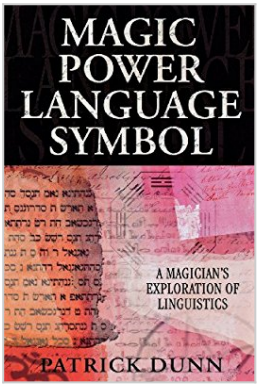

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics

By Patrick Dunn

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics
By Patrick Dunn

From the sigils of chaos magic to the numerical code of Qabalah, all magical practices operate in a web of symbols and language. Yet academics seldom examine the role that semiotics and linguistics play in the unfolding of magical works.

In the follow-up to his debut *Postmodern Magic*, Patrick Dunn returns once again to the theoretical realm of the sign, the signified, and the changeable perceptions of a slippery reality. Intellectual and aggressively modern, his language-driven perspective on magic touches on all elements voiced and written, from speaking in tongues and creating mantras to composing Enochian spells and working with gematria. A hefty appendix includes exercises that put Dunn's theories to work, as well as the first published dictionary of English alphabet numerology.

Highly literate and highly readable, *Magic, Power, Language, Symbol* will tickle the minds of theory-thirsty academics and seasoned mages alike, as well as anyone else eager to examine the manufacture of meaning.

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics

By Patrick Dunn

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn

From the sigils of chaos magic to the numerical code of Qabalah, all magical practices operate in a web of symbols and language. Yet academics seldom examine the role that semiotics and linguistics play in the unfolding of magical works.

In the follow-up to his debut *Postmodern Magic*, Patrick Dunn returns once again to the theoretical realm of the sign, the signified, and the changeable perceptions of a slippery reality. Intellectual and aggressively modern, his language-driven perspective on magic touches on all elements voiced and written, from speaking in tongues and creating mantras to composing Enochian spells and working with gematria. A hefty appendix includes exercises that put Dunn's theories to work, as well as the first published dictionary of English alphabet numerology.

Highly literate and highly readable, *Magic, Power, Language, Symbol* will tickle the minds of theory-thirsty academics and seasoned mages alike, as well as anyone else eager to examine the manufacture of meaning.

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1014781 in Books
- Published on: 2008-08-08
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .61" w x 5.98" l, .82 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

Editorial Review

About the Author

Patrick Dunn (Chicago, IL) is a poet, linguist, Pagan, and a university English professor with a PhD in modern literature and language. His understanding of semiotics and the study of symbols arise from his training in linguistics and literary theory. He has practiced magic since childhood. Visit him online at https://pomomagic.wordpress.com.

The Theory of Symbols:
The Practice of Magic

Every art distinguishes between theory and practice. One may practice an art without studying its theory, and one may study its theory without practicing the art. Ideally, however, theory informs practice and practice tests theory. In magic, some people are interested only in the practical side; these are people who, when faced with a problem, find a spell to solve it and go on with their lives. That approach isn't wrong. I, however, enjoy speculating about theories of magic. Sometimes people dismiss theory as useless, and if it never leads to practice, it can be. But theory provides the foundation stones out of which we can build our own ideas of magic.

The role of magical theory, and its differences from scientific theory, is the focus of Ramsey Dukes's *S.S.O.T.B.M.E.*, and since a new edition of that book has recently been published, I won't repeat its material here._ I will mention, however, that Dukes explores some differences between scientific theory and magical theory that might be useful in a study of the role of language in magic. Dukes points out that for a scientific theory to be useful, it needs to be falsifiable. In other words, it needs to contain predictions that can be proven wrong through observation. For example, part of Newton's physics is that time is a constant. Einstein theorized that time is not a constant but varies according to one's viewpoint in relation to the speed of light. According to Einstein, if two twins were separated and one was sent on a trip at a significant fraction of the speed of light, when that twin returned he would find his stay-at-home brother had aged much more than he had. This prediction, while it looks unlikely, can be tested. We can separate two carefully calibrated clocks, for example, and accelerate one to a considerable speed (not to the speed of light as that's well beyond our capabilities), and then compare them. In fact, this experiment has been done and has falsified Newton's physics and endorsed Einstein's.

