, 116).

Peter Ackroyd is not only an author of fiction or historiographic metafiction but also a biographer of prominent literary, cultural, and historical figures. He is also a chronicler of England’s history during certain periods. Since his poetics of postmodernism in *The House of Doctor Dee* was my master’s thesis subject, and esotericism was one of its essential conventions, my personal aspiration was to take this study further to a doctoral level and compare Ackroyd to Brown, another widely acclaimed writer and his contemporary. To justify my choices, I acknowledge that not all of Peter Ackroyd’s fictions delve into esoteric themes with essential occult conceptions. *Hawksmoor*, *The House of Doctor Dee* and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* are specifically centered around vital occult practices and abstraction dealing with sacrificial rituals, homunculus, and golem creation, respectively. However, his other novels do feature esoteric concepts to varying degrees, serving multiple objectives.

As to Dan Brown’s novels, all of them delve into mysterious and often manipulative knowledge that is challenging to identify per se. Nevertheless, these selected ones respond to the motifs found in Peter Ackroyd’s novels in the sense that they also explore fundamental esoteric traditions. *The Da Vinci Code* covers the story of the Holy Grail, the sacred feminine origin, and an occult ceremony of sacred marriage, *The Lost Symbol* illuminates the activities and characters associated with the fraternal organisation of the Freemasons, and *Origin* explores questions of genesis according to three major religions and their future as explained within the context of the age of science. Therefore, the corpus of this dissertation comprises these six novels, each embracing crucial esoteric lore. Their study will address some of the significant

research questions in the realm of literary representations of esotericism. This includes exploring the core reasons behind the authors' engagement with this field and examining the outcomes of these encounters.

Another compelling reason that underscores the significance of this study is the notable absence of similar research, whether be it diachronic or synchronic, and the dearth of comparative perspectives per se. Both Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown, along with their respective works, have individually been subjects of a substantial body of academic works and scholarship by experts such as Susana Onega, Jeremy Gibson, Julian Wolfreys, David William Charnick, György Endre Szőnyi, Dan Burstein, Simon Cox, Darrell Bock, Bart D. Ehrman, Sarah Newman, among others, within the field of esotericism studies. While Peter Ackroyd's texts serve as excellent examples of historiographic metafictional novels that convey transcendental and visionary traditions through esoteric discourses, Dan Brown's straightforward storytelling is replete with numerous rational explanations and alternative presentations of esoteric traditions. However, a comparative study of these two distinct writers and their writings is not present in esoteric scholarship. Thus, the ambition of this dissertation is to help in filling the gap. At the same time, in recent years, scholarly study of esotericism has witnessed an accelerated trend towards interdisciplinary exploration (Asprem and Strube 2021, 1). In pursuit of a similar intellectual odyssey, this dissertation aims to contribute to this trend by encompassing the exploration of literary, religious, and academic natures of esotericism.

### **1.3. Research questions and arguments**

Being products of the latest centuries, the novels under study can be categorised within the realms of postmodern literature, with realist elements in Dan Brown's works. Contemporary literature significantly benefits from the diverse array of occult practices, presented in particularly an intriguing manner. Therefore, the primary objective of this dissertation is to explore the use of such esoteric conventions in the contemporary literary contexts crafted by these two widely acclaimed authors. Through the analysis of selected novels by Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown, I aim to address questions of how and to what extent esoteric motifs affect the historiography in Peter Ackroyd's novels and the factual aspects of Dan Brown's fictions. Furthermore, I seek the literary motivations that drive these authors to take resources in esotericism. I believe that the findings to these inquiries will help in filling the existing gap in

the comparative study of Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's novels and contribute to the broader exploration of contemporary literary representations of esotericism.

The research questions tackled in this dissertation primarily aid in the intellectual, social, and cultural analyses of literary representations of esotericism through the given works of Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown. Regarding the first research question, I contend that both Dan Brown and Peter Ackroyd, despite their distinct approaches to the occult, employ esoteric themes to challenge religious canons, create alternative rationality, convey the sublime and terror through mystical quests, play with history and serve commercial and marketing purposes. They are unafraid to craft quest-like or visionary narratives and to manipulate history in order to blur the perception of time. In this way, Peter Ackroyd's historiography blended with esoteric motifs results in historiographic metafiction, and Dan Brown's incorporation of realistic accounts give rise to conspiratorial alternative historical novels. As to the second research question, I argue that both authors' use of esoteric elements serve as a potent literary technique that directly engages readers' emotions and influences their consumer behaviour through several ways.

#### **1.4. Research approach**

In terms of the methodology, I mainly rely on text analysis that helps to unveil layers of meaning and significance within literary works by implementing comparative, genre, cultural-historical analysis, and close reading to address the questions posed in the chapters. The theoretical framework of the study is also constructed with the assistance of comparative perspectives. The introduction of theoretical controversy on the subject aids in better situating the subject within the larger field through a review of available literature. Therefore, I am utilising a systematic literature review to define prior theoretical and cultural studies in the scholarly study of literary esotericism.

The theoretical framework of this work adopts a top-down approach, commencing with the formation of esotericism as a subject of scholarly studies and proceeding to examine the application of esoteric motifs in fictional writings. With the historiography of esotericism, I demonstrate how its essence varies from study to study depending on the socio-cultural and historical conditions, academic interests, and the disciplines of scholars dealing with it. Followingly, I present how Wouter J. Hanegraaff treats esotericism as an elusive concept of

thought classifying it into three groups based on nature of the thought. He identifies three models—inner traditions, early modern enchantment, and postmodern occult, yet I will particularly rely on the last two models as the fictional representations of esoteric currents in contemporary literature, which coincides with postmodern occult, are the end products of the late 20<sup>th</sup>- and early 21<sup>st</sup>-centuries re-enchantment, which, in its turn, coincides with the early modern enchantment version.

The corpus of this dissertation consists of six novels in total. Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, *The House of Doctor Dee* and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* are historiographic metafiction while Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Lost Symbol* and *Origin* are thrillers. The secondary literature facilitating this specific examination embraces even a broader range associated with its multifaceted nature. Being interdisciplinary, the current exploration conjoins theoretical, critical, cultural, and religious domains.

## 1.5. Navigating through the dissertation

This **introductory first chapter** sheds light on the entire research process, including its aims, significance, and gaps. The following **second chapter** first maps the theoretical terrains in the horizon of the existing literature on the topic, narrow down the options, provide their etymological discussion, locate the appropriate model of theory — which is, in this case, Wouter J. Hanegraaff's models of esotericism — and focus on the relevance of the selected model for the current study. Consequently, I elaborate on the fictional esotericism that the novels under study demonstrate. At the same time, here, I furnish a theoretical approach to the literary genres of the novels since they radically differ from each other from the compositional point of view. Therefore, theoretical analysis of Peter Ackroyd's historiographic metafiction and Dan Brown's alternative historical novels are to be explored in this section.

The **third chapter** aims to introduce Peter Ackroyd's esoteric narration, by referring to the author's visionary profile. This chapter analyses Ackroyd's unique style of fictional writing, which focuses on Englishness and the influence of London on the lives of its inhabitants. Furthermore, the precise exploration of esoteric motifs in his three novels creates a clear idea of his ways of employing esoteric currents. In the final part of this chapter, I am using these esoteric motifs to demonstrate occult narrative constructs built with the assistance of these

esoteric devices. The historiographic metafictional peculiarities of Ackroyd's novels are also included in this section.

The **fourth chapter** enlightens Dan Brown's literary profile. Famous for his short and precise sentences, Dan Brown conveys rationalistic perspectives of alternative approaches to the religious history of Christianity. Though these orthodox conventions have been acknowledged worldwide by its followers for centuries, they have become one of the most frequent topics for conspiratorial speculations. This part is followed by an analysis of the novels and Brown's way of writing virtual history to present its *what-if* scenarios. The final sub-chapter outlines Dan Brown's techniques for utilising esoteric and occult motifs.

The following **fifth chapter** covers the authors' main motives and reasons for seeking inspiration from the realm of this "rejected knowledge" (Hanegraaff 2013, vi). The multi-dimensional esoteric milieu is rich with terror, mysticism, the sublime, and secrecy that provide fiction writers with the flexibility to interplay with the readily existing concepts, resulting in intriguing plots. These plots have also paved their way into contemporary occulture and proved commercially beneficial at the same time.

The dissertation concludes with **the sixth chapter**, which reflects upon the conducted research study, the findings, and outlines plans for future studies.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter, I primarily focus on the historiography of esotericism and its various taxonomy by different scholars, including Frances Yates, Antoine Faivre, Kocku von Stuckrad, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Arthur Versluis, Wouter Hanegraaff, Henrik Bogdan, György E. Szónyi, Egil Asprem, Julian Strube, Kennet Granholm, Anthony Blake, Guy Stroumsa and others. These scholars have done fundamental work for the recognition of esotericism as a subject-matter of academic discourse. I demonstrate how the essence of esotericism varies across different studies, influenced by socio-cultural and historical conditions, academic interests, and the disciplines of the scholars involved. Starting from the term's appearance in usage, I also highlight the significance of certain classifications by the mentioned authors and draw upon their importance in shaping esotericism as an independent field of study and a subject of scholarly discussions. Furthermore, I sketch Wouter Hanegraaff's three models of esotericism and emphasise two of them, particularly those related to the re-enchantment and contemporary applications of esotericism. These models constitute the theoretical foundation for examining the literary representation of esoteric conventions utilised in the novels under study. At the same time, I delve into the fictional employment of esotericism in a separate sub-chapter to introduce this tradition as a longstanding presence in the literary world.

In the second part of this chapter, I present the unique genre peculiarities of Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's novels concerning their narratological specifications. While Ackroyd is a keen user of historiographic metafiction, Brown is famous for his straightforward storytelling of conspiratorial stories. Infused with esoteric elements, these two distinct styles contribute to the multi-faceted conventions of history writing. Consequently, I conclude this chapter by exploring the theoretical poetics of these genres.

### **2.1. Defining esotericism**

Esotericism has been the subject of numerous studies. However, its meanings, conventions, and methods of examination vary significantly. Therefore, in this chapter, I first begin with establishing the conceptual framework of esotericism that I adopt as the basis for my doctoral dissertation. I introduce various definitions of esotericism, compare their main currents, and elucidate their underlying principles. In order to present the specific model of esotericism that

I employ in this project, I first delve into some pivotal academic studies that have essentially shaped our scholarly comprehension of esotericism. Subsequently, I locate the theory and express its applicability for the to the objectives of this dissertation.

The current prevailing popular understanding of *esotericism* is largely shaped by the books which are marketed on the shelves of bookshops and by discussions centered around spiritualism and discourses diffusing mystery. Although being practiced and utilised in fictional writings of earlier periods, New Age traditions and New Religious Movements, which are widely practised across the World, have significantly transformed the perception of esotericism in its primary provenance. The systematic study of this core meaning is in contrast with the historical development of esotericism itself. Despite having roots in Antiquity, the word itself began to be employed quite late; in 1792, during debates surrounding the secret teachings of Pythagoras in relation to Freemasonry (Neugebauer-Wölk, qtd. in Faivre 2010, 1). However, Anthony Blake contends that the term *esoteric*, in the sense something characteristic “of inner circle,” denoting a piece of information accessible to a limited number of the elite, was first encountered in the second century CE in a satire by the Greek writer Lucian of Samosata titled “Philosophers for Sale” (Blake 2020, 3). Subsequent use of the term includes its appearance in German in 1792 as “esoterik” and in French in 1828 as “l’ésotérisme” within Enlightenment discourses and critique of religion, notably in Jacques Matter’s book *Histoire du gnosticisme* (Hanegraaff 2013, 3; Faivre 2010, 1; von Stuckrad 2014, 2; Stroumsa 2005, 1). Afterward, the word started to navigate through different languages landing in the English language in 1883 (Hanegraaff 2013, 3). Semantically, these instances do not align with the contemporary concept of esotericism as a comprehensive worldview. The academic study of esotericism has added multi-faceted dimensions to its semantics, resulting in the creation of numerous textbooks and introductions aimed at clarifying and enhancing the perception of its definition. Furthermore, I provide an overview of some key introductory literature on Western esotericism<sup>7</sup> to locate the meaning of *esotericism* that I am using in this doctoral project.

By now, significant scholarly examinations of esotericism as a form of thought have been mainly carried out within the disciplines of philosophy and the historical studies of religion

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<sup>7</sup> When I use the term “Western,” I acknowledge that the term is problematic in itself and has a reductionist attitude toward the rich diversity of esoteric traditions found in various nations residing within the West (Pasi 2010; Granholm 2014; Aspren and Strube 2021). I support Kennet Granholm’s (2014) perspective that Western esotericism should be re-designed as “an internal category” within the broader field of Esotericism. However, it’s worth noting that many primary and foundational textbooks on esotericism have labelled the perennial esoteric currents of Greco-Roman terrains in combination with Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions as “Western” esotericism. Scholars have conducted their research based on this construct, and the field has become recognised in scholarly discourses under this label. Therefore, in my research, I also use this combination in line with Granholm’s conceptualisation to refer to the esoteric conventions under consideration.



and culture. Depending on the academic backgrounds of scholars and their approaches to this subject, various perspectives on esotericism emerge, including religionist or universalist, insider or outsider viewpoints, and so on. The first step in the creation of modern scholarship on esotericism was made by Frances Amelia Yates (1899-1981), an English scholar specialising in Renaissance and esoteric history. Her book *Giordano Bruno and The Hermetic Tradition* (1964) along with subsequent articles on the subject in the 1960s, played a pivotal role in this development (Faivre 2010, 10; von Stuckrad 2014, 2). While Yates's research was not a direct exploration of esotericism as a broader field, her study of Giordano Bruno as a driving force fuelling the scientific revolution has opened new avenues in the scholarly inquiries of this domain.

The first of the primary textbooks is Antoine Faivre's *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*, first published in 1994 and later revised in 2010. Though Antoine Faivre does not offer a precise definition of esotericism, he does identify four compulsory and two secondary features that constitute the notion of *esoteric*. Initially, Faivre outlines six connotations of the term esotericism: 1) "disparate grouping," 2) "secret teachings and facts that were deliberately hidden," 3) "a mystery inherent in things themselves," 4) "gnosis," 5) "the quest for the 'primordial tradition,'" and 6) "a group of specific historical currents," precisely, "Western esoteric currents" (Faivre 2010, 1–5). According to Faivre, Western esotericism encompasses late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Alexandrian Hermetism, Christian Gnosticism, neo-Pythagoreanism, speculative astrology, alchemy, the Renaissance, neo-Alexandrian Hermetism, Christian Kabbalah, Paracelsian current, Rosicrucianism, Christian theosophy, Illuminism, and more. Observing the ways for the construction of an "esoteric doctrine" in Western esotericism, Faivre identifies six common features, which, when "[t]aken as a whole, constitute 'Modern Western Esotericism'" and its currents (Faivre 2010, 11). These features are: 1) the idea of universal correspondences, i.e. the existence of relationship between macrocosm and microcosm, planets and the parts of human body, texts of religions and Nature, 2) the idea of living Nature, 3) the role of mediations and the imagination, and 4) the experience of transmutation. The additional two secondary components are 5) the practice of concordance for the detection of a higher truth among traditions, and 6) the idea of transmission (Faivre 2010, 12–13). The first four features are intrinsic, meaning that their simultaneous presence in an object is mandatory for it to be identified within esoteric doctrine. Faivre's classification as such aims to distinguish non-generalist scholars like him from generalist esotericists or historians who treat esotericism as a whole, rather than focusing on specific esoteric currents or authors. On the grounds of such formulations, Faivre's esotericism, by reflecting one of the

sixth meanings that he identified, refers to “the history of Western esoteric currents,” where “Western” encompasses Christian cultural currents “visited” by various religious traditions, including Jewish and/or Muslim (Faivre 2010, 5). He also differentiates between its two sub-meanings: broad and restricted. While the broad meaning covers traditions from late Antiquity to the present, the restricted meaning limits it to modern Western Esotericism, with the Renaissance as its starting point—a perspective Faivre appears to support strongly. In summary, Faivre's model of esotericism is composed of Western esoteric patterns of thought and reflects the presence of four intrinsic characteristics that he identified, excluding ancient esoteric practices (Faivre 2010, 6).

A sociocultural approach to the study of esotericism is much clearer in Kocku von Stuckrad's introductory *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (2014). Von Stuckrad, a German scholar of European history of religion, offers a different perspective. Building on prior scholarly viewpoints on esotericism, von Stuckrad defines it as a version of European religious history that emerges from religious pluralism. In contrast to Faivre, von Stuckrad's concept of esotericism is not solely rooted in the conventions of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam; it also embraces the influence of many European polytheistic religions that have contributed to European culture. According to von Stuckrad, due to these doctrines, esotericism is being presented as a fluid discourse, subject to change depending on historical circumstances (von Stuckrad 2014, 5). At the same time, he advocates using the term “esoteric” rather than *esotericism* on the grounds that the former better signifies cultural processes unfolding over different periods, whereas the latter implies the existence of a clearly constructed doctrine or body of tradition (von Stuckrad 2014, 9–10). Similar to Faivre, von Stuckrad also underscores the necessity of specific features in achieving an esoteric discourse. He places particular emphasis on the presence of hidden truth and certain ways of its disclosure, rather than focusing on the interpretation of correspondences between the universe and history. Therefore, he reduces the notion of esotericism to an element of discourse concerned with the pursuit of real or absolute knowledge.

Arthur Versluis, in his work' *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (2007), defines “Western esotericism” as a body of secret spiritual knowledge that dates back to Antiquity. This knowledge encompasses insights about humanity, the cosmos, and the divine, and it has been transmitted through various Western European historical currents while also informing “North American and other non-European settings” (Versluis 2007, 8). The main defining feature of Versluis' concept of esotericism is its emphasis on *gnosis*, fed particularly by cosmology or metaphysics, as opposed to knowledge that is conventionally

acquired through education, reading, experience, observation, interaction, study, learning, and so on. As a result, all the various traditions gathered under the umbrella of Western esotericism are rooted in their varying approaches to gnosis. Nevertheless, they all share this gnostic insight and are characterised by *esotericism*, representing secret knowledge accessible to a selected few. Therefore, esotericism serves as a defining characteristic that refers to the hidden nature of various aspects of existence within Western esoteric traditions, rather than constituting a separate category. Within this postulation, the attainment of gnosis is achieved through either magical or mystical means. Magicians pursue cosmological gnosis through supernatural methods, while mystics seek metaphysical gnosis through spiritual approaches. Esotericism, in this context, relates to the element of secrecy surrounding the outcomes of these pursuits.

A religionist perspective on esotericism is deeply rooted in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's work, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (2008). This historical survey of Western esoteric currents presents esotericism as "a religious way of thinking" with origins dating back to the earliest centuries A.D. It is viewed as historically significant, in contrast to Faivre's cosmological approach, Versluis' reductionist view, and von Stuckrad's discursive models (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 3). Goodrick-Clarke's position regarding the definition of esotericism rests in the accommodation of esoteric spirituality "as an independent ontological reality," which forms "a reflective cultural category" that transcends mere spiritual or philosophical acumen (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 12). Consequently, Goodrick-Clarke's definition of esotericism sheds light on a self-determining interrelationship between the mind and the cosmos, as originating from "exotic religions" (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 13).

Anthony Blake, in his study of esotericism, characterises it as a form of knowledge "that only an elite few can access" (Blake 2020), aligning strongly with Guy Stroumsa's definition of esotericism, who sees it as "secret teachings" that are available to "a small group of initiates and out of reach of others" (Stroumsa 2005, 1–2). Anthony Blake's taxonomy of esotericism delineates three distinct types of meaning, setting it apart from other interpretations found in the literature on esotericism. These types are the gnosis 1) of "privileged minority," 2) which requires special skills to acquire, and 3) of a spiritual realm concealed from the ignorant (Blake 2020, 3). Blake also acknowledges that these meanings are shaped by various political, religious, and ideological orientations. In the presentation of esotericism as a kind of gnosis, Blake closely follows Arthur Versluis's opinion, associating it with hidden knowledge accessible only to a restricted number of people. However, his interpretation of these meanings, contingent upon the three different aspects mentioned above, resonates with von Stuckrad's discursive construct, which is continuously reshaped by the dictates of history.

Guy Stroumsa, whose ideas on defining esotericism had an explicit influence on Blake's interpretation to a larger extent, characterises esotericism as "the practice of keeping religious or philosophical doctrines" (Stroumsa 2005, 1). However, in contrast to Stroumsa and other scholars, Anthony Blake presents esotericism as a transcendental realm without emphasising any peculiar conventions like Hermeticism, Gnosticism, etc. Esotericism comprises a network and the activities of an elite minority, who are connected through "spiritual 'inner circles'" to granting them access to the secret wisdom passed down from "the wise of all nations since the dawn of civilization" (Blake 2020, 3–4). This wisdom, known as *philosophia perennis*, transcends historical periods of the settlement of its originators. Perennial wisdom is present in the works of figures like Plato and Homer, conveyed through a distinct language accessible only to a selected few who are part of the "civilisations of our past and present" (Blake 2020, 5). This distinct language is inherently esoteric and serves as a signifier of the higher intelligence possessed by these selected individuals. In written texts, the implicit core meaning often lies between the lines. Achieving esoteric understanding while reading may involve techniques such as reading in reverse or considering the text as a whole (Blake 2020, 8). In sum, the esoteric refers to the connection between matters that are not explicitly related to each other in conventional terms.

Henrik Bogdan, in his extensive study titled *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (2007), explores how esotericism navigated within Freemasonry and how it is intertwined with masonic rituals of initiation. He defines it as "a Western form of spirituality that stresses the importance of the individual effort to gain spiritual knowledge," and thus, aligns it with *gnosis* similar to Arthur Versluis, albeit different from Versluis' perennial standpoint (Bogdan 2007, 5). The individual perspective of acquiring divine knowledge has roots in Antiquity. However, the Renaissance played a significant role in shaping the modern understanding of esotericism and collected different traditions under the overarching "form of thought," known as Western Esotericism (Bogdan 2007, 6). The dynamic and changing nature of esotericism sets Bogdan's stance apart from that of numerous scholars of esotericism who have traditionally believed in its intactness since the first centuries of its existence. According to Henrik Bogdan, Western Esotericism stands as one of the three "pillars" of Western culture, positioned between "doctrinal faith and rationality" even though both have historically labelled it as blasphemy or irrationality (Bogdan 2007, 7). One of the informing aspects of Henrik Bogdan's interpretation of Western Esotericism is his successful attempt to challenge Antoine Faivre's categories for identifying esotericism. Although Faivre's methods of approach are theoretically a productive means to classify esoteric thought, it has some limitations in

practicality. It is difficult to identify a thought as being esoteric in case of the absence of characteristic features that Faivre defines. To be more precise, Henrik Bogdan mentions the example of Michael Maier's early seventeenth-century work, *The Laws of the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross*, an administrative text of the fraternity, which he considers esoteric even though the explicit signs of Faivre's components are absent in it (2007, 19). Therefore, Bogdan advances his own elements that relate thoughts to esotericism and proposes his taxonomy based on four categories depending on 1) the explicit presence, 2) implicit presence, and 3) absence of esoteric thoughts in texts belonging to one or more esoteric conventions, and 4) the possibility of a transfer of esoteric ideas to non-esoteric texts. To support his point, Henrik Bogdan argues that the references to magic or alchemy in modern literature often serve as elements of the fantasy genre and are deprived of their original esoteric meanings. In this way, he emphasises the various ways in which esoteric form of thought is manifested to a greater deal, rather than focusing on the blank presence of this esoteric thought itself (Bogdan 2007, 17–21).

The literature on the contemporary theorisation of esotericism in the past decade is considerably limited. It primarily deals with the re-design of methodological approaches to esotericism in general, rather than its complete redefinition. Substantial efforts have been invested in establishing a scholarly and interdisciplinary profile for the field. However, there are relatively few resources which can be consulted regarding new theories and methodological treatments of contemporary issues in modern esotericism that could help position it within other fields of scholarly inquiry and integrate it among constructive dialogues with other disciplines. Many of these issues stem from the differences between the cultural, social, and historical environments of the periods during which the studies were conducted. Consequently, the definitions of esotericism have become more fluid and open-ended without rigid boundaries.

Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, in the introduction of their edited volume *Contemporary Esotericism* (2013), elucidate three theoretical approaches to defining esotericism, as opposed to Antoine Faivre's "rigid and static" rationale derived from prior studies in the field and attribute these approaches to their respective proponents (2013b, 22):

1. The von Stuckrad approach employs the esoteric as an analytical instrument to be utilised in the detection and investigation of the formation process of esotericism within the discourses of a "boarder European religious and cultural field," examining this process in the context of the religious "pluralism" existing in Europe (Asprem and Granholm 2013b, 23).

2. The Hanegraaff approach focuses on the complicated historical processes that drive the emergence and “construct[ion] of ‘the esoteric’ in Western culture” (Asprem and Granholm 2013b, 23).
3. The Partridge approach addresses the contemporary religious and cultural shifts that impact esotericism existing in the present. This approach examines how esoteric practices transform into occulture and their implementation in popular culture (Asprem and Granholm 2013b, 23).

On another note, in their collaborative study titled “Constructing Esotericisms” (2013), Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm expound on the emergence of esotericism as an “invented tradition” rooted in “historical currents, movements, and discourses” that constitute the subject matter of contemporary Western Esotericism (Asprem and Granholm 2013a, 26–33). At the heart of these historical currents of ancient wisdom are two primary narratives: *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis*. The former narrative conveys the existence of one true theology that originated in ancient times as the foundation of all religions but diminished as time passed. It is particularly associated with the “provocative pagan philosopher” Gemistos Plethon (c. 1355 – 1452) and later linked to the writings of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) (Asprem and Granholm 2013a, 33; Hanegraaff 2013, 50–51). The latter narrative, *philosophia perennis*, also claims the existence of one true philosophy as the source of all religious traditions, although it remained intact due to its availability only to select groups at various times, in different places, and through various means. This concept was introduced by the “conservative” Augustinian scholar Agostino Steuco (1497-1548) in the year 1540 (Hanegraaff 2013, 52). These two competing narratives of ancient wisdom are claimed to be integral parts in the construction of esotericism in the way that they challenged those “who wanted to ‘purify’ Christianity” of any alien intrusions (Asprem and Granholm 2013a, 35). Over time, this trend expanded wider with the addition of faithless acts and became an intriguing subject for Enlightenment historians, offering a point of comparison between reason and irrationality.

## **2.2. Hanegraaff’s models of esotericism**

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, one of the prominent scholars dedicated to the scholarly recognition of esotericism in the past few decades, interprets *esotericism* as “an elusive concept” in his

introductory book *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2013). He refers to the term as “Western esotericism” regardless of its vagueness due to the absence of a “neutral and generally accepted terminology,” and acknowledges the synthetic nature of this combination and presents it as a *hypernym*, “a modern scholarly construct” encompassing numerous diverse forms of thoughts (Hanegraaff 2013, 1–3). In contrast to the scholars reviewed above, Hanegraaff proposes a different methodology for incorporating ideas into Western esotericism. Prior to his approach, scholars have been trying to conceptualise esotericism on the basis of the characteristic features existing in different currents and uniting them under a single category. However, to propose his taxonomy, Hanegraaff takes resources from modern cognitive theories, specifically from the psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann’s ethnographic work *Of Two Minds: An Anthropologist Looks at American Psychiatry* (2001), which has nothing in common with esotericism or literature. In her work with bipolar patients, Tanya Luhrmann discusses “prototype effects,” which involve recognizing a case, a thing, or an idea based on already existing prototypes rather than predefined criteria (Luhrmann 2001, 42). To put in simple terms, since prototypes are constructed based on “good examples” within an existing category, it would be easier to compare anything from this category to these established few examples rather than evaluating the entire set of characteristics associated with the whole category. Building on this concept, Hanegraaff defines specific, lengthy features that characterise a thought or tradition as esoteric, challenging the conventional approach of conceptualising esotericism based on a fixed set of criteria. Instead, he contends that there have always been “‘best examples...’ that [the scholars] see as Western esotericism, and ... compare specific historical phenomena to that model” (Hanegraaff 2013, 4). As a result, some scholars labelled certain currents as Western esotericism, while others excluded them. This misclassification is exactly what blurred the conceptualisation and boundaries of the field. To clarify this vagueness, Hanegraaff presents his classification of Western esoteric currents, relying on three prototypes that have significantly shaped and continue to dominate Western esoteric traditions. These prototypes encompass early modern enchantment, (post)modern occult and inner traditions. The first two of these models align with the objectives of this dissertation and constitute its theoretical framework. Therefore, I will first introduce the third model and then proceed with the remaining two, ensuring logical coherence throughout the dissertation.

### **2.2.1. Inner traditions**

The inner traditions model is drawn upon the polarity of *esoteric* versus *exoteric*. It reflects the primary semantic meaning of the word *esoteric* as an inner dimension of secret teachings accessible only to a limited elite. Hanegraaff contrasts inner currents, which delve into the “universal spiritual dimension of reality,” to the *exoteric* teachings created and owned by orthodox religions and religious institutions (Hanegraaff 2013, 10). This model assigns Western esotericism to a much broader field of esotericism, placing it side by side with the esoteric teachings of various worldviews such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Shamanism, and so on. The inner traditions model aligns with the concept of the *philosophia perennis* by claiming the existence of one universal spirituality accessible to a minority of the population. However, Hanegraaff also identifies some problematic aspects associated with this model. The first problem lies in the “conviction” of practitioners, who believe in the existence of this hidden spiritual reality since, rationally, it is impossible to be studied, and even if it were possible, “scholarly methods... are ‘exoteric’ by definition” in the context of spiritual universality (Hanegraaff 2013, 11). Another issue of this model is the verification of its historical evolution. As this model claims the existence of one universal truth, it dismisses the possibility of creativity or transformation within it, similar to the unchanging nature of *philosophia perennis*. This limitation excludes esoteric currents belonging to this model out of the scope of social and historical factors that facilitated their formulation.

### **2.2.2. Early modern enchantment**

According to Wouter J. Hanegraaff, the early modern enchantment echoes those esoteric ideas and practices that have their roots in ancient times and were practiced during the pre-Enlightenment period, particularly prospering in the early modern period. The early modern period shaped these practices as *enchanted* contrary to the ensuing dominant *disenchanted* currents “associated with post-cartesian, post-newtonian and positivist science” (Hanegraaff 2013, 5). To clarify his position and establish a robust foundation for his arguments, Hanegraaff interprets two classifications of the esoteric worldview that exist in the scholarly study of esotericism. As he believes these classifications represent the best examples of esoteric thought,



originating in the premodern period and modelling the world as enchanted during the time span from the Renaissance until the Enlightenment. The first classification is Faivre's criteria, which define certain intellectual or religious traditions or discourses as esoteric. By referring to Faivre's four intrinsic criteria, Hanegraaff argues that *correspondences* stem from Plotinus' philosophy of *sympathy*, which stands for the direct alignment of every element in the universe. The correlation within it is neither the result of causal combinations nor dependent on any intermediary. *Living nature* stands in contrast to the idea of the world as a "dead mechanism or clockwork" (Hanegraaff 2013, 5). *Imagination* or *mediation*, on the other hand, aligns with Platonic cosmology, which consists of numerous layers that separate pure spirit from pure matter. Access to these layers can be achieved through the power of imagination. Faivre's final criterion, *transmutation*, refers to the transformation of state from material into the divine. Wouter J. Hanegraaff argues that these explanations exemplify the enchantment against the prevalence of the scientific revolution and the *best examples* of these enchanted pre-Enlightenment worldviews during the early modern period were Christian theosophy and *Naturphilosophie*. Any religious or intellectual tradition bearing a close resemblance to these two prototypes has been treated as being esoteric. The second model helping Hanegraaff to prove his point is Frances Yates' study of Hermetic tradition. Frances Yates, in her erudite work *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964) introduced Renaissance Hermeticism as of "vital philosophical and theoretical significance in the Western intellectual tradition" and as a power granting the possession of all knowledge about nature and, thus, "a precondition" (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 5; von Stuckrad 2014, 3). Wouter J. Hanegraaff argues that Yates' Hermetic tradition viewed nature as an organic being, in stark contrast to the Enlightenment's view of nature as a mechanistic and rationalistic construct of the Age of Reason. What makes Yates' philosophy relevant to contemporary esoteric studies, according to Hanegraaff, is the re-discovery of her ideas in the 1960s and 1970s. It served as a stimulus in the fights against the political, religious, and scientific conventions of the time that rejected imaginative and spiritual movements. The conceptualisation of re-enchantment, which I apply to this study, also stems from this situation. This period is also analysed in Colin Campbell's *secularisation* thesis, which touches upon the conversion "from 'church religion' to spiritual and mystic religion... occurring in the modern world" (Campbell 1978, 147). This transition does not postulate a credible study for the increase of alternative spirituality and the decline of traditional religious institutions since the rise of the former did not result in the sensational popularity of the latter, but simply in a general denial (Partridge 2004, 38–42). Nevertheless, this shift is a solid aspect of the social and cultural transformations emerging from secularisation, such as "a positive

striving for the spiritual and supernatural” or “new ways of being religious” as of the mid-twentieth century (Partridge 2004, 1:43–44). It is not surprising that this period marks the emanation of occulture constituted by practices originating from the mentioned socio-cultural shift and their flourishing appeal to individuals of various professional backgrounds or fields ever since. Therefore, in this study, re-enchantment refers to the resurgence of long-existed systems of beliefs, understandings, and practices tailored to the needs of the contemporary cultural exigence.

Accordingly, I rely on the definition and understanding of *esotericism* as proposed by Antoine Faivre and further expanded by Wouter J. Hanegraaff. Esotericism is considered a “form of thought” or worldview dealing with the hidden, secret, “non-communicable, non-testable,” experiential and absolute knowledge that is central to all forms of esoteric practices (Hanegraaff 2006, 2013, 87–101; Faivre 1994, 4–6; 2010, 1–7). As a result, esoteric conventions can vary significantly from one another depending on their methods and teachings for attaining this supreme knowledge. It is noteworthy to mention here that the term *occultism* is frequently used interchangeably with *esotericism*, although it has a different meaning today. As Antoine Faivre points out, this differentiation did not exist in the study of esotericism until the mid-nineteenth century when it was adopted to indicate a set of practices related to astrology, magic, alchemy, and the Kabbalah (1994, 34). For Antoine Faivre, esotericism constitutes a form of thought, while occultism is the method of “manipulating it” which signifies a “form” of action or set of practices “that would derive its legitimacy from esotericism” (Faivre 1994, 35; Wistrand 2020). Sided with this very clear and comprehensible definition, I also use the term *occultism* to refer to a group of practices that originates from esoteric conventions and is employed for the mining of esoteric thought and attaining absolute knowledge.

### **2.2.3. Postmodern occult**

Wouter J. Hanegraaff’s third model, which he terms as postmodern occult, includes the manifestations of those religious or intellectual post-Enlightenment experiences in the modern and contemporary culture that have undergone significant changes throughout their practices ever since the nineteenth century. The reasons for these metamorphoses mainly stem from the encounter with various factors such as social, cultural, political, intellectual, and other

developments. However, the contemporary scholarly examination of these modified esoteric traditions does not emerge from their comparison to their earlier forms. While the original forms may be of informational importance in the emergence of the tradition, yet they do not have any crucial role in the transformations or practice frequencies of certain types in the present. Wouter J. Hanegraaff clearly claims that these practices are neither “‘survivals’ from the past” nor objects “of nostalgia for a lost or forgotten enchanted worldview” (Hanegraaff 2013, 8–10). On the contrary, they open up new avenues for contemporary forms of esotericism, which are different from their primordial forms and create spaces for the future showcases of possible new phenomena reflecting *sui generis* dimensions.

