WHITE PAPER: *THE WAGES OF A FELLOWCRAFT*

BRO BULL GARLINGTON

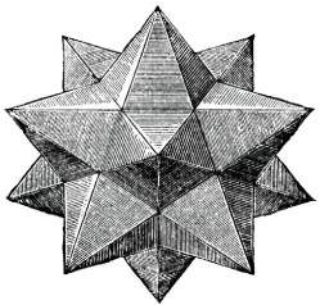
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Fiat Lux is a compilation of research and exploratory papers from various masons.

Editor: Frank Everleigh
Editor: Bull Garlington

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CONTENTS

Wild Thesis Utterly Unsupported by Firm Evidence: 5
The Ingredients for this Speculative Trip 5
The preparation of the ingredients 6
How to cultivate ideas 7
Creating-vs-Receiving 8
Invocation-vs-Evocation 8
Oh, look, the Kabballah 9
But wait, what the hell is this all about, anyway? 11

The Wages of a Fellowcraft

Bull Garlington

This paper is probably wrong. The premise has no grounding in Masonic scholarship or rigorous scientific research. This paper isn't about Masonic history; it's not about ritual. I'm not digging into some overlooked Masonic footnote from a dusty old book I found in a used bookstore. This paper isn't even really about the thing it's about. It's about speculation.

Speculation is a curious word. Speculate is old Latin, from the same family as *specere,* look, *specula,* watchtower, who got married and had a baby word named *speculat,* which means 'observed from a vantage point.' The contemporary definition I employ in this paper is *to form a theory or conjecture about a subject without firm evidence.*

I know. Speculation sounds dangerous. Forming an opinion not grounded in facts is a terrible way to work. It's like you're just making things up. Working from nothing. Such a backward method seems like it would develop a wildly ridiculous idea. But the purpose of speculation is not to assemble a theory. That's science. Speculation is more similar to rumination, brooding, and a host of other words poking their toe into the same water: it means to wonder.

Not to conduct research–this isn't science. Not to notate–this isn't literary criticism. Not even to learn–there's no curriculum available when one is hacking one's way through the underbrush of an untamed idea. But that's what I'm doing in the following paragraphs. I'm working my way through unexplored territory, heading off into the jungle of 'huh,' because I think something is there; I have a vague idea, but I've got no firm evidence. There is no map to lead me to any conclusions to support my wingnut ideas about a fellowcraft's wages.

Does this matter? How should Masons come to an understanding of our various landmarks, emblems, and jewels? We could crack open a Mackey's Encyclopedia and just read what Mackey said. We could wedge ourselves into the rabbit hole of Wikipedia, or Manly P. Hall, or Hodapp, or Wilmshurst, or a slew of other Masonic authors. All of them give concrete and declarative answers to most of our questions about ritual. There's no reason to leap into the thorny bramble of conjecture when so many scholars have cut an obvious path to established Masonic concepts.

Except for that irritating sobriquet of 'speculative Mason.' It's as if the original legislators of Masonic ritual wanted to ensure their future brethren didn't merely accept standard definitions as the endpoint of research but instead used ritual as a starting point for developing our understanding

of the craft. It's as if they knew that if we hold the idea of a level or plumb in mindful speculation, those ideas will open to allow the conceptual kernel nestled in their core to grow into a brand-new understanding.

The following ideas about corn, wine, and oil, which I freely admit are possibly insane and tinted by my prejudice and bias, were developed entirely through unbridled speculation, reading, and staring off into space.

Speculation is about exploration. It's not about getting there in a straight line. It's about stepping off the well-worn path and striking out with no real idea of where you're going. Science-fiction author, Sir Terry Pratchett, wrote more than 41 novels like this. He wasn't what you'd call a plotter. He was a pantser (it's an industry term), meaning he wrote by the seat of his pants. Here's his explanation of his headspace at the start of a new book:

I certainly don't sit down and plan a book out before writing it. There's a phrase I use called "The Valley Full of Clouds." Writing a novel is as if you are going off on a journey across a valley. The valley is full of mist, but you can see the top of a tree here and the top of another tree over there. And with any luck, you can see the other side of the valley. But you cannot see down into the mist. Nevertheless, you head for the first tree.

False starts plague every excursion into the unknown. There are paths leading nowhere; there are gaping, perilous chasms of zealotry; and there is the most common threat: plain old useless bogs of dumb ideas that slow you down and keep you from getting anywhere. This paper might be one of those. Proceed with caution.

