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# Correspondences

Online Journal for the  
Academic Study of Western Esotericism

*Editors*

Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema

3 (2015)

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# Contents

Editorial	1
<b>Research Articles</b>	
CHRISTOPHER A. PLAISANCE. Israel Regardie and the Psychologization of Esoteric Discourse	5
WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF. The Globalization of Esotericism	55
<b>Review Articles</b>	
PETER STAUDENMAIER. The Higher Worlds meet the Lower Criticism: New Scholarship on Rudolf Steiner	93
DAVID W. WOOD. Exoteric & Esoteric: Methodological Reflections on Vol. 7 of the Rudolf Steiner Critical Edition	111
EGIL ASPREM. Patterns of Magicity: A Review of <i>Defining Magic: A Reader</i>	127
<b>Book Reviews</b>	
Damon Zacharias Lycourinos (ed.). <i>Occult Traditions</i> Reviewed by MANON HEDENBORG-WHITE	141
Frank Klaassen. <i>The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and the Renaissance</i> Reviewed by EGIL ASPREM	147
Sheila A. Spector (ed., trans.). Francis Mercury van Helmont's <i>Sketch of Christian Kabbalism</i> Reviewed by GEORGIANA D. HEDESAN	152
Angel Millar. <i>The Crescent and the Compass: Islam, Freemasonry, Esotericism, and Revolution in the Modern Age</i> Reviewed by JUSTINE BAKKER	156
Giulio Busi and Raphael Ebgi. <i>Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Mito, Magia, Qabbalah</i> Reviewed by ALESSANDRO VIGORELLI PORRO	160
Ithell Colquhoun. <i>I Saw Water: An Occult Novel and Other Selected Writings</i> Reviewed by AREN ROUKEMA	164
Thomas Karlsson. <i>Amongst Mystics and Magicians in Stockholm</i> Reviewed by HARRI LINNERA	169



## Editorial

### Jimmy Elwing

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Now that the holiday season is behind us, we bring you one last gift: the third volume of *Correspondences*. This volume marks the end of the third year of our open access adventure, a year which has included some important changes for the journal. We began our new publication model in which articles go online in advance form as soon as they are ready (which has proved to be a success); we migrated our webpage to a new server which will stabilise the journal and allow us to add new features which will further help its maintenance in the future; and we welcomed Kennet Granholm as an editorial board member.

The current volume of the journal contains research articles by a junior and a senior scholar in the field of Western esotericism. In “Israel Regardie and the Psychologization of Esoteric Discourse,” Christopher A. Plaisance re-examines and clarifies the relationship between esoteric and psychological discourses in the works of Israel Regardie, thereby contributing to the theoretical discussion on the “psychologisation” of esotericism that has been underway for quite a while. It also provides a historical exposition of Regardie’s life and work. Wouter J. Hanegraaff follows with the “The Globalization of Esotericism,” an expansion of his keynote lecture delivered at the Fifth International Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism in Riga (April 2015). After examining the scholarly discussions concerned with letting the study of “Western esotericism” part with its geographical or cultural denominator, Hanegraaff concludes that it is advisable to keep the concept as it was originally construed, “not for reasons of conceptual theory

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but for reasons of historical method.” Together, these two articles provide theoretical discussions that we hope to see more of in forthcoming issues of *Correspondences*, and we are looking forward to any responses they may provoke.

In this volume we also introduce three review articles—a new format for *Correspondences*. The first two both deal with volumes of Christian Clement’s *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe*—a venture that has sparked much debate in the German speaking world. Peter Staudenmaier and David W. Wood, respectively, plunge us into the Steiner debate, taking two somewhat different sides on key questions in Rudolf Steiner research; we are happy to present these side by side in this volume. Our book review editor, Egil Asprem, provides the third review article: a final, updated, and standardised version of his essay on Michael Stausberg and Berndt-Christian Otto’s *Defining Magic: A Reader*. We feel that the review article format offers a very good space for providing deeper analysis than fits a more traditional book review, and we are looking forward to exploring this format more in the future.

Alongside the review articles, we are happy to provide a dense book review section with reviews by no less than seven authors. We offer more traditional academic reviews, such as Alessandro Vigorelli Porro’s review of *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Mito, Magia, Qabbalah*, but have also decided to include reviews of primary texts such as Thomas Karlsson’s *Amongst Mystics and Magicians in Stockholm*, and scholar-practitioner books, such as Damon Zacharias Lycourinos’s *Occult Traditions*. Ever since its foundation, *Correspondences* has been an academic peer-reviewed journal that has insisted on not being bound by traditional academic publishing models. We deem it important to review books which may not normally be given attention in an academic setting, but which are still important for specialists, researchers and enthusiasts of the study of Western esotericism.

Although we are not committed to a view of “esotericism” as something that exists as an object, it becomes an object when esoteric actors become increasingly familiar with scholarship from the field of Western esotericism.<sup>1</sup> This calls for an increased emphasis on scholarly reflexivity—it is important to remember the role scholars have played, and are playing, in the continual development of “esotericism” as object.<sup>2</sup> By offering reviews of scholar-

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this, see Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, “Constructing Esotericisms: Sociological, Historical and Critical Approaches to the Invention of Tradition,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 43–45.

<sup>2</sup> Asprem and Granholm, “Constructing Esotericisms,” 48. For a discussion of reflexivity

practitioner books,<sup>3</sup> *Correspondences* provides an academic forum in which to critique not only the merits of particular texts, but also the ways in which scholars participate in creating the very object that they have set out to analyse. We think this enables a much-needed awareness of the discursive processes at work. First hand sources may not first and foremost be important on the basis of their academic merit, but can still be reviewed based on what they offer to researchers, or how they may potentially contribute to deepening academic discussion.

Ever since we started this journal we have intended *Correspondences* to form a forum in which meaningful (and non-polemical) interaction between researchers from all disciplines, outlooks and backgrounds can be held. We deem it important to allow researchers from all levels and backgrounds to dialogue with others inside and outside the field, inside and outside the so-called “ivory” tower. We hope that this third volume will provide a good foundation for research as we enter the fourth year of the journal’s existence, and that it will host many new fascinating discussions in forthcoming volumes.

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and praxis in Western esotericism and Pagan Studies, see Amy Hale, “Navigating Praxis: Pagan Studies vs. Esoteric Studies,” *The Pomegranate* 15, no. 1–2 (2013): 151–163.

<sup>3</sup> For another example of a scholar-practitioner book that we’ve published a review of, see Ethan Doyle White, Review of *Pathways in Modern Western Magic*, edited by Nevill Drury, *Correspondences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 115–118.



# Israel Regardie and the Psychologization of Esoteric Discourse

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## **Abstract**

This is an article in the history of Western esoteric currents that re-examines and clarifies the relationship between esoteric and psychological discourses within the works of Israel Regardie. One of the most common ways in which these two discourses have been found to be related to one another by scholars of the esoteric is through the process of “psychologization”—with Regardie often being put forth as a paragon of the process. This paper argues that a unitary conception of psychologization fails to adequately describe the specific discursive strategies utilized by Regardie. In order to accurately analyze his ideas, a manifold typology of complementary, terminological, reductive, and idealist modes of psychologization is proposed instead. Through this system of classification, Regardie’s ideas regarding the relationship between psychological and esoteric discourses are understood as a network of independent but non-exclusive processes, rather than as a single trend. It is found that all four modes of psychologization are present, both in relative isolation and in combination with one another, throughout his works. These results demonstrate that while it is accurate to speak of Regardie as having psychologized esoteric discourse, this can only be the case given an understanding of “psychologization” that is differentially nuanced in a way that, at least, accounts for the distinct discursive strategies this paper identifies.

## **Keywords**

psychologization; method and theory; psychology and esotericism; science and religion; Israel Regardie; Golden Dawn

## 1. Introduction

Of all the exponents of the esoteric current initiated by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (HOGD),<sup>1</sup> Francis Israel Regardie (1907–1985) contends with the titans of modern Western esoteric currents, such as Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918), Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942), Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), and Dion Fortune (1890–1946), as perhaps the most prolific and widely influential author on the practice of magic. Tremendous portions of Regardie’s esoteric writings concern themselves with a single, unified question: what is the nature of the relationship between esoteric and psychological discourses?<sup>2</sup> Although Regardie explored this family of

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<sup>1</sup> For treatments of the order’s history, see: Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887–1923* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1972); Ithel Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and the Golden Dawn* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1975); R.A. Gilbert, *Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983); Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1995); R.A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn Scrapbook: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1997); Daniël van Egmond, “Western Esoteric Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, eds. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Albany: State University New York Press, 1998), 311–46; Mary Greer and Darcy Küntz, *The Chronology of the Golden Dawn: Being a Chronological History of a Magical Order, 1378–1994* (Edmonds: Holmes Publishing Group, 1999); Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 121–44; Christopher McIntosh, “‘Fräulein Sprengel’ and the Origins of the Golden Dawn: A Surprising Discovery,” *Aries* 11, no. 2 (2011): 249–57.

<sup>2</sup> Within the nascent field of Western esotericism, uses of the term “esotericism” (and “esoteric”) have ranged from strongly essentialist frameworks describing “esotericism” as a *Ding an sich* (e.g., Antoine Faivre, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke), to empirical treatments that view “esotericism” as an historiographical construct (e.g., Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Kocku von Stuckrad), to intermediary positions between these two poles (e.g., Marco Pasi). It is far beyond this paper’s scope to examine the individual merits of such arguments, or to venture into defining related terms, such as “occultism” or “magic.” It will suffice to say that within this paper, I use the term “esoteric discourse” in preference to “esotericism.” The theoretical underpinnings of this shift conceptualize ‘the esoteric,’ as a discourse in European and American religion in which claims of higher knowledge are characterized by a dialectic of revelation and concealment. For more on “esoteric discourse” as a theoretical alternative to “Western esotericism,” see: Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 43–66; Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800–2000* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 152–58; Kennet Granholm, *Dark Enlightenment: The Historical, Sociological, and Discursive Contexts of Contemporary Esoteric Magic* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 28–29; Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 546–51. Additionally, I follow Kennet Granholm’s lead in

concerns in a variety of ways throughout his six decades of involvement in Western esoteric currents, his overriding focus—to elucidate the ways in which esoteric theory and praxis overlapped with the psychological modelling and psychotherapeutic practice of his day—remained relatively constant. Given this focus, the question naturally emerges as to what degree Regardie’s ideas fall within the scope of what many scholars of esoteric discourse now term “psychologization.” In his pioneering works on the New Age movements, Wouter Hanegraaff noted that one of the characteristic attitudes of such intellectual currents is the “double phenomenon of a *psychologizing of religion combined with a sacralization of psychology*.”<sup>3</sup> Far from being a peculiarity of the New Age, Hanegraaff identifies psychologization as the “dominant tendency among 20th-century magicians” as well.<sup>4</sup> This psychologizing trend has been

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that “esoteric currents can be analyzed as ‘discursive complexes,’ i.e. collections of distinct discourses in specific combinations” (Granholm, *Dark Enlightenment*, 36). For more on this, see: Kennet Granholm, “Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes,” *Religion* 43, no. 1 (2013): 46–69. For useful overviews of this definitional debate (apart from the specific advocates for discursive approaches listed above), see: Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 3–48; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7, no. 2 (1995): 99–129; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “On the Construction of ‘Esoteric Traditions,’” in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, eds. Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 11–61; Kocku von Stuckrad, “Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation,” *Religion* 35 (2005): 78–97; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–14; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “The Power of Ideas: Esotericism, Historicism, and the Limits of Discourse,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 252–73; Marco Pasi, “The Problems of Rejected Knowledge: Thoughts on Wouter Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy*,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 201–12; Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, “Constructing Esotericisms: Sociological, Historical and Critical Approaches to the Invention of Tradition,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 25–48.

<sup>3</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “The New Age Movement and the Esoteric Tradition,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times*, eds. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 378 (emphasis in original). For nearly identical wording, see: Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 196–7; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 137 (emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World,” *Religion* 33 (2003): 366. In later works, Hanegraaff caveats this assertion somewhat: “The psychologizing trend is very common in modern and contemporary esotericism, but is certainly not universal.” Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 137.

further identified as the hallmark of modern emic discourses on magic by a wide range of contemporary scholars.<sup>5</sup> Amid this flurry of recent research touching on the psychologization of esoteric discourse, Regardie has come into view as one of the phenomenon's chief representatives—with Hanegraaff,<sup>6</sup> Marco Pasi,<sup>7</sup> John Selby,<sup>8</sup> Egil Asprem,<sup>9</sup> and Kocku von Stuckrad<sup>10</sup> putting him forth as a primary example of modern esoteric discourse's trend towards psychologization. However, in none of these cases is the assertion that Regardie's esoteric discourse is psychologized supported by a full critical review of his writing on the subjects. As such, the degree to which this characterization is a true reflection of Regardie's work remains an open question, one which is addressed by this present work.

In examining the relationship between psychological and esoteric discourses in Regardie's writings, I argue that the notion of "psychologization" as a singular process is imprecise and ill-suited for describing the particular discursive

<sup>5</sup> T.M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 280–2; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 231; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), 144; Jennifer Walters, "Magical Revival: Occultism and the Culture of Regeneration in Britain, c. 1880–1929" (PhD diss., University of Sterling, 2007), 111; Egil Asprem, "Magic Naturalized? Negotiating Science and Occult Experience in Aleister Crowley's Scientific Illuminism," *Aries* 8 (2008): 140; John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 202; Jesper Aagaard Petersen, "'We Demand Bedrock Knowledge': Modern Satanism Between Secularized Esotericism and 'Esotericized' Secularism," in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, eds. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 89; Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 180–81; Marco Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley's Views on Occult Practice," in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55; Colin Duggan, "Perennialism and Iconoclasm: Chaos Magick and the Legitimacy of Innovation," in *Contemporary Esotericism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 94.

<sup>6</sup> Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived," 368; Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 137.