The relevance of these two models of esotericism to the literary representation of esoteric motifs in the studied novels mainly lies in their complementary approach to each other and in unison to the world as an organic whole and embracing modified esoteric conventions regardless of their distinct forms.

The Early Modern Enchantment model establishes a clear demarcation between rational and spiritual worldviews. Therefore, it allows for the identification of the late 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century literary use of esoteric conventions from the perspective of (re)enchantment. I argue that the fictional representations of esoteric currents in contemporary literature are the end products of the late 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century re-enchantment. The re-enchantment that is attributed to the early modern period is present in its essential meaning in the novels which are under the study of this doctoral dissertation. Many notions in the novels are imbued with organic beings, contrasting with the materialist world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Peter Ackroyd’s *The House of Doctor Dee* fashions Matthew Palmer’s life as a continuum; he is a homunculus who is reborn every thirty years. The house, which he lives in, is depicted as a live passage to other worlds, and the dreams that John Dee sees are multi-layered as cosmology, each layer correlated with each other within it as a whole and facilitates the transmutation from one state to another. In his *Hawksmoor*, London is personified as a reciprocal living entity, shaping the fates of its residents based on their actions. In *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, a *Golem*, an animate and monstrous creature, is created by London denizens based on an inanimate and abstract substances, such as rumours and magazine headlines.

Within the literary treatment, certain esoteric currents are subjected to the influences of contemporary literary tendencies which is one of the core studies of my doctoral dissertation and provides an ideal framework for addressing my research questions. However, through Hanegraaff’s postmodern approach, I show that the esoteric themes utilised in the novels are not the mere remnants of the past or a continuation of authentic esoteric forms that have not

undergone or been affected by the consequences of cultural and social evolutions or contemporary trends. My analysis suggests that their literary representations are in dissonance with resistance to change and being static. In contrast, this approach enables me to show that esoteric currents used in the novels have faced modifications in various fictional settings, depending on the authors' traditions, resulting in unpredicted results, as seen in the cases of Dan Brown and Peter Ackroyd. Cultural *mise en scène* reinvents esoteric themes repeatedly. Since it was after the eighteenth century that esotericism became "a social phenomenon on its own right," it devised social practices of those thinking alike (Hanegraaff 2013, 8). Thus, it can be claimed that esoteric fraternities, networks, organizations, social networks, schools, and other institutions are the products of this social recognition that esotericism gained as a resistance to the dogmas of orthodox traditions and the configurations it experienced. Building upon this argument, the study of literary representations of secret societies, such as the Priory of Sion, Illuminati, Freemasons, Opus Dei, and so on, in Dan Brown's novels, precisely reflects these modifications, the reasons of which would be presented in the following chapters.

### **2.3. Fictional esotericism**

Esoteric traditions have a long history as a subject of literary treatment. Although *esotericism* did not bear its current conceptualisation and did not exist as an umbrella field for a group of activities in the ancient world, the practices that are now included in this category have occupied a significant place in the practices and writings of authors starting from the third century of BCE through the first centuries of the common era, including the late Roman world up to the present (Fraser 2022; Szönyi 2020). The first examples of such narrations are preserved in an epic poem called *Gilgamesh*, written in Sumerian and Akkadian (2100 BCE) which deals with the search for immortality and the cultivation of a magic plant for eternal life (Veenker 1981). An ancient tale, *Khufu and the Magicians* (1500 BCE), where "Khufu" stands for the name of pharaoh Cheops, tells the story of the king and one of his magicians, who might be the famous Egyptian statesman, architect, physician, Imhotep, predicting his fate (Guest 1926; Rayhanova 2004). Homer's *Odysseus* (800 BCE) reflects some spells of the Greek enchantress, Circe, transforming Odysseus's friends into animals (Wright 1919). Such esoteric practices can be further found in the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri written by Hellenised priests, in early Jewish mysticism, and so on. Infused with graphic descriptions of human sacrifices, corpse

magic, and necromancy, some of these ritual discourses were treated as “a cultural pollution” harming the high state order and its values by elite authors like Cicero, Pliny, Diodorus Siculus, etc., in the late Roman Empire (Fraser 2022, 23–30). Plato’s furors and Aristotle’s two worlds were the main sources of the dualistic, anthropomorphic, and organic premodern worldviews in these early writings (Szőnyi 2020, Slide #3).

The medieval period draws significant inspiration from the Faustian lore later made famous by Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). Though Faustian stories featured attempts to access absolute knowledge through the pact with the demon, the alternative anti-Faustian narratives mainly dealt with the demon summoning by a Christian who, simultaneously, is a keen magic user (Fanger 2022, 43–44). The early thirteenth-century and subsequent examples can be observed in Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *Dialogue on Miracles* (ca. 1219-1223), a fourteenth-century Benedictine John of Morigny’s *Liber florum celestis doctrine* or *Flowers of Heavenly Teachings* (1301-1308), Don Juan Manuel’s *El Conde Lucanor* (1335) and so on. Similar fictional exploitation of esoteric patterns is available in Medieval Icelandic literature and folklore, where the acquisition of power is conducted through magical motifs like spells mainly present in different types of sagas (Guðmundsdóttir 2022). This tendency includes the influence of alchemy in English literature of the Middle Ages and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Literary reflections of alchemy, along with astrology, natural magic, and witchcraft, are present in numerous fictional works, be it prose, poetry, or drama, such as Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400), Robert Greene’s *The Carde of Fancie* (1587) and his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungy* (1594), John Lyly’s *Gallathea* (1588), Thomas Nashe’s *A Quippe for an Upstart Courtier* (1592), Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1616), John Donne’s *Poems* (1633), George Herbert’s *The Temple* (1633), Henry Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans* (1650-55), John Lacy’s *The Dumb Lady* (1669), Samuel Butler’s *Hudibras* published in three parts (1663, 1664, 1678) and more.<sup>8</sup> Inspiration for such implementation of alchemical currents has its basis in philosophically and spiritually charged themes of Platonism, Hermetic materials, Paracelsian ideas, and so on (Linden 2008, Chapter VII). Although these literary allusions to alchemy help to observe the beginning, blooming, declining, or changing tendencies in the usage of alchemical motifs and allegories in the fictional writings, their influence and contribution to the intellectual paradigms of the period

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<sup>8</sup> A detailed analysis of each listed literary work and its author’s attitude towards the literary allusions of alchemy, astrology, natural magic, and witchcraft is available in Stanton J. Linden’s *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (2008).

also showcase the fraudulent profiles attached to alchemists and negative attitudes towards them in the styles of alchemical satire and humour (Linden 2008, 62–105; Szönyi 2006). Additionally, though alchemical motifs utilised in the Middle Ages were for exoteric purposes, like transmuting base metals to achieve gold, the Renaissance-time representations were mostly of esoteric characters serving spiritual clairvoyance, salvation, and catharsis (Linden 2008, 7–10). This practice, in its turn, led to the exploration of esoteric practices as a medium between heavenly and earthly matters in the eighteenth century. Visionary travels to other worlds, communications with angels, the existence of the alternative spiritual world, and life after death were among the main esoteric philosophies of this period that found their representations in the creative writings of the related authors.

Esotericism, as a well-established literary device, emerges in early modern fictional writings of the early nineteenth century. These writings prominently feature elements of premodern esotericism, such as secret sciences, ritual magic, astrology, alchemy for the creation of doppelgängers, artificial life, like homunculi or golems, angelology and demonology, creeds of secret societies and sects, etc. (Szönyi 2020, slides #6-10). Falling under the gothic novel genre or early science or crime fiction, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and James Hogg's *The private Memoires and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) set a pioneering pace for the further employment of esoteric motifs within creative writing styles. While the former features Frankenstein's thirst for knowledge through Henry Cornelius Agrippa's and Paracelsus' Renaissance philosophies involving mysticism (Hogle 2020), the latter reflects the angelic and demonic binary within one metafictional body (Vergeti 2017). Other prominent exemplars of a similar trend are Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story* (1862) and Somerset Maugham's *The Magician* (1908). Both of these novels have a polar opposition between rational and supernatural forms of thought. Each of them may symbolically be treated as illuminating the fight between good and evil in the bodies of good-willed scientists and dark magicians over the possession of innocent spirits. William Butler Yeats's poems, Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), Gustav Meyrink's *The Golem* (1915), Aleister Crowley's *Moonchild* (1917), Dion Fortune's *The Demon Lover* (1927), *The Winged Bull* (1935), *The Goat-foot God* (1936), *The Sea Priestess* (1938) *The Moon Magic* (1957), John Crowley's *Aegypt Tetralogy* (1987-2007), Lindsey Clarke's *Chemical Wedding* (1989), Patrick Harpur's *Mercurius* (1990), Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), Angela Carter's *Alice in Prague or the Curious Room* (1997), Jeannette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries* (1997), J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Series* (1997-2007), Jennifer Lee Carrel's *Haunt Me Still* (2010), Deborah Harkness' *All Souls Trilogy* (2011-2014), and many other works, along with Dan

Brown's and Peter Ackroyd's novels, carry on the traditions that the above-mentioned early modern prototypes set and now constitute modern literature of fictional esotericism.

In general, depending on the dominance of the side in the inter-relationship between esotericism and fictional practices, the nature of this entanglement can be of two types: 1) practice-inspired fictions and 2) fiction-inspired practices. Practice-inspired fictions deal with fictional writings, which take their stimulus from esoteric practices. A considerable number of the works mentioned above can be considered practice-inspired fictions since these fictional works originate from the actual esoteric practices of their authors. Geoffrey Chaucer was well-versed in alchemy and had a reputation as a "magus" (Linden 2008, 63; Schuler 1984). Aleister Crowley's "magick" partly (the accent on the power of will and imagination) emerged from Blavatsky's philosophy of the Golden Dawn (Frenschkowski 2022; Bogdan 2020) and his own religion Thelema. *Moonchild* illuminates some imaginative lunar rituals in relation to "magick;" however, the under-recognition of his similar fictional texts turned him into an actual "full-time magician" (Frenschkowski 2022, 155). William Butler Yeats was an accomplished poet and playwright, yet his involvement in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn affected his creative imagination around symbolism to a larger degree (Owen 2012, 17–18; Graf 2015, 23). At that time, a significant proportion of the early members of the Golden Dawn were writers practising "literary avant-garde" and literary naturalism, and later, the Order grew into "an esoteric literary circle" (Johannsen 2022, 176–80). The British writer Alma Hirsig's novel *My Life in a Love Cult: A Warning to All young Girls* (1928) is a semi-fictional account of her actual encounter with Pierre Bernard (a "loving guru," who also played an essential role in the early reconceptualisation of Tantra in the USA and his "sex cult" (Urban 2022, 216)). Hirsig's imaginative presentation of Tantric accounts acknowledges Tantric sexual magic rites as women's rights for sexual pleasure, desire and needs. Dion Fortune's esoteric novels were mainly based on her actual involvement in sexual and tantric magic and conveying thoughts on reincarnation, demonic abuse of occult knowledge and so on (Graf 2015, 122–25). She was publishing them with the purpose of communicating her ideas to a larger readership so that "by reading them her audience would achieve a kind of initiation" while identifying themselves with the heroes of her fictional esoteric stories (Graf 2015, 120–21).

The second type — fiction-inspired practices — deals with fictional esoteric writings that fuel actual practices. Numerous orders like the *Fraternitas Rosae Crucis*, *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, *Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, *Theosophical Society*, *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*, *Ordre Martiniste*, and so on, declared Rosicrucian legends—fictional narratives—as their source of *gnosis* and started applying their fictional practices as

actual activities of gaining absolute knowledge (Otto and Johannsen 2022). Although Madame Blavatsky was mainly known for her theosophical philosophy and founding the Theosophical Society, she was famous for her magical thriller *Nightmare Tales* (1892). She was influenced by writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Lewis Stevenson, Sir Henry Rider Haggard, Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, Edward Bellamy, and Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, whose mystical and fantastic novels were “a trailblazer” for her interests in fusing fictional literature with her theosophical thoughts (Johannsen 2022; Frenschkowski 2022). The English writer and politician Edward Bulwer-Lytton, serving as a Grand Patron of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia in 1871, was a particular person from whose novels Blavatsky took her theosophical inspirations. The main three points contributing to Madame Blavatsky’s magical worldview came from Bulwer-Lytton’s ideas of a “white magus” (resonating with Blavatsky’s *Masters* or *Mahatmas*, true founders of theosophy), magic as a product of imagination, and the East as the cradle of authentic wisdom and magic in his fictional stories *The Tale of Kosem Kesamim* (1833), *Zanoni* (1842) and *A Strange Story* (1861) (Frenschkowski 2022, 160–63). Howard Philips Lovecraft’s fictional heritage gave way to the contemporary magical practices based on his Cthulhu Mythos - a fictional mythological universe inhabited by monstrous and hyperspatial entities after the extinction of humankind. The Hunters of the Dark, a Lovecraftian Order consisting of Chaos magicians, conducts visualisation techniques and lucid dreaming to connect precisely with the Cthulhu mythos’ beings as in his tales (Woodman 2022). This fictional element is the main informant of the Order’s magical practice. Aleister Crowley’s secretary, Kenneth Grant, practised magical rituals to communicate with outer space and utilised fictional “crypto-historic and ufological” literature for this purpose (Giudice 2022). Infusing Howard Philips Lovecraft’s fictional work with Crowley’s magick, Grant and the members of his New Isis Lodge were referring to these works as magical portals serving as a medium of contact with alien spirits. Another esoteric practice informed by fiction and conducted under a real institution is The Church of All World (CAW). Created based on Robert A. Heinlein’s novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) by Tim Zell (now Oberon Zell-Ravenheart) and Lance Christie as a Pagan practice, it relied more on the fictional works popular among the members with the idea that the supernatural in the fictions “prefigure, inspire and guide the real” world and thus, deserves to exist in real life (Cusack 2022; Sulak 2014, 42–46). Later their pagan practices shifted to magical, the outcome of which was The Grey School of Wizardry, founded by Zell-Ravenheart after the aesthetics of J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series and Hogwarts. The Grey School of Wizardry became the institution through which Zell-Ravenheart and his second wife, Morning Glow (Diana Moore), started their quest for the recreation of magical, mythical, and



legendary conventions that they read in the book, like breeding unicorn goats, searching for mermaids in the Pacific Ocean, etc.

Alternatively, depending on the nature of their relationship with esotericism, Professor György Endre Szőnyi classifies modern writers of fictional Renaissance esotericism into two groups – *outsiders* and *insiders* – depending on their approach to the occult (2007). The outsider group, which includes authors like Umberto Eco, uses the occult as “a metaphoric or “parabolic device,” while the insider group considers themselves “mystics” like Peter Ackroyd (Szőnyi 2007, 407). Along with this taxonomy, there are also two groups of writers, who can be identified based on their direct involvement with occult practices. The first group is both well-versed in esoteric practices personally and reflects similar thoughts in their creative work, and can be classified as *authors-practitioners*. Notable figures in this category include Jeffrey Chaucer, Aleister Crowley, Madame Blavatsky, Gustav Meyrink, William Butler Yeats, Dion Fortune, Alma Hirsig, and others. For these authors, fiction also serves as a means of conveying esoteric messages. The second group is comprised of authors known as *authors-non-practitioners*, who are not involved in any form of esoteric activities. Nevertheless, they use such practices as literary devices or motifs in their fictional narratives for various purposes, which will be explored in the upcoming fourth chapter. These non-practitioners do not utilise fiction “as a means to transmit... esoteric teachings” either (Bogdan 2020). Still, their works can be interpreted as esoteric texts, despite being fictional, by readers involved in esoteric practices. Authors like Mary Shelley, James Hogg, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, H. P. Lovecraft, Somerset Maugham, Lindsey Clarke, Umberto Eco, J.K. Rowling, Peter Ackroyd, Dan Brown and many more fall into this taxonomy.

## **2.4. Theoretical poetics of novels’ genres**

The genres of the novels studied in this doctoral dissertation are significantly appealing from a theoretical point of view as they facilitate an intriguing use of esoteric motifs that differ from the mainstream utilisation of the novel genre. From this theoretical standpoint, these novels represent two important categories of cultural and post-classical narratives, as seen in the models of Peter Ackroyd’s historiographic metafiction and Dan Brown’s alternative historical fictions.

### 2.4.1. Historiographic metafiction

Historiographic metafiction is a term coined by Canadian literary theoretician Linda Hutcheon in her 1988 book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* to describe a postmodern genre of fiction aimed at overcoming the separation of history writing between literary and theoretical realms within the poetics of postmodernism (Hutcheon 1995). This type of fiction is deeply aware of its self-reflexivity and paradoxical treatment of historical events and figures. The self-awareness that it imposes on fiction and history as human fabrication allows for the “rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (Hutcheon 1988, 5). It self-consciously claims that though historical events indeed occurred in the past, they are being written about from a positional standpoint of different subjects.

According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction brings history to the status of a human construct, thus placing it on par with fiction. Similar idea has been present within different disciplines, including biology, physics, geology, history, and their respective historiographies. This suggested that the historical developments of one state into another is “theoretically deficient” as the mode of being *narrated* for its presentation is “an index of failure” (White 1984, 1). While speaking about historiography itself, scholars like A.R. Louch and Hayden White, among others, emphasise the presence of a narrative nature in all historical texts, be it academic or non-academic, written about stories of the past as “certain kinds of ‘imaginative’ discourses (Louch 1969; White 1984, 2). Historians, when crafting their narratives, perceive a series of events as interconnected, as forming a coherent whole, and possessing an inherent identity. Their role is to “constructs the narrative that reveals the course of evolution, of connectedness, among these events” as his task is “cumulative, a business of filling in more and more gaps... softening the breaks in narrative smoothness” (Louch 1969, 58–59). In Hayden White’s words, this process result in “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse... [with] a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past” (White 1973, ix). By doing so, it rejects the conventional understanding of history as the sole purveyor of truth, by challenging “the ground of that claim in historiography” since both historiography and fiction are discourses and acquire their right for truth from the writer’s identity, which varies based on the “concrete social speech diversity” (Bakhtin qtd. in McHale 1987, 166).

Additionally, it is worth mentioning at this point also that Peter Ackroyd himself is an author of several historical accounts of prominent English figures, like Alfred Hitchcock,

Charles Dickens, Charlie Chaplin, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Blake, Wilkie Collins, and more. As he is famous for his ability to blur the boundaries between fictional and non-fictional worlds in his texts, this deconstruction of borders appears in a bidirectional manner within Ackroyd's literary activity. Ackroyd not only integrates historical elements into his fictions to reshape and challenge history, but also incorporates fictional elements into his works presented as non-fiction (Sauerberg 1999; Vianu and Ackroyd 2006). For this reason, his biographies have been deemed "unworthy of study" for academic purposes, though they are categorised as non-fiction<sup>9</sup> (Murray 2007, 75). The reason of such problematic nature of "Ackroydian biographies" lies in their amalgamation of historical accounts of his subjects with his own literary output, that is, Ackroyd "conflates and collapses the distinction between the biographical subject and biographer" (Murray 2007, 82; 122–29). Not surprisingly, Ackroyd himself has confessed in an interview that he does not "think of biographies and fictions as being separate" (Onega and Ackroyd 1996). He does not view biographies as a means to discover new information about the historical subject; for him "[i]t is the nature of the writing which is important" (Vianu and Ackroyd 2007). To be more precise, for Ackroyd "history is fiction" (Vékony 1997, 248).

To meet the requirements of historiographic metafiction, novels need to use and contaminate the very nature of history in accordance with individual stylistic elements that affect the interpretation of the happening events. At the same time, the historical figures within these novels are not "generalised... 'synthesis of all the human and socially essential determinants'" (Hutcheon 1988, 113), which would accommodate the flow of the narration. Rather they are portrayed as eccentric and marginalised fictional characters, constituting a core feature of historiographic metafictional heroes. Historical information about these characters is abused to create the historical context of the novels and introduce the "transcendent concept of 'genuine historicity'" (Jameson qt. in Hutcheon, 1988, 89), enabling alternating or parallel plotlines. Most historiographic metafictional novels feature at least two alternating or parallel storylines and periods, one or more of which deal(s) with contemporary times and the other(s) with previous centuries (Szőnyi 2006, 53; 2007, 411-12).

In such a postmodern style of writing, this kind of utilisation of historical background is an intentional distortion of facts with thematic discursive techniques and esoteric elements to serve its metafictional purpose. This positioning also prevents the privilege of either the

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<sup>9</sup> Such a categorisation is present on almost all introductory pages of the author, particularly, on the webpage of the agency representing him: <https://thesusijnagency.com/Peter-Ackroyd/> Accessed 18 October 2023.

formalism of history or the fictitious identity of fiction, creating a model where the falsification of factual events is based on “a notion of history as a shaping force” (Hutcheon 1988, 114), which constitutes the core essence of historiographic metafictional novels.

Ansgar Nünning’s interpretation of historiographic metafiction connects it to his concept of *revisionist* historical novels. According to his perspective, these forms of historical writing significantly rely on the multiplicity of characters’ focalised viewpoints,<sup>10</sup> which convey “limited perspectives [that] project highly subjective views of history” (Nünning 2004). The fragmented nature of various stories serves to the marginalisation of historical events and enlightens individual experiences of historical accounts. Such kind of direct communication underscores the fictional nature of the novel evident to the reader, despite the “indeterminate nature of historical knowledge” (Hutcheon 1988, 88). It fulfills the requirements of historiographic metafictional writing by bridging the reader to the world beyond the pages of books. These mentioned conventions of historiographic metafiction are evident in Peter Ackroyd’s novels, in the treatment of which I will primarily use Linda Hutcheon’s theory along with Susana Onega’s conceptualisation of the topic.

#### 2.4.2. Alternative historical novel

Alternative history writing emerged as a sub-genre of science fiction between the years 1871 and 1875, suggesting alterations to historical events or their different resolutions stemming from an “alternative locus (in space, time, etc.) that shares the material and causal verisimilitude of the writer’s world” (Suvin 1983). The production and distorted dissemination of knowledge about the actual past are products of the author’s creative mind. However, this form of alternative historical narration is rich with instances where the fictional historical world is not only “asserted to be accurate, factual representations of reality” (Barkun 2003, 29) but also is argued “to offer a kind of knowledge about the past that factual historiography cannot” (Koenigs 2021, 141). This construction of history also coincides with Ansgar Nünning’s concept of *revisionist* historical novels, yet in quite a different manner compared to Peter

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<sup>10</sup> The narratological equivalent of this technique coincides with Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of “polyphony” in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984). Bakhtin describes this event as “[a] *plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*” which is not characterised by “a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*” and the characters become the “*subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*” (italics in original, Bakhtin 1984, 6-7).

Ackroyd's historiographic metafiction. These novels are born out of the "wish to rewrite history... and offer alternative history" (Nünning 2004, 362), the formulation of which actively involves conspiracy narratives. This complex composition of fictional history writing does not convey entirely different straightforward histories but rather offers new interpretations, alternative possibilities, or subjective perspectives on the cultural exegesis of the reception of existing religious conventions. Therefore, these fictions, also known as "as-if or could-be fictions" (Mikkonen 2006; Miller 1997; Vaihinger 2021), do not act as a form of history or its replacement but rather as "a qualifying supplement" for shifting the emphasis from the accustomed usual to their possible concealed double (Koenigs 2021, 143). This style of historical construction plays with the actual perception of events *as if* they reflect truth and form an alternative historical category existing in parallel (Mikkonen 2006).

According to Ehrman D. Bart, two categories of writers implement this fictional genre. The authors of the first group write about the past in an imaginary way without citing any factual evidence. The second group tries to approach any source and "meld them into synthesis...not evaluat[ing] the surviving evidence" (Ehrman 2004, xxi). This group is mainly sympathetic to conspiracy ideas about the events "*contradicting* a canonical source" (Ehrman 2004, xxiii, italics in original) which is acknowledged as such by critical historians. Actually, such types of historical distortion mainly serve as stylistic devices that make the reader "sceptical, if not hostile," to all the speculations the author indicates (Clark 2006, 21). This intricacy is produced by neglecting the vital aspects of historical reality, which coincides with the "neglective fictions" of the philosophical theory of fictionalism (Vaihinger 2021, 17–22). The perfecting role of esoteric themes and institutions to complete these cut-off portions of historical entries adds another layer of tension to and increases the enticement of such fictional alternative history narrations. Thus, following the tendency of conspiracy culture, most stories posit storylines where some events and their histories are presented as the polar opposite of their conventional worldwide acknowledgment. It is common that such works are being taken as actual historical entries even though they abuse the recognised historical records (Koenigs 2021, 149–50).

Alternative historical fiction also features numerous conspiracy theories that deal with concealed beliefs and truths about the lives of outstanding historical figures "to legitimize them as serious works" as if they are designed "for matters of fact" (Koenigs 2021, 150). These confidential secrets are correlated with each other and historical characters in a hierarchical, quest-like way; the reveal of one secret leads to the discovery of some others. They also follow the fashion of thrillers, "leav[ing] clues so that the detective may solve the case" (Dyrendal 2013). Thus, the narrative logic of such novels mainly lies in the mode of suspense, detective,

and mystery thriller fiction, as will be evident in the upcoming chapter dealing with the narratological peculiarities characteristic of Dan Brown's novels. To treat them, I will use Suvin's definition, as presented at the beginning of this section, for the essential understanding of alternative historical fiction and approach its various aspects based on the above-mentioned points.

### 3. Peter Ackroyd's Esoteric Narration

This chapter primarily focuses on Peter Ackroyd and his three novels explored in this doctoral dissertation. Ackroyd's literary activity is not limited to a couple of genres. Rather, he has a literary legacy that extends across a wide range of texts belonging to different styles, from biographies to documentary television series. Ackroyd has a unique style of writing fictional novels which is coupled with his exceptional emphasis on the Englishness of the English literature<sup>11</sup> and which features London as the main landscape of his most narratives. Thus, his visionary profile illustrates London as a maze-like environ worth exploring. This section also demonstrates the analysis of esoteric motifs and occult conventions employed within the novels in precise detail. Subsequently, I show the peculiarities of historiographic metafiction in Ackroyd's novels, with the help of which he masterly incorporates esoteric notions into historical backgrounds. The final sub-chapters examine the occult configurations, such as occult city, transcendental time, and mythical union, which Ackroyd constructs within the novels by implementing esoteric motifs and blurring the rational perceptions of the ordinary for the readers.

#### 3.1. Peter Ackroyd's visionary profile

Ackroyd's literary endeavours are intrinsically connected to his relationship with London and its unique spirit in the same fashion belonging to the London Luminaries or Cockney Visionaries like the pantomime and music hall artist Dan Leno, the well-known novelist Charles Dickens, the English Romantic painter and Royal Academician Joseph Mallord William Turner, known as William Turner in his life-time, the famous poet William Blake, the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor, etc.<sup>12</sup> His distinctive way of writing includes his metaphysical presence inside the narration, along with his fictional characters, even though he

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<sup>11</sup> His usage of *Englishness* or *English* refers to writers and traditions of England's literary heritage encompassing prominent writers like Dickens, Shakespeare, Turner, Blake, etc. (Ackroyd 1993a, 1993b; Onega and Ackroyd 1996; Neagu 2006; Vékony and Ackroyd 1997; Vianu and Ackroyd, 2006, 2007; Vránová 2010).

<sup>12</sup> For Ackroyd, Cockney Visionaries are the creative individuals who reflect London's genius through their activities, regardless of the ethical or moral context. This sensibility, present in these people living across various historical periods, is materialised—consciously or unconsciously—through their works, serving as an expression of London's continuity. Further insights can be found in Ackroyd's lecture titled "London Luminaries and Cockney Visionaries" in *The Collection: Journalism, Reviews, Essays, Short Stories, Lectures*. (London: Random House UK, 2001).

is not explicitly present in the text. His fictions are imbued with mystical and esoteric motifs that bestow a transcendental quality upon the readers' perception of the novels, rendering them multi-dimensional. Ackroyd believes that there exists an interconnectedness between London's spirit and the creative sensibility of its denizens. This sensibility is not an individual property exclusive to a handful of people but rather is an open flow rejuvenated recurrently. Consequently, his concept of English literary sensibility is an atemporal, ever-present, orally transmitted canon that ascended from the dawn of the English civilisation to English writers and artists who are living forever and persist in feeding the "continuity of English literature" in the state of eternity called Albion (Ackroyd 2001c).

As a keen psychogeographer<sup>13</sup> of London, who has been physically walking in London streets for years, Peter Ackroyd believes in the well-established profiles of locations that convey the spirit of the City. A seemingly tranquil street in present-day London, occasionally alleged with pornographic activities, turns out to be famous for its brothels dating back to the fourteenth century. Streets that once paid homage to occult or spiritual groups and fraternities now house various esoteric or astrological bookshops, illustrating the many faces of London that Ackroyd explores (both parallels in Ackroyd 2001a). In the foreword to Fiona Rule's *The Worst Street in London*, Ackroyd notes that he stumbled upon Dorset Street, which appears as the subject of the book, "by accident" while following a path from one place to another in the hopes of finding defunct remnants of "a London that has long since vanished" (Rule 2010, 10). The London that Ackroyd reports on discovering is not the contemporary city but one that has long been lost. For Ackroyd, it is not a mere coincidence but the *continuity* of London's spirit. This oblivious London is precisely where Ackroyd's characters wander. His visionary approach is present in most of his writings about London. The review of *London: The Biography* can provide additional information on this atemporality, which exhibits "chronological resonance with

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<sup>13</sup> The fundamental description of *psychogeography* is proposed by Guy Debord as "[t]he study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (Debord, Guy. *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*. Translated by Ken Knabb. Les Lèvres Nues, 1955, p. 23). With his lead, it was a means of describing urban life first for aesthetic purposes, then for political radicalisms. However, in its broad meaning, psychogeography is the alliance of psychology and geography, together examining the urban locations' influence on the behaviours of the walkers, wanderers, flâneurs, strollers, stalkers, etc., and was originally specific for Paris, London, and New York. As a literary device, as *The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* states, the first known use of "flâneur" in the English language is the year 1854 in the meaning of "an idle man-about-town" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flaneur> accessed February 21, 2020), and most probably in the August 1854 edition of Harper's Magazine (See: Carlaw, Darren. *The Flâneur as Foreigner: Ethnicity, Sexuality and Power in Twentieth Century New York Writing*. Newcastle University Library 206535814. June 2008, p. 17). However, Dana Brand, in his book *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth Century American Literature* (1992), argues that "flânerie can be found in the 'survey' or 'urban panorama' books" illustrating London in the XVI century (in Carlaw, p. 17). As to its content, Brand states that the stories published in different criminal themes were giving another dimension to the streets "whilst alerting the reader to the dangers of walking in the city" (Carlaw, p. 17).



earlier events, activities and inhabitants” (Coverley 2006, 124). However, it is far from being a “dry chronological study” of London; instead, it is a rhapsodical portrayal infused with feelings about “its history, its traditions, its pulses and its pauses” (Lewis 2007, 1).

As a devout believer in London’s genius, Ackroyd’s literary activity is built around this *sensibility*. His vision is so impressive that to understand it properly, Barry Lewis proposes “to reverse the metaphor of the city-as-human and to consider this English writer as if he were a city. He has his landmarks, his suburbs, and his neglected boroughs” (Lewis 2007, 2). These facets are manifested through his writing, borne out of his personal physical strolls along with London streets. Thus, his visionary embodiment of the city as a perpetual maze-like continuum is mirrored in his entire body of work, particularly his London novels, which show a mythical London, “whose roots go back to the dawn of civilization” (Onega 1998, 43). The inclusion of esoteric motifs further serves for the transcendental disposition of spatial and temporal overlapping for metaphysical purposes. Most of his multi-layered historiographic metafictional London novels involve occult practices and settings. As a result, the rest of this chapter will deal with the detailed analysis of the historiographic metafictional and esoteric constructs found in his three novels.

### ***3.1.1. Hawksmoor***

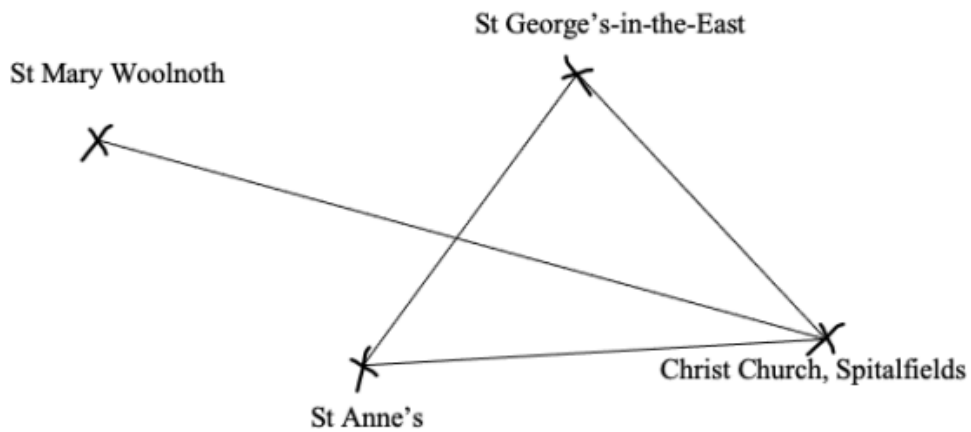
The first plotline, Nicholas Dyer’s life story in the eighteenth century, constitutes novel’s initial part. Although it is rich with flashbacks to his childhood, Dyer retells them retrospectively in the style of confessions. The first introduction of an occult theme emerges with the introduction of a magus called Mirabilis. As a child, Dyer loses his parents to the Black Plague in 1665 and is adopted by Mirabilis, who also schools him in his creed, which promotes the belief “that Sathan is the God of this World and fit to be worshipp’d” (Ackroyd 1993, 21). Mirabilis’s philosophy, known as *Scientia Umbrarum*, is an occult system “developed out of neolithic, hermetic, cabbalistic, and gnostic elements” that acknowledges Satan’s authority over the world (Onega 1999, 48). Mirabilis preaches this faith within the occult society called the *Enthusiasticks* and teaches that to flee the miseries of the mortal world, one should follow certain rituals and ascend the cosmic spheres to become the *Anthropos*. Unable to endure all the spiritual tension of *Scientia Umbrarum*, Nick escapes from Mirabilis and joins a group of vagabonds, most of whom are orphans from the Plague, like Dyer himself. At the age of

fourteen, Nick is apprenticed to a mason, and subsequently, the famous Christopher Wren hires him due to his sensational knowledge of the peculiarities of construction materials such as stone, timber, wood, among others.

As time passes, versed by and subservient to Mirabilis' proclaims, Nick starts his pursuit of "*exaltatio*, that's the deification of man" (Szönyi 2004, 10). Eventually, Christopher Wren's empirical worldview of New Science and plans regarding the rational composition of the post-fire churches contradict Nick's ideas, and he starts disguising Mirabilis' ideas in their constructions. Busy with his other duties, Wren sets Dyer to work independently, unaware of his true intentions. To fulfil his duty, Dyer begins to lay the foundations for seven churches (instead of the historical six) in the most macabre parts of London, which also corresponds to the seven spheres of the seven stars, The Pleiades, to help his soul cross "the seven planetary orbs that separate the material from the spiritual world" and become "*Anthropos*, the cosmic man" (Onega 1997; 1999, 50). From this point on, the novel gets more occult with gothic aesthetics.