WILD THESIS UTTERLY UNSUPPORTED BY FIRM EVIDENCE:

> Corn, wine, and oil are not wages, but symbols of the process of speculation as a benefit of willfully directed intelligence wherein corn, as a seed, represents the kernel of an idea to develop by two paths. One path is wine, which symbolizes passive acquisition or fermentation. The other way is oil, which represents active acquisition or extraction. This Y-shaped construct is symbolic instruction of how Masons may use conjecture or thought experiments to explore ideas that may lead to no qualified conclusion yet introduce the speculative Mason to valuable findings.

THE INGREDIENTS FOR THIS SPECULATIVE TRIP

Corn

Corn refers not to the Mesoamerican grass we are familiar with but instead to native grains' kernels. It refers to a single kernel. These kernels, for instance, the grains on a wheat stalk, are seeds.

If we think of corn as an ingredient, it becomes the basis for bread, which has always been a symbol of sustenance and wealth. As in the Lord of a small medieval town, the word Lord comes from *laird,* meaning a loaf of bread, often the currency paid from the manor house to their workers.

If we think of corn as the base material for chemical transformation, we get beer, which was valuable enough in ancient times to act as currency. The workers in the Mesopotamian city of

Uruk, where they built ziggurats from stone, were paid in beer

Beer in those times was a little different from what we find on our store shelves today. It served a public purpose as it was often a primary source of rehydration. They watered down the beer, so it offered a meager percentage of alcohol, which is good since people drank it all day. It gave them energy, and it contained fewer impurities or bacteria because they boiled it.

Brewers worked on a batch of beer for weeks. The beer had to ferment and be cared for and observed. It just wasn't conducive to a nomadic lifestyle. So grain production and its derivative industries, especially bread and beer making, helped establish permanent communities.

Wine

Like beer, the origin of wine is too far in the distant past to pinpoint, although Georgia and China show evidence of winemaking as far back as six thousand years. Indeed, it's older than that. Evidence of winemaking is not evidence of the discovery of winemaking.

Winemaking also helped to establish communities since you can't take your vineyard with you when you're hunting and gathering, so it bears equal responsibility with beer as a basis for the birth of cities and civilization as we know it.

Oil

Most organic oil comes from nuts, fruit, and grain. Olives are pressed. Grains are heated or mashed. From Italy to Morocco, the whole of the Mediterranean made olive oil thousands of years ago. They used the oil in cooking and preserving cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, soaps, and lamps.

THE PREPARATION OF THE INGREDIENTS

Shibboleth

Here is where this speculative journey veers off the well-worn path of established history into the wild and thorny bracken of exegetical crazy town. Before we go further, I think we need to talk about another meaning of corn. The term kernel means seed. The word for kernel in ancient Hebrew was shibboleth.

You may recognize this word as that part of our ritual where we learn a whole lot of Ephraimite warriors were slaughtered over their inability to pronounce this word correctly as their people carried in their culture or genetics or Lord know-how, a pronounced lisp. The word shibboleth develops to mean a password or a phrase known only to a specific tribe or group of people from this story.

But words and stories and even whole lexicons mutate into useful idioms–the common usage of a word or phrase. Early translators of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek may have translated the literal meaning of a term but would have been ignorant of the time's everyday vocabulary. There are humorous and baffling examples of this kind of accurate yet inaccurate translation (investigate, for instance, the use of the phrase *walk on the water* in ancient Aramaic and Nazarene idioms), which lead us to think a little about language.

The hermeticists had a lot to say about looking into the deep roots of language. In Fulcanelli's brilliant treatise, *Les Mysteries Des Cathedrales,* he talks at length about the *language of birds* or the *green language*. He uses the contemporary (circa 1926) definition of 'Gothic' as an example,

breaking it down to *gothique* and showing its similarity to *goetia*. He then shows how its use in such phrases as *ars gothique* (which described cathedrals' architecture) is the misuse of *argotique,* which means argot or slang. It implies a language known only to a few users. To Fulcanelli, the Cathedrals of France were not just buildings but encyclopedias written in stone. Their *argotique* contained hermetic teachings, allegories, and parables meant to endure far into the future. Fulcanelli delivers a beautiful line that should inspire any researcher of language and symbology:

> "How many wonders, how many unsuspected things would we not discover if we knew how to dissect words, break their bark, and free the spirit, the divine light they contain?"