<sup>7</sup> Marco Pasi, "La notion de magie dans le courant occultiste en Angleterre (1875–1947)" (PhD diss., École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2004), 395–98; Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience," 76.

<sup>8</sup> John Selby, "Dion Fortune and Her Inner Plane Contacts: Intermediaries in the Western Esoteric Tradition" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2008), 199.

<sup>9</sup> Egil Asprem, *Arguing With Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 7. It should, however, be noted that Asprem suggests that Hanegraaff's overreliance on Regardie as an example is partially responsible for his model of the psychologization process being somewhat one-dimensional ("Magic Naturalized," 142).

<sup>10</sup> Von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion*, 72.

entanglements at play. Thus, after providing a brief biographical sketch of Regardie, which examines his careers as both a magician and psychotherapist, I propose a model of “psychologization” as a manifold network of discursive strategies that are mutually independent, but non-exclusive and capable of overlap. The specific component processes of this typology that bear discussion in Regardie’s case are, respectively, the complementary, terminological, reductive, and idealist modes of psychologization. Following this, I briefly look into the origins of the psychologizing trends in modern Western esoteric currents, finding that the bidirectionally formative nature of the relationship between esoteric and psychological discourses makes the blanket characterization of modern esoteric discourse as being psychologized troublesome. Descriptions of Regardie as a paragon of psychologized esoteric discourse by Hanegraaff, Aspren, and Pasi then follow, with a picture emerging of each author describing Regardie’s “psychologization” in somewhat different terms—each accurately reflecting aspects of Regardie’s work in parts, but painting with an overly broad brush in others. Through a careful documentary analysis of Regardie’s esoteric corpus, the conclusion proposed is that the issue of “psychologization” within his esoteric discourse is far from a simple matter with a “yes-or-no” solution.

## 2. The Life and Times of Israel Regardie

### 2.1 The Initiate

In order to understand Regardie’s relationship with the two disciplines in question, a biographical sketch that charts the course of his life in relation to these fields of study will prove useful in contextualizing his writings within the broader framework of his life, education, vocations, and avocations. Regardie, whose surname was originally Regudy, was born on 17 November 1907 in London to a small immigrant family of Orthodox Jews from Russia.<sup>11</sup> When the family left London for Washington, DC, in 1921, Regardie ostensibly took up the study of art. However, at the age of fifteen or sixteen—sparked by a reference to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) in a book belonging to

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<sup>11</sup> Nicolas Tereshchenko, “Israel Regardie (1907–1985) and the ‘Golden Dawn,’” *ARIES: Association pour la Recherche et l’Information sur l’Esotérisme* 4 (1986): 71; Gerald Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice: The Life and Ideas of Israel Regardie* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1990), 1; Pasi, “La notion,” 391; Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 432. The family name, Regudy, was changed to Regardie in 1921 after an army recruiter misspelled the name of Israel’s older brother on his enlistment papers.

his sister—Regardie’s interests began to tend towards the esoteric.<sup>12</sup> This soon blossomed into the exploration of Theosophy, yoga, and the Qabalah, with the works of Blavatsky,<sup>13</sup> Paul Foster Case (1884–1954), and Charles Stansfeld Jones (1886–1950)<sup>14</sup> making particular impressions upon him. Spurred in part by his Jewish heritage, his early delving into the Qabalah was supplemented by a year’s study of Hebrew language under the tutelage of a student of George Washington University, as was recommended to Regardie by the head of the Library of Congress’s Semitic Language Division after the young man expressed his interest in translating heretofore untranslated Qabalistic texts.<sup>15</sup> Between 1926 and 1927, Regardie’s descent into the world of the esoteric was doubly affected by his discovery of Crowley’s writings and by his initiation into the Societas Rosicruciana in America (SRIA).<sup>16</sup> In 1928, Regardie’s fascination with Crowley’s work reached its apogee, and he made contact with Crowley. The result this time was that Regardie was invited to leave the US and join Crowley in Paris as his (unpaid) secretary, travelling companion, and student.<sup>17</sup> Three years later—once Crowley could no longer afford to keep Regardie

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<sup>12</sup> Israel Regardie and Christopher S. Hyatt, “Regardie Pontificates: An Interview,” in *An Interview With Israel Regardie: His Final Thoughts and Views*, ed. Christopher S. Hyatt (Phoenix: Falcon Press, 1985), 19; Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 1; Pasi, “La notion,” 391; Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 432.

<sup>13</sup> Regardie and Hyatt, “Regardie Pontificates,” 9, 52–53.

<sup>14</sup> Israel Regardie, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” in *A Garden of Pomegranates: Skrying on the Tree of Life*, eds. and ann. Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabitha Cicero (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 1999), xxii: “I began the study of Qabalah at an early age. Two books I read have played unconsciously a prominent part in the writing of my own book. One of these was *Q.B.L. or the Bride’s Reception* by Frater Achad (Charles Stansfeld Jones), which I must have first read around 1926. The other was *An Introduction to the [Study of the] Tarot* by Paul Foster Case, published in the early 1920s.”

<sup>15</sup> Israel Regardie, “The Qabalah of Number and Meaning,” in *Foundations of Practical Magic: An Introduction to Qabalistic, Magical and Meditative Techniques* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1979), 113; Israel Regardie, vol. 1 of *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic*, 10 vols (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 1984), 30; Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 4; Nicholas Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult to Chiropractic Psychiatry: Francis Israel Regardie, D.C.,” *Chiropractic History* 27, no. 2 (2007): 35.

<sup>16</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 35; Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 432. Regardie received special permission, due to his age, to join the the Washington, DC, chapter of the SRIA in early 1926. He was initiated into the Neophyte in March of that year, and advanced to the subsequent grade of Zelator in June of the following year. His introduction to Crowley came through a friend who lent him a copy of *Book Four*, and was soon followed by Regardie’s acquisition of a full set of *The Equinox*, obtained directly from Karl Germer (1885–1962) after Regardie had made his initial contact with Crowley via correspondence.

<sup>17</sup> Tereshchenko, “Israel Regardie,” 71; Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 31–51; Pasi, “La notion,” 391; Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 423–43.

on—the pair parted on friendly terms, and, although they did enter into a rather vicious quarrel in 1937,<sup>18</sup> Regardie greatly valued his relationship with Crowley, remarking later in life: “Everything I am today, I owe to him.”<sup>19</sup>

Following his separation from Crowley, Regardie’s life became devoted to the pursuit of two subjects: psychology and the esoteric. In 1932, Regardie published a pair of books, *The Tree of Life* and *A Garden of Pomegranates*, both of which drew deeply from the wealth of HOGD material that Regardie had studied in *The Equinox* and with Crowley. These books at once proved polarizing within the wreckage of the now-defunct order.<sup>20</sup> In the following years, Dion Fortune took on the mantle of Regardie’s champion. Not only did she defend his work in print against detractors, but she petitioned for his acceptance into the Stella Matutina (SM), an offshoot of the HOGD to which she belonged.<sup>21</sup> With Fortune’s sponsorship, Regardie was initiated into the SM’s Bristol chapter in 1934, taking the magical motto: *Ad Majorem Adonai Gloriam*.<sup>22</sup> Although Regardie progressed rapidly through the order’s grades and greatly valued its teachings, he quickly became disillusioned with the generalized opposition to the practice of practical magic within the order.<sup>23</sup> The order was, he determined, “in a state of irreversible decay”<sup>24</sup> and had become “an ossified system” in need of vivification.<sup>25</sup> The only solution that would ensure the revitalization of the HOGD current, Regardie surmised, was to break his oaths of secrecy and make public the teachings and rituals of the order.<sup>26</sup> This he did between 1937 and 1940, with the publication of the four-volume compendium *The Golden Dawn* through Aries Press.

## 2.2 The Student of the Psyche

Although Regardie “had first begun to read about psychoanalysis in the writings of Freud and Jung as early as 1926,”<sup>27</sup> it was his tenure with the SM that allowed

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<sup>18</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 48–51; Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 494–95.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 494.

<sup>22</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 36; Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Tereshchenko, “Israel Regardie,” 74.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert, *Golden Dawn*, 79.

<sup>26</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 74.

<sup>27</sup> Israel Regardie, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” in *The Middle Pillar: The Balance Between Mind and Magic*, eds. and ann. Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabitha Cicero (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2010), xxx.

this interest to blossom into what would become a career. Although she had no formal qualifications, Fortune had long been practicing as a lay analyst when she and Regardie first met in 1932, and had in 1922 already published—as Violet Firth—*The Machinery of the Mind*, a collection of essays on Freudian psychology.<sup>28</sup> When Regardie joined the SM, it was Fortune who acted as the initial catalyst Regardie needed to begin taking the study of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1916) seriously.<sup>29</sup> Concurrently, Regardie became acquainted with another SM initiate, Eric Graham Howe (1897–1975),<sup>30</sup> a medical doctor and psychologist who was a noted mediator of Jungian psychology.<sup>31</sup> Regardie’s friendship with Howe further stoked the fires of his “interest in and involvement with the world of psychology.”<sup>32</sup> In early 1937, Regardie himself entered into a course of psychoanalytical therapy and study under “Dr. E.A. Clegg of Harley Street, and with Dr. J.L. Bendit, a Jungian of Wimpole Street in London.”<sup>33</sup> He also received private instruction in “relaxation techniques” from Oskar Köllerström (c. 1897–1977),<sup>34</sup> himself a student of the eminent psychoanalyst Georg Groddeck (1866–1934).<sup>35</sup> During this period, Regardie underwent analysis and received training in both Freudian and Jungian psychology, and went on to become a lay analyst himself.<sup>36</sup>

Later in 1937, Regardie returned to America from England to commence his formal higher education. Although he never graduated from high school, Regardie applied and was admitted to the Columbia Institute of Chiropractic (CIC) in New York City for the fall term in 1937.<sup>37</sup> At the time, Regardie

<sup>28</sup> Alan Richardson, *The Magical Life of Dion Fortune: Priestess of the 20th Century* (London: The Aquarian Press, 1991), 51–56; Selby, “Dion Fortune,” 132ff.

<sup>29</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 36.

<sup>30</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle: Open Court, 1976), 476.

<sup>32</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 60. It is worth noting that Howe was the uncle of Ellic Howe, the author of *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*.

<sup>33</sup> Regardie, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” *The Middle Pillar*, xxx. Outside of this and other brief notes made by Regardie mentioning the names of these two therapists, little is now known about their identities or practices.

<sup>34</sup> Israel Regardie, *Be Yourself: A Guide Book to the Art of Relaxation* (Cheltenham: Helios, 1965), 8.

<sup>35</sup> Kristine Stiles, ed., *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 164. Apart from his tutelage in psychoanalysis under Groddeck, Köllerström was deeply involved in both the Theosophical Society and the Liberal Catholic Church.

<sup>36</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 37. CIC was a private institution, established in 1919 by Frank E. Dean—who headed the school still in 1937, when Regardie was enrolled. CIC eventually merged with the Columbia College of Chiropractic in 1954, and again with the

identified himself as a writer and masseur, expressing an interest in studying chiropractic due to massage's lack of efficacy in treating patients.<sup>38</sup> He graduated from the CIC with a Doctor of Chiropractic degree in 1941 and stayed on at the college, teaching anatomy.<sup>39</sup> On 18 April 1942, in what he would later refer to as a “ghastly error,”<sup>40</sup> Regardie enlisted to serve in the United States Army. His enlistment records indicate that he entered the service as a Branch Immaterial Warrant Officer, with the rank of Private, and that his term was to last “for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months.”<sup>41</sup> During this time, Regardie was assigned to a medical department, where he provided training to new recruits on a variety of military subjects, including basic medical training (e.g., first aid).<sup>42</sup>

### 2.3 The Chiropractic Psychiatrist

Towards the war's end, Regardie was discharged, whereupon he returned to the United States and sought employment as a chiropractor. In 1944, he was initially hired by the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic (LACC) in Hollywood, California, where he taught chiropractic and “chiropractic psychiatry.”<sup>43</sup> As doctors of chiropractic are not medical doctors and do not have the ability to prescribe medicine, the use of the term “psychiatry” to describe Regardie's subject is “a misnomer, and might better have been referred to as the practice of psychology.”<sup>44</sup> However, the subject was regularly offered both at LACC and the Hollywood College of Chiropractic, where Regardie taught after leaving LACC in 1952.<sup>45</sup> Not content to simply teach, he continued to study

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Atlantic States Chiropractic Institute of Brooklyn in 1964. It was, in the end, renamed as the New York Chiropractic College, which still exists today.

<sup>38</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 37–8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice*, 110.

<sup>41</sup> Record for Francis Israel Regardie; Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938–1946 (Enlistment Records) [Electronic Record]; World War II Army Enlistment Records, created 6/1/2002–9/30/2002, documenting the period ca. 1938–1946; Record Group 64; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD [retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases at [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov), September 26, 2006]. As a note, while Popadiuk et al., in “From the Occult” (40), quote Regardie as giving his enlistment date as 28 April 1942, the enlistment record shows the date as 18 April.

<sup>42</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–43. Originally founded in 1911, LACC is known today as the Southern California University of Health Sciences.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

psychotherapy as well. Through his own Reichian analysis under Nandor Fodor (1895–1964),<sup>46</sup> as well as his correspondence with both Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) himself<sup>47</sup> and his daughter Eva Reich (1924–2008),<sup>48</sup> Regardie came to have a great appreciation for Reich’s idiosyncratic approach to somatic psychotherapy, which augmented Freudian theories of psychoanalysis with the practice of massage. Regardie said of this that “it was inevitable then that the vital biological approach of Wilhelm Reich should appeal to me.”<sup>49</sup> In Reich’s form of practice, Regardie believed that he had discovered “a bridge between conventional psychotherapy and occultism.”<sup>50</sup> However, as Marco Pasi notes, following his return to the United States, Regardie had largely disengaged from “les milieux occultistes” and published hardly anything on the subject of the esoteric until the 1960s.<sup>51</sup>

In 1947, while still employed with LACC, Regardie became a state licensed chiropractor and set up a private practice in Los Angeles,<sup>52</sup> specializing in Reichian techniques,<sup>53</sup> and practicing a form of Reichian analysis which combined Reich’s somatic psychotherapy with more conventional chiropractic as well as yoga.<sup>54</sup> Regardie maintained this practice until his retirement in 1981, when he moved from California to a resort community in Sedona, Arizona.<sup>55</sup> That same year, perhaps as a result of his pending retirement, Regardie became directly involved in the revival of the Golden Dawn. Though he had been publishing on the subject of the HOGD and its esoteric curriculum for decades at this point, his involvement in order work had been at a standstill since leaving the Bristol SM. However, Regardie slowly re-entered the Golden Dawn

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<sup>46</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 110.