Nick erects his first church in "Spittle-fields for it is a long way which has no Destination, and in this instance, it leads us to the Sepulture or Labyrinth... [that has] a Grave-like Smell... half-full of Rubbidge... dark Apartment" where "the Sceleton of a Boy or small Man" is found (Ackroyd 1993, 23). The place perfectly fits the image of "the Site of the Mysteries, as Mirabilis had once related them to [him]: here the Boy who is to be Sacrificed is confin'd to the Chamber beneath the Earth, and a large Stone rolled across its Face" (Ackroyd 1993, 23). In the construction of the church here, the mason's eleven-year-old son Thomas falls prey to Dyer's will. Simultaneously, in the twentieth century, a boy called Thomas is killed in the Spitalfields church while playing there. Later, Dyer is depicted as related to five more churches. The second church is St. Anne's, which is built in Limehouse, a place known as "Settlement of Beggars which consisted of... [stinky] Ragged Regiments" (Ackroyd 1993, 64). During the examination of the foundation, Dyer meets a beggar called Ned and talks him into suicide, gives him a knife and helps him cut himself by crouching him in the "Darknesse beneath the Church" (Ackroyd 1993, 66). In parallel, a tramp called Ned dies in the twentieth century near the same church. The third one is St. George-in-the-East, the new church of Wapping, where a boy named Dan is murdered by Dyer's comrade, Joseph, who also tries to fulfil Mirabilis' will. A man called Dan Dee is found dead at the same location in the contemporary line of plot. The fourth one is the church St. Mary Woolnoth, which was "grievously damaged in the Fatal year 1666 and its Sides, Roof and Part of the Ends damnified by the Fire... [where] work men... found several human Bones... buried there" while digging

its foundations (Ackroyd 1993, 133). A man killed here is Yorick Hayes, who is also Dyer's colleague and whom Dyer thinks of as discovering his evil plans. The twentieth century has a person called Matthew Hayes killed at the same place. The fifth church is St. George in Bloomsbury, and a boy of twelve called Thomas Robinson is the next sacrifice. The sixth church is St. Alfege's in Greenwich, the victim of which is a nameless boy. The final church is of Little St. Hugh beside Moorfields, and the concluding three victims from both centuries are nameless boys.



*Figure 1: The arrow-like constellation of churches Dyer gets in a letter (Ackroyd 1993, 166).*



*Figure 2:* The reconstructed and detailed image of Hawksmoor's seven churches with the Thames River in grey (Vernyik 2015b, 110–16).

Each of these landscapes is a subterranean passage extending into graveyards, cemeteries, sepulchres, settlements of beggars, and historical chambers of sacrifices that are “consecrated to evil spirits by a human sacrifice made in its foundations” (Hollinghurst 1985). The spirit of these locations also affects Dyer, and he suffers mental disorders during this whole process, making his “mildew’d Fancies and confus’d Rules” obvious to the rest of Wren’s construction office (Ackroyd 1993, 87).

The second part of the book starts with Nicholas Hawksmoor’s investigation of the third homicide in Wapping following Spitalfields and Limehouse in the twentieth century. Detective Chief Superintendent Nicholas Hawksmoor is a competent detective and easily recognises how crimes have been conducted by examining the signs on the corpses. From the manners of killings, he allocates them to the eighteenth century because he reads the famous English writer Thomas de Quincey’s essays on the murder cases and draws some resemblances between them. Wandering in these places that radiate eerie rays of lonesomeness, Hawksmoor realises that the mystery lies within the churches having the same nameplate of the architect. This instance marks the infusion of the timelines since Hawksmoor receives a letter from a person calling himself “The Universal Architect” (Ackroyd 1993, 166) and starts to trace him. The Architect

is also an allusion to the “medieval Christian belief that God, the Universal Architect, the *cosmocreator*, is the author of the Book of Nature,” which was also present in Freemasonry and Gnosticism as Supreme Being and Grand Architect of the Universe, respectively (Onega 1999, 55; Cox 2009, 85-87; Morris 2013, 266-267; Di Bernardo 2020, 49-58, Wayne 2014, 17, 95, 495-500). According to this concept, God created the universe based on geometric and harmonic principles, which is why Dyer was trying to construct his churches based on certain principles to resemble his work to God’s and therefore, was reading all ancient treatises on this subject (Høg 2004). The Architect is being positioned as a reincarnation of Dyer. While haunting an unknown murderer in corrupt places, Hawksmoor’s mentality gets altered, similar to Dyer’s. He becomes like a tramp himself, consequently being estranged from his duties. Despite his condition and estrangement from his duties, Nicholas continues his pursuit and finds the tramp in a matte black coat corresponding to Dyer, Architect, Mirabilis and his own physical appearance in the church of Little St. Hugh.

The description of Little St. Hugh introduces an additional esoteric dimension to the text. Historically, Nicholas Hawksmoor designed six new churches after the Great Fire of London in 1666.<sup>14</sup> In the novel, the seventh fictional church is Little St. Hugh, located in Black Step Lane, where “Sathan’s straw men Druides worshipp’d him and held yearly sessions” (Ackroyd 1993, 22). The church’s entrance resembles a gateway to another world in its front part having “a blackened surface as if the darkness had been painted upon it” stands for a passage (Ackroyd 1993, 216). The interior of the church is “a square room with the smell of dampness,” having “a plaster ceiling curved like a shallow dish” and an altar “covered with a canopy of dark wood, iron rails, and rusted metal chain” (Ackroyd 1993, 216). This construction can metaphorically be paralleled with Dante’s purgatory, where Hawksmoor’s further journey will take shape. It is Dyer’s metamorphosis room from the material to the divine self. It is the spot where Hawksmoor faces “his own Image sitting beside him” (Ackroyd 1993, 216). Here happens his unification with Dyer and his other selves. Susana Onega also compares it to the

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<sup>14</sup> In 1711, the commission for building fifty new churches (“Queen Anne” churches), was granted by the Parliament act (9 Anne cap 17), imposing a duty on coals for “Building ... fifty new churches of Stone and other proper Materials, with Towers or Steeples to each of them; and for purchasing of Sites of Churches and Church-Yards, and Burying-places, in or near the Cities of London and Westminster, or the Suburbs thereof; and for making such Chapels as are already built, and capable thereof, Parish Churches, and for purchasing Houses for the Habitations of the Ministers of the said Churches.” Of the fifty churches only ten were built and two rebuilt. Of these twelve churches, only six were designed anew by Nicholas Hawksmoor (“The Queen Anne Churches, ”The National Archives, Reference No: MSS/2690-2750 <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/0073eb3b-fd8a-4549-bb12-b7e487592779> Accessed 19 October 2023). Two other churches were co-designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and John James. Hawksmoor was one of two surveyors of “1711 Commission” and remained in this post until 1733 (Hopkins 2016, 58).

Borgesian Library of Babel,<sup>15</sup> or Jacob's ladder,<sup>16</sup> "casting into eternity" (Onega 1999, 57). However, it remains unknown whether he manages to complete his lofty aim and ascend into divinity or stays in an everlasting loop of reincarnation.

Apart from such obvious esoteric narrations, the text itself is an esoteric embodiment structurally. The book consists of twelve chapters which can be attributed to the cycles of cosmogony, such as the twelve days of Epiphany or the twelve months of the year, endlessly circulating and replacing each other (Onega 1999, 57). The chapters are also connected to each other to amplify uncanny textuality. In addition to semantic bridges, the chapters establish continuity through the repetitions of certain words. The first chapter ends with the words "I can see the brightness of the Starres at Noon," and the second chapter starts with "AT NOON they were approaching the church in Spitalfields" (Ackroyd 1993, 25). The second chapter ends with "And when he looked up he saw the face above him" (Ackroyd 1993, 42), and the third chapter starts with "THE FACE above me then became a Voice: It is a dark morning, Master, and after a fine moonshiny night it is terrible rainy" (Ackroyd 1993, 43). This tradition continues in these chapters conjoining Dyer's and Hawksmoor's universes until the very last page, regardless of spatial and temporal differences, "to generate mystery through portentous vagueness" (Hollinghurst 1985).

### ***3.1.2. The House of Doctor Dee***

Like *Hawksmoor*, this novel also features two alternating stories with two different time periods and characters – Matthew Palmer in the twentieth century and Doctor John Dee in the sixteenth century. The house that Matthew inherits from his father is located in Clerkenwell, "the more open and more desolate... area [that] had been laid waste" (Ackroyd 1994, 2). Thus, esoteric motifs begin to emerge through Matthew's metaphysical experiences of the house. As he moves into the house, he encounters numerous uncanny events, such as seeing four doors of different colours in his dream, hearing voices in the kitchen, finding a skeleton in the yard of the house, discovering glass tubes and papers with some recipes, and more. As a result of the alteration of his sensual derives, Matthew is seized by an obsessive desire to learn more about the house. Simultaneously, Matthew starts to question his own origin as he is not able to

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<sup>15</sup> *Library of Babel* is Jorge Luis Borges' 1941 short story telling the narrator's universe consisting of a library containing all books.

<sup>16</sup> *Jacob's ladder* is a ladder between Heaven and Earth, as appears in Genesis 28:10–19.

remember his childhood. Upon his friend Daniel's note that it is "a surprise, in fact" than "unusual to find a house of this age in London," they begin to descend to the basement and find out that it is not a basement but a ground floor that "has sunk through the London clay" (Ackroyd 1994, 14). These intriguing situations about the house and Matthew's mental state drive Matthew to investigate the house and its history. As it turns out, the house was once inhabited by the famous English magician in London during the reign of Elizabeth I. John Dee was an intelligencer, which is an Elizabethan term describing "a seeker of hidden knowledge, philosophical and scientific, as well as a spy" (Coverley 2008, 20). However, in the novel, he is introduced as a "black magician" by the librarian (Ackroyd 1994, 93).

Narrating esotericism is further sophisticated by the description of Dee's life and activities in England during Renaissance. Dee has occult beliefs and tries to use them for particular purposes. Dee's world consists of three levels: "elemental, intellectual and celestial," corresponding to the historical Dee's *corpus mundi* (the sublunary or system of matter), *anima mundi* (the intelligible or system of principles), and *mens divina*, also called *spiritus mundi* (the angelic or system of ideas) (Ackroyd 1994, 65; Onega 1999, 116). Since acquiring the divine knowledge after being convinced that traditional methods will not grant him what he wants, Dee aims to map "the divinity within, the soul, that spark, that fire which drives the spheres" which is *spiritus mundi* and human's place in it (Ackroyd 1994, 104). John Dee is convinced that England was once a homeland of spiritual giants and later the survivors of Atlantis. Therefore, he starts to search for a lost city where he believes in finding universal knowledge. He is persuaded that in the pre-historical city, macro and microcosms are in correspondence, and a human can restore its origin, that is, god-like status.

Since this attempt ends in failure, he turns his powers to natural magic and gets engaged with the process of creating an artificial living being. Edward Kelley appears in Dee's life during these attempts at the creation of the *homunculus*. Despite his negative first impressions, Dee starts to use his services of scrying and communicating with angels to search for the essential substance, the Philosopher's Stone, to finish his *work*.

Whether Dee succeeds in his experiment is unclear at the end of the novel. However, there is a probability of Matthew being a homunculus. Several points suggest this hypothesis. First, Matthew sees a dream where he is in a glass tube that can correspond to Dee's experiment tools (Ackroyd 1994, 10). Second, he finds his father's handwritten note titled "Doctor Dee's Recipe" of homunculus, where he finds similarities between his personality and remarked peculiarities (Ackroyd 1994, 123). Third, Matthew's unknown origin and the absent memory of his childhood, and his mother's words to him that "[your father] found you. He adopted you.

He said that you were very special. Unique” corresponds to his being a homunculus (Ackroyd 1994, 177). Towards the end, Matthew also finds out that his father was a member of John Dee’s Society, the duty of which is to protect the homunculus from generation to generation. After his death, his duty falls on Matthew’s only friend Daniel, who turns out to be the lover of Matthew’s father.

The novel’s structural composition resembles the historical Dee’s symbol of a *hieroglyphic monad* “denoting the complex unity and wholeness of man” as a “geometrical-alchemical-moral mandala” (Onega 1999, 117; Szőnyi 2006, 51; 2004) and looks like:



*Figure 1.* John Dee’s symbol of hieroglyphic monad.

Moreover, it is constituted by the moon, sun, and central point for the Earth (Ternary – the third level) in the upper part, a cross for the four basic elements (Quaternary – the fourth level) in the middle, and the zodiacal sign of Aries at the bottom (forming Septenary – the seventh level also refers to the seven stages of alchemical transmutation for the creation of homunculus) which stands for the fire. It hides “the most secret” (Octad or octonary – the eighth level) standing for the “philosopher’s stone,” and meaning, “[t]he Sun and the Moon of this Monad desire that the Elements in which the tenth proportion will flower, shall be separated, and this is done by the application of Fire” (Dee 1564; A. Campbell 2012; Onega 1999, 117):



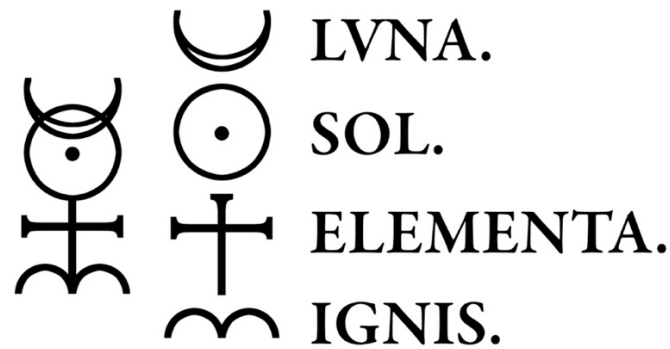


Figure 2. Dissemination of the hieroglyphic monad<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, Matthew's chapters are numbered and are seven in number instead of having titles, whereas Dee's chapters have names and are eight in number. The final chapter, titled 'The Vision,' inhibits both characters. Altogether, the chapters are connected with each other through the repetitive words; each consequent chapter starts with the words repeated at the end of the previous one, as the first chapter ends with Matthew saying, "I seemed to see the dark shape of a man soaring upward above Cloak Lane" (Ackroyd 1994, 19), and Dee's first chapter titled 'The Spectacle' starts with "What became of the flying man?" (Ackroyd 1994, 20). This chapter ends with Dee's sentence, "It was a clear night, and the fixed stars were all I needed to light my path to Clerkenwell" (Ackroyd 1994, 38), and Matthew's following chapter starts with "I decided to walk through the night" (Ackroyd 1994, 39). This paradigm continues till Matthew's fifth chapter, which is connected to his own chapters till the final chapter. The same is with Dee's following chapters until the last chapter. In this style, the last chapter, 'The Vision,' is separated from the rest of the text. Susana Onega demonstrates this sequence in the below figure (1999, 115):

**< ONE > < THE SPECTACLE > < TWO > < THE LIBRARY >**  
**< THREE > < THE HOSPITAL > < FOUR > < THE ABBEY >**  
**< FIVE >**  
**[{THE CHAMBER OF DEMONSTRATION} {THE CITY}]**  
**< SIX >**  
**[{THE CLOSET} {THE GARDEN}]**

<sup>17</sup> Source: <http://www.esotericarchives.com/dee/monad.html>

< SEVEN >  
[THE VISION]

The first eight chapters, paralleling four per each figure, are postulated as four basic elements of the *quaternarius*. Matthew's following three chapters, five, six, and seven, refer to three elements of the *ternarius* and then blend with Dee's four chapters creating *septenarius*, having the last chapter as *octonarius* (Onega 1999, 130).

The title of the novel initially draws attention to the *house* rather than to Doctor Dee. Matthew's intimate visions as a "holy place" for its location in Cloak Lane, the stream of water piped under it as the "water of life", or "a bridge of light" located near the house for London Bridge (Ackroyd 1994, 16–17), employs extra-dimensional emphasis on the house as well (Prosser 2015). Therefore, it can be evaluated as an alchemical metaphor per se. The house is situated in an atypical street "where a medieval brothel has been marked, just beyond the nunnery" (Ackroyd 1994, 60) and corresponds to the "crossroads of good and evil" drawing to the mythical co-existence of the double or a Janus-faced<sup>18</sup> atemporal space combining two narrations (Onega 1999, 122). As an atemporal space, it also echoes Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias – "a place of otherness" – "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space" (Chalupský 2016a, 50; Foucault 1986). At the same time, the house is literally descending to the ground. It has three storeys – underground, ground and above the ground – corresponding to cosmic levels and their human equivalents: body, soul, and spirit (Onega 1999, 121). Matthew resembles the house to "the torso of a man rearing up, while his arms still lay spread upon the ground on either side. When I walked towards the steps, it was as if I were about to enter a human body" (Ackroyd 1994, 3). In this sense, Susana Onega also resembles the house to Dee's *anthropos*, having a "doppelgänger relationship" with Matthew or becoming a member of Dee's "spiritual family" (1999, 122).

### ***3.1.3. Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem***

*Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* deals with the crimes committed in Limehouse. The esoteric trait in the novel is created with the introduction of the Golem, the "fifteenth-century

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<sup>18</sup> In ancient Roman mythology, Janus is the god of time, war and peace. He is the master of both gates of heaven because he opens the day when he rises and shuts it when he sets. Source: <https://gnosticwarrior.com/new-year.html>

concept of the ‘homunculus’ which was supposed to have been given material shape in the laboratories,” or the Golem from the medieval Jewish mythology, the secrets of which should be “found within the annals of London’s past” (Ackroyd 1995, 4). This also constitutes to Dr. Dee’s homunculus. Due to the multiplicity of storylines in the fashion of various narrations — the first murderer’s, second murderer’s, newspaper articles’, Law Courts’ trial interviews and third person’s narration — each one has its own occult image, experience, reception, and perception of the city along with the emergence of speculations of the Golem, which are poles apart from the other.

London denizens are shaken by the mysterious chain of ritual killings committed in the East End, namely Limehouse – “the macrocosmic evil emanation of the whole area” (Onega 1999, 139). The first three killings introduced in the novel belong to two prostitutes and a Jewish scholar Solomon Weil. These murders have some kind of sexual esoteric formulation; Jane Quig, the first victim, is found on the “old steps in three separate parts; her head was upon the upper step, with her torso arranged beneath it in some parody of the human form, while certain of her internal organs had been impaled upon a wooden post by the riverside” (Ackroyd 1995, 5). This positioning also recalls Dr Dee’s hieroglyphic monad. The second victim, scholar Solomon Weil’s body is discovered in his room; “his nose had been cut off and placed upon a small pewter plate, while his penis and testicles had been left upon the open page of a book” pointing to the paragraph about the golem (Ackroyd 1995, 6). Alice Stanton, the third victim, is found “lying against the small white pyramid in front of the church of St. Anne’s. Her neck had been broken... her tongue had been cut out and placed within her vagina... in a manner reminiscent of the killing of Jane Quig nine days before” (Ackroyd 1995, 6). Later it becomes evident that Solomon Weil was killed instead of Karl Marx, who was visiting him at his house. Upon following Marx and seeing him entering Weil’s house, Golem mistakenly killed Weil thinking he was Marx.

Elizabeth, the main figure of the novel, has childhood traumas from being her “mother’s only child, and always an unloved one..., the bitter fruit of her womb, the outward sign of her inward corruption, the token of her lust and the symbol of her fall” (Ackroyd 1995, 11). The wording used in the description of her childhood already prognosticates the unusual nature of her personality for further references. Among the victims, there are people whose roads once crossed with hers. Her mother dies mysteriously after Lizzie gives her a drink (Ackroyd 1995, 50). A boy called Little Victor Farrell, who was working with her at Dan Leno’s theatre and harassed her, is found with a broken neck (Ackroyd 1995, 102). Her dresser Uncle Tommy Farr suffers a sudden death (Ackroyd 1995, 186). Her roommate Doris dies of a drink after living

with Lizzie for a while (Ackroyd 1995, 152). Her maid, Aveline's unborn child from her husband, John Cree, is killed with a potion (Ackroyd 1995, 256). Her father-in-law dies as she visits him in Lancashire (Ackroyd 1995, 256). John Cree gets poisoned (Ackroyd 1995, 267). An interesting case is the mass killing of the Guerrard family, resembling the case of the famous Marr family homicide in 1812. The murders of prostitutes also recall the historical Jack the Ripper's fashion of killings in 1888.

Not surprisingly, Elizabeth turns out to be the Golem – a soulless being resembled to “Adam before ‘the breath of God had touched him’” (Wistrand 2020, 17), to be a physical embodiment of the divine Adam Kadmon of the Cabbala (Scholem 2008). Though she has a physical shape, she is incomplete as a spirit, which also blurs her appearance. For this reason, unable to identify whether a figure disguised as “Old Brother” is male or female, a Jewish man passing by the Limehouse church calls her “something like ‘Cadmon’” (Ackroyd 1995, 154). This echoes Solomon Weil's and Karl Marx's conversation about Adam Kadmon, the spiritual entity called Universal or Supreme or Primordial man who is “male and female joined” (Ackroyd 1995, 67), and after whom the first man Adam was created (Scholem 2008).

Elizabeth has been gaining a gradual identity with each murder. She has become independent after killing two prostitutes and her mother, who was also a prostitute. She was blaming Elizabeth for being a female and trying to tame her by sticking pages of the Bible all over the walls of her room. Another layer of identity as an actress fell upon her after killing Victor Farrell and Uncle Tom Farr. Her transsexual identity emerges when she kills Doris. Finally, her becoming an author and central actress of Leno's theatre is to be completed after killing her husband and strangling Leno on the stage. Nevertheless, her latter plan does not succeed as Leno is the only one capable of rescuing the city from circulating malevolence.

As mentioned, London is the main esoteric entity of this novel, instilling its “brooding presence behind, or perhaps even within, the murders themselves” (Ackroyd 1995, 38). Similar to the previous two novels, the essential occult convention buried into the deepest layers of this “monstrous.. sinister... crepuscular” city, as “a haven for strange powers” (Ackroyd 1995, 38), come into light with the murders in the historically prominent locations having supernatural nuances:

The first killing occurred on the 10th September, 1880, along Limehouse Reach: this, as its name implies, was an ancient lane which led from a small thoroughfare of mean houses to a flight of stone steps just above the bank of the Thames. It had been used by porters over many centuries for convenient if somewhat cramped access to the cargo of

smaller boats which anchored here, but the dock redevelopments of the 1830s had left it marooned on the edge of the mud banks. It reeked of dampness and old stone, but it also possessed a stranger and more fugitive odor which was aptly described by one of the residents of the neighborhood as that of “dead feet.” (Ackroyd 1995, 4)

Such speculative postulation leads to the uncanny perception of the happenings. After paving her way to the stage with the adoption of the famous hall musician Dan Leno, Lizzie starts her ill-natured strolls during London nights which originate from the occult spirit of London. Also inspired by the famous English essayist Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, Lizzie rationally plans her mysterious ritual killings aiming to become “an avenging angel of the city” like John Williams, yet becomes a Golem of the city (Ackroyd 1995, 38).

Elizabeth is an embodiment of London’s apotropaic order and manifests itself in multifaceted shapes similar to the City. Along with Elizabeth, there are different characters like her husband – an aspiring writer Mr. John Cree, the famous Ratcliffe Highway murderer John Williams, the British Museum’s Library intellectuals, like Karl Marx, Solomon Weil, George Gissing, each of which has his own portrait of London. It takes the whole narration to come to an end to identify the City’s character. In this sense, the city is also similar to a Golem. With each conducted homicide, London gains an additional identity corresponding to the gradual formulation of the Golem. The mystical Golem, like London, does not bear any definition of gender, religion or being good or evil in the beginning. Therefore, since the killings have their own distinct styles, the one remaining uncaught at the end will sign for the authorship of that London (or Golem) which replicated his mind, the condition of which is “irredeemable” (Ackroyd 1995, 120). However, only Dan Leno survives, and it is up to him to manifest City’s goodwill in opposition to Elizabeth’s evil order.

London is the *rosarium philosophorum*<sup>19</sup> of the Victorian era, harbouring the *hierosgamos*<sup>20</sup> of opposites, “dual-natured substances and androgyny” (Hauck 2008, 61). Foremost, Elizabeth is a union of opposities due to her double identity employed by the City. Like “an artist,” London used her “as the ‘studio’ to display his works” (Ackroyd 1995, 28).

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<sup>19</sup> “rose garden of philosophers.” As an alchemical manuscript, *Rosarium Philosophorum sive pretiosissimum donum Dei* first appeared in an anthology called *De Alchimia Opuscula complura veterum philosophorum* in 1550 in Frankfurt. Its main subject is the preparation of *Stone*, the process of which is accompanied by numerous paintings illustrating the levels of “spiritual journey” (or sacred marriage) in the achievement of the “enlightened state...the perfection or ‘Philosophers Stone.’” Source: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/april2009.html> Date accessed: 2.11.22

<sup>20</sup> “sacred marriage,” Carl Gustav Jung’s use of this alchemical term for the mystical union of opposities (sexual union of Sun and Moon) depicted in the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Hauck 2008, 240–41).

She is born as a female yet commits crimes as a male without any hesitation coming out of the complexities of this disguise. Apart from being so androgynous, Elizabeth is, at the same time, Dan Leno's doppelgänger, who, despite being absent much of the time in the text, enriches the title of the novel's British edition<sup>21</sup> due to his omnipresence. "All the time [he] had been watching from the wings" above the stage (and City) as the "white" emanation of 'perpetual, infinite London'" (Onega 1999, 144; Ackroyd 1995, 246). Dan Leno prevents Aveline Mortimer's on-stage death, actually planned by Elizabeth and ceases the flow of further murders.

The Reading Room of the British Museum shelters more *Rebis*<sup>22</sup> figures, both fictional and real, of the novel. It accommodates a peaceful reading process as a union of polar opposites of scientists and occultists residing in London at the time of mysterious killings. The anti-materialist, romantic idealist writer George Gissing is sitting next to materialist Karl Marx, and both are concerned about the "irredeemable condition" of London (Ackroyd 1995, 95). The German philosopher Karl Marx discusses the Golem with the Jewish Cabalistic philosopher Solomon Weil. The former sees fog as coming from factories and manufactures, the latter as "straight from hell" (Ackroyd 1995, 49). However, they sit side-by-side discussing old songs of music halls and resembling Dan Leno "dressed as 'Widow Twankey, a Lady of the Old School'" to Adam Kadmon (Ackroyd 1995, 56). Elizabeth's husband, a struggling dramatist John Cree is reading an unrelated account of mass killing by "a self-employed cobbler from Hoxton," while the accomplished George Gissing is absorbed in the English mathematician and mechanical engineer Charles Babbage's essay on artificial intelligence (Ackroyd 1995, 104). "And so," in the mystical Reading Room, "the murmuring of all inhabitants" blended in each other "rose towards the vast dome" in unison "and set up a whispering echo like that of the voices in the fog of London" (Ackroyd 1995, 105).

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<sup>21</sup> The US edition of the book is titled *The Trial of Elizabeth Cree* and was published in 1995, a year after the British issue. Source: [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/928794.The\\_Trial\\_of\\_Elizabeth\\_Cree](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/928794.The_Trial_of_Elizabeth_Cree)

<sup>22</sup> *Rebis* is a double-headed body having two faces looking in opposite directions and two wings in different – red and white – colours. It is the final result of the Alchemists' Great Work symbolising the unity of opposites and holding a globe that stands for the Philosopher's Stone. For more info: <https://www.learnreligions.com/rebis-from-theoria-philosophiae-hermeticae-95751>

### 3.2. Complex historiographic metafiction

As a member of the third-generation historiographic metafiction writers, who combine their “artistic creativity with the critical awareness” (Onega 1995), Peter Ackroyd utilises historiographic metafictional writing as his “self-conscious choice of a mode of expression” (Ackroyd 2001c). All three previously-discussed novels, along with some of his other works, correspond to the exact definition of historiographic metafiction introduced to literary theory by Linda Hutcheon. The self-reflexivity and self-awareness in the paradoxical treatment of historical events and figures identify his heritage since, for him, “the formal and playful use of historical style... placed very firmly at the heart of the English sensibility itself” (Ackroyd 2001c). In Peter Ackroyd’s writing, history is his own construct, his “retreat into history,” in which he modifies the very essence of historical evidence for the sake of “specific moral and philosophical concerns” which are revealed in an “idiosyncratic postmodern way” (Onega 1995, 92; Szőnyi 2007, 412). While re-writing history and infusing it with contemporary events, Ackroyd not only levels it with fictional composition but also plays with its conventional perception. The metafictional text, that he creates in this order, challenges both the traditional flow of the time and history’s only truth. His play with history involves the fusion of esoteric and occult elements, similar to North American “fabulation” and Spanish-American “magic realism,” as a way of challenging the “pre-modernist rationality” (Onega 1995, 92), which continuously suppressed different histories and activities deviating from its essence as seen in John Fawles *A Maggot*, William Golding’s *Rites of Passage*, *Close Quarters* and *Fire Down Below*, Lawrence Durrell’s *Monsieur, Livia, Constance, Sebastian, or Ruling Passions* and *Quinx or The Ripper’s Tale*, Graham Swift’s *Shuttlecock* and *Waterland*, Julian Barnes’ *Flaubert’s Parrot*, *Staring at the Sun* and *A History of the World in 10 ½ chapters*, Rose Tremain’s *Restoration*, A.S.Byatt’s *Possession: A Romance*, Charles Palliser’s *The Quincunx: The Inheritance of John Huffam*, Arturo Uslar Pietri’s *The Red Spears*, Rómulo Gallegos’ *Doña Barbara*, Jorge Luis Borges’ *Fictions* and *The Aleph*, John Banville’s *Doctor Copernicus*, Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Miguel Ángel Asturias’ *Men of Maize* and *Mister President*, Juan Rulfo’s *The Burning Plain* and *Pedro Paramo*, etc. Therefore, the historical motifs of his novels serve as a ploy for the disclosure of the silenced histories, and thus, Ackroyd presents his own version in supernatural environments, yet possible for comprehension.

This tendency is present around the outstanding sixteenth-century English magus, John Dee, who “only serves as a pretext” for the events of the novel (Szönyi 2007, 417) in *The House of the Doctor Dee*, the seventeenth-century architect Nicholas Dyer in *Hawksmoor*, and the nineteenth-century popular music hall performer Dan Leno and Elizabeth Cree in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. Since the protagonists are not “generalised... ‘synthesis of all the human and socially essential determinants’” who accommodate the flow of the narration (Hutcheon 1988, 113); they are eccentric and marginalised fictional figures corresponding to traditional historiographic metafictional heroes. *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* echoes Ansgar Nünning’s interpretation of historiographic metafiction, where he relates it to his own version called ‘revisionist’ historical novels. According to his position, these types of historical writing significantly rely on the multiplicity of the characters’ focalised viewpoints which convey the “limited perspectives [that] project highly subjective views of history” (Nünning 2004, 362). The fragmented nature of various stories serves to marginalise the historical events and enlightens the individual experiences of ordinary London denizens. The metaphysical wholeness is achieved via the omnipresent status of Dan Leno, to whom each character of the novel has a relation, be it direct or indirect.

Even though the historical information is abused for the sake of the historiographic metafiction, the distorted historical context accommodates the “transcendent concept of ‘genuine historicity’” (Jameson qt. in Hutcheon, 1988, 89), allowing multiple alternating and simultaneous plotlines. Positioning of this kind also prevents the privilege of either history’s formalism or fiction’s fictitious identity. Dr. Dee is not living in his historical Mortlake mansion in London, where he accommodated numerous scientists and travellers in his famous library. He is relocated to the Cloak Lane house in Clerkenwell, which Matthew inherited later in the twentieth century. The house becomes an atemporal spatial gateway to otherly worlds, adding another metafictional layer to the wider strata of the novel. John Dee’s teachers, Gemma Frisius and Gerard Mercator, are replaced by an English fictional character, Ferdinand Griffen, who taught him “the use of astrolabe and the astronomer’s staff” (Ackroyd 1994, 47). Dr. Dee reads Abbot Fludd’s *Of Wicked Spirits* (Ackroyd 1994, 222), which means that they are contemporaries, while, in fact, Fludd historically lived in the seventeenth century and published his works after Dee had been dead (Szönyi 2007, 417). The construction of seven churches across London based on Parliament’s Act and which was given to Dyer, echoes the similar actual architectural plan conducted by the British architect Christopher Wren in the eighteenth century. In reality, he cooperated with another architect, Nicholas Hawksmoor, whose preference was more the Tudor Gothic style than Wren’s classical Baroque. Despite the



presence of the fictional Wren in the novel, all his features and pursuits are attributed to Nicholas Dyer while Nicholas Hawksmoor is transferred to the twentieth century, playing the part of the detective (Ackroyd 1993, 5–10). While Dan Leno is an omnipresent figure radiating London’s occult atmosphere of the events happening both in his theatre and in the lives of actors of his theatre, especially in the life of Elizabeth Cree, the presence of both fictional and historical figures like a mathematician and mechanical engineer Charles Babbage, the novelist George Gissing, struggling dramatist John Cree, Jewish philosopher Solomon Weil, German materialist Karl Marx, English essayist Thomas De Quincey, and their simultaneous presence in the Reading Room of the British Library transcend the conventions of the traditional understanding of time (Ackroyd 1995, 43–47). In each novel, London city has an identity as the main character through the author’s occult configuration of the districts like Clerkenwell, Limehouse, Spitalfields, Wapping, Moorfields, Greenwich, etc., having a resonance with their historical background. Such falsification of factual events is modelled on “a notion of history as a shaping force” (Hutcheon 1988, 114) which is the focal point of the historiographic metafictional novels.

All three novels have at least two alternating or parallel storylines and periods, one or more of which deal(s) with the contemporary time and the other(s) with previous centuries. *Hawksmoor* and *The House of Doctor Dee* reflect alternating two storylines of Dyer-Hawksmoor and Matthew-Dee binaries, respectively. *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* has various narrations - the first murderer’s, the second murderer’s, newspaper articles’, Law Courts’ trial interviews and third person’s narration. Even though these lines are split randomly throughout the whole text, and no logical queueing is followed, the lines are not merging or crossing but convey distinct standalone viewpoints on the story. *The House of Doctor Dee* reflects a different pattern in this sense. While most of the plots in the novels are in the first-person singular’s present, the third-person narrating voice in *The House of Doctor Dee* adds an extra “metafictive historical reconstruction” on the structural level of the text (Hutcheon 1988, 108–9). This narrating voice may be attributed to Peter Ackroyd himself in “The Vision” – the last chapter of the novel:

It’s like this house. Nothing ever seems to stay in the same place. And do you know what?

This may have been the actual room where Doctor Dee saw his visions.

What did I call it just now?”

‘The scrying room. Or the chamber of presence. What is the matter, Matthew?’

‘Did you hear something then?’

‘No.’

‘I thought I heard a voice.’

‘You’ll be seeing him next, glimmering in the corner.’

‘Well, I do see him. Look here.’