Science's approach to theory is falsification, but magic's approach is relation. Counterintuitively, all scientific theories strive to be proven wrong, and the failure to do so over time makes them stronger and stronger. Dukes argues that magical theories are not falsifiable in the same way. Instead, rather than making predictions that can be falsified, they describe experiences that a magician can try to relate to. Rather than seeking the flaw in a magical theory, a magician seeks something that's true in it. What this means is that magicians have multiple, conflicting, and sometimes even silly theories about magic, all of which have personal value. Obviously, what I value in a theory you may not, and vice versa. But once we find some truth in a magical theory we can use it, not to make predictions in the scientific sense but to structure magical operations. For example, if I believe in spirits, and I find some truth in a magical theory that describes spirits, I can try to summon and communicate with them. Only a fool would argue that we should abolish the

scientific approach to falsifiability; in reality, we need both approaches to truly understand reality.

My goal in this book is to provide some interesting new theories about magic, as well as explore the role of language in magic from a practical standpoint. There won't, however, be any spells per se in this book. Spells grow out of theory. If your theory is that a magical energy exists and is responsible for magic, then obviously your spell will look different from someone's who believes that there are spirits responsible for magic. I will include discussions of how people in various magical and religious traditions have used language in interesting and unique ways, what the science of linguistics and specifically the field of semiotics_ has to say about such things, and some exercises and experiments you can try-not to falsify the theories I suggest, but to see if you can find something in them that resonates for you.

Before we get to the meat of magic, let's have a couple scoops of mundane dressing. Any intelligent conversation about the role of language in magic is going to require an understanding of the role of language in more ordinary settings. Science approaches language in two ways: linguistics and semiotics. Linguistics studies three branches of language: semantics (the meaning of individual words), syntax (how words fit together to make sentences), and pragmatics (how language is used in real life). I will refer to various theories of linguistics from time to time in this book, but I want to point out that this book is making no linguistic claims, only magical ones. Semiotics, the second way of studying language, is the formal study of symbols and signs. This study includes more, obviously, than mere language-it also includes graphics, visual rhetoric (the way, for example, advertisements are laid out), and body language. Semiotics is almost untapped as a field for elucidating and creating magical theory. My goal is to present it, and linguistic theory, in such a way that you will, if so inclined, be able to make your own personally appealing magical theories out of the material.

Semiotics: The Science of Signs

Symbols are important to magicians-from the qabalist meditating on the shapes and meanings of the Hebrew letters, to the Hoodoo worker dressing her lodestone, to the chaos magician meditating on a sigil. All of these are symbols, objects that represent something other than what they inherently are. Semiotics is the formal study of such things. This definition might seem straightforward, except that a century of formal study of symbols has revealed that there's nothing straightforward about symbols. For example, we tend to think that there is a class of things that are symbols, and a class of things that aren't symbols. We see the word *tree* and think, "Ah, that's a symbol representing an object in the real world," which is actually one commonly accepted theory of the structure of a symbol. A symbol, says that theory, consists of three parts: the sign, which is the visual or verbal (or sensory in some way) physical object that makes up the symbol; the signified, which is its meaning in the world of ideas; and the physical object to which that idea applies. The problem, as postmodern semioticians such as Jacques Derrida have pointed out, is that there is not a clear distinction between a sign and its signified. A signified may itself be another sign pointing to another signified, and the physical object to which an idea applies is, itself, merely another symbol.