<sup>47</sup> Regardie and Hyatt, “Regardie Pontificates,” 53–4. Regardie notes of Reich: “I discovered him around 1947. Again we don’t need to go into the how and why. I became enamoured of him almost immediately. Within a very short period of time I got myself involved in Reichian therapy, in which I stayed for four years. Reich and I had a number of personal communications, which must remain private. I explain why in my book on Reich to be published in 1984.” The book Regardie references here was never published.

<sup>48</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 37.

<sup>49</sup> Regardie, *Be Yourself*, 7–8.

<sup>50</sup> Regardie, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” *The Middle Pillar*, xxx.

<sup>51</sup> Pasi, “La notion,” 394. Regardie’s publishing output on strictly chiropractic topics was pronounced during the period between 1944 and 1965. For a bibliography of his chiropractic publications, see: Popadiuk et al., 45.

<sup>52</sup> Suster, *Crowley’s Apprentice*, 110.

<sup>53</sup> Pasi, “La notion,” 393.

<sup>54</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 48.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

circles and began individually tutoring select students during the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>56</sup> In 1980, Regardie began corresponding with Chic Cicero (b. 1936), who had established an autonomous Golden Dawn organization with his wife called the Isis-Urania Temple No. 18 in Columbus, Georgia, in 1978.<sup>57</sup> Then, after Cicero completed the construction of his temple's Vault of the Adepti in 1982, Regardie performed the ceremony to consecrate the vault, marking "the re-establishment of a valid initiating Second Order in the United States."<sup>58</sup> Regardie died on 10 March 1985 in Sedona of a heart attack,<sup>59</sup> leaving behind a tremendous literary legacy—which spanned both esoteric and chiropractic domains—and, thanks to his work during the last decade of his life, a revived incarnation of the HOGD.

### 3. The Psychologization of Esoteric Discourse

#### 3.1 Defining "Psychologization"

The question of the degree to which Regardie's esoteric discourse is psychologized necessitates a brief examination of just what is meant by the term "psychologization." At its core, any treatment of the psychologization of discourse on the esoteric is discussing a relationship between two categories of discourse: psychological and esoteric. There is a wide range of ways in which these two categories can become entangled; however, it is not within the scope of this paper to develop a typology that claims to exhaust all relational possibilities. Rather, the typology presented here should be seen as exhaustive only insofar as it identifies all of the relational strategies present in Regardie's work, as well as those found in secondary analyses of his work. The members of the typological schema are to be viewed as *modes* of interaction, dynamic discursive processes by which Regardie attempts to reconcile what are often seen—outside esoteric currents, at any rate—as mutually exclusive categories. Within this context, I have identified four different processes which constitute instances of psychologization as found or identified within Regardie's works:

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<sup>56</sup> Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice*, 150–51; Joseph Lisiewski, "Subtle is the Way: A Personal Portrait of Dr. Francis Israel Regardie," in *What You Should Know About the Golden Dawn* (Tempe: New Falcon, 2006), 199–203.

<sup>57</sup> Greer and Küntz, *The Chronology*, 50–51.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. At that time, the only operating orders with charters reaching back to the original HOGD were in New Zealand.

<sup>59</sup> Tereshchenko, "Israel Regardie," 75; Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice*, 178; Popadiuk et al., "From the Occult," 51; Greer and Küntz, *The Chronology*, 51.

Mode-One: Complementary Psychologization  
 Mode-Two: Terminological Psychologization  
 Mode-Three: Reductive Psychologization  
 Mode-Four: Idealistic Psychologization

Mode-one psychologization is the process by which psychological and esoteric discourses are viewed as separate but complementary domains. While this relational modality *does* begin with the position that psychological and esoteric discourses are distinct categories, it does not rise to the level of exclusivity we see in Stephen Jay Gould’s non-overlapping magisteria model of the relationship between religion and science, wherein the two are treated as wholly separate domains whose natures permit no intrusion of one into the other’s sphere of authority.<sup>60</sup> What we see with mode-one psychologization is something more akin to Ian Barbour’s dialogue model, which portrays science and religion’s relationship as being one of a constructive dialogue between two non-identical, but non-oppositional domains.<sup>61</sup> Alister E. McGrath interprets Barbour’s dialogue model of this relationship in terms of complementarity, and draws on examples of modern Catholic theologians who position science and religion as participating in a complementary relationship.<sup>62</sup> This notion of relational complementarity—where both domains are separate but one completes the other in some way—is the essence of mode-one psychologization. This mode of complementary psychologization, then, describes a situation where psychological and esoteric discourses are seen as separate categories, but as relating to one another in a way that is complementary—with one picking up where the other leaves off. As we shall see presently, this mode of psychologization is strongly exemplified in Regardie’s near-constant assertion

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<sup>60</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, “Nonoverlapping Magisteria,” *Natural History* 106 (March 1997): 16–22.

<sup>61</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 23.

<sup>62</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 48: “How might they complement each other? For John Paul II, the answer was clear: ‘Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish.’” For similar treatments of science and religion’s complementarity, see: Erwin N. Hiebert, “Modern Physics and Christian Faith,” in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 441–43; Mikael Stenmark, *How to Relate Religion and Science: A Multidimensional Model* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 38; Victor G. Cicirelli, “Can Science and Christian Religion Coexist: Compatibility or Conflict,” in *Religion and Psychology: New Research*, ed. Sylvan D. Ambrose (Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers, 2006), 259–60.

that psychotherapy serves as a necessary precursor to any esoteric practice.<sup>63</sup> Through mode-one's relational discourse, Regardie positions psychotherapeutic and esoteric techniques as complementary in nature, insofar as they both work towards achieving the same goal, but distinct in that they respectively represent different stages of the work's continuum.

Mode-two psychologization is the process whereby the metaphysical terminology of an esoteric discourse is replaced with psychological terminology, all while maintaining the meaning of the original esoteric concepts. Strikingly similar to Olav Hammer's identification of "terminological scientism" as a typical discursive strategy within Theosophy and the New Age,<sup>64</sup> this mode of psychologization has been identified by Aspren as "an increasing tendency to incorporate terminology and theories borrowed from the new psychological discourses so prevalent from the beginning of the 20th century, and to use these in the interpretation of occult theories and practices."<sup>65</sup> This is then a discursive strategy through which esotericists attempt to legitimize their beliefs and practices by adapting the terminologies of psychology. The intended effects of this process are nearly identical to those of terminological scientism, and can thus be considered a specific sub-modality of that broader discursive strategy. Terminological psychologization at once seeks to position esoteric discourse as being relevant to modernity by "demonstrating" the esoteric's agreement with science, and to subordinate science to the esoteric through the "revelation" that scientists are just now discovering truths known to esotericists for centuries.<sup>66</sup> What is important to keep in mind here is that within mode-two psychologization, unlike in mode-one, esoteric and psychological discourses are not seen as separate categories. Rather, their identity is maintained in a very particular way, which reinforces the inward metaphysical primacy of the esoteric alongside the outward terminological primacy of psychology.

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<sup>63</sup> For a characteristic example, see: Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 20–21.

<sup>64</sup> Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 206. Hammer defines terminological scientism as "the active positioning of one's own claims in relation to the manifestations of any academic scientific discipline, including, but not limited to, the use of technical devices, scientific terminology, mathematical calculations, theories, references and stylistic features — without, however, the use of the methods generally approved within the scientific community, and without subsequent social acceptance of the mainstream of the scientific community."

<sup>65</sup> Aspren, "Magic Naturalized," 141. See also: Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 180–81; Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 216.

<sup>66</sup> Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 328; Petersen, "We Demand Bedrock Knowledge," 89; Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 13.

The paramount example of this process in action is esotericists' utilization of Jung's terms "archetype" and "collective unconscious."<sup>67</sup> Through this process of terminological psychologization, we see "the 'gods' of traditional pantheons ... interpreted as archetypes, and reversely the archetypes of the collective unconscious are seen as powerful, numinous realities."<sup>68</sup> In this way, there is a dual process, whereby esoteric concepts are on the one hand couched in a psychological terminology, and on the other, psychological terms are imbued with an esoteric metaphysics.

Mode-three psychologization is very nearly the converse of mode-two. Whereas the latter essentially masks an esoteric metaphysical system with psychological terminology, the former reverses this vector—masking a psychological system with esoteric terminology. Reductive psychologization can be defined as the active utilization and reinterpretation of the results of the psychological reduction of esoteric discourse. The general idea driving reductionism is that the ability of one system to be reduced to something else, which is itself irreducible, casts that which is being reduced as "not fully real," with reality being characteristically irreducible.<sup>69</sup> In terms of esoteric doctrines, three distinct reductive processes can be identified: (1) epistemological reductionism, which posits that complex behavioral systems like religion follow naturally and can be deduced from, and thus reduced to, biological and physical laws; (2) definitional reductionism, which posits that the terminology of natural science is necessarily universal, and that the terminological apparatuses of religious and esoteric discourses can, by definition, be *translated* into scientific terms; and (3) ontological reductionism, which posits that religious phenomena have no existence of their own, and can be explained away as being "nothing but" combinations of "other types of things that are real."<sup>70</sup> Reductive theories of religion originated with the nineteenth-century anthropologists and sociologists of religion, such as Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), and Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and the particular process of psychological reduction is generally thought to owe its origin to Freud's interpretation of religious doctrines as social projections of internal psychological processes.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 172.

<sup>68</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 216.

<sup>69</sup> Richard H. Jones, *Reductionism: Analysis and the Fullness of Reality* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2000), 16; Ralph W. Hood Jr. et al., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009), 22.

<sup>70</sup> James M. Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (New York: Springer, 2009), 45–47.

<sup>71</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 224–25; Hood et al., *The Psychology of Religion*, 23; Jones,

Where the psychological reduction of religious or esoteric doctrines shifts direction and becomes the reductive psychologization of the same doctrines is in the reinterpretation of psychological reductive theories of esoteric discourse by esotericists. The paramount example of this reinterpretative process is Crowley's essay "The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic" (1903), wherein he poses the question as to "the cause of my illusion of seeing a spirit in the triangle of Art," and answers himself: "That cause lies in your brain."<sup>72</sup> In this way, we see Crowley begin with a psychologically reduced interpretation of the magical practice of evocation, and then reinterpret this as something to be applied to magical practice—acting *as a practicing magician* rather than as a psychologist. For, although the magical practice is reduced to psychological terms, Crowley still advocates for the performance of the ritual itself, rather than utilizing the psychological reduction as a means to advocate for conventional psychotherapy in ritual's stead.

Mode-four psychologization differs greatly from modes-two and -three in that, while it does maintain an identity between psychological and esoteric discourses, its *modus operandi* is neither reductive nor strictly terminological in nature. It is the most complex of the modes examined here. This psychologizing mode, like its terminological and reductive cousins, maintains an identity between psychological and esoteric discourses. However, this identity is not positioned in a way that subordinates one category to the other. Rather, idealistic psychologization comes closest to Hanegraaff's definition of the process as being bidirectional, whereby the esoteric is psychologized at the same time as psychology is esotericized. He notes that since "the subject is conceived as an objective reality and an object as a subjective experience," this mode of psychologization "is not correctly described in terms of objective realities versus subjective realities."<sup>73</sup> Although idealistic psychologization *does* indeed represent a fundamentally subjectivized reinterpretation of esoteric discourse, it does not do so in a reductive manner, as does mode-three. Mode-four's subjectivization does not proceed by reducing formerly objective esoteric phenomena to a wholly private psyche. On the contrary, the psychologized vista *is* seen as public in the sense that it is not ontologically contained within

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*Reductionism*, 232.

<sup>72</sup> Aleister Crowley, "The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic," in *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King, Clavicula Salomonis Regis*, trans. Samuel Liddell Mathers and ed. Aleister Crowley (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1997), 16. For more on Crowley's psychologization of magic, see: Aspren, "Magic Naturalized," 142, 152, 156–59, 163; Pasi, "Varieties of Magical Experience," 53–55, 69–70.

<sup>73</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 196–97.

a *single* esotericist's psyche, but is rather seen as a "separate but connected" locus accessible to all by means of the application of esoteric praxis. In this way, although esoteric discourse is radically reinterpreted in psychological terms, idealistic psychologization is not a simple reduction of the esoteric to psychology, but is rather grounded in a valuation of the psyche itself as the root of sacrality.<sup>74</sup>

Through mode-four psychologization, the esotericist reinterprets the idea of sacrality in such a way that its locus is not conceived of as a god who is separate from the individual, but rather the individual psyche itself.<sup>75</sup> For this reason, it appears that psychologized strains of esoteric discourse "tend to dislike references to a personal creator-God,"<sup>76</sup> favoring instead the notion of divinity as something more akin to a "state of consciousness."<sup>77</sup> This mode of psychologization allows esotericists to at once "talk about God while really meaning their own psyche, and about their own psyche while really meaning the divine."<sup>78</sup> What is important to remember, however, about esoteric practice within this idealistic psychologization is that such experiences are not seen by practitioners as a retreat into a private interior world where the truths gleaned are *only* subjective.<sup>79</sup> On the contrary, the psychologized divine is treated as something objectively real, but whose reality can only be accessed and understood through esoteric practices of "elevating" or "exalting" individual consciousness such that it comes to reach the divine locus that is the psyche.