John Dee heard all these things, and rejoiced. And, yes, I see him now. I put out my arms in welcome, and he sings softly to me... (Ackroyd 1994, 277)

Here Matthew is chatting with someone who is not Doctor Dee or any other character in the novel. This “(meta)physical participant” (Garayeva 2021c) supplies the metafictional presence of Peter Ackroyd, which is more evident in the following part of the chapter where he addresses the reader or abyss directly:

Oh you, who tried to find the light within all things, help me to create another bridge across two shores. And so join with me, in celebration. Come closer, come towards me so that we may become one. Then will London be redeemed, now and for ever, and all those with whom we dwell - living or dead - will become the mystical city universal. (Ackroyd 1994, 278)

Such direct communication makes the fictional character of the novel evident to the reader despite the “indeterminate nature of historical knowledge” (Hutcheon 1988, 88). He first creates an illusion on a historical pretext and feeds the needs of the historiographic metafiction writing, then destroys it to connect the reader to the world outside the pages and prove history’s “intrinsic fictional character” (Onega 1995, 95).

### **3.3. Esoteric constructs**

As described above, Peter Ackroyd’s novels are rich with esoteric and occult elements. Though he employs these motifs to create historiographic metafiction and to retrieve the history of the suppressed domains, they are also being utilised to create various metaphysical and mythical compositions. Peter Ackroyd challenges the conventional perceptions of numerous traditional notions by exhibiting transcendental and mythical dimensions of city, time, space, church, self and so on. His subjectively fragmented mythography of these orthodox conceptions gives birth to their understanding totally distinct from their accustomed meanings. The esoteric constructions of spatial and temporal entities, which he creates in the novels, are simultaneously real and unreal, complementary, and equal to each other due to the blurred boundaries between them. Such paradoxical presentation empowers readers to interrogate and surpass the traditional

foundations of these established conventions. Ackroyd's London is a *Textstadt*, that is, a fictional city creating its own intra-textual reality referencing the city existing outside the given text (Mahler 2020). Ackroyd composes his own London. London composes its individuals and transforms its populace into specific kinds of media for reflecting their own actions on themselves. Ackroyd's time is not linear, albeit circular and crisscrossing. His space has a pattern of habitation and attracts alike-minded inhabitants. Peter Ackroyd's churches are multi-layered gateways to other worlds. Ackroyd's characters have multiple selves commuting continually beyond their natural environs to manifest their altered psyches. Therefore, this sub-chapter will deal with the detailed presentation of these esoteric constitutions.

### 3.3.1. Occult city

For Peter Ackroyd, along with some other London writers like Charles Dickens, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, William Morrison, etc., the city's history is in opposition to the real past. It resembles a place with a symbolic essence linked to class and power. Ackroyd's city, or "Ackroydopolis," as Sebastian Groes puts it (2011, 120), is a constructed environment, and its existence depends on the cultural understanding of time and space, which is based on the "interlocking relations between place, identity and cognition" (Hayes 2007, 7–8). He composes London, and London composes its individuals through its landscape. As Will Self puts it,

some see psychogeography as concerned with the personality of place itself. Thus, in his novels and biographies, Peter Ackroyd practises a 'phrenology' of London. He feels up the bumps of the city and so defines its character and proclivities. To read Ackroyd is to become aware that while the physical and political structure of London may have mutated down the ages, as torrents of men and women coursed through its streets, yet their individuality is as nothing, set beside the city's own enduring personification. (Self 2013, 9)

Peter Ackroyd's city-writing in his novels is a direct result of his own physical explorations through the streets of London. He himself is a dedicated enthusiast of "investigative sorties" into locales brimming with captivating tales, stories that are "strange, brutal and perplexing tales," featuring "thieves, con-men, pimps, prostitutes, and murderers" (Rule 2010, 10). These shabby and incongruous locations hold a special allure for Ackroyd's London strolls because they are as enigmatic as Ackroyd's maze-like portrayal of the city. They are the outcome of

years of wandering through a London that has no end, as the city's streets "provide a wealth of treasure and their exploration can take a lifetime" (Rule 2010, 11).

At first sight, Ackroyd's personal strolls and the ramblings of his fictional characters in London correspond to the original concept of psychogeography. However, Ackroyd's individual touch is the technique of twisting its traditional conventions, which relies mostly on his fictional construction of the topography of London infused with occult notions. He imposes his own interpretation of real historical events, times, and places for the sake of his own creation of the city within the atmosphere in which irrational events, hard to comprehend, occur ubiquitously.

Explicitly, Ackroyd's characters wander aimlessly with no particular logic as genuine pedestrians living in normal places that have existed for centuries. However, as the narrations progress, they become a part of a challenge with an important mission that turns them into the bearers of a duty or strollers of quest-like serpentine walks, which is employed on them by London city. The intertextuality of his novels also depicts the implicit occult power of London's certain places. Peter Ackroyd's "highly contentious and idiosyncratic theory of temporal and spatial correspondences within London" is absolutely in harmony with the emotional inheritance of certain locations (Coverley 2006, 124). It makes them a "psycho – spatial – temporal – fictional construct" (Chalupský 2016a, 155). This inheritance is not a coalition of autobiographical, historical or some kind of literary eclecticism, nor is it politically subversive, rather it is about the "intricate, subtle and contradictory relationships between personal and literary histories within the city" (Chalupský 2016a, 160). Almost all of the author's "generic London novels"<sup>23</sup> are accompanied by *genii loci*, which has transcendental presence in its inhabitants and impact the lives and psyches of its denizens resulting in diverse attitudes towards the city or vice versa. Due to his belief in English sensibility and heritage, Ackroyd believes that there is a pattern of habitation in a certain location. Such kinds of locations attract the same kind of people and events.

The intertextual utilisation of these locations in Ackroyd's literary activity also proves this thesis. In *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* and *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, the place is Limehouse, a location that has had the exotic diversions of romantic marine stories and oriental trickery since Charles Dickens's, Oscar Wilde's, Thomas Burke's, and Sax Rohmer's depictions. Its community became known for its residents who were avid gamblers and opium-smokers. This reputation cast a shadow on the history of London, making it a place

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<sup>23</sup> Roz Kaveney's term for a genre that is specific to only English fiction about mythical London "as 'the city of possibilities allow[ing] a perpetual reinvention of the self' (Onega 1999, 43).

of considerable significance among locations with a similar reputation. Similarly, in *Hawksmoor*, these places are Spitalfields, Wapping, Limehouse, Bloomsbury, Greenwich, and Moorfields<sup>24</sup>. In *The House of Doctor Dee* and *The Clerkenwell Tales*, it is Clerkenwell, in *The Lambs of London*, it is Central London, in *Three Brothers*, it is Camden, and so on. These are the “less salubrious places” that Ackroyd has been interested in since his childhood (Ackroyd 2001a). Such places can also be interpreted as having a “quintessential literary quality” (Tso 2020, v), characteristic of the London of Ackroyd’s perceptions. Thus, to reflect the literary nature of the ambiguous atmosphere of these places, Ackroyd employs esoteric notions to surpass the limits of rational understanding.

The city’s occult power penetrates the minds of its inhabitants and affects their mental states, thus transforming individuals into specific kinds of media to reflect their own actions back onto themselves. Dyer conducts sacrifices in certain locations to serve God.<sup>25</sup> London curses him through these places, causing him to gradually lose his sanity. While trying to detect the murderer, Hawksmoor strolls into the crime scenes, which radiates Dyer’s ill-nature upon him. Dr Dee’s Clerkenwell house shelters his artificial human creation. Matthew gains his genuine human traits by strolling in the streets of Clerkenwell (Lembert 2002; Garayeva 2021b). London allows Elizabeth to claim her multi-layered identity for each killing in different parts of Limehouse, yet a Limehouse breed luminary, Dan Leno, ultimately restores the city’s peace and unity. Thus, Spitalfields, Wapping, Limehouse, Bloomsbury, Greenwich, Moorfields, Clerkenwell, Camden, and sites like the British Museum (for Matthew) and the Reading Room (for Solomon Weil and Karl Marx, and others) are the toponyms transcending the limits of rational understanding and challenging already established perceptions about them. Not surprisingly, in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, the narrator, to emphasise the Reading Room’s occult positioning, explicitly resembles it to the City:

And so, the three men sat side by side on this autumn day, as unaware of each other as if they had been sealed in separate chambers. They were lost in their books, as the

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<sup>24</sup> An impressively detailed study of these and more locations mentioned in *Hawksmoor* has been conducted by Dr. Zénó VERNYIK in the “The Cartographic Fictional Space of *Hawksmoor*” chapter of his book, *Cities of Saviors: Urban Space in EE Cummings’ Complete Poems, 1904-1962 and Peter Ackroyd’s Hawksmoor* (2015) published by AMERICANA eBooks, ISBN 978-615-5423-09-3 (.mobi), available at <https://ebooks.americanaejournal.hu/hu/konyvek/cities-of-saviors/>

<sup>25</sup> Though to contemporary reader’s eyes Dyer’s God seems to be satanic, Dyer himself sees “the True God” as “the totality of everything, containing all good and evil and reconciling all opposites” and therefore, he explains the etymology of the word “*demon*” as coming from “*daimon*, which is us’d promiscuously with *theos* as the word for Deity; the Persians call the Devill *Div*, somewhat close to *Divus* or *Deus*” (Onega 1999, 54; Ackroyd 1993, 21-22, VERNYIK 2015, 125-126). It actually also reflects Ackroyd’s own thoughts that “which is all the sacred implies, has nothing to do whatsoever with moral categories of good and bad... it transcends them” (Vékony and Ackroyd 1997)

murmuring of all the inhabitants of the Reading Room rose towards the vast dome and set up a whispering echo like that of the voices in the fog of London. (Ackroyd 1995, 105)

As small fragments of the City, the mentioned locations all embody *genii locorum*, mirroring London's genius as "a unique spiritual power not only in terms of its physical construction but also in terms of its perception."<sup>26</sup> London's powers reaches into the minds and psyches of visitors, and affects their mental states. It then transforms them into a specific medium that bridges the gap between various realms, connecting the real and the occult city.

In the 'Acknowledgements' page of *Hawksmoor*,<sup>27</sup> Peter Ackroyd indicates that he first became aware of the architect Nicholas Hawksmoor and the strangeness of the London churches he designed in Ian Sinclair's poetry book, *Lud Heat* (1975). The first part of the poems describes how historical Hawksmoor strategically positioned churches due to "a strict geometry of oppositions" to create "a system of energies, or unit of connection within the city" that emanates "the occult power of its millenarian inhabitants," which also corresponds to the positioning of other key elements, such as "old hospitals, the Inns of Court, the markets, the prisons, the religious houses and the others" on overall London terrains (Sinclair 1975, 5–10; Onega 1998, 43). This concept is rooted in ley lines theory, introduced by Alfred Watkins in the 1920s, which provided a new way of city reading and first applied to the outskirts landscapes of London. Nonetheless, Watkins has also identified certain urban leys, and these locations served as an inspiration for Iain Sinclair to correlate Nicholas Hawksmoor's churches in his work, *Lud Heat*. Therefore, for Peter Ackroyd, occult London is seen as "an organic being" (Lewis 2007, 1), possessing a "mystical body" in the "form of a young man with his arms outstretched in a gesture of liberation; the figure [...] embodies the energy and exultation of a city continually expanding in great waves of progress and confidence" (Ackroyd 2009, 30). The capital city, under the sway of the emotional atmosphere of its landscape, mirrors the re-enchanted, uncanny, and somber settings of its local histories, reshaping them into gothic or, more precisely, neo-gothic environs. In Peter Ackroyd's gothic *achronotope*,<sup>28</sup> the city mirrors the experience of its inhabitants in its hidden and malicious corners. London is a literary city that is continually reborn each time someone writes in it or about it. This writing is not merely about formal documentation but rather involves "fictionalising, mythologising and parodying"

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<sup>26</sup> Oxford Reference's definition of "genius loci." Date of access 6 November 2022, [www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095847893](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095847893)

<sup>27</sup> New York: Harper & Row, 1985 edition.

<sup>28</sup> Spatial constructs outside the perceivable flow of time, in Chalupský, *A Horror and a Beauty*, 57.

the city's events, along with "self-reflective" commentary on the narrated occurrences and hints at intimations over imitations "in the process of their creation" (Chalupský 2016a, 239).

### 3.3.2. Transcendental time

Within the premises of traditional peculiarities of time, Peter Ackroyd's generic London novels display a various and intriguing range of temporal alterations and alternations by being distorted in multifaceted ways. His London is a perpetually ominous city that reshapes the perception of time, its value, movement, and conceptualisation. Ackroyd treats history as an artificial construct of the human mind and deliberately distorts the conventional nature of time. He creates rational and irrational temporal parallelisms by diversifying postulations of linear order of time to refute its orthodox theories. Circular time is used to alter the perception of the actual or objective time within the novels. In addition, there is an intersection of quixotically flowing time initiating the penultimate union or transcendental exposition of different slots of time. The transhistorical value of *genii locorum*<sup>29</sup> present in the novels undermines the layers of time. The past has not disappeared; it is present and manifests itself repeatedly. In this regard, Barry Hugill equates Peter Ackroyd's time to "a lava flow from some unknown source of fire" rather than a continuous "stream moving in one direction" (1994). This very point is evident in *Hawksmoor*, where time resists chronology through the dualities of its characters, in *The House of Doctor Dee*, where two different timelines alternate with each other in a continuous way, and in *Dan Leno and The Limehouse Golem*, where multiple times flow simultaneously.

The structure of linear time in *Hawksmoor* is quite distinct in each of its timelines when considered separately. Though rich with flashbacks to his childhood, Nicholas Dyer retells his life story retrospectively in the style of confessions in the first part of the book. A heterodiegetic narrator tells the second part of the book, which reflects Detective Chief Superintendent Nicholas Hawksmoor's quest for the conductor of a series of mysterious crimes unless Hawksmoor solves the mystery of the murders, that is, traces Dyer's footage in them.

On the surface of both Dyer's and Hawksmoor's stories, the conception of time appears as "a linear, uniform, and continually progressing process," each event marks an irreversibly transitory point on the "homogeneous, steadily quantifiable arrow of time" (Fuchs 2018). Deducted from all metaphysical, mystical, and mythical conventions, this homogeneous

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<sup>29</sup> A plural form of *genius loci*.

understanding of time is in an unfluctuating line with the natural world around Dyer. The “chronology as a model of time” is predominant in Nicholas’s eighteenth century (Currie 2007, 93). At first glance, Hawksmoor’s perception of time adheres to one-directional linearity in coherence with clock time and representing “an unimpeded sequence of raw empirical realities” as well (Shiller 1997). The forward time perception in both storylines and the progressive nature of the empirical events also demonstrate that “the only time conceivable is precisely chronological time” (Ricoeur 1985, 2:25). However, with the violation of the ordinary conception of time as “[it] is the most fundamental structure of consciousness” or rather “temporalising is what consciousness *does*” (Rodemeyer 2015, italics in original), the transhistorical recurrences of events start to resonate the circularity of time. A breach of this pattern leads “to physical or psychological as well as to social disorders,” as seen from Dyer’s and Hawksmoor’s altered mental states with the growth of circling instances revolving around them in London—Ackroyd’s “psycho - spatial - temporal - fictional construct” (Chalupský 2016a, 155).

Such disruption of the progressive flow of time becomes apparent in the second part of the novel and leads to dualistic abstractions of time. Initially, the transtemporal nature of time is posited by duplicities existing in both centuries. The churches, which are constructed by Nicholas Dyer throughout London in the eighteenth century, remain perfectly preserved into the twentieth century and carry the same power resonating with gothic, mystical, and labyrinthine aura of the grandiloquent London (Chalupský 2014). The names of the virgin boys, whom Dyer sacrificed in the foundations of his churches, have either identical or slightly different names — the first three murdered boys in both centuries are respectively named Thomas Hill, Ned, Matthew Hayes, and all die in the same areas (Ackroyd 1993, 64, 78, 162). Additionally, some trails of Dyer’s personality seem to intrinsically descend to the victims and Hawksmoor, who are estranged from him by centuries. In his childhood, the place where Dyer spent much of his time, was the yard of the church at Spitalfields. In the twentieth century, the victim, Thomas, also enjoyed playing in the same place, regardless the objections of his mother. Dyer had a fondness for reading *Dr. Faustus*, and the twentieth-century victim Thomas Hills had a copy of *Dr. Faustus and Queen Elizabeth* as his bedside book (Ackroyd 1993, 18, 33). Hawksmoor’s aimless strolls on the outskirts of London have a similar impact on his reasoning, resulting in the weakening of his psyche, similar to the experiences of Dyer. In this sense, these boys and Hawksmoor can be seen “as a personification of continuum” since they keep on reappearing and conveying the same energy while stripping away from the political context of their respective times “to focus on its aesthetics” (Charnick 2011; Shiller 1997).



Along with people, two worldviews also constitute a part of this mythical circularity: the occultist *Scientia Umbrarum* and the empiricist New Science, embodied respectively by Mirabilis and Christopher Wren in the eighteenth century, and later by Dyer and Hawksmoor in the twentieth century. When faced with a dead body, Dyer begins to envision the behaviour of murderer, while Hawksmoor, just like Wren, relies on the findings of autopsy carried out by medical specialists or on prior rational studies regarding the behavioural patterns of murderers (Ackroyd 1993, 159).

These metaphysical circularities are further reinforced by the structure and stylistics of the novel itself, similar to *The House of Doctor Dee*. The book is divided into twelve chapters, which can be attributed to the cycles of cosmogony, such as the twelve days of Epiphany or the twelve months of the year, endlessly circulating and replacing each other (Onega 1999, 57). The chapters are also interconnected with each other to amplify the uncanny textuality of the narrative. Besides the use of semantic bridges, the chapters create continuity through the repetition of certain words. Similar to *The House of Doctor Dee*'s structural pattern, the first chapter of *Hawksmoor* ends with the words "I can see the brightness of the Starres at Noon," and the second chapter begins with "AT NOON they were approaching the church in Spitalfields" (Ackroyd 1993, 25). The second chapter ends with "And when he looked up he saw the face above him" (Ackroyd 1993, 42), and the third chapter begins with "THE FACE above me then became a Voice: It is a dark morning, Master, and after a fine moonshiny night it is terrible rainy" (Ackroyd 1993, 43). This tradition continues in these chapters conjoining Dyer's and Hawksmoor's universes until the very last page, regardless of spatial and temporal differences "to generate mystery through portentous vagueness" (Hollinghurst 1985).

These distortions are present in the symbolic — along with stylistic, structural, and linguistic — strata of the text. Symbolically, the recurring concept of time is reinforced through the repetition of certain words within the text, creating a continuous yet crisscrossing pattern. Notions like 'dust,' 'pain,' 'child,' 'pattern,' 'shadow,' 'tramp,' 'fire,' 'glass,' and 'time' in *Hawksmoor*, and 'shadow,' 'dust,' 'light,' 'voice' in *The House of Doctor Dee*, are endlessly rotating throughout the novels. Set against the backdrop of the spiritual and miraculous London, these incessant textual patterns reveal a complex metaphysical depth to the books as they cohere "forward and backward at the same time, disrupting traditional notions of chronological linearity in favour of a circular, or mythical conception of time" (Onega 1999, 47).

*The House of Doctor Dee* also presents circularity in Matthew's experiences and visions of Doctor Dee's life and magical activities. As a homunculus, Matthew's life itself is a snap

from a grand cycle, which is ending and beginning anew every thirty-three years. It appears that the homunculus also lives through the same events repeatedly in each of its everyday life.

Though the distortion of flowing time is not present in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, there is duality in terms of events, places, characters, and the songs and ballads sung in the novel. However, there is an implicit circularity that coincides with the real history of London. In the novel, Dan Leno seizes Elizabeth's ongoing crimes, which she meticulously designs in a significant fashion in 1880. This story of killings is a distorted and fictionalised version of the actual murders that occurred during the "Autumn of Terror" in Whitechapel, East-End London, in 1888, attributed to a figure known as Jack the Ripper, who employed Lizzie's exact style of killings (Eddleston 2001, 1; Curtis Jr. 2001, 18; Cornwell 2002, 5). Ackroyd presents these events as if happening eight years ahead of their actual historical timing. As a result, this fictional cycle anticipates the historical events that unfolded in London in 1888. Similarly, the real Jack the Ripper, who later was identified as a Liverpool cotton merchant named James Maybrick, purportedly wrote a diary, echoing Elizabeth Cree's fictional diary in the novel (Curtis Jr. 2001, 30; Eddleston 2001, 177; Onega 1999, 134). Furthermore, it was revealed that the real Jack the Ripper was Mrs. Florence Maybrick, who logged a diary assigned to her husband and poisoned her husband, just like Elizabeth (Eddleston 2001, 225; Curtis Jr. 2001, 30).<sup>30</sup> This interplay between real and fictional entries, once more underscores Peter Ackroyd's conceptualisation of time and history as constructs of the mind. In his lecture on *Hawksmoor*, Ackroyd himself accepts that "'time' is perhaps an ambiguous and uncertain dimension" by acknowledging its obscurity (Ackroyd 2001b). To convey his philosophy, he designs time that defies all evidence of empiricism. These are novels about the multiple distortions of traditionally perceived temporal consciousness of a twentieth-century man who evolved with the idea of time as "a linear, unidirectional and irreversible process" (Vikis-Freibergs 1977).

### 3.3.3. Mythical union

One of the intriguing esoteric constructs that Ackroyd built in all three novels is the mythical identities of the main characters residing across various time zones. These figures defy both the

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<sup>30</sup> The historical account of Jack the Ripper is still difficult to identify (Whiteway 2004). Allegations about his true identity is detailed in Paul Begg's *Jack The Ripper: The Definitive History*, (2005), London/New York: Routledge.

linearly progressive and cyclically recurring concepts of time by surpassing the conventional instances of transtemporal manifestations of time and space. Such crisscrossing of time and space is notably present in specific locations, adding an intersectional dimension to the overall experience of time and place. “There are parts of London,” Barry Hugill says in *The Observer*, “where time has actually hardened and come to an end” (1994). In Ackroyd’s vision, the end of time is marked by the union, both physical and spiritual, of his characters in a mythical, timeless unity that “exists eternally” (Ackroyd 1994, 276). The locations that accommodate this unity include the church of St. Little Hugh in *Hawksmoor*, a garage in Wapping in *The House of Doctor Dee*, and the stage in *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. These places serve as focal points where the characters’ experiences transcend conventional notions of time and space.

The first occasion of mythical unification happens in *Hawksmoor* when Christopher Wren and Dyer travel to Stonehenge. Wren intends to use similar kinds of stones to construct St. Paul’s Cathedral, emphasising the importance of geometry in his architectural endeavours. However, according to Dyer, the circle inside Stonehenge was once a place for sacrifices and now resonates a strong mystical power of dark deities inside this “Architecture of the Devil” (Mergenthal 2006). For Wren, “Geometry is the Key to this Majesty” (Ackroyd 1993, 61). When they start having a dispute over the shadows on the stones that mark the position of the sun and thus, daytime hours, it starts raining. They seek shelter and lean to a sarsen, one of the biggest stones of Stonehenge. In this moment, while Dyer feels the “Fabrick the Labour and Agonie of those who erected it... the marks of Eternity which had been placed there,” Wren confusingly confesses that he puts “no Stress upon the Thing called a Dream [...] but [he] just now had a Vision of [his] Son dead” (Ackroyd 1993, 60–61). This revelation becomes even more eerie when, months later, he is indeed informed about the death of his son. The following chapter in the novel shifts to the simultaneous twentieth-century story of one of the victims, called Ned. Ned abandons his regular life and starts wandering as a tramp from Bristol to Stonehenge. At Stonehenge, he encounters two cars parked and overhears voices, uncannily belonging to Wren and Dyer, but does not see anyone around. When Ned leans over one of the stones, he hears “voices swirling around him – among them his own father saying, ‘I had a vision of my son dead’” (Ackroyd 1993, 76). This uncanny connection between past and present, as well as the mystical qualities of Stonehenge, adds a layer of borderless unified mythical time to the narrative.

The other instance in *Hawksmoor* whirls around Hawksmoor’s two victims, the boy called Thomas and the above-mentioned Ned. Although they belong to different time periods,

they walk by each other in Limehouse. After walking to London from Bristol, Ned sets out to find lodging and strolls across Whitechapel High Street in Limehouse. On the same day, Thomas leaves home to escape from his mother. When walking on their neighbouring street, Commercial Road, he sees “someone walking in front of him” (Ackroyd 1993, 39). Ned, hungry and thirsty from several days of travel, walks slowly, unaware of the boy behind him. Suspicious of his slow pace, Thomas tries to stop and increase the distance between them. However, “although the man seemed still to be walking forward he was at the same time coming nearer” (Ackroyd 1993, 40). Thomas runs hysterically towards the church to hide from this unknown man, and Ned notices “a young boy ran away from him in obvious fright” when walking down Commercial Road (Ackroyd 1993, 77). Their respective chapters retell the account of this encounter from each figure’s own perspective.

The most significant convergence, which enfolds Dyer and Hawksmoor merging “enigmatically with [one] another [into a] mysterious being” occurs at the end of *Hawksmoor* (Link 2004). The book ends when a tramp, known as The Architect, who is also a reincarnation of Dyer and is Hawksmoor’s mythical image, face Hawksmoor inside the darkness of the seventh church, Little St. Hugh’s:

They were face to face, and yet they looked past one another... where one had ended and the other had begun? And when they spoke they spoke with one voice. (Ackroyd 1993, 217)

When an impingement of the superstitious intrudes upon the logical, as in this scene, a transcendental architecture exposes an atemporal spatial indefiniteness. This can be assessed as a level of “transcendental ladder to higher spheres of transtemporal existence” (Chalupský 2016a, 39). In this moment, Hawksmoor encounters numerous figures looking like him and sounding like him. Following this mythical union, Hawksmoor becomes one of these figures, whose souls have been sacrificed to serve Dyer’s *magnum opus*. Since he has not been murdered like other souls, Morton P. Levitt suggests that Dyer is Hawksmoor’s alter ego, with “each needing the other to fulfill his nature” (2002). To follow this idea, Hawksmoor’s survival would have resulted in the incompleteness of Dyer’s pursuit and disrupt the temporal circularity, as is the case when Hawksmoor turns back to check on himself. He sees that,

... they were watching one another silently. (Ackroyd 1993, 217)

Not only does Hawksmoor talk about his body in the third person, but he also sees his other self as a child.

And then ... I looked down at myself and saw in what rags I stood; and I am a child again, begging on the threshold of eternity. (Ackroyd 1993, 217)

The temporal layering of this type illustrates the restless oscillation of the “wheel of life and death” (Onega 1999, 47). Hawksmoor disappears to become a child once more and experiences the repetitions of life continuously. Circularity is an indicator of the character’s personalities, time’s orders, and events throughout the novel, only for this moment to posit heterogeneity within oneself. The mythical unity between the reincarnated soul of Dyer and Hawksmoor can be interpreted as the realization of the cosmic man Dyer was striving for. The temporal aspect of this omnipresence can be related to Mircea Eliade’s concept of “solution of continuity” which exists between ordinary, profane, and sacred, mythical types of time (Eliade 1987a, 68). Unlike mythical time, which is “an ontological, Parmenidean time” that neither passes nor reverses, the transmigration that Hawksmoor experiences bear the peculiarities of the liminal time (Eliade 1987a, 69).

Similar situations are present in *The House of Doctor Dee*. Matthew and Doctor Dee encounter each other twice throughout the novel until the final chapter. However, since Doctor Dee disappears, Matthew thinks of him as “melt[ing] into [his] own body” (Ackroyd 1994, 11). However, there is an additional occasion that serves as a grand finale for the novel. The mythical union at the end of the book introduces an unusual entity blending in with the characters, none other than Peter Ackroyd himself. These temporal structures and spatial platforms intersect with one another in the garage left to Matthew by his father, drawing in the actual author’s spatial and temporal dimensions. The novel concludes with a dialogue in which “Matthew’s present self, the texts of the others, i.e., the author’s self and the texts of the past, i.e., John Dee’s self, blend together within a mystical self” (Garayeva 2021a):

It’s like this house. Nothing ever seems to stay in the same place. And do you know what? This may have been the actual room where Doctor Dee saw his visions. What did I call it just now?”

‘The scrying room. Or the chamber of presence. What is the matter, Matthew?’ ‘Did you hear something then?’

‘No.’

‘I thought I heard a voice.’

‘You’ll be seeing him next, glimmering in the corner.’

‘Well, I do see him. Look here.’

John Dee heard all these things, and rejoiced. And, yes, I see him now. I put out my arms in welcome, and he sings softly to me... (Ackroyd 1994, 277)

This dialogue has been previously mentioned in regard to the metaphysical participant of the novel as it is carried out by Matthew Palmer and his interlocutor, who is not Doctor Dee, or any other character featured in the text. It can be interpreted as Peter Ackroyd's own voice since as an authorial voice, it is not "impersonal and objective" due to its direct address and conveys a sense of presence (Booth 1983, 32-35, 178-182).<sup>31</sup> By overlaying these narrative voices with his own, Ackroyd produces a mythical union, comprehension of which is possible through a cognitive distortion, as it involves the actual reality as well. In another instance, the authorial voice, which I attribute to Peter Ackroyd's own self, addresses the abyss or the reader directly:

Oh you, who tried to find the light within all things, help me to create another bridge across two shores. And so join with me, in celebration. Come closer, come towards me so that we may become one. Then will London be redeemed, now and for ever, and all those with whom we dwell - living or dead - will become the mystical city universal. (Ackroyd 1994, 278)

The infusion of Ackroyd's reality with the novels' realm changes the perception of the time and place, which results in a different reading that converts it into a post-cognitive construction (Martínez 1999). Due to Ackroyd's this technique, Barry Hugill calls him "a writ" and "sane," yet treats his "merging of time past with time present [as resonating] with the crazies" (1994). This final chapter of the book is an all-inclusive passage where all historical periods, plot lines, and narrative voices are blended in unison with Peter Ackroyd's vision of the mystical universal London.

In his lecture on *Hawksmoor*, Ackroyd accepts that "'time' is perhaps an ambiguous and uncertain dimension" (Ackroyd 2001b). To convey his philosophy, he designs time that defies all evidence of empiricism. Such a final grand union in one mythical self and liminal time reinforces the distortion of the conventional dimensions of time. This marginal reality is the category "where rules of status and boundary do not apply" (Nuzum 2004, 210). These novels are in a limitless atmosphere where all confines are blurred and merged, and everything constitutes the particles of a whole. They are about the multiple distortions of the traditionally perceived temporal consciousness of a twentieth-century man who evolved with the idea of time as "a linear, unidirectional and irreversible process" (Vikis-Freibergs 1977, 538). To

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<sup>31</sup> Such a direct address to the reader also coincides with "manipulating mood," as Wayne C. Booth suggests (1983). When discussing Edgar Allan Poe's "The Premature Burial" (1844), he explains that Poe starts with several pages of explaining the frequency and horror of premature burials to set a mood for the actual start of the story. In the given excerpt, Ackroyd seems doing the same, but *after* the story ends. It is also possible that Ackroyd was influenced by Poe due to his admiration. Ackroyd is an author of his short biography as well; *Poe: A Life Cut Short* (Nan. A Talese/Doubleday, 2008)

challenge the traditional understanding of time postulated by social, cultural, and historical norms, Peter Ackroyd uses the metaphor of “a lava flow” rather than an established “river flow” streaming unidirectionally (Ackroyd 2001a; Currie 2007, 89). Taking its spring from fire, lava, its streams move in a different celerity and route, not in one course as conventionally accepted. Similarly, this version of time, which we are dealing with in the discussed novels, should not be evaluated as linear or circular but as a “disordered intersecting of time sequences” that imbues the present and the past (Chalupský 2016a, 74). This tradition of challenging the conventional understanding of time is a narratological device coming from the context of poststructuralism and postmodernism’s critique of the dominant, all-encompassing traditional narratives of the Enlightenment era. As a technique, it aims to deconstruct grand narratives which follow a linear, teleological, and progressive timeline, and suggests that history and knowledge advance in a straightforward and purposeful manner. Altering such use of time by introducing non-linear, fragmented, lava flow-like, layered, or cyclical temporal structures in storytelling, Peter Ackroyd employs a poststructuralist manner as a way of actually disrupting the idea of single, unified history and progress. In doing so, Ackroyd highlights the contingent, constructed, and often arbitrary nature of narratives in general. By applying a postmodernist technique of multiple temporal layers, where past, present, and future intermingle or coexist, Ackroyd questions temporal unidirectionality showing that time is more complicated and interconnected than traditional narratives acknowledge. The intentional temporal ambiguity replete with esoteric motifs, coupled with postmodern metafiction and self-reflexivity, is the reason of complexity and intertextuality of his novels.

## 4. Dan Brown's Occult Language

This chapter sheds light on Dan Brown and his three novels explored in this doctoral dissertation. Dan Brown's literary activity is not limited to mystery thrillers, yet this genre constitutes the majority. Dan Brown has a distinct writing style consisting of short, simple sentences conveying rationalistic viewpoints of esoteric events and rituals, making his books page-turners without any complexities. Thus, the following sub-chapters will demonstrate detailed descriptions of his ways of applying esoteric devices in each of his three novels included in the primary literature for this dissertation. Afterward, I will show the virtual historical peculiarities of his straightforward storytelling, with the help of which he creates alternative histories of the publicly acknowledged religio-historical events. The final sub-chapter will present Dan Brown's occult style, overarching the esoteric genius of opposites completing each other and the quest for *gnosis*, granting absolute knowledge.

### 4.1. Dan Brown's straightforward rationality

Brown-mania is a phenomenon that unites the author's worldwide readership under one umbrella. Dan Brown's sensational fame is the result of his best-selling novels conquering the tops of the lists of the most selling books, translated into more than fifty different languages, and sold over two hundred million copies worldwide ("Bestselling Authors Dan Brown '86, Charles Mann '76 to Speak Thursday | Campus Buzz: Celebrating the Liberal Arts | Amherst College" 2017).

Dan Brown's rational perspective stems from his deviation from religion at an early age, despite being born into a strictly religious family. Nevertheless, his deep involvement with science revealed him its other facets. According to Brown in an interview, "physics [became] metaphysics and numbers [became] imaginary numbers... there is an order and a spiritual aspect to science" (Kaplan 2009). This transformation may be the very reason behind his approach to solving religious mysteries with the help of a rational mind. Langdon never relies on his feelings and consistently follows a logical path. The puzzles he solves often involve numbers and critical thinking, incorporating both available and hidden facts as well as his powers of observation.



One specific aspect makes Brown's prose style exclusively specific. Dan Brown's writing style is characterised by its extreme simplicity. Despite consisting of more than four hundred pages, each novel contains short sentences, paragraphs, and even chapters. He has an extensive reliance on "dot dot dot for building suspense mid-sentence and ... italicisation for indicating deep thought" (Sexton 2013). The uses qualifying parts of the speech to line up for the appraisal of the "art forms" and their historically famous authors featured in the novels (Hesse 2013). "The language he uses is repetitious and full of clichés," the recurrence of characters' names "in almost every sentence," is seen as "a comprehension aid" for bibliophiles with tight or no attention spans (Sexton 2013). His use of italics, ellipses, and explanatory passages can make his novels be read as "textbooks or travelogues" (Minzesheimer 2013). The reader does not face any incomprehensible setting on the textual level of narrative. "I write in a way that ideally the reader doesn't realize he's reading, [he] just sort of gets transported to a location and there's people talking, and you're not really paying attention to language," tells Brown in his phone-call with Jason Diamond (2020). Brown's such fast "fun ride," making his books page-turners, leads to a much harsher critique of his writing style (Hesse 2013). "Everyone makes fun of these books" for lacking linguistic sophistication (Dean 2016). Brown "believes the word 'suddenly' infallibly excites" (Sexton 2013). His such concrete writing manner in which "style and word choice blunders in... (sometimes every line)" is believed to be "clumsy, ungrammatical, repetitive... full of unnecessary tautology" (Pullum 2004; Deacon 2013).