It's difficult to identify what, exactly, any given sign points to. Take the example of *tree*-the word seems to point to an idea in the real world, but show me the actual "tree" to which the word refers. Is it an elm? A poplar? The tree outside your window? The tree outside my window? A tree I used to climb as a child? You might say, "Sure, be a sophist, but everyone knows what I mean when I say ‘tree': I mean a class of objects that shares similarities." What are those similarities, however? At what exact height does a shrub, for example, become a tree? The category "tree" that we claim is an actual physical thing is just a collection of experiences we have labeled together. In some languages there is no equivalent word for *tree*-instead, you must name the exact type of tree you're speaking of. The class of "tree" is just as arbitrary as any other idea we might point to with symbols. This arbitrary nature of symbols becomes apparent when you compare different languages. For example, in English we have two words for pig: when it's alive, it's a pig, and when

it's dead, it's pork. But other languages have just one word for these same things. So which of us is right? Both. In reality, there are only arbitrary distinctions to be made._

According to postmodernists, everything is a symbol. I've sometimes seen the criticism, "If everything is just symbolic, then we can act any way we want and hurt anyone we want!" It's difficult to get one's mind around what postmodernists are saying about reality. They are not saying, "Everything is just a symbol," because that word *just* implies that there's something that isn't a symbol, something more real than the symbol. There isn't.
Symbol doesn't mean non-real to the postmodernist; it means really real. There's no other way to be real than symbolically. So if we hurt something, we really hurt them, even if they are symbols and our actions are symbols-they're still symbols that hurt. The advantage of recognizing the symbolic nature of reality is that we can make choices about the way that we interpret it, which could make us less vulnerable to being hurt. We can also be more conscious that what we observe is not necessarily what we interpret. If we see someone cut us off in traffic, being aware of the symbolic nature of reality we don't need to automatically assume that they are a jerk. That act could symbolize that they are in a rush to take someone to the hospital, or that they are late for an important appointment, or that they are just having a bad day.

Postmodernists are also, mostly, not denying the existence of reality or, necessarily, the existence of a reality beyond the symbol. Perhaps there's a reality that isn't symbolic, but we, as symbolic creatures, can never experience that reality. And even if we could experience it, we couldn't actually talk about it. Interestingly, one of the characteristics of many religious experiences is an inability to talk about them or describe them in symbols. Anything we can talk about is, by definition, symbolic, because anything we talk about is something we have translated into symbols (i.e., words).

I can imagine a reader saying, "It's not so arbitrary for the poor pig!" and that's true. Some of these arbitrary distinctions break down along fairly reasonable lines; the difference between a dead pig and a living pig is a pretty obvious difference. But other arbitrary distinctions are less salient. For example, we have separate names for people with certain skin colors, but not for people who can and cannot wiggle their ears or roll their tongues.

We cannot experience something without experiencing it as a symbol, and we develop ways of dealing with symbols, called "codes." Codes are simply frameworks into which we place our symbols. Language itself is a code, but many codes are not so formal. If you're watching a movie and the director chooses to tilt the camera slightly (a "Dutch angle"), that's a code that you're supposed to read the main character as confused or disoriented._ When a novel begins "Ted got out of his Ford Focus and stretched," we know that Ted is likely to be the main character. But if someone said that sentence to you in conversation, you would be compelled to ask, "Who's Ted?" In a novel, treating the main character as if the reader already has some knowledge of him or her is a code. We rarely think about the codes we use to interpret symbols; we learn most of them so early and so effortlessly that we rarely need to. But codes, like the symbols they interpret, are mostly arbitrary. Movies in the _9_0s and '40s often showed people walking from one location to another-from the car to a front door, for example; now we use an arbitrary code, a jump cut, to indicate the same sort of motion. We have such codes in language, too. When you ask your friend, "Can you pass the salt?" he or she knows the code that, when you ask an irrelevant question about ability, you're actually making a request.