The relocation of esoteric phenomena to a "separate but connected" psychic vista that characterizes mode-four's psychologization has been identified by Asprem—drawing at once on Tanya Luhrmann and Hanegraaff—as arising out of the cognitive dissonance felt by esotericists as their beliefs and practices come into disjunctive contact with modern rationalism and scientific naturalism.<sup>80</sup> This is to say that the esotericist who, for example, believes in the existence of angels and demons on the one hand, yet in the descriptive efficacy of science on the other, finds himself divided. This mode of psychologization allows for the alleviation of this cognitive dissonance by means of suspending their "disbelief by confining magic to a place outside the empirical realm of

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<sup>74</sup> Hanegraaff, "The New Age Movement," 378.

<sup>75</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 216, 245–46; von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 144.

<sup>76</sup> Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived," 366.

<sup>77</sup> Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 513.

<sup>79</sup> Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Asprem, "Magic Naturalized," 141–42.

verification, evidence and rational criticism.”<sup>81</sup> The specific tool used to effect this doxic suspension is the “magical plane,” which is described as separate from but connected to the mundane world.<sup>82</sup> According to Hanegraaff, the magical plane functions to rationalize magic by positing that it operates “on a different level of reality,” in which “processes of secularisation and disenchantment in the everyday world simply *have no bearing* ... and hence do not have to affect the reality of magic.”<sup>83</sup> Luhrmann describes this idea of the separate-but-connected magical plane as having been given “particular force” by “the advent of psychoanalysis.”<sup>84</sup> The connections drawn between the magical plane of the esotericists and the unconscious mental realms of the psychoanalysts served to legitimize the construct in the eyes of esotericists—to imbue it with the scientific credibility desperately craved by so many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practitioners. In Luhrmann’s analysis, apart from its separateness, the defining feature of the magical plane is the fact that it is either presented as being composed of a different substance or as operating under different rules than the mundane plane of the everyday world.<sup>85</sup> The overall effect and function of this differentiation is “to *insulate* magical practice from rational critique, thereby legitimising it.”<sup>86</sup> However, this insulation from “rational” criticism should not be misconstrued as implying that esoteric truths were conceived as being non-demonstrable. What we see instead is a particular type of empiricism whereby esoteric phenomena are viewed as being non-testable on the “material plane,” but as fully testable on the “magical plane.” A prime example of this mode of psychologization can be seen in Regardie’s statement that magical techniques of visualization and skrying on the magical planes “are seen to be technical methods of exalting the individual consciousness until it comes to a complete realisation of its own divine root.”<sup>87</sup>

The four psychologizing modalities now having been described, the question of the modes’ relations to one another arises. As I have intimated,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>82</sup> Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 277; Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived,” 370; Asprem, “Magic Naturalized,” 141–42.

<sup>83</sup> Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived,” 370 (emphasis in original).

<sup>84</sup> Luhrmann, *Persuasions*, 277.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 274, 280.

<sup>86</sup> Asprem, “Magic Naturalized,” 141–42 (emphasis in original).

<sup>87</sup> Israel Regardie, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Dawn: An Account of the Teachings, Rites and Ceremonies of the Golden Dawn*, ed. Israel Regardie, 4 vols. (Chicago: The Aries Press, 1937–1940), 29.

and as will be demonstrated presently, Regardie's psychologization of esoteric discourse is not limited to *one* of these modalities—or even to utilizing one *at a time*. Rather, what we see throughout his work is a tendency to make use of two or more modes of psychologization within the same book or essay. How, then, do these modalities relate to one another? It would appear at the outset that certain modes would exclude one another, rendering any attempt to engage in all four *at once* to be logically inconsistent. Mode-one would seem to be excluded by the other three modes, as it is the only one considered here that insists on treating psychological and esoteric discourses as separate categories, while the others maintain some type of identification. Similarly, there appears to be a great logical disjunction between modes-two and -three, as each category is nearly the exact converse of the other. Finally, mode-four's particular method of identifying psychology and the esoteric would put it at odds with all three of the other modalities. These disjunctions being the case, what does it mean for a single individual to simultaneously engage in more than one mode of psychologization? Logically, this would be permissible by redefining our categories *P* (psychological discourse) and *E* (esoteric discourse) from being singular entities to constellations of related entities (i.e., *P* becomes  $P_1, P_2, \dots$ ; and *E* becomes  $E_1, E_2, \dots$ ). In this way, in order to maintain consistency, any combination of mode-one alongside other modes would need to distinguish why *some* aspects of these categories remain separate, while others are identified (i.e., rather than broadly identifying or distinguishing *P* and *E*,  $P_1$  could be identified with  $E_1$  while  $P_2$  is distinguished from  $E_2$ ). Now, if the individual were to, within a single work, identify  $E_1$  with  $P_1$  via mode-two (or mode-three or -four) and at the same time distinguish  $E_1$  from  $P_1$  via mode-one, then we would arrive at a clear logical impasse. As such, any challenges regarding the internal logic of Regardie's multimodal psychologization of esoteric discourse must be careful to account for the specific esoteric phenomena being psychologized at the time.

### 3.2 Origins of the Psychologizing Trend

The cultural context within which the psychologization processes emerged is denoted by Hanegraaff as “secularization,” which in turn leads to the related cultural process of “disenchantment.”<sup>88</sup> As he defines it, secularization is “the totality of historical developments in modern western society” that has resulted in Christianity's demotion from being the foundational centre of discursive hegemony in the West, reducing it “to merely one among a

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<sup>88</sup> Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived,” 358–60.

plurality of institutions within the context of a culture which is itself no longer grounded in a religious system of symbols.”<sup>89</sup> Disenchantment, then, is the resulting set of circumstances that arise from secularization, and is defined by Hanegraaff as “the social pressure exerted upon human beings to deny the spontaneous tendency of participation, by accepting the claims of a culturally established ideology according to which instrumental causality amounts to a worldview capable in principle of rationally explaining all aspects of reality.”<sup>90</sup> Within the specific discussion of the psychologization of modern magic, Hanegraaff contends that, owing to the fact of secularization, “although the Golden Dawn-magic of the 20th century is rooted in the hermetic and kabbalistic currents which flourished in the Renaissance ... there yawns a gulf between Renaissance *magia naturalis* and the occultist magic of today,” such that modern magical practitioners “actually appear to have serious trouble understanding the original meaning of the worldview” from which their own practices emerged.<sup>91</sup> The consequence of this process of psychologization is that, although this “is a survival of magic in a disenchanted world ... *this will no longer be the same magic* that could be found in periods prior to the process of disenchantment. It will be a disenchanted magic.”<sup>92</sup> Within the broader context of the study of religion, particularly sociological approaches, both the secularization and disenchantment theses have been interpreted and applied in widely diverging ways.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, since Hanegraaff’s original formulation of the psychologization thesis, there has been a good deal of debate among scholars of Western esoteric currents regarding both the broader idea of secularization and the particular applicability of the disenchantment thesis to modern esoteric currents.<sup>94</sup> In both cases, the debates in question are outside

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 358–59.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 366 (emphasis in original).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 359–60 (emphasis in original).

<sup>93</sup> For overviews of the origin and reception of both the secularization and disenchantment theses, see: William H. Swatos Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, “Secularization Theory: The Course of a Concept,” *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 209–28; Michael Saler, “Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review,” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 692–716.

<sup>94</sup> For major discussions after Hanegraaff, see: Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 10–11; Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 29–55; Christopher Partridge, vol. 1 of *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark International, 2004–5), 8–15, 40–44, 67–70; von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge*, 11; Kocku von Stuckrad, “Discursive Transfers and Reconfigurations: Tracing the Religious and the Esoteric in Secular Culture,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, 228, 233; Kennet Granholm, “The

the scope of this paper to address, as it is Hanegraaff's original position that particularly informs the notion of psychologization.

Before moving on to Regardie, the nature of the complex relationship that exists between psychological and esoteric discourses must be addressed. Although a full examination of this relationship's nature is well beyond this paper's scope, a brief explanation will prove useful in understanding Regardie's work. According to the eminent historian of psychology Henri Ellenberger, the safest general characterization of modern psychology is that there exists "an uninterrupted continuity . . . between exorcism and magnetism, magnetism and hypnotism, and hypnotism and modern dynamic schools."<sup>95</sup> Ellenberger sees the emergence of early modern psychology as being birthed through "the antagonism and the interplay between the Enlightenment and Romanticism."<sup>96</sup> The major figures involved in this dynamic interrelationship between pre-Enlightenment esoteric currents and the burgeoning schools of psychology include Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815),<sup>97</sup> Armand-Marie-Jacques de Chastenet Marquis de Puységur (1751–1825),<sup>98</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854),<sup>99</sup> Freud,<sup>100</sup> Jung,<sup>101</sup> and Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957).<sup>102</sup>

Secular, the Post-Secular and the Esoteric in the Public-Sphere," in *Contemporary Esotericism*, 309–29; Egil Asprem, "The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939," (PhD diss., Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2013).

<sup>95</sup> Henri E. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 48.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 198–99.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 58–66; Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith*, 67–71; Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 14.

<sup>98</sup> Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 112.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–78, 159, 202–3; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 34–35; Hanegraaff, "Magnetic Gnosis," 127; S.J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–2, 21–23, 44–45, 107; Matt Ffytche, *The Foundations of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 106, 112.

<sup>100</sup> Ffytche, *The Foundations of the Unconscious*, 17, 71–72, 219; Webb, *The Occult Establishment*, 359, 364–65, 371–78; Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 218, 542, 887–88; Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 143; Odo Marquard, *Transzendentaler Idealismus, romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse* (Köln, Germany: Verlag für Philosophie J. Dinter, 1987), 163.

<sup>101</sup> Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 487, 500–501; Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 208, 223, 728–30; Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 41–42, 48, 69, 169, 171; Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung* (New York: Random House, 1997), 30–32, 126–27, 131; Ffytche, *The Foundations of the Unconscious*, 223.

<sup>102</sup> Webb, *The Occult Establishment*, 472; Myron Sharaf, *Fury on Earth: A Biography of Wilhelm Reich* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 55, 235; William Edward Mann, *Orgone, Reich, and Eros: Wilhelm Reich's Theory of Life Energy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 91–93;

In general, it appears that the connections between post-Enlightenment depth psychology and pre-Enlightenment esoteric currents are such that the former “basically continues the esoteric project by other means.”<sup>103</sup> This being the case, we must keep in mind that characterizations of modern esoteric currents as being psychologized depend on a psychology that is itself greatly dependent prior esoteric currents—the relationship between the two being bidirectionally formative. To speak of modern esoteric discourse being “psychologized” in some sense refers to post-Enlightenment esoteric currents being interpreted in light of a system of thought (i.e., psychology) that is itself the product of pre-Enlightenment esoteric currents, and is thus something of *an esoteric current*—albeit one of a different sort than the openly esoteric currents with which it is being related.

### 3.3 Regardie as a Paragon of the Psychologization Process

In his discussion of the psychologization of modern magic, Hanegraaff singles out Regardie as a paragon of the psychologization process. He sees Regardie’s Middle Pillar ritual as epitomizing “the basic approach to ‘magic’ in modern occultism, which rests essentially on training the imagination by means of visualisation techniques.”<sup>104</sup> In Regardie’s work, Hanegraaff views magical practice as having been transformed “essentially into a series of psychological techniques for ‘exalting the individual consciousness,’ involving meditational practices and, most importantly, visualisation.”<sup>105</sup> He characterizes Regardie’s psychologized interpretations of the HOGD’s and SM’s rituals as occurring within “a perspective grounded in Freudian psychoanalysis.”<sup>106</sup> For Hanegraaff, this focus on constructive visualization—as opposed to the strictly passive reception of images—is the characteristic attitude of modern psychologization.<sup>107</sup> In his analysis, Regardie’s “magical techniques are

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T.E. Weckowicz and H.P. Liebel-Weckowicz, *A History of Great Ideas in Abnormal Psychology* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1990), 265.

<sup>103</sup> Von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 146.

<sup>104</sup> Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived,” 369. The Middle Pillar ritual can be found in: Regardie, vol. 1 of *The Golden Dawn*, 179–82.

<sup>105</sup> Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived,” 368. Hanegraaff is here quoting, Regardie, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Dawn*, 29. Regardie states in this passage that magic “is a poetic or dramatic convention,” and that “from a purely psychological point of view” it can be seen as “technical methods of exalting the individual consciousness until it comes to a complete realisation of its own divine root.”

<sup>106</sup> Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 137.

<sup>107</sup> For a counter-argument, demonstrating the historical continuity between the visualization practices of contemporary esoteric currents with their antique, medieval, and Renaissance

psychological techniques intended to develop a mystical consciousness,” which is to say that they represent a psychologically subjectivized reformulation of the pre-modern esoteric worldview, which “was based upon the belief in a personal God,” further demonstrating Hanegraaff’s characterization of Regardie’s work as participating in the idealist mode of psychologization.<sup>108</sup> Hanegraaff is here following in Luhrmann’s footsteps. In her treatment of the magical plane, she puts Regardie forth as one who “at times . . . seems to regard magic as no more than a system of psychology,” noting that Regardie’s presentation of magic often centers on the conscious manipulation of “powerful symbols to gain direct access to his unconscious feelings.”<sup>109</sup> This analysis also seems to characterize Regardie’s magic as exemplifying mode-four psychologization.