Nevertheless, by acknowledging his distinct authorial style, Brown himself confesses that "all of that is intentional" and "is designed to draw as little attention to the language as possible," with the aim of being understood from the first reading (Diamond 2020; Flood 2013). He uses language as a means of direct storytelling rather than constructing linguistic complexities in conveying the ideas, which would require overthinking or multiple readings. He presents arcane thoughts, religious debates, intellectual ideas, and scientific explanations in a manner that "the layman will understand" (Kerridge 2017). Speaking from his own taste in fictional literature, Dan Brown includes his writing into the category of readings that can either "entertain or inform" rather than drawing attention to "the beauty of language... where [he's] just drowning in the prose" for the sake of conveying "the depth of artistic expression ... of Shakespeare or Milton" (Flood 2013; Dunn and Bubeck 2006, 176).

Along with creating a smooth reading experience for the reader, Brown's precise, eloquent chapters offer a comprehensive understanding of the featured cities, art pieces, and mysteries making them "seem glamorous... mixed with luxury," yet accessible to everyone

(Poole 2013). Dan Brown, while teaching writing thrillers in the MasterClass, a streaming platform offering video lessons taught by the world's bests,<sup>32</sup> emphasises that the success of his novels is primarily attributed to the cruciality of how Robert's quests are set, rather than the originality of the ideas pursued (Smith 2018).

#### ***4.1.1. The Da Vinci Code***

*The Da Vinci Code* tells the story of the possibility that Christianity, more precisely Catholicism, is constructed on a historical mistake. Brown's such narrative introduces Jesus and Mary Magdalene as a married couple having a child and reveals secrets built around this premise. The novel takes place in Paris, London and Edinburgh over a period of twenty-four hours, depicting the joint quest of Robert Langdon's and Sophie Neveu's, the Agent of the Cryptography Department, to find location of the Holy Grail. While the plot is thrilling and fast-paced, the novel delves deeper into complex themes of religious symbolism, the role of women in religion, and the quest for hidden knowledge. Thus, at its core, *The Da Vinci Code* is not just a page-turner but a thought-provoking work that challenges traditional beliefs and narrative.

The story opens with a murder at the Louvre Museum, where the darkness of the Grand Gallery illuminates the Museum's curator, Jacques Saunière's message beside his body on the floor:

“13-3-2-21-1-1-8-5

O, Draconian devil!

Oh, lame saint!” (Brown 2004, 65)

P.S. Find Robert Langdon. (Brown 2004, 97)

In Addition, a glowing purple line surrounds Saunière's corpse, “inscribing [him] inside a circle,” creating a live replica of Leonardo da Vinci's famous sketch, *The Vitruvian Man* (Brown 2004, 67). This uncanny setting establishes a stage for a mystery that leads to a whirlwind tour of art, history, and theology. Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu are thrust into

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<sup>32</sup> The definition is given in the FAQ section of the platform, available at <https://www.masterclass.com/> accessed December 11, 2022.

a web of codes and symbols that seem to point to a larger conspiracy. As they decipher these enigmatic clues, they are drawn into a quest to uncover the secret history of Jesus Christ. The Grail scholar, Sir Leigh Teabing, who also reveals the true nature of the Holy Grail to Sophie, explains to her that the Bible is a “product of *man*... [n]ot of God... Jesus Christ was a historical figure... the most inspirational leader the world has ever seen... A descendant of the lines of King Solomon and King David... a rightful claim to the throne of the King of Jews” (Brown 2004, 309–10, italics in original). To defeat His power, the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great compiled the modern version of the Bible and, to revive religious turmoil, “decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity” (Brown 2004, 311). Afraid of Jesus’ influence on the people surrounding him, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea to declare the divinity of Jesus Christ.

*The Da Vinci Code* contains multiple layers and thematic elements. While the plot is gripping, it is these elements that provide the greatest food for thought. One of the primary devices that Brown uses is religious symbolism, particularly the reinterpretations of symbols and codes existing throughout history. Langdon, a specialist in religious symbology, serves as a guide to understanding the hidden meanings in various artworks and historical documents. He identifies the fleur-de-lis, lily flower, on the equal-armed cross as the “official device of the Priory of Sion” (Brown 2004, 196). He knows that a “‘five-petal rose’ [is] a Priory symbol for the Holy Grail” (Brown 2004, 256). Langdon’s primary interpretation of the pentacle on Saunière’s body is that it represents the feminine side of the things – “a concept religious historians call the ‘sacred feminine’ or the ‘divine goddess’” (Brown 2004, 56). Nevertheless, he continues to refer to this pentacle as “Venus – the goddess of female sexual love and beauty,” symbolising the feminine concepts of the divine order of Nature and Mother Earth (Brown 2004, 56–57). Though historically this pentacle is associated with Venus, it is linked to Satanism nowadays. Therefore, Langdon blames the Church for erasing the original meanings of symbols used in paganism long before Christianity: “Poseidon’s trident became the devil’s pitchfork, the wise crone’s pointed hat became the symbol of a witch, and Venus’s pentacle became a sign of the devil” (Brown 2004, 58). Thus, the novel underscores the idea that symbols, like words, can be interpreted in multiple ways and that their meanings are often subject to cultural and historical contexts, just like the conceptualisation of the term *esotericism*.

Perhaps one of the most controversial and thought-provoking aspects of the novel is its reinterpretation of the role of Mary Magdalene in Christian history. The traditional narrative presents her as a repentant sinner, but *The Da Vinci Code* suggests a different story. According

to the novel, Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute but a close companion of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the novel proposes the existence of a Gospel from Mary's words where Jesus gave her instructions on how to carry His Church after him, meaning a female would carry the Christian Church and that her relationship with Jesus was far more profound than commonly believed (Brown 2004, 332). Moreover, the novel hits its climax when Teabing clarifies that when they say, "the chalice that held the blood of Christ," they speak of Mary Magdalene's womb "carry[ing] Jesus' royal bloodline," that is, his child. Priory of Sion's legends tell that Mary was bearing a child at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, and to keep the child safe, she fled the Holy Land, settled in France in the Jewish neighbourhood and "gave birth to a daughter... Sarah" (Brown 2004, 339). At that time, the Jewish protectors chronicled Mary's and Sarah's lives and drew Jesus' family tree. This evidence was kept in the Sangreal (San Grail – Holy Grail; Sang Real – Holy Blood) documents consisting of "tens of thousands of pages of information" found by the Knights Templar "under Solomon's Temple," and protected by the Priory of Sion "in four enormous trunks" (Brown 2004, 340–41). It is now believed to be buried with the bones of Mary Magdalene in a tomb.

This idea that Mary Magdalene is not just a follower but a leader in her own right challenges the traditional, male-centered view of Christianity by suggesting that women have played more significant roles in religious history than has been acknowledged. While the historical accuracy of this claim is a subject of debate, it is undeniable that *The Da Vinci Code* sparks conversations about gender equality and the role of women in religion.

The novel's exploration of hidden knowledge is another topic that resonates with the research questions of this doctoral dissertation. Throughout the story, Robert and Sophie pursue hidden knowledge that has been concealed and protected for centuries by secret societies like the Priory of Sion. This theme taps into the broader fascination with conspiracy theories and the idea that powerful organisations have guarded secret information to maintain their influence. *The Da Vinci Code* raises questions about the manipulation of knowledge and the potential for knowledge to be used as a tool of control. The idea that certain groups possess secret information that could reshape the world challenges the notion of transparency and open access to knowledge. It highlights the power dynamics inherent in controlling information and suggests that the truth can be a weapon. Thus, the quest for hidden knowledge is not just a matter of intellectual curiosity but a matter of life and death, which is the case for Langdon. He is in a race against time, trying to decipher codes and puzzles to uncover the Holy Grail's secret to help Sophie with Saunière's message. This sense of urgency underscores the idea that knowledge is not only powerful but can also be dangerous.

Dan Brown places great emphasis on art and architecture infused with esoteric motifs. Various artworks serve as central sources of information in the story. At the beginning of the novel, while risking being caught by the police, Sophie looks at the painting of *The Mona Lisa* and finds a six-word combination — “SO DARK THE CON OF MAN” — written with an invisible pen on its protective glass (Brown 2004, 169). Unsatisfied with this discovery, Sophie realises that it is a hint to another step and checks da Vinci’s other painting, *Madonna of the Rocks*, depicting Mary Magdalene sitting with Baby Jesus, John the Baptist, and the angel Uriel among the rocks. Sophie finds the golden key on the back side of the canvas, which is familiar to her from her childhood times with Saunière when he used to say that the key would one day belong to her, with which she would be able to open a box where he had kept his secrets.

In a more critical scene, Teabing, while looking at Leonardo’s *The Last Supper*, questions Sophie about the number of people, what they eat and drink, and the number of glasses in front of them in the fresco. The painting depicts the celebration of “the definitive arrival of the Holy Grail,” and Jesus does not have a cup in front of him in this depiction (Brown 2004, 316). In response to Sophie’s question about whether this image shows what the Grail is, Teabing affirms by revealing, “[n]ot *what* it is, [b]ut rather *who* it is” (Brown 2004, 316, italics in original). Langdon interrupts by indicating the gender of this person as female and drawing symbols denoting it. Historically, the original icon for males was “a rudimental phallus... formally known as the *blade*, and it represents aggression and manhood” (Brown 2004, 318, italics in original):



In parallel, the female icon is the opposite and is called a “*chalice*... [that] resembles a cup or vessel, and more important, it resembles the shape of a woman’s womb” (Brown 2004, 318, italics in original):



Thus, the Grail’s interpretation as a cup or chalice is a camouflage to protect its true essence. The idea of a “woman as life-bringer was the foundation of ancient religion. Childbirth was

mystical and powerful” (Brown 2004, 319). Therefore, the Christian doctrine destroys it in Genesis, where Eve is posited as Adam’s offspring. Teabing, directing Sophie to *The Last Supper*, asks her to find the woman:

“Hold on,” Sophie said. “You told me the Holy Grail is a woman. The Last Supper is a painting of thirteen men.”

“Is it?” Teabing arched his eyebrows. “Take a closer look.”

Uncertain, Sophie made her way closer to the painting, scanning the thirteen figures—Jesus Christ in the middle, six disciples on His left, and six on His right. “They’re all men,” she confirmed.

“Oh?” Teabing said. “How about the one seated in the place of honor, at the right hand of the Lord?”

Sophie examined the figure to Jesus’ immediate right, focusing in. As she studied the person’s face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom. It was, without a doubt... female.

“That’s a woman!” Sophie exclaimed.

Teabing was laughing. “Surprise, surprise. Believe me, it’s no mistake. Leonardo was skilled at painting the difference between the sexes.”

....

“Who is she?” Sophie asked.

“That, my dear,” Teabing replied, “is Mary Magdalene.” (Brown 2004, 324–25)

Additionally, Teabing claims that Jesus’ and Mary’s position mirroring each other creates the letter M and stands for Mary Magdalene. He also notes that there was a Gospel from Mary’s words where Jesus gave her instructions on how to carry His Church after him, meaning a female would carry the Christian Church. Besides, Mary was also from a royal line—she was of the House of Benjamin but “recast as a whore... to erase evidence of her powerful family ties” (Brown 2004, 332). Church’s concern mainly was the political union of two royal bloodlines (Jesus is from the royal House of David), probably resulting in claiming “the throne and restoring the line of kings as it was under Solomon” (Brown 2004, 332). Thus, Teabing presents the story of the Holy Grail involving royal blood.

Architectural symbolism is evident throughout the cities accommodating Robert’s and Sophie’s journey in the novel, but the final one is the most striking. After Sophie finds her long-lost relatives, and her job is finished, Langdon seeks to further solve the last of the mysterious lines to find the exact location of the Holy Grail:

The Holy Grail 'neath ancient Roslin waits.  
The blade and chalice guarding o'er Her gates.  
Adorned in masters' loving art, She lies.  
She rests at last beneath the starry skies. (Brown 2004, 582)

After leaving all the chase behind, Langdon notices the Rose Line<sup>33</sup> on his walk to the Louvre. Upon looking ahead, he sees how the Louvre Pyramid aligns with its inverted pyramid – “a breathtaking V-shaped contour of glass” forwarded into the ground and resembling the chalice (Brown 2004, 588). Beneath, there is a miniature pyramid pointed up to the inverted pyramid, “their bodies perfectly aligned, their tips almost touching. The Chalice above, the Blade below” (Brown 2004, 589). Thus, Langdon finds the Holy Grail as depicted in Saunière’s poem - beneath the Rose Line, guarded by the blade and chalice, surrounded by the works of masters, and under the starry sky.

Dan Brown attaches the religious symbolism to artworks and architecture not as merely set pieces but as integral parts of the plot. They contain hidden occult codes and esoteric messages that drive the narrative. This approach adds a layer of depth to the story by demonstrating how Dan Brown uses art and symbolism as powerful tools for communication, capable of conveying hidden meanings, profound messages, or knowledge, along with being a form of aesthetic expression.

The novel is set against the backdrop of European locations like Paris, London, and Edinburgh, cities steeped in history, art, and culture. Its portrayal of these settings highlights the idea that historical events, cultural contexts, and social settings have a profound influence on how stories are told and interpreted. This social and cultural context of the novel also ties into the broader theme of reinterpreting religious history. By revisiting historical events and reimagining the roles of historical figures, *The Da Vinci Code* questions the reliability of religious historical accounts. It conveys the idea that history is not an objective, unchanging narrative but a product of interpretation and cultural context.

In general, *The Da Vinci Code* is a novel that goes beyond being a mere thriller. Its exploration of religious symbolism, the role of women in religion, the quest for hidden esoteric knowledge, and the power of art and symbolism when blended with esoteric motifs challenges established narratives and questions the orthodox understanding of history, religion, and the

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<sup>33</sup> Rose Line in Paris refers to the Paris Meridian, which was the Prime Meridian until 1884: <https://www.guernicamag.com/carol-spindel-a-line-through-the-heart-of-paris-the-original-prime-meridian/> accessed December 15, 2022.

world. The novel's popularity and the discussions it has sparked demonstrate its lasting impact and its ability to provoke thoughtful reflection. Whether as a work of entertainment or as a catalyst for deeper exploration, *The Da Vinci Code* continues to inspire conversations about the mysteries concealed beneath the surface of history and culture.

#### ***4.1.2. The Lost Symbol***

As a “crypto-thriller,” *The Lost Symbol* deals with the legend of the Ancient Mysteries embedded in Freemasonry and the symbolism that envelops it (Flood 2009). The novel narrates the story of a chase around some clues left by the kidnapper of Robert Langdon's mentor, Peter Solomon, in the Capitol Building in Washington – a “city...conceived and designed by Master Masons — George Washington, Ben Franklin, and Pierre L'Enfant” (Brown 2009, 49). Peter Solomon is also a thirty-third-degree Mason and serves as the head of the educational research organisation, the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the novel explores the intricate relationships between science and religion, the potency of human thought, and the quest for enlightenment. Nevertheless, at its heart, *The Lost Symbol* challenges conventional wisdom and confronts it with profound questions about belief, knowledge, spirituality, and the enigmas surrounding human existence.

The novel commences with a frantic phone call to Robert Langdon, who is once again thrust into a high-stakes adventure. Peter Solomon's kidnapper, who introduces himself as Mal'akh, issues a chilling ultimatum to Langdon: he must decipher a series of ancient symbols hidden in the nation's capital, or Peter will meet his demise. Followingly, the story unfolds in Washington, D.C., a city loaded with Masonic symbols, historical monuments, secret societies, and their traditions and rituals. As Langdon and Peter's sister, Katherine, race against time to rescue Peter, they unravel a complex web of secrets that touch upon the Freemasons, the mystical teachings of Noetic Science, and the potential to unlock the untapped powers of the human mind.

The tension between science and religion is central to *The Lost Symbol*. The novel introduces Noetic Science as a field that explores the intricate relationship between mind,

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<sup>34</sup> As the official website of the institution says, The Smithsonian Institution consists of the “world's largest museum, education, and research complex, with 21 museums and the National Zoo” targeting to preserve heritage, discover new knowledge and supply the world with resources for the brighter future: <https://www.si.edu/about> accessed December 15, 2022.



matter, and consciousness. This theme serves as a platform to ponder the coexistence or conflict between scientific inquiry and spiritual belief, raising the question of whether science and religion can find common ground. Dan Brown introduces the fictional field of study called Noetic Science and puts a significant accent on it in the exploration of the interconnectedness of consciousness and the physical world. The noetic consciousness, that the novel introduces, is the idea that human thoughts possess the power to influence and interact with the material universe. However, Katherine Solomon's research suggests that humanity's understanding of the world is incomplete. It questions the limitations of current scientific paradigms and opening up possibilities for the convergence of scientific and spirituality. Noetic Science challenges the boundaries of conventional scientific thinking. Such uncharted territory of the human mind and its untapped potential deceives Mal'akh as being a means for personal enlightenment.

Similar to *The Da Vinci Code*, this novel also delves into the concept of hidden knowledge and the relentless pursuit of absolute knowledge. This theme finds a resonance with the traditions of secret societies such as the Freemasons or Illuminatis. The presence of Masonic elements in the novel illustrates the pivotal role of secret societies in the preservation of ancient knowledge, encapsulated within symbols that carry profound and concealed meanings. As Robert and Katherine within the story decode these ancient symbols and unveil truths long buried in history, the novel posits that enlightenment is not solely an individual journey but also a collective endeavor aimed at broadening human understanding. This collective quest for knowledge underscores the idea that the pursuit of enlightenment transcends personal boundaries and is, in fact, a shared pursuit of a higher understanding.

Dan Brown's profound fascination with symbols is on a full display in *The Lost Symbol* as well. The novel vividly portrays the significance of symbolism in various facets of life, encompassing realms from religious iconography to scientific representation. The narrative opens with a striking symbol known as *the Hand of the Mysteries*, which sets the tone for the intricate exploration of symbols that follows. In a chilling act, the assassin leaves Peter Solomon's severed right hand on the floor of the Capitol Rotunda. Adorned with tattoos of a crown atop the thumb and a star on the index finger, Robert instantly identifies it as "*The Hand of the Mysteries*" (Brown 2009, 80). Langdon elaborates on this to the CIA Director, Inoue Sato, describing it as "one of the most secretive icons of the ancient world" and being used as "an invitation to receive secret knowledge—protected wisdom known only to an elite few" (Brown 2009, 103–4). Despite being deeply rooted in legend, the concept of the Ancient Mysteries keeps resurfacing back within mystic teachings, historical esoterica, symbols, myths, and allegories. It claims to be "a portal" through which only "properly initiated could access

its power” (Brown 2009, 115, 118). Consequently, Peter Solomon’s captor, Mal’akh, compels Langdon to find this elusive passage, for him and to keep Solomon alive.

The infusion of Masonic symbolism in the narrative adds layers of intrigue and historical depth to the story. This rich tapestry includes the layout of Washington, deliberately designed with an abundance of Masonic symbols, as well as a detailed exploration of the rituals and teachings of the Freemasons. These elements combine to offer a glimpse into the mystique of this ancient fraternity. The Freemasons have played a significant role in shaping the cultural and architectural landscape of the nation’s capital and continue to influence perceptions by conveying deeper meanings through their symbolism.

The choice of Capitol’s Rotunda as a crime scene is especially significant, since it is a construction rich with symbolism tied to the belief in the Ancient Mysteries that suggest mortal men can attain god-like status. The severed right hand of Peter Solomon, with its index finger pointing upward towards the Rotunda’s ceiling, serves as a focal point in solving Masonic secrets. Upon looking up, Langdon sees Constantino Brumidi’s painting, *Apotheosis of Washington*, which depicts the transformation of George Washington into a god. Brumidi created this fresco after Michelangelo’s art on the Sistine Chapel’s ceiling. In the *Apotheosis of Washington*, Washington is depicted standing at the centre, dressed in white robes, accompanied by thirteen females “and ascending on a cloud above mortal man” – the very moment of the transformation (Brown 2009, 126). He is also surrounded by the Founding Fathers of the United States of America, who are being presented “advanced knowledge” by Gods; “Minerva giving technological inspiration to Ben Franklin, Robert Fulton, Samuel Morse,... Vulcan helping to ... build a steam engine... Neptune demonstrating how to lay the transatlantic cable... Ceres... [initiating] the farming breakthrough that enabled [the USA] to become a world leader in food production” (Brown 2009, 126–27). Of particular note, George Washington also used to have a massive sculpture in this very Rotunda sitting in “the same exact pose as Zeus in Pantheon; bare chest exposed, left hand holding a sword, right hand raised with thumb and [index] finger extended” (Brown 2009, 129).

Besides institutional esoteric conventions, *The Lost Symbol* is also replete with numerous mysterious codes and digits engraved into occult artifacts and pieces of art. Langdon’s decoding these codes serves to reveal hidden esoteric knowledge. The hand gesture that prompts Langdon to check under Peter’s remaining clenched fingers reflects the symbols:



As Langdon deciphers, when the symbols are turned upside down, “X-I-I-I becomes a *valid* Roman numeral — thirteen,” and the other characters can be seen as letters “using the Roman alphabet — SBB” (Brown 2009, 166, italics in original). This discovery leads Langdon to the Capitol Crypt, where secret rooms are locked. The SBB13 is situated in the basement under the Capitol. Upon entering it, Langdon identifies it as a Chamber of Reflection, where “a Mason can reflect upon his mortality... on the inevitability of death” (Brown 2009, 219). The room is also supplied with artifacts like “skull and crossed bones, scythe, hourglass, sulfur, salt, blank paper, a candle,” and so on, serving as symbols of transformation (Brown 2009, 219):

The skull, or *caput mortuum*, represents man’s final transformation through decay; it’s a reminder that we all shed our mortal flesh one day. The sulfur and salt are alchemical catalysts that facilitate transformation. The hourglass represents the transformational power of time... And this candle represents the formative primordial fire and the awakening of man from his ignorant slumber—transformation through illumination... The scythe is a symbol of the transformative nourishment of nature—reaping of nature’s gifts. (Brown 2009, 220–21, italics in original)

The ancient encoded language engraved on the wall appears as a strange, meaningless grid (Brown 2009, 230):



However, Langdon deduces that this item is, in fact, a map with “a grid of sixteen symbols” (Brown 2009, 243). With the assistance of Peter’s old friend and Masonic brother, Warren Bellamy, who also happens to be the Capitol’s architect, Langdon discerns that this encoded language is “Freemason’s Cipher... used for private communication among early Masonic

brothers” (Brown 2009, 255). With the aid of the secret concealed in the capstone, Robert manages to decipher that the following key is related to Albrecht Dürer, who was “a lifelong student of the Ancient Mysteries” and whose 1514 work, *Melencholia I*, – “is his most mysterious piece of art” (Brown 2009, 347). This piece “represents mankind’s failed attempt to transform *human* intellect into *godlike* power” (Brown 2009, 350, italics in original). By comparing Peter’s message with Albrecht Dürer’s art and using linguistic alchemy, Robert finds the answer:

J E O V  
A S A N  
C T U S  
U N U S

Jeova Sanctus Unus – One True God (Brown 2009, 359)

The unfinished pyramid’s base (cube) collapsing into a crucifix with the help of Peter’s Masonic ring, reveals the text; “*All is revealed at the thirty-third degree*” (Brown 2009, 424, italics in original). The ring is also a key that fits perfectly into the circumpunct crafted on the cube. Langdon explains to Katherine that these two symbols — circumpunct and cross — adjoining into one were used “by Egyptians to represent the intersection of two dimensions – the human and the celestial. As above, so below. It was a visual representation of the juncture where man and God become one” until the cross became a Christian symbol (Brown 2009, 428). However, it has numerous meanings, and the most esoteric one is its “being *rose*, the alchemical symbol for perfection,” but when put on a cross, it becomes a quite different symbol – “the Rose Cross” belonging to the general symbolism of Freemasonry (Brown 2009, 428, italics in original). Not surprisingly, one of the degrees of the Scottish Rite is known as “Knights of the Rose Cross,” paying tribute to the early Rosicrucians, “who contributed to Masonic mystical philosophy” (Brown 2009, 428). Langdon, with Dean Colin Galloway’s (National Cathedral’s dean and Peter’s friend) help, solves *Jeova Sanctus Unus* — it is an anagram of the name of a famous alchemist in Latin: Isaacus Neutonus. Thus, Newton becomes another key in decoding the pyramid’s mystery. It occurs to Katherine that this mystery can be solved using Newton’s science: “as an early alchemist, Rosicrucian, and mystic,

Isaac Newton *also* considered the number thirty-three special” (Brown 2009, 443, italics in original). Thus, they reveal that the thirty-third degree does not relate to Masons but to temperature, particularly Newton’s Scale – his system of quantifying temperature according to which thirty-three is the temperature of boiling water. They put the pyramid made of a granite base and gold capstone into the boiling water and see how the following words start to shine on the capstone:

**The  
secret hides  
within The Order  
Eight Franklin Square**

While sending this message to Mal’akh, Robert finds out that it is not the last address: the bottom of the pyramid is covered in carvings after being boiled:



When viewing it with “*Ordo ab chao,*” that is, with “order from chaos,” Langdon sees the clear image (Brown 2009, 614, italics in original):



Mal'akh fails to succeed in his evil plan, and the mystery remains unsolved for him. However, Peter, now saved, helps Langdon understand what lies at the heart of the Ancient Mysteries and where it is hidden. Initially, Robert interprets the engravings as,

At the top of the image, we have the word *Heredom*—the ‘Holy House’—... as the House of God . . . or *heaven*... The downward-facing *arrow* after *Heredom* signifies that the *rest* of the pictogram clearly lies in the realm *beneath* heaven . . . that being . . . *earth*... The lowest two rows, those beneath the pyramid, represent the earth itself—terra firma—the lowest of all the realms. Fittingly, these lower realms contain the twelve ancient *astrological* signs, which represent the primordial religion of those first human souls who looked to the heavens and saw the hand of God in the movement of the stars and planets... On a foundation of astrology... the great pyramid rises from the earth . . . stretching toward heaven . . . the enduring symbol of lost wisdom. It is filled with history’s great philosophies and religions . . . Egyptian, Pythagorean, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Judeo-Christian, and on and on . . . all flowing upward, merging together, funneling themselves up through the transformative gateway of the pyramid . . . where they finally fuse into a single, unified human philosophy... A single universal consciousness . . . a shared global vision of God . . . represented by the ancient symbol that hovers over the capstone... [Staircase] symbolizes the Winding Staircase of Freemasonry . . . leading upward out of the earthly darkness into the light . . . like Jacob’s ladder climbing to heaven . . . or the tiered human spine that connects man’s mortal body to his eternal mind... As for the rest of the symbols, they appear to be a blend of celestial, Masonic, and scientific, all lending support to the Ancient Mysteries. (Brown 2009, 615–16, italics in original)

However, Peter explains to him that this pictogram tells a different story and points to the third row, where Langdon sees seven symbols,



Peter informs Robert that the Masonic legend is true. The Masonic Pyramid is an actual map pointing to the exact location. The Masonic brotherhood has always believed that the Ancient Mysteries are contained in a single word, which they refer to as “the Lost Word,” possessing “actual power” (Brown 2009, 612). This map reveals the location of the Lost Word, which grants knowledge of the Ancient Mysteries, and Langdon has walked past this place many times without realizing it. Taking Robert to the Washington Monument, Peter shows Langdon that the “shining apex of the Washington Monument [is] the same size as the Masonic Pyramid” and bears the famous engraving *Laus Deo* – “Praise God,... [t]he Masonic Pyramid’s final

code” reminiscent of the engraving. Furthermore, Peter Solomon enlightens Robert that the Lost Word is not an actual Word but rather a book in each culture — the Bible for Christians, the Qur’an for Muslims, the Torah for Jews, the Vedas for Hindus, and so on. These books have served as vessels through which “the mysteries have been passed down through history” (Brown 2009, 640–41). For the Masonic Forefathers, it was the initial version of the Bible, the Old Testament, where all the “mysteries are about the god within you,” and when “mankind *separated* himself from God” as in the New Testament, “the true meaning of the World was lost” (Brown 2009, 646, italics in original).

### ***4.1.3. Origin***

In this “apocalyptic thriller,” Robert Langdon is in Bilbao, Spain, to attend his student and long-time friend, Edmond Kirsch’s event in the Guggenheim Museum (Conrad 2017). Due to his engagement with codes and ciphers, Edmond Kirsch has become a billionaire computer scientist with a deep interest in futurism. He also has all the advanced technological supply allowing him “major leaps forward in fields as diverse as robotics, brain science, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology,” thanks to which his precise prognostic hypotheses about “future scientific breakthroughs had created a mystical aura around” him (Brown 2017, 20). Consequently, *Origin* deals with the journey through the world of art, science, religion, and technology. In classic Dan Brown fashion, the novel unfolds with a narrative rich in cryptic codes, intellectual puzzles, and high-stakes action, all set against the backdrop of a tight timeframe. Beyond its suspenseful plot, *Origin* explores intriguing themes that challenge conventional beliefs, and inspiring contemplation on the intersection of science and spirituality. The novel raises questions related to the origin of life, the impact and consequence of technological advancement, and the enduring human quest to find answers to life’s most fundamental questions.

As a tech geek, Edmond has gathered a diverse audience in a futuristic museum to unveil his groundbreaking discovery, which holds profound implications for humanity. He has claimed to have found answers to “the two most fundamental questions that have been asked by the human race throughout our entire history... Where do we come from? Where are we going?” (Brown 2017, 59). Edmond tells Langdon that “the religions of the world are not going to like” the answers he is about to reveal in his upcoming presentation since such scientific

revelations will demolish “the myths of religion” and shake the foundations of science, religion, and human understanding (Brown 2017, 60). Edmond’s discovery and the subsequent narrative progressing around this topic, depict a futuristic perspective on scientific exploration that has the potential to upend established religious conventions. He consults three members of the Parliament of the World’s Religions – one from each Christianity, Islam, and Judaism – at the Abbey of Montserrat, near Barcelona. The Christian representative, also one of the key figures in the Spanish Catholic Church, who is “known for his deeply conservative views and strong influence over the king of Spain,” Bishop Antonio Valdespino, forces Edmond to leave their presence with his absurd ideas (Brown 2017, 62). These ideas, which are linked to Edmond’s quest for unknown knowledge and the motivations behind it, give rise to conspiracies that propel the novel’s narrative. The emergence of internet conspiracy theories suggesting Bishop Valdespino’s alleged financial support for the Palmarian Church,<sup>35</sup> an antipope group with “military ties with conservative Carlists,<sup>36</sup>” and his potential involvement in the deaths of not only Edmond but also two other religious leaders, signals the significant role of conspiracy theories in Dan Brown’s storytelling (Brown 2017, 280).

However, Edmond’s highly anticipated event, presented by Ambra Vidal — both the Director of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and the fiancée of Spanish Crown Prince Julián, takes a shocking turn when an unknown assailant in the crowd shoots Edmond just before he is able to reveal his groundbreaking discovery. As chaos erupts, the Spanish Royal Guard’s agent, tasked with protecting Ambra, becomes suspicious of Langdon, who had moved closer to Edmond at the time of the shooting, mistakenly identifying him as a potential murderer. Amidst the ensuing turmoil, Langdon teams up with Ambra Vidal and Winston, Kirsch’s AI assistant, to unlock the secret that Edmond died protecting. As they follow a trail of clues, they find themselves pursued by those determined to prevent Kirsch’s revelations from coming to light. Meanwhile, Langdon is also on the run from the Spanish Royal Guard, who wrongly believes he has abducted the fiancée of the Spanish Crown Prince. This sets the stage for a

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<sup>35</sup> Palmarian Christian Church, also known as One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Palmarian Church, is founded by Clemente Domínguez y Gómez (Pope Gregory XVII) in 1978 in El Palmar de Troya, Spain, after the death of Pope Saint Paul VI. Clemente claimed who claimed he became pope by Christ’s command in the presence of St. Peter, St. Paul and deceased Pope VI. The Church recognises the Vatican as the source of evil and does not acknowledge any of its popes after Pope Paul VI (Chapter "The Papacy" in Lundberg 2020). Also: <https://www.palmarianchurch.org/who-are-we/> accessed December 18, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Carlism is a Spanish traditionalist political movement consisting of Royalist Volunteers formed in 1827 as an opposition to Liberalism. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Carlism> accessed, December 18, 2022. During the Spanish Civil War in 1936-39, Carlists were seen as “‘crusading’ with ‘mystical spirit’ [—] with a bomb in one hand, a rosary in the other... placing [their] life at the service of the cause of God” (Parker 1937).



thrilling race to decipher Kirsch's discovery, ultimately leading to a clash between science and religion, along with moral dilemmas posed by the rapid advancements of technology.

The novel explores humanity's enduring quest for answers to centuries-old, occult inquiries about existence, purpose, and the future. Edmond Kirsch's journey to uncover the origin of life serves as a symbol for this timeless quest, and it becomes the central focus of the narrative. Kirsch's revelation, which is the crux of the novel, promises to offer a scientific explanation for this age-old inquiry about the beginnings of humanity. In delving into this theme, Dan Brown confronts the intricate relationship between science and religion. This narrative raises the possibility of scientific answers to fundamental questions that have traditionally belonged to the realm of philosophy and religion. Dan Brown's interplay between science and religion challenges religious beliefs concerning the origin of life. He plays with the notion that science and religion are irreconcilable by exploring how scientific discoveries can coexist with spiritual beliefs. It provokes questions about the compatibility of faith and reason and the potential for harmonising scientific advancements with religious faith.

Dan Brown's central focus on the technology makes this novel also a subject to be approached from the prism of posthumanism.<sup>37</sup> The rapid progress of technology and the ethical dilemmas the novel presents are fundamental to Kirsch's discovery. Kirsch duplicates the Miller-Urey experiment by studying the primordial soup and explains it as containing DNA. It is the first step that shakes the world as he claims that life could happen "*without divine intervention*" (Brown 2017, 411, italics in original). To envision the future progress of this DNA, he creates a time machine or a supercomputer called E-Wave, which is programmed to re-fashion the "Miller-Urey experiment in virtual reality, with startling accuracy" and illustrates the integration of humans with a strange race—technology (Brown 2017, 415). His groundbreaking discovery is being streamed live worldwide with around three million remote attendees over the internet. It stems from supercomputing centre in Barcelona and is intricately linked to technology, particularly artificial intelligence, the use of which is spreading around the world, second by second. Winston, Edmond's AI assistant, embodies the result of the rapid advancement of technology and its implications. The character of Winston serves as both a representation of the possibilities and perils of AI, encouraging to consider the future of human-AI fusion and the associated ethical considerations, including breaches of human rights through

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<sup>37</sup> Here, I am referring to Rosi Braidotti's definition of posthumanism as "the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives" (2013, p. 37). She also identifies three posthuman developments, the second of which is in line with the term's use in this dissertation as it emerges from science and technology studies and deals with the status of human in regard to technology.

the misuse of technological assets.<sup>38</sup> It also turns out that Edmond has staged his own real death by programming Winston to carry out the actions Edmond had set. As Langdon and Ambra navigate a world filled with technology, they confront the moral choices and responsibilities that come with it. In Peter-Paul Verbeek's terms, "[t]echnologies contribute actively how humans do ethics" (Verbeek 2011, 5). In this sense, *Origin* carries some essential features of a posthuman concept, which challenges traditional notions of human existence and identity in an increasingly technologically driven world.