All of which I write here to show that how we read a word now, after we've translated it from Aramaic, to Greek, to Latin, to Hebrew, to Olde English, and finally to contemporary English, may be different from how our ancient brethren used that word.

For instance, the phrase 'the word of God' may mean, instead, the *language* of God, as *word* was often idiomatically transposed with *language*.

Symbology, allegory, and parables are all part of an argot–or a language known only to a select group of people–that supersedes the literal. These are methods that contain and maintain information across eons. Words are kernels of ideas; they are shibboleths of ideas that transect cultures and languages. Such transport of meaning happens because of commonalities between cultures. For instance, a *kernel* in Mesopotamia would have been *sporos* in Greece; *semen* in Latin; *la graine* in France; and *seed* in present-day English. Since seeds tend to work the same way all over the world, learned and creative people in every culture would have recognized the metaphor of a large and valuable thing, like an oak tree, is somehow contained in an acorn ("a corn," ... this speculation on language never stops). These wise thinkers would have employed those words for the same symbolic purpose: *to indicate the germ of an idea.*

HOW TO CULTIVATE IDEAS

Suppose you think of the words in our ritual as kernels of corn. In that case, we follow that metaphor to its logical conclusion: a seed planted in fertile ground will sprout and, given adequate sustenance, grow into a mature plant, bearing fruit, each of which then sows more seeds, the process repeating endlessly.

For masons, the maintenance of fertile ground is vital to ensuring the germination of an idea. This may be one of the great benefits of the Fellowcraft degree. In the second degree, the learning paths taken ad hoc from the old liberal arts tracks (the trivium and quadrivium) expose a mason to great arcs of intellectual progress in all the critical disciplines. These paths are not meant to be completed upon hearing a lecture in lodge but are lifelong paths of learning.

Pursuing an understanding of the trivium–grammar, logic, and rhetoric–prepare a mason's mind to measure and prove concepts. The quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) give that mason paths of active training that can lead to the discovery and development of

the talents mentioned in the first degree.

A grounding in such an education is the fertile loam for planting ideas. As one pursues the paths throughout their life, that ground only gets more and more productive–to the point where a seed barely even falls onto its surface before it has sprouted leaves and grown to its full height.

The most obvious way to cultivate this soil for growing ideas is to read. We have at our disposal a new Library of Alexandria on the Internet. Granted, 90% of it is cat videos, but the discerning craftsman may use this wondrous device to obtain books, essays, scientific papers, and journals from any time, from anywhere. As a journalist, I use JSTOR and Google Scholar to find the sources that support my reporting. Anyone with a library card has access to these tools at any time. You can also use the library to obtain books from which one can learn pretty much anything.

However, one should also listen to great music, learn how to play an instrument, calculate pi, form a syllogism, and become familiar with the Platonic and Aristotelian solids. One should be using the library in one's neighborhood to build a library in one's mind. By planting ideas and concepts there so when one takes a wild jaunt off into the thorny flatlands of speculation–as we are doing now–the kernels one discovers there have everything they need to flourish.

CREATING-VS-RECEIVING

If we unpack the origins of the words, the concepts of wine and oil, we can look at them as two methods of obtaining and developing what they contain.

You get oil by extraction, through the active force of pressure. You get wine through fermentation, through the passive power of natural processes and time.

Both methods make something new. However, you can make an argument one creates, or *makes*, oil, but one *receives* wine. This argument is undoubtedly specious, and the hermeticists among the readers–if they haven't already fled this dissertation from embarrassment–are surely now rolling their eyes with enough force to affect the orbit of the earth because we are getting into the kind of linguistic territory where one is splitting the fine and nearly invisible remnants of hairs one has already split. But stay with me; we're speculating here. It's more about fun than accuracy.

INVOCATION-VS-EVOCATION

I distinguish between creating and receiving so I can use fermentation and extraction as new symbols to dissect. I'm extrapolating from our original kernels, the seed, and the grape, to trace to their root meaning (or maybe to bastardize it) a crazy idea: is it possible the methods of obtaining wine and oil stand for something besides obtaining wine and oil?

In a broad sense, both seem to describe acts which bring about a transformation. Only one seems to change its original matter from the outside, and one changes from within.