Although hesitant to extrapolate Regardie’s positions as being representative of the whole of modern esoteric discourse, Asprem does “believe that there is much merit in describing Regardie’s own take on ritual magic as ‘psychologized.’”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Asprem is somewhat critical of Hanegraaff’s general characteristic of modern esoteric discourse as psychologized, insofar as his sample set (i.e., Regardie’s writings, Luhrmann’s anthropological study of a single group) is insufficiently broad to warrant such a sweeping generalization.<sup>111</sup> As Asprem does not expand on what he precisely means in describing Regardie’s magic as psychologized, we are somewhat less than certain as to whether he is concurring with Hanegraaff’s characterization, and to which mode of psychologization he refers. However, the fact that he is referencing Regardie’s psychologizing of magic within the context of Hanegraaff’s argument leads one towards that assumption. Selby’s statement that Regardie “was one of the first authors seriously attempting to integrate psychology and magic” is similarly vague.<sup>112</sup> We are left in the dark as to what exactly Selby means by the “integration” of psychology and magic, although it is clear that—whatever this process is—Regardie is seen as a paragon of the psychologization process.

A far more in-depth discussion of Regardie’s psychologization is given by Pasi. He begins his treatment of Regardie’s psychologization by discussing the continuum leading from Blavatsky’s notion of the Ascended Masters

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precursors, see: Christopher A. Plaisance, “Magic Made Modern? Re-evaluating the Novelty of the Golden Dawn’s Magic,” *Correspondences: Online Journal for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism* 2, no. 2 (2014): 159–87.

<sup>108</sup> Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived,” 366.

<sup>109</sup> Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*, 276.

<sup>110</sup> Asprem, *Arguing With Angels*, 77.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 76–77.

<sup>112</sup> Selby, “Dion Fortune,” 199.

as “des êtres incarnés” (incarnated beings) to the more fluid and gradually psychologized positions of Fortune and Crowley, seeing Regardie as having crossed “le dernier seuil” (the final threshold) to arrive at “une interprétation complètement psychologique de la magie” (a completely psychological interpretation of magic).<sup>113</sup> Pasi notes that, despite Fortune’s training as a lay analyst, Regardie tends to “‘subjectiviser’ et ‘psychologiser’ la pratique magique” (“subjectivize” and “psychologize” the practice of magic) in a far more radical way than does Fortune, in whose system “la communication avec des entités extérieures et objectives reste fondamentale” (the communication with external and objective entities remains fundamental).<sup>114</sup> For Pasi, then, Regardie’s psychologization is principally mode-four, and is fundamentally tied to the shift from objectivity to subjectivity in the focus of modern esoteric practice. In general, Pasi notes that for Regardie, “there seems to be an almost perfect equation between psychology and magic,”<sup>115</sup> which results in “une conception totalement individualiste et sécularisée de la magie” (a totally individualistic and secular conception of magic) whose ultimate aim is “le développement ‘intégral’ de sa propre personnalité” (the “integral” development of his own personality).<sup>116</sup>

As a case in point of this wholly subjectivized psychologization, Pasi examines Regardie’s treatment of the Holy Guardian Angel (HGA). He notes that within Crowley’s system, even though he had begun to introduce “des interprétations d’ordre psychologique, voire physiologique, au sujet des entités” (psychological or physiological interpretations of [supernatural] entities), he stuck fast to the position that certain beings—such as the HGA—“ne pouvaient pas être ramenées à la psyché du magicien” (could not be reduced to the psyche of the magician).<sup>117</sup> For Regardie, the primary goal of magic is to enter into a relationship with one’s HGA, an objective that Pasi sees Regardie as identifying with the psychological process of “l’ouverture de la conscience vers le ‘Soi Supérieur’” (the opening of consciousness to the “Higher Self”).<sup>118</sup> The centralization of this process, which is essentially psychological self-knowledge draped in a facade of religious terminology, at once participates in mode-two and mode-four psychologization. This reformulation of magical

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<sup>113</sup> Pasi, “La notion,” 387–88.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>115</sup> Pasi, “Varieties of Magical Experience,” 76.

<sup>116</sup> Pasi, “La notion,” 397.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

practice is, for Pasi, a radical innovation, whereby magical practice has ceased to function as a means through which the magician either communicates with “des entités désincarnées” (disincarnate entities) or attempts to “manipuler la réalité extérieure et objective par le biais de forces ou qualités impersonnelles” (manipulate external and objective reality through impersonal forces or qualities), but has rather become “une technique pour interagir avec une partie (‘supérieure’ ou ‘inconsciente,’ peu importe) de soi-même” (a technique for interacting with a portion [“higher” or “unconscious,” it does not matter] of oneself).<sup>119</sup> This shift from a strictly external and objective conception of magic to a more internal and subjective view is, Pasi tells us, “un signe, certainement, de l’impact de la culture moderne (ou, si l’on préfère, de la sécularisation) sur les théories de la magie” (a sign, surely, of the impact of modern culture [or, if you prefer, secularization] on theories of magic).<sup>120</sup> This final characterization of Pasi’s seems to strongly tend towards mode-four psychologization.

#### 4. Psychology in Regardie’s Esoteric Corpus

##### 4.1 Psychological and Esoteric Discourses

The requisite theoretical background now having been developed, we may proceed with a documentary analysis of Regardie’s esoteric corpus, with the overriding goals being to illuminate the ways in which he relates psychological to esoteric discourses and to determine what modes of psychologization appear in his works. In working towards this understanding, the natural starting point is the collection of explicit statements made by Regardie as to the nature of this relationship. Although his earliest works, *A Garden of Pomegranates* and *The Tree of Life*, certainly contain a mixture of psychological and esoteric elements, it is in *My Rosicrucian Adventure* (1936) that we see the first explicit statement.<sup>121</sup> Here, Regardie directly quotes Jung’s commentary on Richard Wilhelm’s (1873–1930) edition of the Chinese alchemical text *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, noting that “magical practices are ... the projections of psychic events which, in cases like these, exert a counter influence on the soul, and act like a kind of enchantment of one’s own personality.”<sup>122</sup> This is a

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Israel Regardie, *What You Should Know About the Golden Dawn* (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 2006), 67. The book was originally titled *My Rosicrucian Adventure*; subsequent reprintings were retitled as *What You Should Know About the Golden Dawn*.

<sup>122</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, “Commentary,” in *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*,

clear statement of the mode-three reduction of magical processes to psychic processes, which is characteristic of Regardie's reliance on Crowley's essay "The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic."<sup>123</sup>

Two years later, with the publication of *The Middle Pillar* (1938), we see Regardie moving away from this reductive identification to see "analytical psychology as the spouse of the ancient system of magic,"<sup>124</sup> with "broad divisions of certain principles common to both."<sup>125</sup> This, then, is a statement of a collaborative relationship, where both magic and psychology address the same fundamental issues from different angles. This sense is maintained in Regardie's other 1938 publication, *The Philosopher's Stone*, where he makes use of the same quotation from Jung's commentary above, but this time frames it with a comment noting that "the psychological approach borders very closely on the magical one," and that magic's objective is "to bring the student into an awareness of his own divine nature," which is essentially "to effect psychological integration."<sup>126</sup> Thus, although we see Regardie making something of a differentiation between psychological and esoteric discourses here, they are both positioned as working towards the same goal, which is itself bound up with the fourth mode of psychologization, wherein divine illumination and psychological holism are one and the same.

After Regardie's break from publishing on esoteric topics following his enlistment in the army, we see him return to the topic with his 1968 book *Roll Away the Stone*. Here, Regardie returns to his previous reliance on Crowley's early reductive psychologization, plainly stating that "magic is the name for a primitive psychological system" whose goal is "the transcendental experience" of illumination, which he identifies with Jung's notion of individuation.<sup>127</sup> Two years later, in his 1970 introduction to *The Middle Pillar's* second edition, Regardie speaks of a "correlation of the practice of magic to modern psychotherapy," noting that the difference is terminological rather than conceptual, which

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trans. Richard Wilhelm (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1931), 100.

<sup>123</sup> Crowley, "The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic," 15–19.

<sup>124</sup> Israel Regardie, *The Middle Pillar: The Balance Between Mind and Magic*, eds. and ann. Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabitha Cicero (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2010), 20.

<sup>125</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 25.

<sup>126</sup> Israel Regardie, *The Philosopher's Stone: A Modern Comparative Approach to Alchemy from the Psychological and Magical Points of View* (Saint Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1970), 150–51.

<sup>127</sup> Israel Regardie, "Roll Away the Stone," in *Roll Away the Stone: An Introduction to Aleister Crowley's Essays on the Psychology of Hashish, With the Complete Text of the Herb Dangerous*, ed. Israel Regardie (Saint Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1968), 9.

seems to be a clear statement of mode-two psychologization.<sup>128</sup> The same year, in his psychological interpretation of Crowley, *The Eye in the Triangle*, Regardie emphasizes the same identity between the two. In one passage, he claims that both Reich's and Crowley's techniques were essentially the same, with Reich's "vegeto- and orgone therapy which levelled its attacks on the neurotic armoring" and Crowley's "yoga and magical processes" both working towards the unified goal of "gaining access to a different level of psychic functioning."<sup>129</sup> Similarly, he makes a clear terminological identification between "the Jungian concept of creative fantasy" and the HOGD practice of "skrying in the spirit vision," seeing "little difference" between the two and stating that they are "practically identical" practices—which seems to indicate a terminological psychologization of magic.<sup>130</sup>

In one of his last works, *The Art and Meaning of Magic* (1971), Regardie maintains his previously held position that "magic is a series of psychological techniques" that allow us to "understand ourselves more completely" and to "more fully express that inner self in every-day activities."<sup>131</sup> This would, at first, appear to be a return to his Crowley-influenced reductive phase, wherein magical techniques were seen as something akin to methods of hypnotic autosuggestion. However, he is quick to note his "emphatic disagreement" with this idea that the efficacy of a magical talisman is "due entirely to suggestion," which seems to indicate an instance of mode-four psychologization.<sup>132</sup> In the last year of his life, Regardie came out rather strongly against the efficacy of Jungian practice, calling active imagination "plain mental masturbation"—a characterization that plainly calls into question his previous statements as to active imagination's identity with certain magical practices.<sup>133</sup> During this final interview, however, Regardie still speaks highly of Jung's ideas, noting the degree to which it shaped his personal philosophy and terminology, saying that Jungian psychology "still has a place in my life, but as a therapy I think it's utterly useless."<sup>134</sup> Thus, we see a continuation in his late period: the mode-four dual process of the psychologization of magic going hand in hand with the enchanting of psychology. He would have us see the two categories as either

<sup>128</sup> Regardie, "Introduction to the Second Edition," in *The Middle Pillar*, xxix.

<sup>129</sup> Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 1982), 314.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>131</sup> Israel Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic* (Toddington: Helios Book Service, 1971), 44.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–24.

<sup>133</sup> Regardie and Hyatt, "Regardie Pontificates," 24.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

identical or deeply related, but seeks to strike such a balance so as to neither reduce magical processes to psychological processes like simple suggestion (mode-three), nor reduce psychological techniques to mere terminological blinds for interactions between an ontologically separate magician and legions of angels and demons (mode-two). However, as we have seen already, Regardie *did* clearly espouse both mode-two and mode-three psychologization, vacillating between the latter three modes in his explicit statements on the entangled relationship between esoteric and psychological discourses.

#### 4.2 Mode-One: Complementary Psychologization

We have now examined two categories of statements found within Regardie's esoteric corpus that deal with his opinions on the nature of the relationship between psychological and esoteric discourses. This briefest of overviews of his explicit statements of this entanglement has demonstrated occurrences of modes-two, -three, and -four psychologization. There are still, however, hundreds of other disparate attestations of psychologization to be found in Regardie's writings. The proceeding sections 4.2–4.5 will identify and discuss specific examples of each of the four modes of psychologization culled from the corpus.

One of the most unique and consistent ways in which Regardie expressed his views on the relationship between esoteric and psychological discourses was in his continued insistence that some form of psychotherapy functioned as an essential precursor to the practice of magic—mode-one psychologization. Of all the modes under discussion here, mode-one is singular in that none of the secondary analyses of Regardie identify this process at work. As opposed to the patterns of change we saw in the previous section, Regardie's opinion on this matter remained fixed throughout his entire magical career. It is in 1938, in *The Middle Pillar*, that Regardie first proposes this idea, and the fact that this came about less than a year after he began undergoing analysis with Bendit and Clegg leads us to think that there is a relationship between the two.<sup>135</sup> However, we cannot strictly deduce whether Regardie's decision to enter analysis formed or was formed by this position. Initially, Regardie positions therapy as “the logical precursor” that should “comprise definitely the first stage” of the practice of or attainment in magic, going so far as to say that for esoteric schools to remain viable, they need to create departments of—specifically analytical—psychology.<sup>136</sup> He viewed the psyche of the student

<sup>135</sup> Popadiuk et al., “From the Occult,” 37.

<sup>136</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 20–21. See also: Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 40, 98.

as being “hopelessly clogged with infantile and adolescent predilections,”<sup>137</sup> and believed that any failure to recognize and deal with these foundational psychological issues would open the student up to much deeper neuroses and nervous breakdowns.<sup>138</sup> In this way, Regardie saw psychoanalysis as a requisite first step which any would-be magician need take before entering into a proper course of esoteric studies.

Moving forward to Regardie’s 1968 re-emergence into esoteric publishing, we see that he has adjusted somewhat his opinion as to the place of psychotherapy within a magical curriculum, but that his position has not fundamentally changed. In *Roll Away the Stone*, we see him reassert his belief that analysis should “precede practical experiments” with magic.<sup>139</sup> Here, however, we do see two subtle shifts in Regardie’s position. First, rather than specifically endorsing Jungian analysis, as he appears to have done in 1938, he explicitly notes that it “makes little difference” whether the student undergoes Freudian, Jungian, or Reichian analysis.<sup>140</sup> Second, although he does note the use of analysis as a protective measure in removing psychotics and neurotics from esoteric schools, he here notes its importance in bringing the student in touch with hitherto unknown aspects of himself.<sup>141</sup> The same year, we see Regardie elsewhere espouse an almost identical position in his introduction to *The Golden Dawn*, noting that the choice of therapeutic styles “is of small consequence” compared to the preparation and aid it provides to the student of magic.<sup>142</sup> The essential point of the preparative nature of psychotherapy in relation to magical practice is again reinforced two years later, in *The Eye in the Triangle*, where Regardie clearly notes that “there must be no confusion between the two,” emphasizing that while therapy makes an excellent *precursor* to esoteric practice, the two are not identical.<sup>143</sup> This emphatic point serves to strongly reinforce the nature of mode-one psychologization as differentiating psychological and esoteric discourses in a non-oppositional, collaborative manner.

