BRITISH VOODOO
THE BLACK ART OF
ROLLO AHMED

Rollo Ahmed practised black magic, taught Dennis Wheatley yoga, helped Aleister Crowley find a flat and wrote a popular history of occultism. Christopher Jostiffe explores the life and times of a forgotten figure from the annals of British magic whose journey from British Guyana to the England of the 1920s encompassed both esotericism and racism.

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"HE WORE A RED FEZ AND WAS ROBED IN A WHITE BURNOUS"

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arrived at Wheatsley’s Queen’s Gate house for dinner. He was dressed only in a light cotton suit, wearing no tie, hat or gloves, and led walked four miles from his flat in Clapham. Upon being Ahmad’s hand, Wheatsley found it to be ‘warm as toast’ - the result, apparently, of Ahmad’s ability to generate internal heat via yoga. Wheatsley had other reasons to be impressed by Ahmad and his social power; on another evening, he was entertaining Ahmad together with a member of the Society for Psychical Research, apparently psychically guided. After Ahmad had departed, the SPR then asked Wheatsley whether he had noticed the small black bag leaping about behind Ahmad. A demonic sign, apparently made an appearance in Wheatsley’s The Saturday (1950).

THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC... Such was Wheatsley’s respect for his friend’s knowledge that when his publisher, John Long Ltd., asked him to write a monograph book on the history of magic to capitalize on the success of The Devil Rides Out, he instead suggested that Ahmad write the book. The result was The Black Art (John Long, 1936), an overview of black magic and sorcery with a curious European/Western bias. Curiously, because Ahmad, one of few non-white people on the British 1930s occult scene, was of European background, he did not regard the book as inappropriate. He believed it was Wheatsley’s responsibility to write on such matters. In this context, the compilers of the Liddell-Scott Arabic-English dictionary may have been surprised to find that the term was a title for a work by Ahmad. In this context, the compilers of the Liddell-Scott Arabic-English dictionary may have been surprised to find that the term was a title for a work by Ahmad.

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London after Dark

Inspection facilities of the black immigrants in the capital’s indigenous communities during the 1890s

London after Dark

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Published and other items like these were banned in the 1890s for their association with black magic and necromancy, and conveyed a sense of fear and revulsion among the public. Discrimination against black people was widespread throughout the country, and the term ‘black’ was often used as a derogatory term.

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Obed, and both are carried on today...Voodooism is Devil worship pure and simple...In past days it involved the sacrifice of a girl-child who was called the 'goat without head'...in similar lurid fashion, Ahmad describes the typical Voodoo ceremony, which, he says, was carried out in lonely and desolate places, where the moon was full, the participants joining hands and dancing around a fire. Sometimes these dances were in honour of the moon as representing the 'Old Master' or Devil...As the dancers grew wilder, the victims were killed and pieces of the quavering body given to each of the celebrants to eat, which spurred them on to even greater delirium. They acknowledgments to the 'Old Master' and 'Spectre Moon'...Such ceremonies were...accompanied by drunkenness and orgies...However, Devil worship is not and was not a feature of Caribbean Voodoo or other African-African patronal practices, and Ahmad - a former native of Guyana - would presumably have been aware of this. What, then, of the existence of such practices? Was this, perhaps, preceding to popular narcotic sentiment of the time, and giving his British readership what they wanted? Or was it sheer potentiality? Again, in another chapter of the book, Ahmad declares that 'Everywhere recognition that street magic and magics are a natural part of the lives of barbarous people, but many find it difficult to believe that black magic has any reality at all.' Perhaps such views indicate Ahmad's misgivings of himself as an Egyptian, having repudiated his Christianity past as a means to gaining acceptance in British society.

RISE

A similar scene is described in Ahmad's 1927 novel, Rise, The Life History of a Negro (John Long, 1937), to be thought of as author-writings and ethnographic. In the book's foreword, Ahmad writes: 'Some of the characters are portraits, but all the most important circumstances are based upon facts...The novel is a passage to some of the protagonists. Obed, Butler, witnesses a Voodoo ceremony in Guiana as a young man. The celebrants, in the light of the moon, dance upon the place, say to Ollo Meen' and "Dey Mass Dat'llh" as the much-fancied Ol' Man, old Koa, sacrifices a black goat. Could this be Ahmad's novel that Ahmad had witnessed as a young man in Guyana? Interestingly, the novel also features some less dramatic (and thus more convincingly realistic) examples of African-Diablos magic practised in Trinidad. The protagonist's father consults a deck of playing cards for divination purposes, she then announces his intention to see a magic man, and a goat appears at the door of no one sorts but the mainstay of the busy mind which 'he had made a small circle of bonanzas and then looked like sleepy beasts. He was staring something very rapidly, and suddenly he took a stick of some powdered substance from a paper bag he was holding

THE VICTIMS' FLESH WAS GIVEN TO THE CELEBRANTS TO EAT

Another is the Leopard Society of Sierra Leone, whose members once roamed the Jibes' forest for their ceremonies, and we thought to be "Jo-Jo". If we were leopards, believed to roam through the forest in search of meat, best on evil and destruction. Another surprising claim is made about the pre-Shakerian Balinese practices of Tiber, who Ahmad says, 

"form the basis of all the legends and myths of the people, and their beliefs.

"For I Rise: the Life History of a Negro by Rollo Ahmed"

Lucky Beans and Crocuses

Such is the problem faced by the novel, which has the same effect as the novel, but because "you follow it to the end of the book, where you can't see what happens there."

Compelled to leave the hotel where he meets a middle-aged black man, Warren Codd, who introduces him to a lawyer. Codd had been an accountant with a successful business in Birmingham, but had been forced to sell his building after a false accusation of embezzlement. He now sells his oil paintings, and introduces Calib to his trade. He is able to

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as in Europe. He was known for his sharp wit and犀利的言辞，以及对时事的敏锐洞察。他的作品中充满了对社会和政治问题的深刻见解。

In conclusion, the legacy of Fikry Ahmed is a testament to his brilliance and the impact of his writings on the Egyptian society. His contributions continue to inspire future generations of writers and thinkers. He remains a symbol of freedom of speech and a leader in the intellectual discourse of the Arab world.

NOTES
2. Fikry’s first novel, “Al-Farabi,” was published in 1935.
3. His works include “Al-Zahiriya,” “Al-Sama,” and “Al-Farabi.”
4. His last novel, “Al-Sama,” was published posthumously in 1952.
5. Fikry was a member of the “Al-Farabi” literary group.

ABOVE: Fikry Ahmed is shown above as an Egyptian intellectual and a prominent writer of the 20th century. His works continue to influence modern Egyptian society and culture.