Winston, as an AI assistant and Edmond Kirsch's creation, is emblematic of blurring the boundary between human and machine by attributing humans' cognitive abilities to a machine. Designed to emulate human-like intelligence and interactions, Winston challenges conventional distinctions between human and artificial intelligence. This resonates with posthuman thought, which suggests that the integration of AI into human life is eroding the traditional concept of human uniqueness. Transhumanism explores how technological enhancements, such as Winston's integration as an AI or the emergence of a new race, *Technium*, could augment human abilities and potentially lead to a posthuman future<sup>39</sup>. The utilisation of an AI assistant by Edmond to navigate his standard living reflects the functional integration of technology into human existence<sup>40</sup>. Kirsch's technological activities for overseeing the future fate of humanity show a significant alteration in the course of human evolution. This human-machine integration challenges conventional notions of humans as separate, autonomous beings and envisions a future where humans and technology are inseparable.<sup>41</sup> In doing so, a shift in the notion of identity occurs, as technology reshapes how humans perceive themselves. In *Origin*, Dan Brown depicts how Langdon and Ambra grapple with the implications of Kirsch's findings on their own identities and beliefs. He conveys the aspects of posthuman curiosity in Edmond Kirsch's quest for information about the origin of life and Langdon's pursuit of clues to uncover Edmond's discoveries. These quests are driven by a deep curiosity about the universe and a desire to push the boundaries of human knowledge. These explorations

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Carr discusses the ethical implications of technology in his *The Shallows*. Carr addresses the impact of technology on our cognitive abilities, attention span, and ethical decision-making across the entire book.

<sup>39</sup> Transhumanism is a form of thought involving "the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its current human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values" (More [1990], 2013, 31)

<sup>40</sup> It also shows Edmond's desire for experiencing transhumanism through "fundamentally improving [his] condition... by developing and making widely available technologies ... to enhance [his] intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities" (More 2013, 31).

<sup>41</sup> The potential of human-machine integration and its implications for the future of humanity is broadly discussed in Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005, New York: Viking Penguin), particularly in Chapter Three and Four, p. 82 – 141.

of knowledge can be reviewed in a posthuman context as the potential for technological enhancements to expand human intellectual capabilities.

In general, this novel also adds to the body of literature addressing the co-existence of computers and esoteric traditions. Computers and the internet, when viewed from the prism of esotericism in postmodern texts, reflect diverse occult approaches to science and technology. The computer and the internet serve as instances obeying esoteric principles that have a presence in the esoteric understanding of the world as a continuation of esoteric traditions involving correspondences and principles of universal interdependence (Wallraven 2011).

Introducing esoteric interpretations of computers and the internet serves as particularly noteworthy examples of esoteric thinking. Consequently, they illuminate the enduring adaptability of esoteric approaches throughout history. This comparison between computers and magic is not arbitrary. Instead, it highlights that, rather than serving as a contrast to a realm of magic, science and technology have consistently been associated with esoteric elements. This association became evident in the nineteenth century and has grown even more pronounced in contemporary and postmodern literature. As “the holistic worldview of western esoteric tradition” asserts, scientific and esoteric knowledge have a longstanding history of being interconnected, primarily due to “universal relationships of energy” as a driving force behind correspondences and interdependence (Wallraven 2011, 238). Such alignment suggests the existence of energy interconnections among all acknowledged entities, which are identified and purposefully utilised. The computer is portrayed as a sentient being, suggesting that “the machine has a consciousness the user has to understand and relate to” (Wallraven 2011, 241). Through this prism, Dan Brown’s *Origin* depicts Edmond’s duplication of the Miller-Urey experiment as successful due to the inserted energy into the primordial soup, leading to the formation of DNA. Additionally, Edmond’s AI assistant, Winston, is not only an animate being due to its human name (inspired by Winston Churchill) and its pre-programmed synthetic cognitive skills like problem-solving, decision-making, and logical thinking, but mainly because of the physical location of its abstract consciousness in the Barcelona Supercomputing Centre. The E-Wave serves as Winston’s brain and the vessel of his essence. The machine is situated,

in the center of the floor, on a raised platform, stood a massive metallic blue-gray cube—ten feet square—with no wires, no blinking lights, and nothing about it to suggest it could possibly be the cutting-edge computer... qubits replace binary digits... superpositions of states... quantum algorithms...entanglement and

tunnelling...resulting in quadrillions of floating-point calculations per second... Making the fusion of these two very different machines the most powerful supercomputer in the world. (Brown 2017, 555)

And E-Wave's consciousness is inside this cube as,

an intricate metal cylinder hanging down from the [cube's] ceiling like a stalactite...composed of seven horizontal rings that decreased in diameter as they descended, creating a narrowing column of tired disks attached by slender vertical rods. The space between the burnished metal disks was occupied by a sparse mesh of delicate wires. An icy mist swirled around the entire device. (Brown 2017, 568)

Edmond has constructed a quantum-leap “synthetic brain that mimicked [as] *human* brain—that is, segmented into left and right hemispheres” though in an “upstairs-downstairs arrangement” (Brown 2017, 569). The energetic spheres connecting the rings holding them together form a “whole universe,” corresponds to their interdependence facilitated by energy patterns. The adaptation of the esoteric principle of correspondences to Winston and its network also serves as a metaphor for the conceptualisation of knowledge, in line with “organic views of a ‘web of life...’” (Wallraven 2011, 245). The internal vertical arrangement of the cylinder mirrors the vertical positioning of cosmology, which is an underlying principle of all things and symbolises the web and universal interconnection. Seen as an intelligent technology possessing consciousness that allows user interaction, the computer is considered a living entity essential for a network that embodies the concept of an esoteric web of connections and correspondences in the postmodern era.

Despite positioning technological advancements as a central line of the plot, Dan Brown still masterfully integrates religious symbolism and cryptology into the works of art, architecture, and literature in the novel. Upon discussing Edmond's settlement in Barcelona, Ambra informs Robert that he had moved there because of his love for Antonio Gaudí, one of the most famous Spanish architects. Edmond also resided in one of Gaudí's architectural wonders, *Casa Milà*, also known as *La Pedrera*. Langdon and Ambra's search for a forty-seven-character password to complete Edmond's broadcast starts with a line from Friedrich Nietzsche's words written on the walls of Edmond's flat. Robert takes the clue as a signal for a line of poetry. In Edmond's library, Robert stumbles upon a book box dedicated to William Blake, “*The Edmond Kirsch of the eighteenth century*” — both “*loved to challenge Christianity*” — but the box is empty (Brown 2017, 282–83, italics in original). Robert finds

out that Edmond has lent Blake's works to the museum of *La Sagrada Família*, "Gaudí's most enigmatic architectural masterpiece," whose fans and some conspiracy theorists believed that La Sagrada Família, the Basilica of the Holy Family, "was secretly conceived as something other than a Christian church, perhaps even as a mystical shrine to science and nature" (Brown 2017, 296). In addition to conventional religious iconography, the building was also adorned with numerous references to mother nature as "turtles supporting columns, trees sprouting from facades, and even giant stone snails and frogs scaling the outside of the building" (Brown 2017, 313). Upon reaching La Sagrada Família, Robert asks Father Joaquim Beña, its oldest priest and presiding clergyman, also Edmond's friend for the last few months, to lead them to William Blake's *Complete Works*, displayed open at the page one hundred sixty-three as per Edmond's request. To Robert's surprise, the page does not contain a poem but an illustration — "an image of God" (Brown 2017, 328). *The Ancient of Days*, Blake's 1794 watercolor etching, depicts "a deity called Urizen — a god conjured from Blake's own visionary imagination — measuring the heavens with a huge geometer's compass, paying homage to the scientific laws of the universe" (Brown 2017, 333). Father Beña also explains to Robert that Urizen is not a Christian god and that "Gaudí blended religion with science and nature" (Brown 2017, 334). Although page one hundred sixty-three lacks a poem, Beña shows Robert that there is a poem on its side-page — *The Four Zoas* — Blake's "one of best-known prophetic poems divided into nine 'nights'... centered on the demise of conventional religion and the eventual dominance of science" (Brown 2017, 344). After counting the numbers of the characters, they discover the exact line "The Dark religions are departed et [&/and] sweet *science reigns*" (Brown 2017, 345, italics in original).

*Origin* primarily falls within the esoteric thriller genre, exploring religious history against the backdrop of scientific developments. Yet, it subtly intertwines esoteric motifs with posthuman themes by presenting a future where advanced technology challenges the dogmatic religious boundaries of humanity. The posthuman landscape of the novel sheds light on various aspects of human life, including ethical, religious, symbolic, and existential questions. It also serves as an interesting example of utilizing occult practices in an interplay with technology, fuelling the evolving concept of posthumanism.

## 4.2. Alternative history telling

Alternative history writing involving esoteric themes and institutions constitute a prominent deal of Dan Brown's historiography narration that coincides with the alteration of the events, or their different resolution emerged from the "alternative locus (in space, time, etc.) that shares the material and causal verisimilitude of the writer's world" (Suvin 1983; Cowdrey 2016). His stories, rich with conspiracy narratives, are designed to be "asserted to be accurate, factual representations of reality" (Barkun 2003, 29). Dan Brown presents historical events embellished with various elements of fictionality, driven by his "wish to rewrite history... and offer alternative history" (Nünning 2004, 362). Consequently, his alternative histories do not convey entirely different straightforward religious histories but instead offer fresh interpretations or cultural historiography regarding the reception of existing religious conventions. These interpretations constitute a "moral grey area" that Brown deliberately crafts as a juncture where fact and fiction intersect, prompting questions about the possibility of alternative plots (Smith 2018). However, Dan Brown does not fit neatly into Ehrman D. Bart's two categories of writers mentioned in the theoretical chapter. While some authors write about either an imaginative past without any reference or attempt to modify actual sources, "meld[ing] them into synthesis... not evaluat[ing] the surviving evidence," Brown's approach is considerably different; his writing involves evaluating surviving evidence and presenting alternative historical perspectives (Ehrman 2004, xxi).

To James Kaplan's question whether he is a conspiracy theorist, Brown replies by stating that he is "not in any way, shape, or form" (2009). He identifies himself as a sceptic, yet he sees "symbols, religion, conspiracy" as "material for Robert Langdon," thus, mainly inclines toward those themes sympathetic to conspiracy ideas involving events "*contradicting* a canonical source" (Cowdrey 2016; Ehrman 2004, xxiii, italics in original). These historical speculations employ stylistic devices and make the reader "sceptical, if not hostile," to all the distortions he indicates mysteriously as "secrecy is central to conspiracy theories" (Clark 2006, 21; Partridge 2005, 2:316). Due to this very reason, Brown is often being perceived as "plotting more conspiracies" by taking elements from "medieval sects" and "ancient global conspiracies" and transforming them into "world-shattering" conspiracy devices (Yuhas 2013; Hesse 2013; Deacon 2013; Lawson 2013; Sexton 2013).

Dan Brown's (hi)stories present intriguing details as facts about publicly-claimed historical and religious events, figures, and confidential belief systems. These concealed

aspects are explored and revealed in a hierarchical, quest-like fashion, where the disclosure of one secret leads to the discovery of a new one. The primary decipherer of these hidden codes is a Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon, who goes through numerous difficulties in solving the questions posed at the beginning of the plots and unlocking the secrets by following the “clues [to] solve the case” (Dyrendal 2013). Consequently, the straight storytelling characterised by simple, short sentences resembling instructions or guidelines, radiates similarities with mystery thriller fiction.

Dan Brown’s alternative approach to historical events also coincides with Petr Chalupský’s definition of “counterfactual history,” often referred to as “what ifs” or virtual history (Chalupský 2016a, 41). This contemporary approach to history mainly challenges traditional historical events by focusing on different sequences of publicly acknowledged historical causalities. Virtual history writing offers versions of historical accounts that could have unfolded differently if certain events had taken an alternative course, as envisioned possible by the author. The primary purpose of creating what ifs is its being formulated as a device “to enhance the understanding of history, to make it come alive” (Cowley 1999). For this very reason, the novels postulate danger as some of Dan Brown’s readers take his stories for actual historical accounts, overlooking their fictionality and believing in the falsified details (Worth 2007). These details are “anchored to actual historical reality” to construct the credibility condition of Brown’s alternative history narrative (Chalupský 2016a, 42–43).

Dan Brown’s novels establish plausibility through the *Facts* page of each novel, where he claims that all the artworks, architectural locations, documents, and rituals featured in the texts are accurate. These pages in each book, along with his words in numerous interviews (CNN/ABC/NBC 2003),<sup>42</sup> where he repeatedly confirms the truthfulness of his texts and his extensive research periods, create a form of “pseudoconfirmation” — if repeated many times, it is perceived as true, and there is no need for further evidence test. Consequently, it buried seeds of faith in the newly introduced version of religious history in the mass audiences “whose beliefs seem[ed] to conflict with dominant values” (Barkun 2003, 22). On the backdrop of such plausibility, Dan Brown employs esoteric motifs to create alternative histories by weaving elements of the mystical, secret, and hidden into his narratives in several ways. Dan Brown often reinterprets the roles and identities of historical figures. *The Da Vinci Code* mainly deals with historical claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the fourth-century Roman emperor

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<sup>42</sup>The full list of interviews and their transcriptions are available at: <https://www.defendingthebride.com/code/brown.html>

Constantine the Great,<sup>43</sup> based on the gospels forming the New Testament. It precisely focuses on an alternative history of Mary Magdalene's role, suggesting she had a more significant presence in early Christianity than traditionally believed. In Dan Brown's narrative, Jesus "gives Mary Magdalene," rather than Peter, "instructions on how to carry on His church after He is gone" (Brown 2004, 333–36). These fictive claims draw inspiration from the 1982 book titled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by independent researchers Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh (Leigh Teabing is an anagram of Baigent and Leigh), and Henry Lincoln. It's worth noting that Dan Brown won the court appeal regarding their plagiarism accusation related to *The Da Vinci Code*. Nevertheless, not a single credible historical study of the claimed fictional marriage, known to me, apart from apocryphal scriptures and gnostic gospels, suggests that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.<sup>44</sup> All his twelve disciples also were men, although there were women who provided financial support for his teachings (Ehrman 2004, 144–50; Newman 2005, 157–58).

*The Lost Symbol* explores the enigmatic history of Freemasonry and portrays historical George Washington and Benjamin Franklin as Freemasons who possessed hidden knowledge and played significant roles in shaping American history. Their profound connection to the novel's overarching themes of Freemasonry and the founding principles of the United States is seamlessly woven into the story's exploration of Masonic symbolism, as well as themes of

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<sup>43</sup> Constantine is presented as an evil figure trying to abolish Jesus' importance within Christianity by removing Jesus's human traits from the Gospels. For this reason, he compiled the New Testament, excluding those gospels that draw upon Jesus' human traits. He acted to eliminate divine feminine and so on. One of the fundamental instances for argument is the presentation of Constantine as a pagan worshipper who "was baptized on his deathbed" (Brown 2004, 313) and used Christianity during his lifetime to rule Rome. In fact, though he was pagan, he converted to Christianity in 312 CE, long before he died in 337, and was not trying to erase Jesus' humanity but to initiate the understanding of his divinity in terms of whether he was a God-like or same-as-God deity (Ehrman 2004, 11–23). Additionally, he supported Christianity by funding constructions of Christian churches, allowing Christians to serve in the Roman army, appointing Christians to significant state positions, etc. (Newman 2005, 32–34; Freke and Gandy 2005, 45).

<sup>44</sup> Numerous apocryphal scriptures and Gnostic gospels discovered in the sand near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in 1945, reflect this account (Almond 2023, 33–40; Leloup 2006; Vernyik 2015, 43–44). In the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*, Mary as "... the companion of the [Savior is] Mary Magdalene. [But Christ loved] her more than [all] the disciples and used to kiss her [often] on her [mouth]. The rest of [the disciples were offended] . . . They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you as (I love) her?" ("Gospel of Philip" in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 1990, 105; additions in brackets are present in the introduction (p.2) but missing in the original text; Almond 2023, 39; Ehrman 2006, 214–216, Breninger 2012, 181–186; Leloup 2006, 9, 55–57, 80; 2014, 23, 102, Vernyik 2015, 41–42). There is also the *Gospel of Mary*, the first six pages of which are missing. The *Gospel of Mary* tells the story of a discussion between the Savior and his disciples about the "end of the material world and the nature of sin" (King 2003, 4). Mary is the only one to comprehend these teachings as the Savior came to her in a vision and Andrew and Peter challenge her by refusing to believe that "Jesus would ever have given this kind of advanced teaching to a woman" (4). During these arguments, Peter asks Mary "[s]ister, we know that the Savior loved you more than all other women" or "[s]ister, we know that you were greatly [loved by the Sav]ior, as no other woman" or "Assuredly the Savior's knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us" ("Gospel of Mary" in King 2003, 15, 17; Breninger 2012, 182; Ehrman 2006, 187; Vernyik 2015, 41)



enlightenment, intellectual curiosity, and the search for hidden knowledge. The novel also depicts Aleister Crowley “as the most evil man who ever lived” (Brown 2009, 275). Peter Solomon’s son Zachary draws inspiration from his words and intriguing character and starts transforming himself into Mal’akh. Aleister Crowley’s involvement with “the Art,” which mainly means to “*become something holy... Make yourself sacred,*” makes Mal’akh believe in the power of “sacred words,” which “if properly spoken, functioned like keys that opened gateways to other worlds” (Brown 2009, 275, italics in original).

In Dan Brown’s “techno-thriller” novel *Origin*, the character of Edmond Kirsch plays a central role in the narrative. Kirsch is portrayed as a futurist and scientist whose life is dedicated to the pursuit of the origins of life and the future of humanity (Jay and Nair 2020). While Kirsch’s character is not based on a historical figure, he serves as a pivotal element in the novel’s exploration of profound mysteries. Kirsch is not merely a scientist but a complex individual whose personality is enriched by the influences of two prominent figures, William Blake, and Antonio Gaudí. William Blake, known for his visionary and mystical works, influences Kirsch’s deep connection between art and science, where the boundaries of human knowledge and creativity become fluid. William Blake’s ideas about the interplay between the spiritual and the material world are woven into Kirsch’s scientific pursuits, highlighting the novel’s analysis of the intersection between technology and spirituality. Antonio Gaudí is known for his unique, highly imaginative architectural designs as he was often inspired by nature and incorporated elements of nature into his buildings. Kirsch’s association with Antonio Gaudí hints at a fusion of technology and the natural world, conveying the idea that technology can be harmoniously integrated into human lives while respecting the natural boundaries.

To create alternative reality, Dan Brown frequently incorporates secret societies, often with esoteric knowledge and occult practices, into his plots. *The Da Vinci Code’s* Priory of Sion and Opus Dei are portrayed as religious groups with numerous intriguing connections. While the novel posits them as mystical, cult-like sects, factual evidence presents a different perspective. In the fictional narrative, the Priory of Sion is described as a “very old covert brotherhood... included some of history’s most cultured individuals: men like Botticelli, Sir Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo... and Leonardo da Vinci... [who] presided over the Priory between 1510-1519 as the brotherhood’s Grand Master... [It] was founded in Jerusalem in 1099 by a French king named Godefroi de Bouillon” to protect and pass the secret down to proceeding generations; the Knights Templar was the military arm of this Order to protect the king’s documents tracing the history of the sacred feminine (Brown 2004, 16, 158, 217).

However, the outcomes of academics in the fields of religious and historical studies show that the Order was not as it is depicted in the novel; it was a fraternity founded in France in 1956 by an officer named Pierre Plantard (1929-2000), with the purpose of restoring the concept of an ancient knighthood within Catholic institutions (Newman 2005, 237–38; Lacy 2004; Introvigne 2004; Hughes 2005; Worth 2007; Davis 2006).

The *Fact* page of the novel states that Opus Dei is “a deeply devout Catholic sect” that has been subject of some disputes and has a world headquarters in New York City (Brown 2004, 16). The novel illustrates some of the controversies around this sect in terms of its being “a brainwashing cult” or an “ultraconservative Christian secret society” that asks its members to make sacrifices for God’s Work (Brown 2004, 50). It is depicted as an impressively wealthy Catholic sect that also provides financial support to the Vatican’s Institute for Religious Works known as Vatican Bank and was granted the order of “personal prelature” status by The Vatican (Brown 2004, 66–67). Members of Opus Dei are said to be bound by “vows of chastity, tithing, atonement for sins through self-flagellation and the *cilice*” and “corporal mortification” (Brown 2004, 51, italics in original).<sup>45</sup> The novel also suggests a humiliating approach to female members; male dominance indicates the regression of women’s rights within the organisation, as informed by Sister Sandrine, who serves her duty at the Parisian Saint Sulpice church. However, the historical accounts behind the activities of the organisation are ambiguous. While some accounts prove the points stated in the novel, others evaluate them as solely fictional descriptions, far from reality.<sup>46</sup> Dan Brown’s fictional interpretations of these accounts create a radical opposition that becomes fully comprehensible only when both versions are consulted. His manipulated explanations for this information deviate significantly from its mainstream

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<sup>45</sup> The truthfulness of all these allegations or publicly available information stated on the organisation’s official websites is hardly objective as well, thus not entirely plausible, or testable for the majority of the readers. In addition, the ideas of some researchers and investigators, like the Canadian journalist Robert Hutchison, who evaluates the sect as “a danger to the Church,” also contribute to these beliefs, which only serve the purposes of writers like Dan Brown, who is masterfully able to manipulate the perception of the real essence of the sect as shown in the novel (Hutchison 2006, 17).

<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, there are some sources like the official websites, Opus Dei Awareness Network (ODAN) and Opus Dei Info, publishing the stories, documents, testimonies, information, and analysis of the former members about Opus Dei. The materials are quite diverse and reflect the supposedly actual descriptions of eerie experiences such as corporal mortification, forceful recruitment processes, absence of informed consent, alienation from families and friends, control over the social environment, and censored information access. These ideas, however, are defeated or never touched on in the writings or interviews of the authors, including females belonging to the supernumerary or higher rankings. Instead, they describe the sect and its plans of prayers as reaffirming femininity through Opus Dei’s guidance which wants the women to be “the type of woman that you’re called to be, that you want to be for God” (Oates, Ruf, and Driver 2009, 86). The entrusted role of home governing to the female members and their involvement in the domestic chores like cleaning the resident halls are done with “great pride” and seen as a holy duty filling the Christian homes with “light and joy that were in the home of the holy family” (Oates, Ruf, and Driver 2009, 93).

understanding, thus transforming it into unexplained phenomena. These mysteries are depicted as intricate conspiracy theories closely connected to or inspired by real-life conspiracy theories. Dan Brown's interpretations of related symbols, practices, and religious texts support his narrative. He assigns new meanings to them that differ from their conventional interpretations. These new meanings contrast with his sensationalised portrayals of religious organisations and the lifestyles of their members (Barkun 2003, 27).

In *The Lost Symbol*, Freemasonry is presented as an illuminating fraternity which supports its members on the completion of their journey to ancient wisdom. However, since the novel's antagonist, Mal'akh, tries to access this wisdom,<sup>47</sup> Masons assist Robert Langdon in his mission to rescue "the Word" from the villain and protect Robert in the course of his perilous quests. Nevertheless, "America's most authoritative scholar of Masonry: Grand Archivist and Grand Historian Arturo de Hoyos, a 33° Mason and holder of the Grand Cross of the Court of Honor in the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in America" states that Dan Brown's description of Freemasonry in *The Lost Symbol* is "esoteric, and borders on being conspiratorial" and the representation of some of its conventions are "inaccurate and misleading" (Burstein and de Keijzer 2009, 38–39). The novel has numerous fabricated details both about the organisation and its mysterious codes of conduct. The main striking distortion is presented in the demonstration of the "Lost Word" as a clue to Solomon's temple, which turns out to be literal words on the top of the Monument.

In *Origin*, Brown depicts the Vatican as providing funding to "the Institute for Creation Research — an organisation that, according to its own informational materials, views the Bible as an infallible *literal* account of historical and scientific fact" (Brown 2017, 199; italics in original). The purpose of this funding is to publish books discrediting Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and promoting the Bible's version of the Genesis. As a result of these machinations, an ultraconservative Catholic group known as the Palmarian Church is posited

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<sup>47</sup>Due to this, the Lost Word is the main reason why Mal'akh targets it. He has a special empty place on his fully tattooed body waiting for this word — "a small circle of pale, untattooed flesh" inside "the crownlike halo" on his head (Brown 2009, 12). He believes this knowledge would grant him his divine spirituality so that he would be able to gain an unearthly power and take revenge on his father. However, his intention is the counter-aspect of the real nature of the Lost Word. As one of the attributes of Masonry, it does not support Mal'akh's thesis; rather serves as a tool for defence over and combat evil. Mark Koltko-Rivera, a specialist in the psychology of religion, also a Master of the Royal Secret—a 32° Mason of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, a member of the Masonic version of the Knights Templar in the York Rite of Freemasonry, reveals that the story around the Lost Word is a "common mythic theme" within the Rites of Masonry and suggests a metaphor with various meanings depending on its utilisation in contrast to the novel which shows it as an actual word buried "beneath a pyramid" (Brown 2009, 428). It can be used as a password, a principle, a secret not to be uttered, etc. (Koltko-Rivera 2009). However, at the end of the novel, Peter Solomon explains to Langdon that the actual lost word is engraved on top of the Monument in Washington DC, the tip of which resembles a Masonic pyramid. Such kind of positioning is truly evaluated as "gross exaggerations" (Hoyos 2009).

as breaking away from the Vatican, validating their separation by claiming that the Popes were not adhering to the conventions and will of God. It's worth noting that the Institute for Creation Research is a real institution located in the United States of America. Its scientists have devoted more than fifty years to investigating the "scientific evidence that refutes evolutionary philosophy and confirms the Bible's account of a recent and special creation."<sup>48</sup> However, there are no records or evidence to support Dan Brown's hypothesis about its financial support to the Vatican. These statements, that are made by Dan Brown create his alternative discourses about religious entities, are presented as credible information. He portrays them as "suppressed knowledge," the existence of which is "valid" for authorities but is "suppressed because the institutions fear the consequences" of its public dissemination among the masses (Barkun 2003, 27). The factual accuracy of these claims is based on the assertions of fictional characters like Robert Langdon, Leigh Teabing, Jeremy England, Alexander Grosberg, Carl Franck, Constance Gerhard, and various other scholars, as well as the actual existence and content of entities that can be easily manipulated. Since many readers may not have the opportunity to fact-check, they are often inclined to believe Dan Brown's version of history, even develop a negative view of the church and disrespect it (Bock 2004, 59). Such uncritical acceptance of Dan Brown's narratives by his readers has caused a mixed reception of his novels. This, in turn, has created challenges for various authorities and institutions, particularly religious organisations. In some cases, it has even fueled protests and led to calls for the prohibition of the sales of his novels (The Telegraph 2006; BBC News 2006; Tolentino n.d.; *GMA News Online* 2013).

Another way that Brown creates 'what ifs' is through the speculations of esoteric symbols, codes, religious and mystical practices, as prevalent in his novels. He uses these symbols as clues and mysteries that the characters must decode to unveil hidden truth. Pentacle, Fleur de Lis, Fibonacci sequence, Vitruvian Man, attires of Freemasons like apron, gloves, etc. and having symbols of square, compasses, letter G or number 33, artworks like Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, *Virgin of the Rocks*, *Mona Lisa*, Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia I*, Edmond's supercomputer consisting of left and right hemispheres, paintings in the initiation halls, tools used in rituals, and other objects having symbols and codes engraved in them are more than mere plot devices; they are conduits for presenting alternative histories and secrets that are digged beneath the surface. Artworks play the most significant role in conveying hidden messages and alternative interpretations. For instance, in *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown suggests

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<sup>48</sup> See more: <https://www.icr.org/who-we-are> Accessed on May 29, 2023.

that Mary Magdalene is disguised as the Apostle John in *The Last Supper*. He interprets the V-shape on the left side of Jesus as a chalice resembling “a cup, vessel, and more importantly, it resembles the shape of a woman’s womb,” and also points to Mary’s presence in the painting (Brown 2004, 321; Bock 2004, 57). Sharan Newman, however, in her *The Real History Behind The Da Vinci Code*, argues that not only does John, but Philip as well, appear feminine and wear similar colours to John. She links this observation to Italian Renaissance art, where “other male figures... look very feminine or, at best, androgynous” due to the fashion of the period (Newman 2005, 134; Apostolos-Cappadona 2005).

*Origin* serves as a “literary laboratory,” offering a mixed perspective on religious and mystical practices through Edmond’s personal history; his mother was a devoted Christian yet Christian God didn’t protect her and she died young (Joy and Nair 2020). While it may seem that Edmond aims to reconcile science and religion, his true goal is to demonstrate the supremacy of science over divinity. The novel initially presents an alternative history of human abiogenesis, as Edmond’s experiment proves that “life *does* happen” without divine interference, challenging traditional religious canons (Brown 2017, 411, italics in original). Furthermore, the novel ventures into the future by introducing a computer model depicting the year 2050, where new species entirely dominate humanity and erase from the earth. It creates the future as The Seventh Kingdom, *Technium*, and includes all kinds of technology as its inhabitants. The computer diagram depicts the infusion of mankind with technology as “obligate endosymbiosis,” which happens when “two species cannot survive without each other, the process [of bifurcation] occurs in reverse” (Brown 2017, 436). In this alternative portrayal of future, Dan Brown envisions a synthesis of biology and technology, with technology becoming increasingly integrated into human life. It goes beyond traditional IT-related uses, extending to providing clean drinking water, fighting diseases, and making education universally accessible. These hybrid species demonstrate how humanity can transcend the “limitations of the physical human form” (Joy and Nair 2020).

Dan Brown’s such alternative assertions are primarily for the purpose of creating fictional historiography and do not rely on the authority of certain types.<sup>49</sup> His novels utilise alternative interpretations of esoteric motifs, such as historical figures, secret societies, symbols and codes, religious and mystical practices, quests for hidden knowledge, and more. These

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<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the sensation that Brown placed around the figure of Mary Magdalene has led to many counter-writings in non-fictional forms from theological studies, and to further research in fields like feminist studies, memory studies, among others (Kennedy 2012; Bock 2004; Chilton 2006; Cox 2009; Ehrman 2004, 2006; Gardner 2007; Lacy 2004; Marjanen 1996; Martin-Gardner 2020; Simmons 2018; Thiering 2005; Twyman 2011; Valerio 2021, etc.).

motifs are integral to the plots of his novels, driving the unraveling of mysteries and the presentation of virtual histories. Such storytelling technique is not limited to providing simple background details but is central to the narrative structure. In doing so, Brown blurs the lines between fact and fiction, seamlessly blending historical facts, religious texts, and artistic details with his own interpretative elements. This fusion makes it challenging for readers to distinguish between what is historically accurate and what is a product of his creativity. The result is an enhanced sense of mystery and intrigue, reinforcing the idea that hidden truths are interwoven with established historical accounts.

### **4.3. Dan Brown's occult writing**

Dan Brown's Langdon series mainly deals with secretive speculations around ancient mysterious organisations and belief systems. Similar to his straightforward storytelling, Brown's occult writing is profound due to the uncanny and thrilling themes that drive the narrative. He mainly relies on conspiratorial opinions that allow him to "blend fact and fiction in modern and efficient style to tell a story" (Brown in an interview with Minzesheimer, 2013). He uses the general occult topics as factual catalysts to maintain the continuous flow of the narration. At this point, he blends in the Harvard symbologist, Robert Langdon's expertise in the symbolism surrounding these esoteric themes and creates scientific yet comprehensible interpretations to the existing currents. The background of the events is connected to some questionable dark moments in history from several centuries ago but are now abandoned or forgotten. These details are linked to one another in a specifically simple yet progressive relation, ensuring that complex and confusing implications loaded with intense historical information do not pose a sophisticated description that requires symbolic interpretations for solving the mysteries on behalf of the readers. Langdon does that for everyone. Brown himself presents the exact configuration of puzzles and keys for the next steps of Robert's chases to build a smooth, logical flow that can be easily comprehended at once. Such linear development, infused with speedy hunts throughout picturesque urban landscapes, is the reason that makes Brown's novels a "page-ripper" (Hesse 2013).

At the same time, through Robert's continuous chases, Dan Brown enables the reader to experience the diverse strata of the cities and the events that have taken place or are happening within their premises. Since most of these events feature various types of uncanny

fraternities, rituals and mysteries, Dan Brown's novels can be evaluated as "a pseudo-anthropological study" of the described secret societies and the environments surrounding them due to their vivid exploitation of brotherhoods' hidden doctrines, teachings, buildings, rituals, arts, symbols and more (Ascari 2013). Though fictional, they provide preliminary insights into remarkably complex topics in many straightforward ways. Such preliminary knowledge may not substitute the actual truth about the realities of these entities; nevertheless, the fictional nature of these narratives is the sole merit for evaluating this information. By blending the factual and fictional aspects of some esoteric conventions, Dan Brown creates a safe space for the harmonious coexistence of contradicting yet complementary currents in his novels, similar to the Chinese philosophy of *Yin and Yang*.<sup>50</sup> The concept of *complementary contradictions*, *paradoxical complementarity* or *dialectical unity* is a recurrent theme in a multitude of contexts across various domains. In science, it finds expression in phenomena like the Wave-Particle Duality in quantum physics, where particles exhibit both wave-like and particle-like behaviour, presenting a paradoxical unity of contrasting properties. In interpersonal relationships, the age-old saying that 'opposites attract' highlights the idea that individuals with differing characteristics often form strong and complementary connections. In business and strategy, the synergy between innovation and efficiency showcases how opposing principles can act together, leading to success. Furthermore, in the realm of art and aesthetics, This concept manifests itself as 'aesthetic tension,' where contrasting elements within a work of art create a dynamic and captivating visual experience. In psychology, it aligns with Carl Jung's theory of integrating opposites, emphasising the importance of balancing conflicting aspects of one's personality for personal growth and self-realisation. Even in literature and philosophy, the notion of dialectical thinking, as championed by Hegel, centers on the idea that the synthesis of opposing ideas leads to a higher truth.

Dan Brown's infusion of this philosophical concept with occult practices, whether intentional or unintentional, injects an additional layer of excitement and intrigue into his writing, particularly in his exploration of the occult. By melding the coexistence of contradictory elements and mysterious, esoteric themes, Brown crafts narratives that are not only gripping but also intellectually stimulating. This juxtaposition of the rational and the

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<sup>50</sup> The quality of *yang* identifies with the energy that "crates and motivates" while *yin* "nourishes, nurtures, sustains and harmonizes" and their peaceful co-existence "is essential to health of the cosmos, the Earth, society, and the human being" (J. P. Miller, Li, and Ruan 2022). In art, this idea is presented in a symbol called "*The Taiji* or *Tai Chi*"—a circle divided by the colours white and black in the shape of drops, and each side has a dot in the colour of the opposite shade (de La Torre 2021).

mystical, the known and the enigmatic, serves to heighten the allure of his occult-themed works, offering a world where secrets, symbols, and hidden knowledge dance in dialectical unity, making all phases of the journey more thrilling and thought-provoking.