The last decade of his life saw Regardie categorically emphasizing the

<sup>137</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 21.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>139</sup> Regardie, “Roll Away the Stone,” 61.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Israel Regardie, “Introduction to the Second Edition: Volume I,” in *The Golden Dawn: A Complete Course in Practical Ceremonial Magic*, ed. Israel Regardie (Saint Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1998), 5.

<sup>143</sup> Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle*, 432.

preparative nature of psychology within an esoteric curriculum in a largely similar way to his work in earlier decades, but, again, with a few small adjustments and developments that differentiate it from his earlier opinions. During the course of his 1980 essay on the HGA, Regardie makes the analogy that a student attempting to invoke his HGA without having first undergone analysis is like “pouring fine wine into an unwashed bottle,” in that any good result will tend to be tainted and distorted by unresolved neuroses and psychoses.<sup>144</sup> In his final interview with his colleague Christopher S. Hyatt (1943–2008), he is quite firm in reinforcing his tenet that “anyone getting into the Golden Dawn ... MUST precede any practical work with some psychotherapy,”<sup>145</sup> as it is “the only valid requirement for a sane occultism.”<sup>146</sup> He again makes it perfectly clear that we are not to identify psychotherapy *with* magical practice, but that it is a prerequisite.<sup>147</sup> Similar to what we see from his middle period as well, late period Regardie strongly emphasizes the self-knowledge and freedom from delusion and phantasy that comes from honest analysis.<sup>148</sup> Thus, we see that over the course of nearly fifty years, Regardie maintained the general position that while psychoanalysis is a distinct operation from magical experimentation, it forms a necessary precursor to the latter. And although we see small shifts in those aspects of therapy and particular therapies Regardie values, there is a remarkable consistency in this position throughout the whole of his esoteric corpus. It is curious that while we have seen previously that Regardie concurrently argued for some form of identity between psychological and esoteric discourses—varying between modes-two, -three, and -four—in this specific doctrine, he assiduously denied an identity between analysis and magical practice. This latter position is, for our purposes, quite interesting in that it appears that Regardie was engaged in parallel modes of psychologization, and that he did not appear to view his continued utilization of mode-one as disjunctive with his varied uses of the further three modes.

#### 4.3 Mode-Two: Terminological Psychologization

Continuing with mode-two psychologization, we find it to be a continual trend present in a great deal of Regardie’s esoteric writings. He more or less

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<sup>144</sup> Israel Regardie, *Ceremonial Magic: A Guide to the Mechanisms of Ritual* (Wellinborough: The Aquarian Press, 1980), 73.

<sup>145</sup> Regardie and Hyatt, “Regardie Pontificates,” 41.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 111.

continually propounded the position that the relationship between esoteric and psychological discourses was such that nearly all (if not all) of the former's concepts could be expressed using the latter's terminological apparatus. In his 1946 book on Christian Science, *The Romance of Metaphysics* (later retitled *The Teachers of Fulfillment*), Regardie notes his belief that "the average person is not at all interested in religious terminology, which is a medieval barbarity."<sup>149</sup> Rather, he proposes that religions must adapt their language, not their ideas, to better comport with that of modern science if they wish to remain relevant. Similarly, in one of his final books, *Healing Energy, Prayer and Relaxation* (1982), Regardie tells us that the utilization of "psychological rather than metaphysical" terminology may allow for the conference "of scientific and popular recognition on metaphysics."<sup>150</sup> This is the very definition of terminological psychologization in its most consciously directed form.

Apart from these explicit statements of Regardie's on his reasons for propounding mode-two psychologization, there are dozens of examples of his doing so. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and then again in the 1970s and 1980s, we see Regardie espouse the identity of esoteric and psychological terminologies in a shifting and often contradictory manner. We begin with his identifications of the five Qabalistic components of the soul (in ascending order) and various Freudian and Jungian terms. Regardie describes the *nepheesh*, which he defines as "the animal soul" and "the life of the body," as the focus of the investigations of Freud, Jung, and Alfred Adler (1870–1937).<sup>151</sup> In *The Tree of Life*, he vaguely equates the *nepheesh* with "what the analysts call the Unconscious,"<sup>152</sup> and then in *The Middle Pillar* more specifically identifies it with both "the Freudian unconscious" and "the Jungian concept of the unconscious."<sup>153</sup> Apparently treating these terms as identical as well, Regardie additionally uses the term "subconscious" as another synonym for the *nepheesh* in instances where he previously identified it with "the unconscious."<sup>154</sup> He defines the next component of the soul, the *ruach*, as individual consciousness

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<sup>149</sup> Israel Regardie, *The Teachers of Fulfillment* (Phoenix: Falcon Press, 1983), 128.

<sup>150</sup> Israel Regardie, *Healing Energy, Prayer and Relaxation* (Las Vegas: Golden Dawn Publications, 1989), 13.

<sup>151</sup> Israel Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates: Skrying on the Tree of Life*, eds. and ann. Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabitha Cicero, (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 1999), 94.

<sup>152</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 84.

<sup>153</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 36.

<sup>154</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 105; Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, 95–97; Israel Regardie, "Mysticism and Oedipus," in *Mysticism, Psychology and Oedipus*, ed. Christopher S. Hyatt (Phoenix: Falcon Press, 1985), 23.

singularly identified with the psychological term “ego.”<sup>155</sup> Following this, Regardie takes the *neschamah* and the *chiah* as a gendered pair comprising both the “divine soul” and “higher Self,”<sup>156</sup> and respectively identifies them as Jung’s primary archetypes of the collective unconscious: the *anima* and *animus*.<sup>157</sup> The highest component of the soul, the *yechidah*, he at once identifies with the Freudian *id*, Groddeck’s *es*, and the supernal triad of Sephiroth on the Tree of Life.<sup>158</sup>

Moving from the microcosm to the macrocosm, we immediately encounter the superior classes: gods, archangels, angels, demons, and so on. Regardie is quite consistent in a Jungian interpretation of these classes of beings. He consistently identifies the higher types as Jungian archetypes or dominants, specifically equating them with “gods and archangels and angels” in two instances;<sup>159</sup> in another, “great gods and spiritual forces, *Cosmocratores*, who become the intelligent architects and builders of the manifold parts of the universe”;<sup>160</sup> and in yet another, specifically the god Bacchus as an archetype.<sup>161</sup> At this point, I would like to call attention to the fact that Regardie’s characterization of the gods in *The Art and Meaning of Magic* (1971) is decidedly non-reductive. As we have just seen, he proposes a terminological identity between the gods and Jung’s archetypes, but maintains that the gods *are gods* insofar as they are the demiurges who shape and govern the manifold universe. This maintaining of the esoteric meaning of “god” juxtaposed with the Jungian term “archetype” is decidedly characteristic of mode-two psychologization. This is important to note because, as we shall see in the following section (4.4), his treatment of Jungian complexes in that same volume, as well as elsewhere, does not appear to be non-reductive, and instead comports to mode-three psychologization. The final point to examine within this section’s discussion on Regardie’s terminological psychologization is that of his widely varying esoteric

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<sup>155</sup> Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, 94; Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 33; Regardie, “Mysticism and Oedipus,” 23.

<sup>156</sup> Regardie, “Mysticism and Oedipus,” 23.

<sup>157</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 30–31.

<sup>158</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 27, 32; Regardie, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, 20.

<sup>159</sup> Identical wording is found in the following: Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 60; Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 95.

<sup>160</sup> Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 13–14. It is of interest that Regardie here uses the term ‘cosmocrator’ to denote one of the superior classes. For more on this designation, see: Christopher A. Plaisance, “Of Cosmocrators and Cosmic Gods: The Place of the Archons in *De mysteriis*,” in *Daimonic Imagination: Uncanny Intelligence*, 64–85, ed. Angela Voss and William Rowlandson (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

<sup>161</sup> Regardie, *Ceremonial Magic*, 87.

Tree of Life	Astrological Spheres	Qabalistic Microcosm
Kether	Primum Mobile	Yechidah
Chokmah	Zodiac	Chiah
Binah	Saturn	Neschamah
Chesed	Jupiter	
Geburah	Mars	
Tiphareth	Sun	Ruach
Netzach	Venus	
Hod	Mercury	
Yesod	Moon	Nephesch
Malkuth	Earth	Guph

Table 1: The Qabalistic Universe and Man

correspondences to Jung’s collective unconscious in particular, and the idea of the unconscious in general. The first of these identifications is with the esoteric locus, variously referred to as the astral plane, world, light, and so on. Throughout his writings, Regardie variously defines this as being composed of some “subtle electro-magnetic substance,”<sup>162</sup> or as “a four-dimensional plane composed of a luminous etheric substance.”<sup>163</sup> In esoteric terms, Regardie at once syncretically identified the astral plane with both the ninth Qabalistic sphere of Yesod, the Platonic world soul,<sup>164</sup> and the alchemical Sea of the Wise.<sup>165</sup> In his very first book, Regardie already speaks of a “clear correspondence” between the esoteric “Astral Light and the concept of the

<sup>162</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 55. For further instances of the electromagnetic nature of the astral, see: Regardie, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Dawn*, 27; Israel Regardie, “A Qabalistic Primer,” in *Foundations of Practical Magic: An Introduction to Qabalistic, Magical and Meditative Techniques* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1979), 78–79; Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, 104; Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 42; Regardie, *Be Yourself*, 29–30; Israel Regardie, *The One Year Manual: Twelve Steps to Spiritual Enlightenment* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1981), 42–43; Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 86; Israel Regardie, *How to Make and Use Talismans* (New York: Sterling, 1983), 48.

<sup>163</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 71. For further instances of extra-planar and etheric identifications, see: Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 72, 74; Regardie, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Dawn*, 27. For further information on planar and dimensional terminologies within modern esoteric discourse, see: Christopher A. Plaisance, “Occult Spheres, Planes, and Dimensions: Geometric Terminology and Analogy in Modern Esoteric Discourse,” *Journal of Religious History* (forthcoming).

<sup>164</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 55; Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, 54; Regardie, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Dawn*, 27.

<sup>165</sup> Regardie, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, 119, 137.

Collective Unconscious.”<sup>166</sup> We see this terminological correlation between Jung’s collective unconscious and the constellation of esoteric identifications bound up with the astral plane carry forward throughout many of Regardie’s subsequent writings as well.<sup>167</sup>

However, as strong as this identity between the collective unconscious and the astral plane is in Regardie’s writings, it does appear that he wavered in his consistency—at times proposing other identities for the unconscious that were quite at odds with the astral. In one notable instance, he specifically identifies Yesod “with the Freudian idea of the Unconscious.”<sup>168</sup> This is not *too* far a stretch from Jung’s collective unconscious, but is different enough to give us pause. Elsewhere, we see Regardie identify “the Unconscious” with the five classical elements, and, although he is not here *specifically* referencing the *collective* unconscious, the hylic elements are themselves a far cry from the astral forms of the sublunary sphere.<sup>169</sup> Far more disjunctive is the direct identification Regardie makes in two places between the collective unconscious and the three supernal Sephiroth.<sup>170</sup> This is particularly troublesome because of the previous identification Regardie made between the supernals and Freud’s *id*, but more importantly because of the vast gap that exists between the first three supernal Sephiroth and Yesod, the ninth. As Regardie is clearly *not* supposing an identity between Yesod and the supernal Sephiroth, the disjunction between these two identifications of Jung’s collective unconscious is rather stark. Just as troubling is the clear identity Regardie proposes between God and the collective unconscious,<sup>171</sup> and between God and the (undifferentiated) unconscious.<sup>172</sup> Again, since Regardie does not appear to be proposing that God and Yesod are identical, we have a clear disjunction between his systems of identities between the psychological and esoteric terminologies. However, for all these disjunctions, we can glean one important point from this section and the previous section (4.2) taken together: in terms of mode-two psychologization, it appears that Regardie tended to limit himself to proposing identities between descriptive models rather than normative techniques. In other words, while his

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<sup>166</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 84.

<sup>167</sup> Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, 54; Regardie, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, 25, 52, 45, 119, 203, 137; Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 55; Regardie, *Ceremonial Magic*, 88, 92, 97.

<sup>168</sup> Regardie, “Mysticism and Oedipus,” 6.

<sup>169</sup> Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 60.

<sup>170</sup> Regardie, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Dawn*, 28; Regardie, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, 77.

<sup>171</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 60; Israel Regardie, *The Art of True Healing*, ed. Marc Allen (San Rafael: New World Library, 1991), 52.

<sup>172</sup> Regardie, *The Teachers of Fulfillment*, 167–68; Regardie, *Healing Energy*, 56–57.

instances of mode-two psychologization commonly substitute psychological terms for essentially esoteric metaphysical concepts, we do not see the same mode of psychologization at play in regards to esoteric practice.