Some codes are particularly relevant to magic. These aren't artistic or linguistic codes, but codes that frame the way we experience reality. Try an experiment: go for a short walk, perhaps around the house, but fix your eyes as straight-ahead and unmovingly as you can. Pay attention especially to the edge of your vision; you will notice that, with each step, your vision bounces and jerks. In fact, such bouncing and jerking is going on constantly as we move, but we have a code that filters it out so we have the experience of smooth

fields of vision without bouncing around. If you hold a video camera up on your shoulder and walk around in the same way, you'll notice that the film is also jerky and wobbly. Some people, watching such poorly shot videos, complain that the motion makes them seasick, but they experience the same sort of jerky visual field every time they walk somewhere. They just compensate with eye motion and psychological codes that cancel it out. Another way to experience a code that changes the way we experience reality is to stare at a single point ahead of you until your depth perception goes away. We have the illusion of depth not just because of our binocular vision, but because we expect to. It is part of the code by which we perceive reality.

These codes are probably at least somewhat ingrained in us from birth. After all, there's an evolutionary advantage to a smooth field of vision, and the illusion of depth provides us with plenty of advantages. But there's some historical evidence that even these codes, which seem so natural and biological, change over time. For example, some argue that pre-Renaissance
paintings have no concept of depth perception, but a closer examination shows that there is merely a different code employed. For example, objects higher in the painting are often farther away. On the other hand, our current codes for depicting depth perception in two-dimensional paintings involve a complex mathematical relationship between size and foreshortening. However, both such codes are merely illusions of depth perception, a two-dimensional depicting of the way that we perceive the world. While the later code is perhaps a bit closer to our own perceptual code, it is still a perceptual code and not an objective part of reality.

We also have codes that have nothing to do with the way that we interact with matter. For instance, we have codes about our attitudes toward sex. When you strip sex of all its codes, it is the rubbing together of certain mucous membranes in order to cause a reaction in nerve cells that leads to muscle spasms in certain parts of the body, which we interpret as pleasurable. And to the materialist that's all that sex is. But in reality, we have so many codes around this act that my description above reads as bizarre-it is not even clinical; it is alien.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jessie Lloyd:

Here thing why this kind of Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics are different and trustworthy to be yours. First of all examining a book is good nevertheless it depends in the content from it which is the content is as delightful as food or not. Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics giving you information deeper as different ways, you can find any book out there but there is no publication that similar with Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics. It gives you thrill reading journey, its open up your current eyes about the thing that happened in the world which is probably can be happened around you. You can easily bring everywhere like in recreation area, café, or even in your technique home by train. In case you are having difficulties in bringing the published book maybe the form of Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics in e-book can be your substitute.

Kim McLoughlin:

The book with title Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics posesses a lot of information that you can discover it. You can get a lot of profit after read this book. This book exist new information the information that exist in this e-book represented the condition of the world today. That is important to yo7u to find out how the improvement of the world. That book will bring you in new era of the the positive effect. You can read the e-book on your own smart phone, so you can read it anywhere you want.

Dana Register:

Many people spending their moment by playing outside using friends, fun activity using family or just watching TV 24 hours a day. You can have new activity to shell out your whole day by studying a book. Ugh, ya think reading a book can really hard because you have to accept the book everywhere? It okay you can have the e-book, taking everywhere you want in your Cell phone. Like Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics which is finding the e-book version. So , try out this book? Let's view.

Trina Durham:

Is it you who having spare time after that spend it whole day through watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something new? This Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics can be the respond to, oh how comes? A book you know. You are consequently out of date, spending your spare time by reading in this completely new era is common not a geek activity. So what these guides have than the others?

Read Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn for online ebook

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn Free PDF d0wnl0ad, audio books, books to read, good books to read, cheap books, good books, online books, books online, book reviews epub, read books online, books to read online, online library, greatbooks to read, PDF best books to read, top books to read Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn books to read online.

Online Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn ebook PDF download

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn Doc

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn Mobipocket

Magic, Power, Language, Symbol: A Magician's Exploration of Linguistics By Patrick Dunn EPub