Extraction puts pressure on an olive until the oil in the fruit's cells is released from their bonds to drip into a bucket. Fermentation places all the ingredients together, then lets nature do her thing, so the local yeast attacks the sugars in the fruit and turns them into a delicious *Chateau Neuf de Pape.*

Aren't these two methods allegories for invocation and evocation? One calls forth; one calls into. Their language uses are often interchangeable, but conceptually they are distinct, even

though they are talking about the same thing. Evocation and invocation are used in ceremonial magic to describe how to summon a spirit. To invoke a spirit is to have it manifest internally. To evoke means it manifests externally.

Before you go and start yelling about how this is just a bunch of malarkey and hullabaloo and all this calling spirits junk is only in your head, may I remind that you are correct, but also, just sit with that a minute because *everything is in your head.*

However, I am not about to let the smooth travels of this essay get t-boned by the wildly swerving out-of-control S.U.V. of magical esoterica–banish the thought!

There are other uses of invocation and evocation. In prayer, for instance, there is praying as a supplicant, or a prayer in which one attempts to surrender entirely to the divine, and praying for a result, like a specific outcome in the world. The first is invocation.

OH, LOOK, THE KABBALLAH

Extraction is active, fermentation is passive, which reminds us of the two pillars of the kabbalah–the pillar of mercy and the pillar of severity.

On the left, we have the column of severity, on the right, mercy. Severity can also be thought of as active and mercy as passive. But let's unpack them a little. Note: I am not a qualified kabbalist, but a cabbalistic tourist, and you should arch at least one eyebrow as high as possible during the following paragraphs to indicate your intense skepticism.

The column of mercy contains three sephiroth: chokmah, chesed, and netzach. Severity carries, Binah, geburha, and hod. The definition of the sephirot is cause for fisticuffs among many kabbalists and hermeticists since there are divergent and often conflicting explanations. Still, I think it is safe to define a sephirah as an idea. (The kabbalah is also sometimes called the tree of life and the sephirot its fruit—or, *ahem,* kernels).

The column of severity is also the path of judgment and discipline, of the awe of the divine; we might think of it as the masculine or the exercising of active force. We *affect* through this column.

The column of mercy is the path of nurturing, of love and grace, of inspiration and the blessing of God; we might think of it as the feminine, or the column of passive force, acceptance, and patience. We are *affected* though the column.

Of course, there is a third column: balance, which brings me to a curious correlation with Freemasonry.

Because as Freemasons, we are brought into the lodge during the second degree between two columns, Boaz and Jachin. Boaz is the column of strength, correlating to the cabbalistic column of severity; Jachin is the column of establishment, relating to the cabbalistic column of mercy.

We enter the second degree between these columns to emphasize the middle path, that of balance. If we follow only the way of mercy, of passivity, how can we get things done? If we follow on the path of severity, of action, how can we understand anything?

The Mason is instructed at that moment to recognize the importance of wine and oil.

Wine is the passive acquisition of knowledge, the path whereby we invoke an idea and let it

ferment until it blooms in our mind fully formed; if we are not careful, we can become intoxicated, possessed, and may overstate the true meaning of our idea. You might think of it as inductive reasoning.

Oil is the active acquisition of knowledge. The path whereby we evoke an idea, work on it, apply force until we extract its essence; if we are not careful, we may use too much pressure or heat and destroy the idea before we understand it, we become saturated and tired, obsessed, and may miss the application of our idea.

There is another lesson that lies within the corn and the wine and oil. If one plants a seed, one has to care for it. This cultivation is the preparation and maintenance of the medium wherein the seed grows.

As we discussed earlier, before you even obtain the fruit from this seed, before you apply the force of fermentation or extraction, the plant must *grow.* It must be healthy. It must have all the nutrients and water a plant requires. This is a workable symbol–if a wee bit forced–of autodidactism. Of self-education. Of work.

This gives us yet another way to look at wine and oil–as *theory* and *experiment.* Performance versus rumination. Waiting versus chasing.

To work the middle path means understanding both methods. It means having experienced with extraction and fermentation. It means being possessed and obsessed. It means developing a theory then experimenting to see if it works.

It means never taking words for granted because if the hermeticists who wrote our ritual were the same ones who built Notre Dame and Reims and St. Paul's cathedrals, they were intent on fixing important information in the shibboleths of their art. The great stories contain eternal truths which when we apply force, or when we allow them to possess us, bloom into the same flowers their authors cultivated. Our world's great houses and temples flourish with vibrant, eloquent essays written in rock that can show us paths to greater knowledge.

For instance, if an *argotique* exists in Freemasonry, our ritual is nothing more than the Golden Fleece, a shiny object, a luminous poem concealing the real treasure, the meaning buried deep within the words and phrases, like corn wine and oil. Like numberless worlds. Like the *Master's Word*.