#### 4.4 Mode-Three: Reductive Psychologization

As mode-three psychologization is nearly the precise converse of mode-two, and given that Regardie clearly made extensive use of mode-two terminological psychologization, we would not expect to see mode-three reductive psychologization present throughout his works. However, as mentioned previously in discussing his mode-two interpretation of Jung's archetypes, it does appear that his interpretations of complexes tended towards mode-three. It is quite telling as to Regardie's continued reliance on Crowley's essay "The Initiated Interpretation of Ceremonial Magic"—which itself proposed a mode-three interpretation of the evocation of lesser spirits—that the most glaring instance of reductive psychologization in Regardie's esoteric corpus is his interpretation of evocation. As early as 1932, we see Regardie proposing a comparison between the object of a magical evocation and psychological neuroses or complexes, specifically noting that "the same subjective rationale" by which a neurotic patient delves into his personal unconscious to confront harmful complexes "may be extended to the Goetic aspect of Magic, the evocation of spirits."<sup>173</sup> In the same book, he clearly states that it can be argued that such spirits are "but previously unknown facets of our own consciousness" and that "their evocation ... is certainly not incomparable to a stimulation of some part of the mind or imagination" by a patient undergoing psychoanalysis.<sup>174</sup> Regardie's language here is important to make note of in order for us to distinguish the identity he proposes between spirits and complexes *as reductive* from the previously identified *non-reductive* identity between gods and archetypes. In this case, Regardie specifically relegates these "spirits" to the *personal* unconscious rather than the collective unconscious, and clearly indicates their ultimately *subjective* rather than objective nature. In this way, Regardie's interpretation represents a fundamental shift from the medieval demonological ontology, which considered the Goetic demons as objectively existing entities, separate from the magician. Regardie restructures this dynamic, positing a wholly subjective mode of existence for the demons, ontologically relocating them to a position within the magician's being. This is the very essence of reductive psychologization.

Regardie maintained this reductive identity between demonic spirits and

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<sup>173</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 296.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

complexes of the personal unconscious throughout the rest of his esoteric career. In the mid-period essay “Mysticism and Oedipus,” we see Regardie “remind the reader that ‘angels,’ ‘spirits,’ and ‘powers’ of the practical Qabalah and Magic are ... ‘ideas’ of varying degrees of power and significance which exist and function unperceived in the different regions of our subliminal consciousness.”<sup>175</sup> This interpretation, which Regardie specifically identifies as Freudian, maintains his early-period mode-three treatment of lesser spirits as wholly subjective denizens of the magician’s individual unconscious. This reductive interpretation, however, reaches its apogee in 1971 during the course of Regardie’s discussion of evocation in *The Art and Meaning of Magic*. Therein, he clearly states that “what modern psychology calls a complex” is identical with what “the ancient psychology of Magic ... named a Spirit.”<sup>176</sup> He is clear in his assertion that while there is “a purely objective occult theory” of evocation, his position “is the subjective point of view.”<sup>177</sup> In this sense, he describes the practice of evocation as a technique by which these unconscious complexes are personalized and given “tangible shape and form” by the magician’s imagination, and are then called forth and “brought within the dominion of the stimulated will and consciousness of the theurgist” where they can be “assimilated into consciousness.”<sup>178</sup> In other words, the evocation technique is, for Regardie, something akin to a dramatic facade superimposed over a process that is, at its core, psychotherapeutic. The “demons” with which the evocator deals are not, for Regardie, objective beings from the nether worlds, but rather mere aspects of his own unconscious psyche. The magic of evocation has thus been effectively *reduced* to the psychoanalytic confrontation of complexes of the personal unconscious by the conscious mind.

The second category of examples of mode-three psychologization in Regardie’s writings is his consistently reductive interpretation of the HOGD and SM’s initiation rituals. In his early work, *My Rosicrucian Adventure*, referencing Jung’s reductive description of magic from *The Secret of the Golden Flower* quoted above in section 4.1, Regardie identifies the officers of the orders’ initiation rituals as representing “psychic projections ... just as figures in dreams do,” being “personifications of abstract psychological principles inhering within the human spirit.”<sup>179</sup> Using the Neophyte ritual as an example, he describes

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<sup>175</sup> Regardie, “Mysticism and Oedipus,” 9–10.

<sup>176</sup> Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 51.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 54–55.

<sup>179</sup> Regardie, *What You Should Know About the Golden Dawn*, 67.

the various facets of the individual psyche symbolized and personified by the ritual officers.<sup>180</sup> Additionally, the overall characteristic of the Vault of the Adepti—within which rituals of the higher grades of the HOGD and SM took place—and its connection to the mythology of Isis and the tomb of Osiris was interpreted in a Freudian manner as “a highly interesting and complex symbol of the Mother.”<sup>181</sup> Nearly identical descriptions of the order officers as psychic projections of the initiate’s personal unconscious appear throughout Regardie’s later works as well, demonstrating a continuing strain of mode-three psychologization throughout. In his introduction to the first edition of *The Golden Dawn*, he makes use of the same Jung quotation and nearly identical language in interpreting the officers as “psychic projections” and “personifications of abstract psychological principles inhering within the human spirit.”<sup>182</sup> In each of these instances, not only do we see the same principles being relayed, but also nearly *identical verbiage*. There is, in all of these examples, a consistent characterization of the projections as being *personal* in nature, and as existing *within* the initiate’s psyche. Similar to Jung’s reductive interpretation of evocation, the projections Regardie here describes are eminently subjective in nature and are ontological dependents of the initiate’s own mind. Such an interpretation of ritual is paradigmatic of reductive psychologization, insofar as the initiating officers are seen as mere vessels onto which the initiate may project aspects of his personal unconscious.

#### 4.5 Mode-Four: Idealistic Psychologization

Moving forward to mode-four psychologization, we do not see instances where Regardie describes psychological and esoteric discourses as equivalents, either in

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.: “Thus, in the preliminary Neophyte or 0°=0□ grade, the Kerux personifies the reasoning faculties. He is the intelligent part of the mind, functioning in obedience to the Will; the Qabalistic *Ruach* in a word. The highest part of that mind, the aspiring, sensitive, and the intuitive consciousness, the *Neschamah*, is represented by the Hegemon who ever seeks the rising of the Light, while the active will of man is signified by the Hieres, the guardian against evil. The Hierophant, in this initial ceremony of Neophyte, acts on behalf of the higher spiritual soul of man himself, that divine self of which but to rarely, if ever at all, we become aware.”

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>182</sup> Regardie, “Introduction,” in *The Golden Dawn*, 43–44. Just a year later, in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, we see Regardie again using nearly identical language to describe the initiating officers as “just such psychic projections as Jung refers to,” and “personifications of psychological principles active within the psyche (151). This mode of psychologization carries forward to 1970, in *The Eye in the Triangle*, where he again utilizes the same Jung quotation, and similarly describes the officers as “psychic projections” and “personifications of abstract psychological principles inhering within the human organism” (136–37).

a terminologically or reductive mode of psychologization, but rather narratives that express a bidirectional non-reductive relationship where psychology is esotericized alongside a psychologization of esoteric discourse. As we have seen, Regardie seems to have had no trouble in making use of what would appear to be mutually exclusive modes of psychologization within a single work. As such, it should come as no surprise that we see evidence of mode-four psychologization among the same early works wherein he first made use of modes-one, -two, and -three as well. In *A Garden of Pomegranates*, we see this trend emerge in an already developed form, with Regardie questioning “whether the Qabalah resolves itself into an objective or subjective scheme,” and arriving at the position he terms “objective idealism,” wherein “the universe is subjective without denying in the least its objectivity.”<sup>183</sup> This idea is unpacked with greater detail in *The Tree of Life*, where Regardie examines the question of the interiority of the astral plane and the objectivity of its denizens. While he does concede that “the Gods and the Universal Essences come to be apprehended within the interior constitution of man,” which seems to imply a subjective ontology that “has no primary reference to any external subject,”<sup>184</sup> they are neither “the products of his imagination” nor “subjective creations.”<sup>185</sup> This discursive strategy, then, allows Regardie to combine an esoteric ontology of the superior classes as objective beings with a psychologized understanding of religious experience as an interior phenomenon that is ontologically *within* the experiencing subject—a confluence of objectivism and subjectivism.

Regardie tends to justify this idealistic psychologization by means of combining a macrocosmic theology with the Hermetic axiom of the microcosm’s reflective relationship to the macrocosm.<sup>186</sup> In *The Tree of Life*, he makes this doctrine plain, noting that “one of the fundamental postulates of Magic is that Man is an exact image in miniature of the universe, both considered objectively, and that what man perceives to be existent without is also in some way represented within.”<sup>187</sup> In this way, Regardie proposes what is essentially an orthodox Hermetic doctrine of man’s external and internal structure being a mirror of the greater structure of the cosmos. This reflective axiom is found in Regardie’s earliest works, and is a strain that continued

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<sup>183</sup> Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, 128–29.

<sup>184</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 95.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 234–36.

<sup>186</sup> For the origins of this doctrine within the Hermetic corpus, see: *Corpus Hermeticum*, 4 vols., ed. A.D. Nock and trans. A.J. Festugière (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946–54), XI.15; *Asclepius*, in vol. 2 of *Corpus Hermeticum*, I.10.

<sup>187</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 95.

well into his final works as well, appearing in early works such as *A Garden of Pomegranates* and *The Middle Pillar* as well as late-period works such as *The Art and Meaning of Magic* and *Ceremonial Magic*.<sup>188</sup> One of the more interesting ways in which this Hermetic doctrine of the microcosm was filtered through Regardie's mode-four psychologization is found in his essay "Mysticism and Oedipus," where he draws a connection between this esoteric anthropology and Freudian psychology by means of Ernst Haeckel's (1834–1919) theory that, among all organisms, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.<sup>189</sup> Here, following in the footsteps of a long succession of *Naturphilosophen* from Goethe onwards, Regardie posits that just as man's external physical ontogeny recapitulates his species's physical phylogeny—which is to say that man's physical development from embryo to adult recapitulates mankind's development from single-celled organism to *Homo sapiens*—so does his internal psychological ontogeny recapitulate man's phylogenetic ascent, from that of brute animal to civilized man.<sup>190</sup> From this, Regardie develops a soteriological interpretation of Freud's Oedipus complex, rooted in the idea that all complex organisms desire a return to the unitary state of their genesis. For, just as "the whole universe in all its manifold branches would be permeated with the inherent desire to return to the material source of life,"<sup>191</sup> so does man desire to return to the womb, so as to "approach Nirvana" by recapturing the fetus's "feelings of peace, placidity and omnipotence."<sup>192</sup> Thus, in Regardie's Hermetic recapitulation theory, we see a model of magical soteriology that is at once subjective *and* objective, with domains of psychological internality and physical externality being bridged by the doctrine of the microcosm.

A second way in which we see mode-four psychologization present itself in Regardie's works is in his theology. Making full use of the Hermetic reflective axiom, Regardie's theology is dipolar, with macrocosmic and microcosmic genera of divinities comprising at once the respective poles. This being the case, any references that Regardie makes to divinities—particularly to "God"—must be contextualized so as to clearly understand whether he is referring to the God of the macrocosm, or the God of the microcosm. Regarding the greater macrocosmic God, we see a pronounced panentheistic current throughout

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<sup>188</sup> Regardie, *A Garden of Pomegranates*, 93; Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 77–78; Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 85; Regardie, *Ceremonial Magic*, 13–14.

<sup>189</sup> For the historical context of Haeckel's theory, see: Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977).

<sup>190</sup> Regardie, "Mysticism and Oedipus," 13–17.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

the whole of Regardie's theology. Panentheism is a family of theologies that affirm that "although God and the world are ontologically distinct and God transcends the world, the world is 'in' God ontologically."<sup>193</sup> This relationship between God and the world is most often portrayed by the panentheist as the world being God's visible body, but that this body is ontologically within God. We see this doctrine laid out plainly in *The Tree of Life*, where Regardie paraphrases Acts 17:28,<sup>194</sup> telling us that in God "do we live and move and have our being,"<sup>195</sup> describing "the totality of all life in the universe" as God's "cosmic body," of which we "are the minute cells and molecules."<sup>196</sup> This doctrine is continued forward and is manifestly present in later works as well, such as Regardie's 1979 essay "A Qabalistic Primer," where he impresses upon his reader "the realization of the universe as a being divine, the entire body of God which includes every man and every form of life within its vastness."<sup>197</sup> At times, Regardie moves from an explicit panentheism to pantheism, but on the whole, the former more strongly characterizes his thought.<sup>198</sup> Additionally, Regardie's conception of the macrocosmic divine is strongly characterized by polycentricity,<sup>199</sup> as is evidenced both by early statements that the world's divinity "is represented by hosts of mighty Gods, divine beings, cosmic spirits or intelligences,"<sup>200</sup> and by later works that similarly characterize the demiurgic divinities as plural in nature.<sup>201</sup> However, whether panentheistic

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<sup>193</sup> John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 18. According to Cooper, within the Western theological tradition, this doctrine begins with Plato's *Timaeus*, and was largely diffused into later currents through successive generations of Platonic commentators, most notably the late antique Neoplatonists.

<sup>194</sup> This phrase from Acts 17:28 (NRSV), "in him we live and move and have our being," is so strongly identified with panentheism that a modified version of it appears as the title of a collection of essays by contemporary panentheists: Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke, eds., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004).

<sup>195</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 101.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>197</sup> Regardie, "A Qabalistic Primer," 61.

<sup>198</sup> For a notable exception, see Regardie, *The One Year Manual*, 57: "There is no God *and* the World—there is not God and himself. There is *only* God. All is God." This direct *equation* of God and the world, as opposed to the panentheistic supervening of God *over* the world, is the very definition of pantheism.

<sup>199</sup> For polycentrism within antique Platonic theologies, see: Edward P. Butler, "Polycentric Polytheism and the Philosophy of Religion," *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008): 207–29.

<sup>200</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 61–63.

<sup>201</sup> Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 13–14.

or pantheistic—or whether monocentric or polycentric—what all of these macrocosmic theologies have in common is an insistence that God is a reality external to the individual and objectively real.