### **4.3.1. Complementary esoteric contradictions**

Dan Brown's novels feature mysterious events unfolding within distinct urban settings over a finite timeframe. These cities, each carefully selected to complement the story, possess their own special characteristics and unique energies that mirror the themes of the stories told. Unlike Peter Ackroyd's approach, who personifies London as an organic entity with his own spirit and *genii locorum*, Dan Brown's portrayal of cities is more utilitarian. They serve as backdrops that showcase the architectural and symbolic elements central to the unfolding narratives. In cities like Paris, Washington, Edinburgh, Rome, the physical and symbolic attributes play a crucial role in the narratives, carrying the weight of both notorious secret societies and orthodox fraternities involved in significant historical events. Therefore, Brown's spatial narratology is driven by "an attempt to overcome the good versus evil binary" that often characterises narratives. Nevertheless, he emphasises the falsified co-existence of *yins* and *yangs*, the opposites reflecting a more complex reality (Ascari 2013). This dichotomy of two opposing forces, often manipulated or masked by the same city, underscores the idea that the existence of one side contributes to the significance of the other. In Brown's narratives, the city itself becomes a reflection of the intricate interplay between light and shadow, where both are essential to understanding the overarching esoteric story. This narrative technique adds depth and complexity to the storytelling, making the cities not just settings but active participants in unfolding the mysteries.

This mode of thought can be particularly examined based on the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophical system, relying on the dialectical thinking method. The dialectical unity of contradictions is central to his philosophy. Though Hegel's ideas are related to understanding God, spirit, infinity, matter, effect, etc., its formulation is similar to the narration of esoteric motifs in Dan Brown's novels reflecting paradoxical complementarities as key elements. Later, Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus introduces the triadic structure of Hegel's dialectical thinking in his *Historical Development of Speculative Philosophy, from Kant to Hegel* (1854). He identifies three stages of achieving a dialectical



unity based on Hegel's conceptualisation. The first stage is called "thesis" and stands for the presentation of an initial idea or position (Chalybäus 1854, 326). The second stage is the "antithesis," which denotes the introduction of an opposing or contradictory idea (Chalybäus 1854, 406). Finally, the third stage is the "synthesis," which reveals the resolution of the conflict between the thesis and antithesis, leading to a higher level, synthesis (Chalybäus 1854, 407).

Paris is the accommodator of *The Da Vinci Code's* fictional binary or synthesis comprised of Opus Dei as the antithesis and the Priory of Sion as thesis. This narrative is reshaping the history of Christianity to be rewritten anew. The former Parisian terrain is described as the location where Mary Magdalene settled to give birth to her child, where the Jewish Community took on the duty of protecting Mary Magdalene and her lineage, and where Jesus' bloodline, known as the Merovingians, established contemporary Paris. It is the location where the Priory's keystone in the Masonic pyramid is concealed, where the Church of Saint-Sulpice was built upon the ruins of the Egyptian goddess Isis' temple, where the world's first prime meridian intersected, and where one of the most mysterious paintings, the *Mona Lisa*, is housed, among many other significant aspects. The ability to facilitate the clash between thesis and antithesis, Paris, as a synthesis, accommodates two radically different narratives. Brown suggests that the Priory of Sion, a purportedly genuine European secret society, was founded in 1099, among the members of which appear to be Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci. This fact is further elaborated within the manipulative content of the novel, portraying the society as the true and sole custodian of the truth regarding how the Roman Emperor Constantine converted "matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity" by "demonizing the sacred feminine" (Brown 2004, 169–70). This theme is a central catalyst for the events happening in the novel. However, historical accounts based on the writings of Eusebius, the biographer of Roman Emperor Constantine, provide a completely different perspective. Eusebius notes that even Constantine's father, Constantius, believed in a single God — Sol Invictus, a deity known as "a god of light," and in his letter to the bishop at Arles, Constantine referred to this deity as "'our God,' the God of Christians" (Potter 2013, 156). Constantine's reported visions of the god and the cross in the sky, along with his "contact with the Divine Mind," also believed by him as a guarantee of victories in battles (Potter 2013, 157; Drake 2007, 111). This indicates that Constantine's conversion was the result of a long spiritual process, not an impulsive political act though his *kind* of Christianity, which is a topic of hot debates up to present.

In the novel, it is stated that the sacred documents chronicling all of these changes were buried, and the military arm of the Priory of Sion, the Knights Templars, were entrusted with the mission of discovering and safeguarding these documents. As the Knights Templar unearthed the documents, they acquired a superior power, which was believed to reflect the Vatican's misdeeds as well. Consequently, the Church acknowledged the Knights as "an autonomous army independent of all interference from kings and prelates, both religious and political" (Brown 2004, 215). However, by the fourteenth century, the increasing wealth and influence of the Knights Templar raised concerns for Pope Clement V, and he ordered their simultaneous capture and torture across Europe. Those who managed to evade arrests continued carrying their mission "under a variety of names" (Brown 2004, 216).

The actual emergence and activities of the Knights Templar have been interpreted from various perspectives, including as religious warriors, historical crusaders, or a "secret order, intent on obscure intrigues, clandestine machinations, shadowy conspiracies and design" (Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 2006, 55). The portrayal of the Knights Templar in Dan Brown's text aligns with the latter perspective. However, the main purpose behind the creation of the Knights Templar was to install them to protect the pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. After several years, they were officially "recognised and incorporated as a religious-military order... a 'militia of Christi'" by the abbot of Clairvaux, Saint Bernard, who hailed them "the epitome and apotheosis of Christian values" (Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 2006, 56). They were destined to serve as both a military and administrative arm of a secret order, the *Prieure de Sion*, also known as the Priory of Sion (Baigent and Leigh 2011, 91–92). After they evolved into "an autonomous international empire... ow[ing] allegiance to no secular or ecclesiastical power other than pope himself", the Knights Templar's power extended beyond Europe and the Middle East, and trespassed the banking, shipping, property managing, and other businesses, while also wielding political and diplomatic influences (Sora 2003, 13–20; Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 2006, 59). It is true that this prosperity ultimately led to Pope Clement V's order to apprehend members of the Knights Templar. However, in reality, the French King Philipp planned to curb the Order's overgrowing power by accusing the brotherhood of heresy (Martin 2004, 115; Baigent and Leigh 2011, 74; Sora 2003, 1, 12, 21–26; Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln 2006, 65; Hodge 2013, 209, 268–69).

The novel presents a contrast between the Priory (thesis) and the sect Opus Dei (antithesis). Opus Dei's activities are described as radical, fast-growing, and financially independent. They are portrayed as a Catholic sect dedicated to promoting the restoration of ultra-conservative Catholic ethics by performing "God's Work" daily (Brown 2004, 46). Opus

Dei is said to have “the full endorsement and blessing of the Vatican. [It] *is a personal prelatore of the Pope* [John Paul II] *himself*” (Brown 2004, 48, italics in original). According to the novel, it turns out that the sect has also donated an impressive amount of money to the Vatican’s Bank to influence the Church to make it sanction the fraternity’s practices. Silas, as a member of Opus Dei, embodies the members of the sect who are engaging in various forms of atonement for their committed sins. As the events surrounding the Holy Grail unfold, Opus Dei also begins its pursuit in Paris. The sect hires an assassin to carry out the orders of *Teacher* (a disguised member of the sect who turns out to be Leigh Teabing), with the goal of obtaining the keystone and acquiring the details of the Holy Grail’s location. The Holy Grail becomes the target of two opposing groups with conflicting intentions. The Priory of Sion is a group that has dedicated its existence to protecting the Grail for centuries, while Opus Dei seeks to eliminate all evidence that could expose Church’s mischiefs. Over the centuries, both groups have settled in Paris, avoiding any explicit collision or direct confrontation. However, this portrayal of Opus Dei in the novel is far from the reality. First and foremost, Scott Hann, an author who converted from Calvinism to Catholicism and was a Presbyterian minister in the description of his spiritual journey within the order, has noted that Opus Dei was founded in 1928 and currently has approximately ninety-five thousand members worldwide (Thorpe 2023). This simple fact is also confirmed by Maria Del Carmen Tapia, who served in the sect between the years 1948 – 1966 (Del Carmen Tapia 1997, 3). These insider accounts, along with historical records, emphasise that the sect does not have a long history of involvement with the Priory of Sion and the pursuit of the Holy Grail for centuries (Hahn 2005, 11). In terms of its vocation, Opus Dei is mainly advocating “devotion to the Bible,” inclusivity for non-Catholics, “holy ambition,” “biblical spirituality,” “friendship and confidence,” “divine power,” “equality,” and so on (Hahn 2005, 10–11; Bauer 2016, 7, 13). The contracts that prospective Opus Dei members sign with the organisation are far from religious and are more secular, and do not involve any commitment to “blood and the selling of the soul,” as suggested in Brown’s words to create an artificial opposition to the Priory (Bauer 2016, 17). Until 1982, when Opus Dei was declared the Pope’s personal prelatore, it operated as “a secular institute, free from the official oversight of the Catholic Church” (Bauer 2016, 40). The official agenda of the organisation also does not reveal any explicit intentions concerning the Holy Grail and its whereabouts. The controversial ideas about the cloak of secrecy, mortification, the role of women within the organisation, and more, as depicted by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*, date back to the 1930s and 1940s when Opus Dei, based in Spain, was accused by Franco’s Fascist regime of being “a Masonic branch connected to Jewish sects” or “akin to a ‘sect of illuminati’” (Bauer 2016, 49). Following the

idea of Opus Dei's founder, Josemaría Escrivá's "collective humility," members of Opus Dei do not prefer public appearances or even any "distinctive insignia" that would reveal their affiliation with the sect. Nevertheless, corporal mortification appears to be "one of the strangest" yet "most notorious" traditions of Opus Dei that is being practiced by just a minority of members of the organisation and is less extreme than portrayed in *The Da Vinci Code* and other fictional works alike (Bauer 2016, 54). Historically, mortification was "a recognised part of many spiritualist beliefs" for the purposes of "training people to live virtuously and devoutly" by involving the activities for training body "to endure hardships" or emulate the sufferings that Jesus Christ experienced during his crucifixion, and many other Church sects, such as the Discalced Carmelites, Franciscan Brothers, Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, and the Mother of the Church Monastery, also practiced various forms of mortification and used specific tools for these purposes (Oates, Ruf, and Driver 2009, 110; Bauer 2016, 55, 59–61). The items like cilices, hair shirts, and discipline whips are among the most common devices that Opus Dei used for inflicting physical pain upon body. Additionally, practices as spending a night in silence, sleeping on the floor or without a pillow, taking cold showers, drinking coffee without sugar or milk, and abstaining from dessert or a second-course meal were some of the variations of corporal mortification. Bauer argues that Josemaría Escrivá himself experienced all these practices, although rarely advised them to his disciples (Bauer 2016, 59). Nonetheless, Dan Brown portrays these confessions of former Opus Dei members regarding the harsh aspects of mortification, which are practiced by only a small percentage of members, as the essence of being in the sect.

The urban myth about Freemasonry is artificially contrasted with Robert Langdon's scientific interpretations in *The Lost Symbol's* Washington. Washington is depicted as the epicentre of masons not because Dan Brown wanted to put Robert Langdon on the United States soil, but due to the historical fact that the Founding Fathers of the United States were Freemasons themselves. They played a pivotal role in the establishment of the city, shaping its buildings, architecture, and art based on masonic symbols and principles. The cornerstone of the Capitol was laid in "a full Masonic ritual by George Washington himself" (Brown 2009, 49). This event took place on September 18, 1793, "between the hours of eleven fifteen and twelve thirty," with Washington donning Masonic attire and using a tripod to lower a stone block to fulfil the laying foundation ceremony (Brown 2009, 53). This precise day and time were chosen because "the Caput Draconis<sup>51</sup> was in Virgo"—the perfect time prognosed by the

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<sup>51</sup> Latin for "dragon's head," here stands for the "ascending lunar node" (Seiler n.d.).

stars as the Masons “strongly believed that the stars and fate were intertwined” (Brown 2009, 53–54). Over the time, the Church demonised Masonic elements like astrology and zodiac signs as belonging to occult symbolism, which later gave way to the creation of obscure legends about Freemasonry. Rich with such meaningful emblems, Washington shelters an impressive trinity of Masonic buildings known as the Federal Triangle—the Capitol, the White House, and the Washington Monument—empowering the special condition of the city. This unique positioning of the city brings into attention its association with the *Holy Trinity* to emphasise the exceptional significance and might that only Washington is able to handle. Therefore, the narrative of *The Lost Symbol* effectively exploits the topic of one of the most influential fraternities, the Freemasons, within this rich and symbolic landscape.

Washington is a city with several other binaries anchored in it. The first one revolves around the existing positive and negative opinions about Freemasonry. As an admirer of Freemasonry, Dan Brown, positions Langdon at such a point that the shady and scandalous aspects of the brotherhood constituting urban myths are filtered through his self as if he is the one to purify the existing abrogating opinions and reveal their true meanings, which in turn garners admiration from his audience, whether they are his students or fellow pursuers. The second binary is represented by Katherine Solomon’s study of the relationship between mind and matter. Katherine challenges conventional beliefs about the mind, suggesting that it possesses quantifiable properties and is able to transcend established rules. At one point, she even attempts to calculate the weight of a dying man’s soul to explore the impact of inner abstractness on external reality. Thus, her field of study, known as noetic science, claims the physical presence of mentality, which is capable of causing activities in material dimensions. The third binary is the juxtaposition of human aspiration against God, in the profile of Zachary, who is Peter Solomon’s son and known as Mal’akh in the novel. He believes that possessing the Ancient Mysteries will grant his transformation from a mortal human to a sacred being having Godlike status. Adorned with tattoos covering every bit of his body, he believes that physically he is almost God; he only needs to be killed by his father so that his soul is sent to Heaven.

The synthesis in *Origin* unfolds in Barcelona, a city that pays homage to a new alternative history of genesis (thesis) not involving a divine power (antithesis) for which Dan Brown drew criticism from and was denounced by the Vatican (Kerridge 2017). This account presents itself in the opposition of science and religion depicted by the views of Antonio Gaudí, William Blake, and Edmond Kirsch. Despite his strong Catholic faith, Antonio Gaudí created buildings that mirror “God’s natural world... [as] [t]here are no straight lines in nature,”

meaning his works also have very few of them (Brown 2017, 223, italics in original). Being a creator of “living architecture and biological design,” Gaudí erected his masterpiece, La Sagrada Família, as having “sea sponge spires,” regardless of its being an impressive Catholic basilica. The construction appears as if it were “carved by the wind, and rain, his supporting pillars seem to have grown out of the earth, and his tile work resembles primitive sea life” (Brown 2017, 234). Thus, even in the construction of a sacred place such as a church, Gaudí paradoxically employs nature’s patterns to commemorate nature as an organic art form. The art form that does not involve divine intervention.

William Blake’s duality in the novel is related to his depiction of God. The image that “*appeared* to depict the archetypal Christian God” — an old man with a white beard and hair, standing on the clouds and lowering toward Earth from Heaven (Brown 2017, 333, italics in original). However, the figure is not the Christian God; it is drawn from William Blake’s own visionary illustrations. Blake, a controversial figure who combined religious themes with his spiritual visions in the eighteenth century, serves as an inspiration for Robert, much like Edmond, who also fuses religious conventions with his scientific visions. In Blake’s image, a deity called Urizen, holding a geometer’s compass and measuring the universe, is disguised as the Christian God. The image is still prominently being demonstrated in a sacred place like La Sagrada Família. The created paradox states nothing more than “blasphemous art in the heart of a Christian church”—a yin and yang coexisting as peacefully as Edmond’s supercomputing laboratory situated in the heart of the church (Brown 2017, 334). As the novel shows, the Barcelona Supercomputing Centre is housed inside a building that resembles a church and even has a cross on its roof. The irony between the external structure of this infrastructure and the content of the work that Edmond was doing inside for years presents the novel, as well as Dan Brown’s world, as a balanced space of opposing yet complementary dimensions.

As seen, the concept of dialectical unity in itself centers on the juxtaposition of two opposing viewpoints and their resolution in a higher level. In Dan Brown’s works, this concept revolves around the contrasts between good and evil, as well as morality and ethical choices. The thesis is associated with the forces of good, which are represented by protagonists, like Robert Langdon and his companions. These characters typically exemplify values such as truth, justice, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge. They strive to uncover hidden truths, unravel mysteries, and challenge oppressive or corrupt forces. The antithesis takes the form of antagonists, orthodox secret societies, or other characters who stand against the protagonists. These forces often symbolize evil, secrecy, and the abuse of power which is granted by the knowledge revealed to them. They often aim to safeguard hidden knowledge, protect their own

interests, or manipulate historical and religious truths for their personal gain. In the course of narrative, Dan Brown's novels lead to a synthesis where the forces of good and evil collide, leading to a resolution. In the cases of the mentioned novels, this resolution does not necessarily result in the complete triumph of good over evil, but it yields a more intricate and complex outcome. Characters are compelled to make moral choices, and hidden truths are unveiled in ways that reshape the understanding of certain conflicts, paving the way for further resolution. The dialectical progression is consistently achieved through quests that entail uncovering mysteries, proceeding with findings and solving puzzles that involve a series of revelations, confrontations, and dilemmas. These seemingly contradictory occult forces are interdependent. Thesis and antithesis are not absolute categories; rather, they exist in a relative manner, coexisting in a dynamic tension. The characters' journeys culminating in the synthesis reflect how these contradictory esoteric motifs complement one another in a sense that they challenge, shape, and redefine one another, as a result of Dan Brown's skilful manipulation.

#### **4.3.2. Quest for *gnosis***

As per the definition of esotericism that I have discussed in the second chapter, one of the primary understandings it bears, and the one that I have adopted for this study, is its meaning as a worldview dealing with hidden, secret, “non-communicable, non-testable,” experiential, and absolute knowledge that lies at the core of all forms of esoteric practices (Hanegraaff 2006, 2013, 87–101; Faivre 1994, 4–6; 2010, 1–7). Normally, esoteric traditions differ from one another depending on their methodologies and teachings of achieving this supreme knowledge, and Dan Brown's novels showcase models of accessing *gnosis* through the activities of secret societies and certain ceremonies practiced within their premises. Consequently, the novels depict a significantly vivid illumination of occultism as a set of practices that appear to “derive its legitimacy from esotericism,” conducted during rituals with the aim of unlocking the key to absolute knowledge (Faivre 1994, 35; Wistrand 2020).

Dan Brown's listed novels, along with his other books in the Langdon series, revolve around hunts for the unknown. In these stories, Robert Langdon typically finds himself at the crime scene without prior knowledge of the circumstances but quickly becomes entangled in unfolding the mystery. Dan Brown's “genius code making” is designed for “electrifying storytelling,” casting Robert as the primary decipherer of the given enigmas due to his expertise

in symbology or his close relationship with the person in danger (Cowdrey 2016). In each narrative, the pursuit culminates in Robert reaching the final destinations within a tight twenty-four-hour time frame, where he obtains crucial clues located there for the ultimate closure at the end of the novel. However, shifting the focus from Robert to the secondarily important figures, who accompany him throughout the novels, presents astonishing stories of their quests for *absolute knowledge*. This knowledge, which is also considered sacred, thus “equivalent to *a power*”, is not necessarily intended for Langdon himself, but for selected people who share the journey with him, and who are also members of the *elite few* holding rights for *gnosis* (Eliade 1987b, 12, italics in original).

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Langdon is in Paris for a lecture when he crosses paths with Sophie Neveu at a crime scene. The message that her grandfather, Jacques Saunière, leaves before dying draws Robert into Sophie’s quest for her ultimate truth. Robert’s involvement in this chase is incidental; Robert’s editor had sent his book about the sacred feminine to one of the prominent scholars dealing with the study of the Holy Grail, who appears to be none other than Jacques Saunière himself.

The supreme knowledge in the novel, which is available only to a very limited group of people, revolves around the feminine origin of Christianity. According to this knowledge, Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. To ensure the child’s safety at the time of Jesus’s crucifixion, Mary Magdalene left her homeland and sought asylum within the community of the French Jews. The family lineage originating from this union continued to grow over the centuries till our present time. Despite progressing continuation, the family faced numerous threats and the risk of extinction. Nonetheless, the *elite few*, to whom the origin of the family was known, kept the safety of the lineage and provided the uninterrupted unitary flow of this descendancy. This exclusive group of people was the members of the Priory of Sion, an organisation established in “Jerusalem in 1099 by a French king called Godefroi de Bouillon” (Brown 2004, 213). The sole purpose of this secret brotherhood was to protect the intactness of the sacred feminine descendancy. Each milestone and development in this lineage was meticulously recorded in chronicles in order to preserve and transmit the history of their roots and origin from one generation to the next over the centuries. In their efforts to protect and retrieve these documents, the Priory of Sion formed another smaller inner circle known as “a military arm” composed of “nine knights called the Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon,” commonly referred to as, “the Knights Templar” (Brown 2004, 213). Camouflaged under the “idea of protection of pilgrims” in the Holy Land, the Knights Templar gained access to “*something*... that made them wealthy and powerful”—an additional layer of



supreme knowledge known to very few (Brown 2004, 214, italics in original). By the conclusion of the novel, the sacred lineage of Mary Magdalene and Jesus persists up to the present day, the whereabouts of whom are still known to only a few. Sophie eventually meets these individuals in their own location and becomes one of the select few. While these new people Sophie meets are her family, their connection to the sacred lineage elevates; their “immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality” (Eliade 1987b, 12).

In *The Lost Symbol*, the story depicts Mal’akh’s twenty-four-hour journey in pursuit of absolute knowledge, which is protected by some of the high-degree Masonic brothers. Although he is Peter Solomon’s son, Zachary is not initiated into Freemasonry, which means *gnosis* is being kept out of his reach. To seek revenge against his father due to his attitude when meeting Zach in prison, he aspires to ascend to a Godlike status following Aleister Crowley’s teachings, thereby undergoing a total transformation, and gaining access to the secret knowledge known only to a select few of the highest-degree Masons. To achieve this goal, he educates himself and gets initiated into the brotherhood and acquires its highest degree, the thirty-third degree. Still unsatisfied with his position, Mal’akh believes that the Ancient Mysteries concealed within the Masonic Pyramid represent the final step in his transformation. He is convinced that the powers of these Ancient Mysteries will elevate his soul to Heaven. Mal’akh stages his own death within the Temple room, conducting a ceremony where he plans to place the Lost Word on the only vacant spot on his body, the top centre of his head. He urges Peter to kill him using the Akedah knife,<sup>52</sup> which he holds in his left hand at the altar, mirroring Abraham’s intention to sacrifice his son, Isaac. However, Peter refuses to carry out the act and kill him, causing Mal’akh’s death plan for his transformation and presentation to the Demons as “*a king*” fail (Brown 2009, 602, italics in original).

This novel also reflects Katherine Solomon’s embark on a quest for *gnosis*. Unlike the hidden knowledge sought by others, in her case, the absolute knowledge is not intended to remain secret forever; rather it is destined to be spread publicly once she reaches its final form. Katherine’s primary objective is to demonstrate the existence of mind’s physical power and to demonstrate the ability of human’s mental thoughts to cause changes in the physical world. A quest that shares a similar fate with Edmond Kirsch’s discovery. In contrast to Kirsch, Katherine has formulated her hypothesis based on theoretical foundations, but now needs to

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<sup>52</sup> The Akedah knife is one of the important and sacred masonic artifacts, “it had been crafted over three thousand years ago from an iron meteorite that had fallen to earth. It was believed to be the exact knife used by Abraham at the Akedah — the near sacrifice of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah — as depicted in Genesis. The knife’s remarkable history included possession by popes, Nazi mystics, European alchemists, and private collectors” (Brown 2009, 585).

prove it experimentally with the aid of high-tech equipments. Consequently, in *The Lost Symbol*, absolute knowledge is neither sacred nor supernatural. Its attainment bestows earthly powers upon those who come into contact with it.

In *Origin*, Robert is in a chase to uncover William Blake's poetic line to use as a password to unlock Edmond Kirsch's presentation and broadcast it to the world. However, the novel mainly revolves around Edmond's relentless quest for undiscovered knowledge. This knowledge is not available to Edmond nor to the *limited group of people*. Edmond becomes the first one to unearth this supreme information. To achieve it, Edmond has dedicated his life and all his income to studying the primordial soup. He purchases a working space in the Barcelona Supercomputing Centre and obtains the original version of the primordial soup in glass vials, akin to the research conducted by chemists Stanley L. Miller and Harold C. Urey decades ago to stimulate the conditions of early Earth to investigate the possibility of abiogenesis. Edmond dedicates years to observing and studying it with the help of his advanced technology. In this novel, Edmond Kirsch stands as the primary creator of this *supreme knowledge*, known only to him. Subsequently, he pioneers something previously unknown to mankind: a computer program functioning as a time machine in order to unravel the answers to questions regarding the origin of life and its ultimately unknown fate. Initially, Edmond is the sole individual having access to this knowledge during the first stages of his research. His intention is to share it with the world, making this ultimate insight accessible to everyone, thereby transforming them into the *elite few*. With the assistance of his synthetic intelligence, Winston, Edmond creates an isolated universe to successfully conclude the search for his *gnosis*. This quest is directed at challenging the religious doctrines of the orthodox authorities regarding the history of Creation.

In conclusion, the quest for absolute knowledge is a recurring theme in Dan Brown's novels, where characters embark on journeys to uncover hidden truths, challenge established beliefs, and expose long-guarded secrets. As seen, this quest often revolves around the tension between science and religion, as well as the exploration of ancient mysteries and cutting-edge scientific discoveries. For this purpose, Brown's works engage in philosophical and ethical reflections on the nature of knowledge and the consequences of possessing such profound truths. The pursuit of absolute knowledge not only drives the narrative but also serves as a catalyst for contemplation one's own perceptions and beliefs. Through these quests, Dan Brown's novels offer a thrilling and intellectually stimulating exploration of the human desire to seek absolute knowledge in a world filled with enigmas.

## 5. The Authors' Acquiescence to the Lore of Esotericism

Esoteric motives constitute an exceptional percentage of the fictional literature of the late modern period, starting in the 1960s. The emergence of re-enchanting approach to spiritualities, occult societies, and practices resulted in an increased appearance of the uncanny exposés in the mass media. The complex language of occult literature was translated into a “more simple [and] direct prose of the popular press,” and led to a massive growth in the audience, who turned into members of “various mediated networks of circulation” (Gunn 2005, 144). This mass audience looking for entertainment was more extensive than those seeking esoteric literature for enlightenment. Occult topics became ubiquitous due to “the pages of popular novels, weekly periodicals, and anonymous pamphlets,” covering “public performances and pranks of figures like Crowley in newspapers and penny magazines,” not because of the “famous occult works, such as Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled*” (Verter qt. in Gunn 2005, 244). The same tendency can be applied to our contemporary times, when esoteric conventions and occult practices are becoming subjects to fictional writings that conquer the tops of best-selling book lists. Thus, the popular imagination fueled by this media coverage increases the demand for such books, which leads to the growing use of esoteric topics as a source of inspiration. This aspect can be treated as one of the driving factors breaking authors’ resistance to the lure of the occult, along with their desire to challenge religious canons, play with history, create alternative rationalities and histories, convey the sublime and terror, and more. The rising demand also serves as a significant financial income for authors, motivating them to retreat to occult philosophies continuously. In his digital lecture on the esoteric motives in (post)modern fiction Professor György Szőnyi, identifies four main causes and reasons fueling authors’ thrill toward the lure of the occult.<sup>53</sup> First, as he explains, the occult conventions offer “a *counter-culture*, as a ‘conscience of humanity’ against the excesses of reason” (Szőnyi 2020, 18’30, italics in original). Second, occult philosophies are the signs of the “(partial) failure of the ‘Enlightenment project’” which was spreading the disenchantment of the world (Szőnyi 2020, 19’05). The popularisation of esoteric forms have led to a re-enchantment and, consequently, the creation of an entire culture swirling around it. Third, the modern revival of these topics fulfils the “antiquarian, cultural-historical interest[s]” of those “fascinat[ed] with the past”

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<sup>53</sup> Professor György Endre Szőnyi’s digital lecture “The Lure of Occult” is divided into four parts in seven separate videos available in his Youtube channel under the playlist titled “Western Esotericism”: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbp3ab1Mybt9iiZ7y5WhHtwFfJEDG2RB0> Part 4c, I am referring to is available at <https://youtu.be/XH9mWKZJFX4>

(Szőnyi 2020, 20'51). Fourth, such motives offer satisfaction for humans' constant need for entertainment through "the thrill of dangerous, supernatural stories; fantasies about the oppressed Other" under the umbrella of "psychological perspectives" of the lure (Szőnyi 2020, 21'10). In addition to these ideas, one more valid reason makes authors benefit from the lore of esotericism. The commercial value of esoteric narrations is one of the growing aspects turning such writings into products of popular culture and contributing to the growth of contemporary occulture, resulting in millions of copies sold. In the following section, I am also elaborating on the relationship between the sublime and the occult, diving into the psychological aspects that make these books appealing to modern readers. However, in order to avoid repetition, I am not discussing the authors' desire to play with history, as this topic has already been addressed in the Theoretical Framework of this study and the chapter on Dan Brown's novels. Therefore, the two sub-chapters in this section deal with the authors' two drives, which are to channel the sublime and the economic value that esoteric discourses have gained within contemporary occulture. While some of the reasons sprout from the authors' insider positions within esotericism, driven by their genuine knowledge of the occult and intention to share with others, the rest only function as influenced by "mainstream stereotypes or ... manifestations of the mainstream trivialization and commercialization of occulture" characteristic to the outsiders (Partridge 2004, 1:132).

## 5.1. Sublime

In Ackroyd's and Brown's novels, the sublime is achieved through the frightening terror revealed by mystical occult quests. The association of the occult with terror can be identified in several ways. The first aspect relates to the historical reception of esoteric practices and symbols after Christianity. As Langdon describes in *The Da Vinci Code*, Christianity has restored the pagan meanings of many symbols and replaced them with darker, more horrible references; "the magic and mysticism became illegal" as deriving its might from demons regardless of being done for good or evil deeds (Gunn 2005, 240). Therefore, throughout the centuries, despite its degree of association, popular culture has been persistent in relating dark tropes with the occult to this day. The second reason is the "ideational proximity" of the unknown explicitly to "human fear" and, implicitly, to "an overwhelming experience of beauty mixed with terror and admiration," caused by sublime subjects and actions that are difficult to

articulate, as in the case of Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's novels (Gunn 2005, 241; van Eck, Bussels, and Delbeke 2012). This interplay of psychological factors in the association with the uncanny causing sublimity was first put forward by Sigmund Freud in the twentieth century (Gunn 2005, 241). Nevertheless, the concept of the sublime has been present in philosophical and aesthetic literature since Pseudo-Longinus' classical work *On the Sublime* (*Peri hypsous*), dated to the first century AD, later discovered during the Italian Renaissance, and first published in 1554 in Greek (Doran 2015, 29). The work deals with language selection, organisation, and aesthetics of written material, drawing attention to visualisation, the use of figures, amplification, imitation, and so on. According to Longinus, sublimity "produced on the right moment, tears everything up like a whirlwind"<sup>54</sup> to demonstrate the orator's or author's might in a single instance and has five sources (Longinus 1981, 192). The first two of them are 1) "the power to conceive great thoughts" and 2) "strong and inspired emotions" (Longinus 1981, 196). These two aspects come from the natural genius or greatness of the author's noble mind since the sublime, in this case, can be achieved even without words.<sup>55</sup> The following three sources of the sublime are stylistic or "technical-rhetorical," involving 3) certain kinds of figures (of thought and speech), 4) noble diction (the choice of words and the use of metaphorical and artificial language), and 5) dignified and elevated word arrangement (Doran 2015, 33). While sublimity is an emotion, not all emotions are sublime; emotions like fear, grief, and pity are devoid of it. The sublime is mainly characterised by its effects on the readers, which are ecstasy, astonishment, and wonder produced "in particular *moments* in texts, not entire works" (Doran 2015, 46, italics in original). Therefore, it occurs with the production of grandeur, magnificence, or awe through enthusiasm or emotions like danger, terror, etc., which cause "being at once overwhelmed and elevated, dominated and exalted" (Doran 2015, 28).

The modern history of the theory of the sublime is marked by the publication of Longinus' text in French by Nicolas Boileau in 1674. The sensation around this translation and Boileau's interpretation gave birth to the concept of the sublime. Although Longinus touches on the representation of supernatural beings<sup>56</sup> concerning successful and unsuccessful ways of exciting awe or terror, it was the English critic and writer John Dennis (1658-1734) who

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<sup>54</sup> The 2000 edition of the book has different wordings due to Penelope Murray's additions to and review of the first T.S. Dorsch translation.

<sup>55</sup> For this idea, Longinus exemplifies Homer's "Ajax's silence in the Vision of the Dead" as "grand and indeed more sublime than any words could have been." Longinus, "On the Sublime," *Classical Literary Criticism*, (Transl. by T. S. Dorsch. London: Penguin Books, 1981), 197.

<sup>56</sup> He mainly draws on the Battle of Gods, during which the Earth is destroyed, Heaven and Hell are overthrown, and mortal and immortal things are at the same risk.

developed Longinian sublimity into its modern state and proposed a direct connection between the sublime and terror. Dennis' sublime is an oxymoronic phenomenon that involves experiencing two contradictory feelings, like "delightful Horror, a terrible Joy... infinitely pleas'd, I trembled" (Doran 2015, 125). This affective intensity is achieved through two sources he adopted from the first two sources of the Longinian sublime. According to Dennis, the sublime can be achieved through "Religious Ideas" and "Enthusiastik Passion" (Doran 2015, 127). For him, the sublime is present only in poetry, and "the use of Religion in Poetry was absolutely necessary to raise it to the greatest exaltation, of which so Noble Art is capable" (qt. in Doran 2015, 128). Despite being secular, poetry has a religious vocation in its general substance. This definition makes Dennis' theory a "religious sublime" residing "ultimately in God" and including subjects "ranging from God... angels... demons, spirits, prophecies... visions... wonders of the created universe..." to "Hell... Souls of Men... Miracles... Prodigies... Enchantments... Witchcraft... Volcanoes... Monsters... Serpents... Lions... Tigers... Fire... War... Pestilence... Famine" and so on (David Morris' term in Doran 2015, 129; Wheeler 1986; Malm 2000). Such "anti-rationalistic" sublimity can be achieved through the "grandest idea," and all such ideas are sacred, "then it is Religious Ideas that are chiefly responsible for poetic sublimity/greatness" (Barnouw 1983; Doran 2015, 129). As these grand ideas generate "great Passion" through poetry, the passion can be "Vulgar" and "Enthusiastik;" the former is experienced in everyday life, the latter in exceptional cases as "thousands have no feeling or notions of them" (Doran 2015, 133). According to John Dennis, Enthusiastik Passion can be achieved through sadness, terror, horror, joy, desire, and admiration, with terror being "the most dreadful phænomena in nature" (Dennis 1704 [1996], 36).

Following the Longinian path, various authors, such as the English philosopher and physician John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690), the English critic, essayist, poet, playwright, and politician Joseph Addison (several articles in *Spectator*, 1712), the English poet, religious writer, and physician Sir Richard Blackmore (*Essays upon several subjects*, 1716), the English philosopher John Baillie (*An Essay on the Sublime*, 1747), The English theologian and writer on cosmogony Thomas Burnet (*The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, 1684-90), and many more,<sup>57</sup> have touched the concept of the sublime. Nevertheless, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756) by

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<sup>57</sup> More essays on the subject are collected in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. The transformation of the sublime in the eighteenth-century British literary representation can be found in Zoltán Cora's "From rhetoric to Psychology: the Metamorphosis of the Sublime in Eighteenth-Century British Literary Aesthetics (1700-1740)," *Eger Journal of English Studies*, XVIII, 2018, pp. 17-36.