Let's take a look at that concept, which is an essential part of our final ritual. Why is there an entire dramatic allegory–a play with costumes, sound effects, and dialogue? That's a lot of effort to tell the story of losing an important word. But if the idea that some words have multiple meanings, that historical context matters, then the master's word may be understood as a shibboleth referring to a hidden language.

If the literal meaning of this lost word as it is taught to us is 'the grand lodge door opens,' and if we may take some liberty with Latinate and Aramaic syntax which English transposes, we can rewrite that as 'opens the doors to the grand lodge.' If we consider the idiomatic usage of the word door, we can take it to mean, also, a gate. A passage. A way. And if we take the grand lodge to mean that grand lodge to which we must all one day enter, then it means heaven or the abode of the divine. One can read the phrase at the end of that ritual this way: this-lost-word-opens-the-gates-to-heaven, or *this hidden language is a passage to the realm of the divine.*

The wages of a fellowcraft is the understanding of that secret language. To suddenly read

our ritual in its original language, the lithic lexicon of cathedrals, the argot of the alchemists, the language of birds; we might finally comprehend what it is the divine has always been trying to tell us.

BUT WAIT, WHAT THE HELL IS THIS ALL ABOUT, ANYWAY?

I'm glad you asked. Am I, in this paper, suggesting that Freemasonry is a centuries-old society whose ceremonies and ritual indicate a methodology by which an individual may learn and employ the language of God?

Seems awfully Indiana Jonesy. Maybe a little too Dan Brownish. It is, perhaps, a leap of reason from a four word phrase ("corn, wine, and oil") to a treatise on deific linguistics and the impolications of its employment.

Allow me to relieve you of your concern, which at this point may be quite considerable, that I am about to launch a movement, start a webinar, or write a series of mystery thrillers regularly employing the concept that Freemasonry hides within its text the language[1] of deity. I am not.

This paper is not really about corn, wine, or oil. It's not really about the wages of a fellowcraft in the specific sense. As I mentioned right up front: it's about speculation.

We are told we are speculative masons but we aren't given any information about what that means, or *how* we are to speculate. But if it is our defining characteristic, the singluar separating us from our operative ancestors, then it's reasonable to want to give speculation a shot.

This paper was written over several weeks as I disappeared into a warren of rabbit holes, following my thoughts wherever they led me while speculating about the meaning of corn, wine, and oil. I followed every spurious tunnel as far as I could. I definitely got lost a couple of times and in the end, when I crawled up out of that labrynth of conjecture I was miles away from where I went in.

However, deep down in the burrows and catacombs of thought, I had discovered something worth keeping. I held in my hands a sturdy idea. I might put it on a shelf and maybe when I have company over, I'll point to it and say, *yeah, got that in the great rabbit hole catasptrophe of '21.*

Or, I could take my new idea and put it to further tests. I could subject it to the tools of my trade and find out just how useful this idea is. Not just to me, but to my fellow creatures.

Which is another reason why I invited you to follow my speculation in real time. It shows the value of our intellctual mission. The world is never fully satiated from good ideas. Its always hungry; sometimes, it seems like it's *starving* for a reasonable, useful, fully-tested brand-new shiny notion.

Speculation is nothing more than recreational thinking. It is the exercise of rolling an idea over and over in your mind, dissecting it, disassembling it, mashing it into a paste, and boiling it in an alembic until you get something interesting. It is one way to develop hypotheses. They may be insane, like the one I came to in this paper; sure. But through speculation, through rumination, through persuing an idea as far as you can, you may just arrive at a pretty good proposition.

If you do, I believe it is your obligation to look around and note the endless symbology of

1 And therefore the grammar, phoenetics, logic, and rhetoric of deity.

working tools decorating the walls of your mother lodge. They represent the importance of checking your thesis with the implements you've been given in your Masonic Tookit. The square for accuracy, the plumb for truth, the compass for precision, and the ruler for value. Remember your virtuous training: to be prudent by constantly evaluating the varacity and value of your idea; to be temperate, by restraining yourself from getting intoxicated by your speculation; to have the fortitude to stick to the results of your proofs, even if they disappoint or paralyze you with fear; and finally to employ justice, by weighing your idea against its potential worth if you share it: will this idea provide clarity? Or confusion? The end point of speculation is a responsibility for the concepts you discover.

Unless I'm wrong...

❋