Edmund Burke (1729-1797) is considered one of the “foundational texts of modern aesthetics” and one of the “great modern popularizers of the concept of the sublime,” which enlarges its horizon of discussion beyond literature readers to include “the impact of art on its audience” (Doran 2015, 141; Gunn 2005, 241; Malm 2000). Edmund Burke follows the Longinian approach to the effects of the sublime. For him, fear, as a “cause of terror,” also leads to the sublime, which is related to pain. However, Burke starts his interpretation of the sublime as having roots in “curiosity... the most superficial of all the affections... [that] always has an appearance of giddiness, restlessness and anxiety” (Burke 1764, 42). Originating from curiosity, he identifies three primary emotional states of “indifference, of pleasure, and of pain” and two hybrid states of “the cessation of pleasure,” conveying “indifference..., disappointment..., [and] grief” and “delight,” accompanied by the “removal of pain and danger” similar to delightful horror (Burke 1764, 54). Nevertheless, Burke limits it to the “*ideas* of pain and danger,” similar to John Dennis, albeit the actual state of being in danger (Burke 1764, 58, my emphasis). Burke’s such mixed associations of the sublime’s effects recall John Dennis’ oxymoronic pleasures. Additionally, Burke talks about passions related to “*self-preservation*,” where ideas are related to “*pain or danger...sickness, and death*,” radiating the emotions of horror as the “source of the *sublime*” — “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (Burke 1764, 57–59, italics in original). As seen, Burke’s definition of sublimity levels the *idea* of danger to the recovery from *actual* danger and equates it to the resulting effects such as “astonishment..., admiration, reverence and respect,” with the former being the “highest degree” of sublimity (Burke 1764, 96). In doing so, Edmund Burke parallels this concept with the “empirical-psychological account of pleasure and pain,” adding another layer to the multi-faceted conceptualisation of the field (Doran 2015, 147).

Later, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) developed the concept further by suggesting that the sublime was an attribute of the mind or a result of a cognitive activity rather than any object. However, his earliest account of the sublime in the *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime* (1764) identifies three types of the sublime — terrifying, noble, and magnificent, which are related to nature. Sublime is terrifying when it is accompanied by “some dread or even melancholy,” it is noble when it is merely assisted by “quiet admiration,” and it is magnificent when “beauty [is] spread over a sublime” (Kant 2011, 16). However, in his later, more sophisticated theory, Immanuel Kant shifted his focus from concrete objects in nature to the process of their comprehension. Kantian sublime does not represent “any particular form in nature” but is an emotion that “arises indirectly... by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces... in the exercise of the imagination” or is something describing “what is

*absolutely great*” in a non-comparative way (Kant 1790 [2007], 76, 78, italics in original). Therefore, Kant defines the sublime as a category of judgement. Until Kant, nature’s sublimity was mainly relied on its *might* manifested in instances like rain, volcano, storm, earthquake, “night,” or “a mountain whose snow-covered peaks arise above the clouds,” etc. (Kant 2011, 14). Kant’s sublime, however, by inducing a cognitive activity onto the experience and perception of sublimity, draws upon the mind as a superior “faculty” concealed in and enabling us to judge nature’s strength “without fear” (Kant 2007, 94).

The novelty that Immanuel Kant introduced to the concept of the sublime is his reference to literary works, not in terms of literary descriptions or episodes from authors like Homer, Virgil, or Milton as Longinus, Dennis, or Burke did, but in terms of more general abstractions. According to Kant, tragedy is sublime, while comedy is beautiful. The former invokes sympathy and reflects the,

magnanimous sacrifice for the well-being of another, bold resolve in the face of danger, and proven fidelity. There love is melancholic, tender, and full of esteem; the misfortune of others stirs sympathetic sentiments in the bosom of the onlooker and allows his magnanimous heart to beat for the need of others. He is gently moved and feels the dignity of his own nature. Comedy, in contrast, represents intrigues, marvellous entanglements and clever people who know how to wriggle out of them, fools who let themselves be deceived, jests and ridiculous characters. Here love is not so grave, it is merry and intimate. Yet as in other cases, here too the noble can be united with the beautiful to a certain degree. (Kant 2011, 19)

Finally, Sigmund Freud took a step further in interpreting the philosophical concept of the sublime as the uncanny, a central concept in the novels under the current study. In fact, Freud did not explicitly use the term *sublime*.<sup>58</sup> However, his definition and interpretation of the uncanny align with both the sublimity and the effect of the occult themes in fictional writing. According to Freud’s *The Uncanny* (1919), the uncanny “belongs to the realm of the frightening,” evoking fear and dread through people, situations, impressions, processes, and more, which “goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (Freud 2003, 198, 200). This idea is one that has been originally put forward about sublimity by many authors. Freud associates the uncanny to the German word *unheimlich* (unhomely), the semantic meaning of which links to everything “intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open” from being “repressed” (Freud 2003, 209, 232). Freud primarily

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<sup>58</sup> In the chapter “Freud’s Uncanny Sublime” of his book *Gothic Radicalism*, Andrew Smith suggests that Freud intended to “grant the sublime a free space so that he could grant culture (or a ‘high’ of it) a privileged position” (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 165.



analysed the uncanny based on the psychoanalysis course of individuals attending his rehabilitation sessions who suffered from neurosis. He claimed that “animism, magic, sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, unintended repetition... [are] the factors [turning] the frightening into the uncanny” (Freud 2003, 229). Nevertheless, he differentiated the fictional uncanny from real-life experiences revived by “repressed childhood complexes, the castration complex, the womb fantasy, etc.” (Freud 2003, 235). The uncanny found in fictional literature is “much richer,” as the elements creating the uncanny are “exempt from the reality test,” with the extent of this exemption dependent solely on the author’s imagination (Freud 2003, 236). Despite being frightening, the souls in Dante’s *Inferno* and the ghosts in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar* are not uncanny, as they are part of “the writer’s fictional reality” and are “fully entitled to exist” (Freud 2003, 237). The author creates the uncanny by presenting an everyday reality experience for the reader and then surprising them with the supernatural. The reader adopts this experience as their own reality, and the twist creates the uncanny. As seen, Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny entirely corresponds to the perception of the sublime, or sublimity can easily be seen as the result of the “feelings of fear, and therefore of the uncanny” (Freud 2003, 240).

The mentioned reviews about the progress of the sublime as a concept and its relation to esoteric currents demonstrate how “aestheticized terror” can serve as a powerful motivation for writers of the occult, such as Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown, to delve into the lure of the occult (Doran 2015, 134). What remains unidentified at this point is the reader’s attraction to reading the sublime present in these novels. The shown various approaches explaining the connection of the sublime’s subjects to general aesthetics focus on the “promotion of an aesthetics of terror,” which serves as “one of the mainsprings of the gothic novel and the horror genre” (Malm 2000; Doran 2015, 141). Although Ackroyd’s and Brown’s novels do not completely fall under the taxonomy of these literary genres, Ackroyd’s texts can be seen very close to neo-gothic, and Brown’s are mystery thrillers that feature the characteristic devices of these styles. These devices include medieval architecture consisting of secret passages, “antiquated space,” “a subterranean crypt,” multi-dimensional or “large old house,” mystical or “an aging city,” etc., all populated with sensitive inhabitants facing lethal dangers or secrets from the past that hunt them in the contemporary timeline (Hogle 2002, 2).

The occult practices illuminated in these novels involve secret, monstrous, horrifying, and bloody experiences that arouse feelings dictating the physiological senses of readers. In general, the quest for hidden supreme knowledge that grants Godlike status to ordinary mortals, the creation of an artificial man as a skill that empowers humans, the pursuit of the

Philosopher's Stone for the brew of an immortality elixir, the appearance of Earth from a chemical soup, the erroneous development of an entire religion, and more specifically, the detailed descriptions of the murders of virgin boys and prostitutes, natural magic and conjugation of chemicals, sex magic for *hieros gamos*, Masonic rituals involving the placement of stars, buildings or the extraction of blood, the drinking of blood from a skull, the positioning of artifacts as having supernatural powers, and so on, are the experiences that cause "psychological profundity" (Cochrane 2012, 126). Reading such accounts, especially for the first time, produces protean feelings and emotions, such as astonishment, admiration, fear, being overwhelmed or excited, and more, which correspond to the sublime. The quest- or chase-like fashion of the novels situates the reader in the midst of ongoing events and makes them physiologically interact with the dwellings of the leading character by assuming their actual position, albeit in an imagined account. The arousal of the reader's psychological state is caused by accelerating heartbeats or pulses, leading to admiration or shock at the possibility of the impossible, the inexplicable, and incomprehensible turn of events, and more. Thanks to this emotional rollercoaster, Dan Brown's and Peter Ackroyd's books have become bestsellers and continue to be published and sold up to the present. Tom Cochrane's insightful study, *The emotional experience of the sublime* (2012), provides an excellent account of the appeal of sublimity that keeps readers longing for such novels. Cochrane presents his study by drawing on John Dennis' and Joseph Addison's concepts of delightful horror, in the conceptualisation of which both got inspired by nature, specifically by the Alps. Thus, he grounds his ideas in the encounters of humans with "mountains, storms, deserts, volcanoes, oceans, the starry sky, and so on" as examples of "sublime phenomena" and presents "attraction" as its fundamental driving force, which can be related to Edmund Burke's "curiosity" (Cochrane 2012, 141; Burke 1764, 42). This attraction or curiosity can be classified into egoistic and non-egoistic models. The first group consists of the heroic and the relief models and contrasts a positive self with the negative qualities of currents causing the sublime. The second group includes the humble, admiration, and identification models and questions the degree of terror caused by subjects evoking the sublime. As evident, these several modes depend on the sublime's impact on readers and the degree of readers' involvement with sublimity. Based on this conceptualisation, the supernatural events and secrecy in Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's novels similarly cause an attraction that defines readers' irresistible allure to these texts.

The occult activities, despite shattering traditional perceptions due to their exposed details and constituting a danger to certain people, cities, or even mankind, posit a safe space for everyone outside the pages of the books. The fictionality of the texts helps readers overcome

their threats. Additionally, sublime subjects allow the experience of pleasure or relief with every resolution throughout the novel initiated by the terror created in the reader's imagination. This *relief* model coincides with the sublime's oxymoronic outcomes, where delight is simultaneous with pain or danger. The *heroic* model creates a condition for the manifestation and acknowledgement of readers' powers, which are mainly cognitive rather than physical. Such mental engagement with the sublime through the given novels serves as an enhancer of the readers' perception of their might, making them capable of using perceptual strength to imaginatively overcome the terror of sublimity. In the *humble* model, the sublime serves as a gateway for leaving the worries, concerns, and problems of the actual tedious everyday life. By diving into the deeper strata of occult meanings and embracing the superior affection caused by sublimity, one is easily lost in the complex mystical constructs away from the monotonous earthly concerns. The main attraction of this model is the absolute "'otherness' of the sublime," which swallows the self entirely (Cochrane 2012, 137). The *admiration* model is achieved when challenged by sublime summoning subjects or when "the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us" (Kristeva 1982, 210). The idea of a feminine origin of Christianity or *Technium* or homunculus creation is uplifting and inspires with its grandeur. The degree of this model posits a risky state, as it may lead to the loss of connection with reality. In this case, the sublime arousing themes can easily replace actual factuality or become objects of desires for possession. Finally, the *identification* model draws on the imaginative identification with the subjects, acquiring the qualities of sublimity. Similar to what I mentioned earlier in this passage, identification is encountered when one is encouraged to replace the figure or his characteristic features in the sublime environment. Many readers, if not most of Brown's fans, have probably identified themselves with Robert Langdon, an analytical thinker rushing from one code to another, solving mysteries in several minutes, always accompanied by witty, beautiful women, granted with an access to the darker corners of history, and so on. Understanding these models or general conceptualisations of the sublime, which leave indelible marks in the memories or impressing so that waiting to purchase the book within the first minute of its release seem absolutely reasonable, authors tend to strengthen the bond between the occult and the sublime since the former amplifies the emotional intensity and psychological impact of the latter. As a result, this inseparable bond is an intentionally integral part of both Dan Brown's mystery thrillers and Peter Ackroyd's neo-gothic historiographic metafiction.

## 5.2. Economic values of esoteric narrations

As the attraction models of sublime indicate, the written esoteric novels are essentially directed at the sentient perception and emotional spots of the reading market. The creation of mystical or unknown realms is one of the powerful effects to produce sublimity and touch upon the sentimental chords. Hence, it is one of the reasons for the deployment of occult motives in fictional writings. The mystified aesthetics of Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's prose obscure the interpretations of the conventions enriched with occultural nuances. This camouflaged description creates a certain kind of discrimination among the readers. While one group familiar with such occultural texts enjoys reading them and constitutes the growing ground of the readers' market, navigating successful sales, the other group is intrigued for not being able to access its core. Thus, the longing for the inaccessible makes it appealing to even larger masses. Writers with such enormous fan bases intentionally keep writing in a homogenous style to keep their audience on the hook and guarantee the sales of the books. It is apparent that based on such a "tacit contract" between the authors of specific genres and their readership, the authors are entitled to meet the expectations they have themselves set with the generic nature of their fictions, making them addictive to their audience (Archer and Jockers 2016, 29). In this sense, romance and thrillers are "two most lucrative genres" dominating the *New York Times* bestselling lists. The main reason for this success can easily be connected to the sublime, since these two genres enable the psychological experiences of sentimental, cognitive, and imaginative instances, resulting in the "dominance of crime theme" blended with love. Not surprisingly, Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's currently studied novels have crime if not love as their central pillar keeping them strong in the list of bestsellers.

However, a specific non-traditional approach also reveals that such writers are consciously utilising certain devices in books directed to the reader market. *Bestsellingness* is not the result of authors' lucky fates, but rather their masterful and intentional skills. An interesting study has been conducted to answer the questions: 'Why are some books bestsellers?' 'What makes them sell in millions of copies?' and 'Is there a certain plan for writing a bestseller?' Stanford scholars Jodie Archer<sup>59</sup> and Matthew L. Jockers<sup>60</sup> executed the study on approximately five thousand novels published during the past thirty years, among

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<sup>59</sup> Jodie Archer has a PhD in English from Stanford University, where she researched bestsellers. Before starting her doctoral studies, she had left her position as an Acquisition Editor at Penguin Publishing house.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew L. Jockers is a lecturer at Stanford and co-founder of the Stanford Literary Lab. His main specialisation is text mining/text analysis, Irish and Irish American Literature, 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature, and Literature of the American West.

which only five hundred became bestsellers and made it to the *New York Times* bestselling lists. The remaining non-bestselling books, however, had never been “formally” introduced to any literary editor, agent, or publishing house (Archer and Jockers 2016, 14). They used a computational method involving extensive code writing, called the “bestseller-ometer,” which was able to predict the bestsellers accurately with eighty to ninety percent of the time (Archer and Jockers 2016, 12). The model’s “certainty” about the success of J.K. Rowling was 95%, John Grisham 94%, James Patterson 99.9% (Archer and Jockers 2016, 17). The model also predicted the success of Dan Brown’s *Inferno* with 95.7% (Archer and Jockers 2016, 13). Currently, they are selling this service to authors who want to predict whether their books will be of success or not.

The bestselling books, including Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* as well, possess “an uncanny number of latent features” that make readers “imagine, feel, discuss, think and empathize... fantasize, spy, escape,” leading to their inclusion on the *New York Times* bestseller lists (Archer and Jockers 2016, 12, 19). While millions of dollars are spent on marketing, promotional tours, interviews, campaigns, and the authors’ established fame does play an essential role in turning these books into bestsellers, it is the specific linguistic and thematic patterns in their styles, plots, and characters that increase demand for them on a mass-market scale. The written codes, programs, and algorithms are designed to extricate all information about the style, themes, emotional highs and lows, characters, settings, and “seemingly mundane linguistic data” not reflected in the styles and plots, such as the frequency of question and exclamation marks, the ratios of nouns to adjectives or verbs to adverbs, the use of numbers, geopolitical settings, and so on (Archer and Jockers 2016, 26). The outcome of this examination reveals three patterns found in all bestsellers that are mainly responsible for their massive global sales figures. These precise patterns make editors, and publishing companies bid for these particular novels and spend thousands of dollars on positioning them in the mass market even before their release. Editors’ quests for them also explain why only the five biggest publishing houses “own approximately 80 percent of bestsellers” (Archer and Jockers 2016, 21). These aspects, referring to theme, plot, and characters, are certainly to be found in *The Da Vinci Code* and other novels under my study. When reviewing the “agency of the characters” in Ackroyd’s and Brown’s novels, one can easily observe the extraordinariness of the literary figures (Archer and Jockers 2016, 152). None of them is a traditional individual; rather, each is a character with unique personality traits. Nicholas Dyer and Nicholas Hawksmoor are black swans of their conventional systems. Matthew Palmer is a scholar who gains his identity with strolls through John Dee’s footsteps. Elizabeth Cree is in a phenomenal

multifaced disguise within her theatrical surroundings, and Robert Langdon is the owner of an exceptional skill for deciphering codes with his sharp wit, always accompanied by a female character as his essential contributor. The companions, that the characters are exposed to, lead to the second aspect of all bestselling books — “human closeness” (Archer and Jockers 2016, 152–53). Despite being occult novels and dealing with supernatural events, each of these novels, along with its characters, has a setting rooted in humanist qualities. All of Ackroyd’s characters have difficult childhoods in many different ways. Matthew was brought up without love and had a terrible relationship with his father, John Dee, having Matthew’s latter issue, was betrayed by Edward Kelley and could never achieve his goal. Hawksmoor was totally alone in the whole world, which led him to his mental degradation. Dyer, losing his parents to the Plague, encountered Satan at a young age and followed a Faustian aim. With his professional profile and claustrophobia, Robert Langdon finds himself in the middle of deprived family issues. Each of these cases can find its exceptionally vast analogues among the readers, which will make them feel closer to the characters in numerous various ways. Finally, the last aspect contributing to sales success is the “curves” in the plot, which are univocally achieved through the actions driving the plot (Archer and Jockers 2016, 152). The characters’ actions navigate the plot, “manipulating its trajectory and its curves,” causing the highs and lows of the readers’ experiences (Archer and Jockers 2016, 139). Suffice it to say, some verbs do have significance in selling better. While less successful characters tend to *shout, fling, whirl, thrust, murmur, protest, hesitate, seem, demand, wait, and interrupt*, the bestselling characters *want, need, grab, do, think, ask, look, hold, tell, like, start, know, work, reach, see, hear, smile, pull, push, decide, love, and miss*. Successful characters *want* and *need* twice more than their non-bestselling counterparts. The former group of characters *misses* and *loves* “about 1.5 times more often” compared to the latter group, meaning that readers are attracted to characters who are mentally and emotionally more active and decisive (Archer and Jockers 2016, 143). Therefore, it is not surprising to indicate that Ackroyd’s and Brown’s novels are in constant motion with multi-faceted actions performed by unique characters who appear to be the *creators* of their own destinies.

The *sellingness* of fictional esoteric books also emerges from structural changes in society. It has been suggested that the occult has been opposed to “institutionalised” or “official” knowledge associated with science and religion and “popular ‘commonsense’” (Campbell and McIver 1987). While official knowledge was a subject of the domain of specialised elites, popular commonsense was mainly inherited by the lower social classes. Religious themes such as “transubstantiation, the trinity and the virgin birth” were against the

common-sense of the ordinary social classes, who were interested in that time's scientific progresses such as Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Therefore, this internal opposition between the mentioned two traditional — scientific and religious — forms of thoughts led to the transformation of common-sense into popular thinking, inhibiting in itself neither radical and deviant occult nor conventional religious paradigms. Instead, it created a new sphere of popular culture that blended spiritual and unorthodox paths of two strictly opposed worldviews. Consequently, this hybrid sphere facilitated the rise of popular occulture, enabling the harmonious coexistence of many heterogeneous practices. To widen the sphere to reach growing lower classes, esoteric books and pamphlets calling for joint spiritual practices and new experiences became easily comprehensible and accessible to the general public. Over time, however, this mass media and popular culture played a significant role in both the acceptance and rejection of various occult conventions, which found expression in diverse media forms ranging from “comic books and horror movies” to “rock music motifs” (Gunn 2005, xxiii). Despite the othering of or ambiguous attitudes to some esoteric currents, like beliefs in UFOs or astrology gained public acknowledgement and wide acceptance, mainly due to the popularity of horoscopes in magazines, newspapers, and television programmes. Wicca considered the “fastest-growing religion in America,” attracted approximately “a million and a half teenage” American youth, practising it from the early age of thirteen (Partridge 2004, 1:131). The fame of the *Harry Potter* series also gave rise to the widespread acceptance of the topic of “children and Wicca” and became a “hot buy for publishers” (Partridge 2004, 1:135). The popularity of TV programmes like *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996), or movies and TV series like *The Craft* (1996), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), *Practical Magic* (1998), *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2011), *His Dark Materials* (2019-2022), film adaptations of Dan Brown's books, soap operas like *Dark Shadows* (1966-71), and more fuelled a “continent-wide interest” in magic, witchcraft, Tarot cards, astrology and made it the “official Hollywood stamp of cool” (Partridge 2004, 1:131–33). The popular representation of occult figures, like Aleister Crowley, who was called “the wickedest man in the world” in bold headlines, and presented in the periodicals fashioned these figures as symbols of evil for the sake of “unquestioningly economic” opportunities; “sensationalist stories [are selling] tabloids and newspapers” as much as their popularity is spread (Gunn 2005, 114–15). The state of “being in the know” within general and occultural communities also led to a broad readership for many diverse topics related to esoteric discourses (Partridge 2004, 1:132).

Additionally to the above-mentioned forms, various types of commodification, which are not in line with the standard practices in the publishing industry due to their scale, reach,

and diversity, can also serve for the mass popularization of literary esotericism. As the novels achieve such a level of commercial success that, it leads to unique and extensive commodification strategies. The immense popularity often result in larger marketing and merchandising efforts compared to typical novels. For example, Dan Brown's books are known for their mass appeal and blockbuster status. Sensation is being fed via Dan Brown's social media channels to his followers through crypts to be decoded or puzzles to be solved. Some of his books have been adapted into high-profile Hollywood films, which is not the norm for most authors, including Peter Ackroyd. These films adaptations are able to significantly impact the commodification process of Brown's books, as they create an additional product category with its production, marketing, and distribution. Brown's novels have a global readership, leading to extensive translations, international editions, and marketing efforts aimed at a worldwide audience. Such global reach can require more large-scale commodification strategies to accommodate diverse markets. Due to the high visibility of such novels, there is greater potential for spin-off products such as video games, puzzles, and merchandise. *The Da Vinci Code*, along with Brown's early novels, have been produced in special collector's editions with unique cover art and features to target collectors, fans, and book clubs, including reading guides and discussion questions. This practice is not unique to Dan Brown, but his popularity has led to an increased focus on especially book clubs. The novels' commodification extends beyond his books through the cross-media promotion, such as the integration of marketing strategies for books, their films and other forms of entertainment, and turns them into the powerful assets of popular culture in general.

This very nature of Brown's novels can also be seen as symptomatic of certain aspects of the postmodern or posthuman subject in society. Though this topic itself can be a subject to a separate research work, I would like to mention it here briefly. Consumer culture in the postmodern era is the marker of the shift from a production-based society to a consumer-driven one, and the commodification of cultural products, such as Dan Brown's novels, is a hallmark of this shift (Featherstone 2009, 13-49). It reflects a readership where individuals are defined, in part, by their consumption of these novels as cultural goods. In this sense, the commodification processes around Brown's novels serve to the consumer-oriented nature of the postmodern subject. On the basis of this idea, postmodernism can be characterised by several aspects. Fragmentation and diversity serve to the juxtaposition and remix of various cultural elements (Harvey 1990, 284-307). The marketing and merchandising of Dan Brown's novels contribute to this fragmentation. Different editions, adaptations, and spin-off products showcase the diversity of media and cultural experiences available to the postmodern subject.



The concept of simulacra and hyperreality, where reality is often indistinguishable from its representations, is also found in postmodernism as suggested by the French postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard in his *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995). The commodification of Brown's novels with unique marketing strategies contribute to the creation of hyperrealities which is the final stage of simulation, where the boundaries between the book, its film adaptation, merchandise, other related products and reality is blurred. This reflects the postmodern idea that we often inhabit a world of signs and symbols. Desire and consumption are interconnected on the background of postmodernism. The commercialisation of popular novels, like Dan Brown's, can be seen as a manifestation of the postmodern subject's desire for cultural products. The desire, turning out as "pseudo-needs," and leading to consumption of these products becomes an integral part of one's identity and self-expression (Debord 2005, 34). The global reach of Dan Brown's novels, with international editions and translations, reflects the postmodern subject's engagement with transcultural influences. In a globalised world, consumers have access to a wide range of cultural products, transcending geographic and cultural boundaries (Stiglitz 2002, 214-218).

As Langdon in *Inferno* divides the fourteenth-century Italian literature into two categories of "high literature" written in formal Italian (mainly tragedies), and "low literature" written in vernacular for ordinary people (mainly comedies), the twenty-first-century literature can be further divided into "literary and commercial" (Brown 2013, 96). While Brown is "proud to be on the commercial side" of this division, the same cannot be said for Peter Ackroyd even though Ackroyd emphasises the entertaining function of literature and claims that "otherwise no one would read the stuff," and aims to make his books fun both for himself when writing and for the reader when reading (Minzesheimer 2013; Vékony 1997; Onega and Ackroyd 1996).

## 6. Conclusion

Having engaged with this dissertation, my intention was to contribute to the study of literary esotericism, especially to fill the gap by presenting a brand new comparative study of Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's uses of esoteric motifs, adding more to the already existing studies of esotericism. Historically, esotericism faced plenty of ambiguous attitudes, which turned it into a rejected knowledge at some point in history. However, academic studies conducted during the last decades and the educational institutions founded solely for this purpose have shaped its profile as a distinctly interdisciplinary field within which its literary treatment could have needed more contributions.

The main goal of this dissertation has been to perform an in-depth comparative examination of fictional esotericism by analysing certain novels written by Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown, two renowned contemporary writers implementing esoteric devices in their writings totally different from each other. Esoteric motifs used in these novels, either intentionally or unintentionally, add extra semantical layers to the perception of the narrated stories by causing possible conversions of the texts' structural and stylistic bases. Dan Brown's thrillers become mysterious, and Peter Ackroyd's historiographic narrations gain metafictional nature.

To ground my analysis of fictional esotericism, I have revisited the prior studies and older concepts to introduce a better understanding of the theorisation of the field. Though modern scholarship on esotericism was introduced by Frances Amelia Yates, Antoine Faivre first presented esotericism as a field of academic study. He designed its distinct meanings implemented prior to him into a textbook. Later, Kocku von Stuckrad, Arthur Versluis, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Anthony Blake, Guy Stroumsa, Henrik Bogdan, Wouter Hanegraaff, György Endre Szőnyi, Christopher Partridge, Egil Asprem, Kennet Granholm, Julian Strube and many more, have helped to shape the field's emergence conditions, definition, taxonomy, methodological approaches to its study and teachings, its place in cultural, social, psychological, and historical environments. Having taken resources in these domains, my dissertation achieved mapping the fictional esotericism in modern English novels. The role of esoteric conventions in adding multi-dimensional strata to the traditional perception of mystery thrillers or historiographic metafiction constitutes a significant step towards the establishment of fictional esotericism as a literary sub-genre with its own assets.

After defining the meaning of esotericism that this dissertation is bound by, the following separate chapter has been dedicated to Peter Ackroyd's style. His multi-coloured literary legacy consists of various genres, among which are the three historiographic metafiction, *Hawksmoor*, *The House of Doctor Dee*, and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* — which also happen to be among his London novels — included in the primary study of this dissertation. Peter Ackroyd's unique style seamlessly combines his intense exploration of the Englishness of English literature with his visionary profile illustrating London as a maze-like environ. Infused with esoteric themes, Ackroyd creates esoteric configurations like an occult city, transcendental time, mystical unions of many selves, all of which challenge their rational perception. Peter Ackroyd implements the historical backgrounds for these esoteric compositions as a ploy to introduce his own specific account surrounded by supernatural constructs. The historical information is mixed with esoteric components and, thus, abused for the sake of the historiographic metafiction so that the distorted historical context could accommodate the transcendental nature of the narration.

On the other hand, Dan Brown's occult writing is revealed through his straightforward rationality and alternative storytelling in the subsequent chapter. His mystery thrillers, *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Lost Symbol*, and *Origin*, convey rationalistic viewpoints of esoteric events and rituals. They are constituted by simple sentences in short paragraphs. Such conscious choice of authorial manner serves a specific purpose. The reader faces no obstacle in understanding the text. Brown accommodates the readers' transmission through pages without their awareness. He wants the readers not to pay attention to the complex compound language structures. With the help of these devices, Brown creates an urban space where opposites complete each other, and Robert Langdon is featured in a quest for gnosis granting absolute power. Despite the composite contents of the described esoteric meanings and rituals attached to secret societies and brotherhoods, hidden doctrines, teachings, buildings, rituals, pieces of art, symbols, and so on, their preliminary understanding is accessible to everyone. This also helps him to create virtual histories of widely acknowledged historical, religious, and cultural events and figures.

I have also tried to identify the possible drives fuelling the authors to take inspiration from the lore of the occult. These purposes are explored in the fifth chapter of the dissertation. My research has shown various reasons for the authors' acquiescence to the lore of esotericism. While some share their knowledge to educate others for their enlightenment or to challenge religious dogmas, play with history, create alternative rationalities and histories, convey the failure of disenchantment of the world, and more, many want to entertain the masses through

esoteric discourses of popular novels, periodicals, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, performances and so on. One of such drives is firmly attached to psychological factors such as evoking powerful feelings through the emotion of terror, which, when skilfully employed, can create a profound and captivating experience for readers. Thus, the occult is closely associated with terror and the concept of the sublime in Peter Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's novels. The aesthetics of terror contribute to the sublime experience by reading of mystical and occult accounts. Esoteric practices and symbols, particularly after the rise of Christianity, were labelled as belonging to Pagan ideas, which were replaced with darker connotations after the emergence of Christianity, and esoteric practices were deemed illegal and associated with demonic power. This transformation has set the stage for the occult to become intertwined with notions of terror, as it became a forbidden realm of knowledge and power. This association between the occult and terror is masterly conveyed through the concept of the sublime in the novels under the study of this dissertation. The historical, psychological, and philosophical accounts show that the sublime has always been characterised by emotions which are difficult to articulate and often related to the unknown and uncanny. In this sense, Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown provide exceptionally compelling examples. The philosophical perspectives of the scholars of the sublime, such as John Dennis, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and so on, also account for the sublime's interchangeable connection to religion, psychology, and the cognitive activity of the mind. Armed with this knowledge, Peter Ackroyd and Dan Brown have turned their faces to the sublime and intertwined the occult with terror. Although their novels may not strictly fall into the gothic or horror genre, they draw upon the aesthetics of terror to create a sense of sublime experience for their readers. The mystical and mysterious quests depicted in their novels evoke a sense of frightening horror, capturing the attention and imagination of readers. Ackroyd and Brown have created an immersive encounter that aligns with the sublime as an outcome of understanding the occult, ultimately leaving readers with a lasting impact of the employed elements of secrecy, mysticism, and esoteric practices to weave narratives that drag the reader from cover to cover by attaching them with fear, unknownness, awe, and a sense of the uncanny.

Esotericism also contributes to the immense popularity and success of the novels. Ackroyd's and Brown's fictional esoteric novels blended with sublime are captivating readers worldwide, enticing them with mystical realms, occult motifs, and exciting quests. As such novels target the emotional and conscious perceptions of the audience, their reading creates a unique adventure that resonates profoundly and makes such books bestsellers. At the heart of these appeals lies the creation of mystical and unknown realms within these novels. Peter

Ackroyd's and Dan Brown's prose, shrouded in mystified aesthetics, add an element of enigma and intrigue. Their camouflaged descriptions of esoteric conventions foster a certain separation in terms of the readers' treatments of such texts; while one group enjoys the familiarity of occult texts, others are intrigued by their mysterious. This longing for the inaccessible contributes to the mass appeal of these novels, propelling their popularity and ensuring their continued profit. Thus, writers with massive fan bases, such as Ackroyd and Brown, intentionally maintain their such homogenous writing style to keep their audience engaged and guarantee book sales. This tendency between the authors and their readerships empowers authors to meet the expectations that they have established through the generic nature of their fictions.

The genres of romance and thrillers, known for their ability to elicit sentimental, cognitive, and imaginative experiences, dominate the New York Times bestselling lists. Ackroyd's and Brown's fusion of crime themes with love and other sentimental feelings further amplifies their appeal, allowing readers to indulge in a rich psychological journey. This blend, however, is not only due to the content or genre of these novels. One of the main reasons for Ackroyd's and Brown's novels' financial success is their texts' structures. Specific linguistic and thematic patterns like theme, plot, and characters applied into the narrative's mechanism drive the success of these bestselling novels. For example, the utilisation of certain parts of speech, more precisely, certain action verbs or the leading figures' personality traits, like challenging childhoods and complicated relationships with others, make them alluring for readers and, thus, contribute to the novels' massive global sales figures. The plot twists, emotional highs, and lows of these novels also play a significant role in their transformation into the mainstays on bestseller lists. The readers are directly involved in the plots of these books. Such intentional use of action-driven narrative propels the story forward, catering to the readers' desires for excitement and unpredictability. This human closeness contributes to the immersive experience that makes these novels so popular.

If I claim that the ambition of this dissertation is to bring innovation to the field, it might sound revolutionary. However, it is not. The main revolution has been made by the scholars of esotericism, who are mentioned above and treated extensively in the second chapter when I recall, how they turned esotericism into a subject of academic studies and peeled its blasphemous layers off. This dissertation attempts to fill gaps by extending the academic study of esotericism employed in fictional literature. Literary treatment of esotericism has been in practice since Ancient Times through the Middle Ages. As distinct motifs, esoteric conventions like secret sciences, ritual magic, astrology, alchemy, angelology, demonology, and more,

appear in the creative writings of the authors of the early nineteenth century. Throughout their practices, some practitioners turned into creative writers and vice versa. Consequently, practice-inspired fictions and fiction-inspired practices emerged from those who were well-versed in esoteric traditions personally and reflected similar thoughts in their imaginative works, and those who only deployed esotericism as a literary device or motif for various purposes.

Along with conducting analyses of more fictional writings and detecting further implementations of esoteric motifs, the genre specifications of fictional esoteric novels are promising for revealing peculiar insights. The possible transformations of the genre levels of the texts as a result of the application of esoteric devices can further help me to develop the study of fictional esotericism. The exploration of the sublime and the occult in literature opens up a fascinating realm of emotions, challenging our perceptions and leaving an indelible mark on our literary experiences. Thus, I will include this topic in my future research plan as well.

Creative implementation of esotericism can also be subject to non-traditional study methods, namely, computational text mining, depending on the research questions to be addressed. I was not able to dive deeper into this strand, however, it is one of the paths that I am planning to deal with further in my academic career. The drives fuelling the authors to take refuge in the unlimited pool of occulture might need further interdisciplinary investigations. Such studies similar to my research in this dissertation can create a distinct study arena inside the general field of esotericism.

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