The opposite pole of Regardie's theology, the individual God, is the psychologized microcosmic reflection of the macrocosmic God. Where the macrocosmic God is wholly external to the individual, the microcosmic God's nature is fundamentally one of internality. Various identified by Regardie as the "higher genius,"<sup>202</sup> "Divine Genius,"<sup>203</sup> or "Holy Guardian Angel,"<sup>204</sup> this being is seen as the internal and eminently personal reflection of the external and impersonal macrocosmic God, and is correlated to various psychological concepts throughout Regardie's career, such as the "higher self,"<sup>205</sup> "the *id*,"<sup>206</sup> "the core of the unconscious,"<sup>207</sup> "the Unconscious,"<sup>208</sup> "the central core of individuality, [and] the root of the Unconscious."<sup>209</sup> Regardie sums up the relationship between this internal, psychologized God and the external God whose body is the cosmos:

By the magical hypothesis, the higher genius corresponds within man to the possible relationship of God to the universe. That is to say, man being the microcosm of the macrocosm, a reflection of the cosmos, is a universe within himself, a universe ruled and governed by his own divinity.<sup>210</sup>

Regardie's soteriology tended to revolve around this God, with his understanding of magic's central process being at once represented as the magician's invocation of his HGA, and the ego's confrontation and union with the higher self.<sup>211</sup> In this way, when Regardie speaks of "the belief in a personal God" as "a poetic or dramatic convention," and describes the goal of magic as "purely psychological" with the goal of "exalting the individual consciousness

<sup>202</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 77–78.

<sup>203</sup> Regardie, *Ceremonial Magic*, 13–14.

<sup>204</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 104.

<sup>205</sup> Regardie, *The Art of True Healing*, 5–6.

<sup>206</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 42.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>208</sup> Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 48, 69.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>210</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 77–78.

<sup>211</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 104; Regardie, *What You Should Know About the Golden Dawn*, 60; Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 35; Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 48–49; Regardie, *Healing Energy*, 56–57.

until it comes to a realisation of its own divine root,”<sup>212</sup> we are to understand that he is strictly speaking of the microcosmic, not the macrocosmic, God. This reflective relationship that exists between the microcosm and macrocosm in Regardie’s ontology makes for a theology that allows for both an objective deity external to the subject, and a personal deity internal to the subject. This particular species of dipolar theism is the very essence of mode-four psychologization. It psychologizes the idea of God by viewing an aspect of the self as divine, but it sacralizes this psychological outlook by treating this personal divinity as a reflection of an objective, universal God.

The third aspect of mode-four psychologization within Regardie’s work concerns his presentation of the mind-body relationship. Far from compartmentalizing esoteric practice as something strictly psychological and disconnected from the body and materiality, we see a strong somatic component that clearly allows for the events that transpire on the “magical plane” to directly affect the world of matter. As early as 1932, we see Regardie proposing a method whereby “health is restored by the persistent concentration of divine power” by means of a “flow of energy” under the stimulus of which “diseased tissue and diseased cells ... become gradually broken down and ejected from the personal sphere.”<sup>213</sup> Six years later, in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, Regardie similarly presents us with an extensive list of esoteric theorists in whose doctrines imagination was believed to directly affect matter,<sup>214</sup> and follows this with the bold assertion that he can see “no valid reason why the interior psychical or magical power should not be able to effect a physical transmutation” or to “move a physical object without physical contact” by virtue of the soul’s ability to “exude its own subjective astral substance into objective materialization.”<sup>215</sup> This belief of Regardie’s in the ability of mind to causally exert influence over matter does not disappear in his later works, but continues to reassert itself. In 1946, we see him claiming that the “great spiritual powers” of the mind to affect matter have “concretely been proven by magnetic experiments.”<sup>216</sup> And again, in 1965, although he claims to “loathe the glib phrase” of “mind over matter,” he finds himself “disposed to accept the truth implicit in it,” insofar as he finds “that mental processes have a

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<sup>212</sup> Regardie, “Introduction,” *The Golden Dawn*, 28–29.

<sup>213</sup> Regardie, *The Art of True Healing*, 42–43.

<sup>214</sup> Regardie, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, 90–91.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>216</sup> Regardie, *The Teachers of Fulfillment*, 35.

remarkable influence on physiological activity” and healing.<sup>217</sup> Although it does appear that Regardie’s later views are a bit more subdued than in earlier years, there is a continual train of thought present in which the “magical plane” exerts causative influence over the material body.

The mechanism by which Regardie saw mind being able to exert this influence over matter appears to be his conception of man’s astral or etheric body. While we have previously identified the way in which Regardie conceived the astral plane as being an electromagnetic mean between soul and body, it is here important to note that his doctrines continually make reference to a specialized body possessed by all that is composed of this substance. We see this evidenced as early as 1932, when Regardie speaks of “centers in our mental and spiritual nature” that are the correlates of physical organs.<sup>218</sup> He later described this “interior subtle or astral body” as “the medium or intermediate state between mind and body.”<sup>219</sup> As Regardie gradually became acquainted with Reich’s somatic psychology, he came to integrate Reich’s notions of “orgone energy” and “vegetotherapy” into his practice. As early as 1938, we see Regardie—who, it should be remembered, worked as a masseur early in life—utilizing massage as a means by which a therapist’s astral body could directly affect a patient. He notes that this spiritual energy “may be communicated like an electric current through the arm and hands to finger tips,” and enter “the patient’s body as the palms of the masseur’s hands glide over the surface being treated.”<sup>220</sup> This technique of esoteric massage was eventually assimilated into Regardie’s understanding of Reichian vegetotherapy. Later in life, Regardie came to adopt Reich’s belief that, owing to the fact that “mind and body are phases of a unitary living organism,” psychological tension was intimately connected with the particular “neuromuscular tension” that Reich termed “muscular armor.”<sup>221</sup> Like Reich, Regardie identified this muscular armor with certain “neurotic character structure[s]” found in patients.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Regardie, *Be Yourself*, 41–42.

<sup>218</sup> Regardie, *The Art of True Healing*, 15. For a view of the astral body as composed of psychic organs, see also: Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 52.

<sup>219</sup> Regardie, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, 28–29. For more on the development of terminologies relating to the so-called ‘astral body,’ see: Christopher A. Plaisance, “The Transvaluation of ‘Soul’ and ‘Spirit’: Platonism and Paulism in H.P. Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled*,” *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 15, no. 1 (2013): 250–72.

<sup>220</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 79.

<sup>221</sup> Israel Regardie, “What is Psychotherapy?” in *An Interview With Israel Regardie: His Final Thoughts and Views*, ed. Christopher S. Hyatt (Phoenix: Falcon Press, 1985), 118.

<sup>222</sup> Israel Regardie, “On Reich,” in *An Interview With Israel Regardie: His Final Thoughts and Views*,

As discussed in section 3.1, one of the driving forces behind idealistic psychologization is the desire of the magician to insulate himself from rational critique of scientific naturalism by relegating magic to a separate-but-connected psychic plane. In phrasing his view of this plane's relationship with materiality—and thus the sacral psyche's relationship with the body—Regardie notes that the “ideal is not to escape from the body but to become involved more and more in life . . . to bring down godhead so that one's manhood being enriched may thereby be assumed into godhead.”<sup>223</sup> Rather than proposing that the magical plane serves as an escape from material reality, Regardie implores the magician to become *more* involved in materiality *through* magic, but in a way that circumvents materialism by sacralizing the world of body and flesh. Furthermore, like Crowley, Regardie explicitly did *not* seek to insulate his practice from experimental falsifiability, but sought to apply a method of empirical verification that operated on and was native to the magical plane.<sup>224</sup> With Crowley, we see a dedicated and sincere commitment (which was somewhat less than successful) both to discovering “scientific methods for reaching . . . the magical realm” and to devising ways by which such magical experiences could be empirically evaluated and tested.<sup>225</sup> In both his early and late works on the subject,<sup>226</sup> we see Regardie appeal to Crowley's methods of “testing” astral visions by means of checking the vision's contents against the exhaustive symbolic frameworks that comprise the HOGD's interpretation of the Qabalah.<sup>227</sup> Flawed as it is in its substitution of confirmation bias in the aim of *verifying* the Qabalah's truth for the spirit of open-ended inquiry that characterizes the epistemological framework of true experimentation, Regardie's attempts at incorporating experimental methods into his practice demonstrate a committed opposition to escapist psychologization throughout his works.

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ed. Christopher S. Hyatt (Phoenix: Falcon Press, 1985), 133.

<sup>223</sup> Regardie, *The Middle Pillar*, 77.

<sup>224</sup> For Crowley's relationship with the experimental method, see: Asprem, “Magic Naturalized,” 138–65; Pasi, “Varieties of Magical Experience,” 53–87.

<sup>225</sup> Asprem, “Magic Naturalized,” 163.

<sup>226</sup> Regardie, *The Tree of Life*, 227; Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic*, 91–96.

<sup>227</sup> For an outline of Crowley's method, see: Aleister Crowley, “Liber O vel Manus Sagittæ sub figura VI,” *The Equinox: The Official Organ of the A.A., The Review of Scientific Illuminism* 1, no. 2 (1909): 11–30.

## 5. Conclusion

In concluding this documentary analysis of Regardie's esoteric corpus, it has become apparent that his doctrines and practices can be strongly characterized as being psychologized. However, it does not appear that speaking of "psychologization" as a unitary phenomenon greatly elucidates the particular ways in which Regardie saw esoteric and psychological discourses interfacing. Rather, I fear that such a treatment of the issue may indeed serve to more greatly obfuscate the issue. In this way, I also believe that descriptions of Regardie's interpretation of esoteric discourse as "psychologized" made with this overly general definition do him and his works a disservice, by simplifying and generalizing what is in actuality quite a complicated network of proposed relationships. The fourfold typology of complementary, terminological, reductive, and idealistic modes of psychologization most accurately describes the various ways in which psychological and esoteric discourse are entangled within Regardie's work. In uncovering these modes within his corpus, and applying the resultant typological schema to the question of his psychologization of esoteric discourse, I believe we may come to a better understanding of what processes are actually at work—both in terms of evaluating prior statements made by other scholars regarding the issue, and in performing this present analysis.

In summation, I have argued that while it is indeed accurate to speak of Regardie as having psychologized esoteric discourse, this can only be the case given an understanding of "psychologization" that is differentially nuanced so as to distinguish between diametrically opposed psychologizing currents. This differential typology enables us to specifically identify Regardie as participating in four distinct psychologizing discursive strategies, both in isolation and in combination with one another in ways that are on occasion logically problematic, but tend towards an internal consistency. This clarification is, I believe, important not only insofar as it sets the record straight on Regardie in particular, but also in terms of ironing out the idea of psychologization itself as a discursive strategy within modern esoteric discourse. For, if it is the case that such an analysis of Regardie's works necessarily leads to a nuanced and differentiated idea of "psychologization," it seems also to follow that any such statements regarding modern esoteric discourse being psychologized be re-evaluated in light of this typology.

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# The Globalization of Esotericism\*

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## Abstract

In recent discussions about the study of esotericism, the adjective “Western” has come under critical scrutiny. Shouldn’t “esotericism” be understood as a global rather than just a Western field of research? Doesn’t the very concept of a “Western esotericism” logically imply that there must be an “Eastern esotericism” as well? If so, what would that be? And in what respects would this “esotericism” common to Eastern and Western cultures be different from non-esoteric cultural formations? Or is the terminology supposed to imply, to the contrary, that esotericism is something unique to Western culture, with no parallels elsewhere? But if so, what is it that makes it unique, and how are we supposed to define and demarcate “the West” from “the Rest”? Are we supposed to think in terms of a geographical space or of a cultural domain? In either case, doesn’t the very term “Western” imply an essentialist discourse with troubling political connotations and implications? The author of this article argues that these problems are best approached from a historical rather than a strictly theoretical perspective. Reviewing the most important stages in the conceptualization of “esotericism” as a distinct field of study since the early modern period, he argues that it has always been theorized as a global rather than just Western phenomenon. Nevertheless, he concludes, it is advisable to maintain the concept of “Western esotericism,” not for reasons of conceptual *theory* but for reasons of historical *method*.

## Keywords

esotericism; western esotericism; orientalism; globalization; rejected knowledge; paganism; occultism; Edward Burnett Tylor; Lucien Lévy-Bruhl; participation; Carl Gustav Jung; Antoine Faivre

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As noted by Egil Asprem in a recent contribution to *Correspondences*, a strong case can be made for “dismissing the categorisation of esotericism as intrinsically Western, on historical and terminological grounds.”<sup>1</sup> In the present article I intend to examine this claim in some detail, with reference to the main arguments that have been presented for such a position in the recent scholarly literature. Are we moving from the concept of “Western esotericism” to an understanding of esotericism as a global phenomenon?

### A Short History of the Adjective

The adjective “Western” in combination with “esotericism” seems a fairly recent innovation. It appeared clearly in Antoine Faivre’s foundational monograph *Accès de l’ésotérisme occidental* (1986), and has become firmly established in the study of esotericism at least since 2001. In that year, the French journal *ARIES* (an acronym of the *Association pour la Recherche et l’Information sur l’Esotérisme*, founded in 1985 by Antoine Faivre together with Roland Edighoffer and Pierre Deghaye)<sup>2</sup> was re-launched as a new series by Brill Academic publishers, resulting in the first professional peer-reviewed journal in the field. While the original series was devoted to the study of “l’ésotérisme,” without adjective (although the journal was focused clearly on the occident), the new series was explicitly titled *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*. This terminological specification had much to do with a new research agenda that reflected the more general move in Religious Studies, since the 1980s, from a predominantly “religionist” paradigm towards perspectives marked by methodological agnosticism, empiricism, and critical historiography.<sup>3</sup> As the

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<sup>1</sup> Egil Asprem, “Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esotericism,” *Correspondences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 4 (and footnote 1 for references to the main contributions to the debate).

<sup>2</sup> The original ARIES series (1985–1999) is now available online: [www.esswe.org/journal](http://www.esswe.org/journal).

<sup>3</sup> On the notion of “religionism” and its historical backgrounds, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. 127, note 174, 295–314, 357–58. While religionism is mostly associated with Mircea Eliade and his “Chicago School,” that understanding is historically too narrow: its real origin lies in the famous Eranos meetings, 1933–1988. See Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Sheffield/Bristol: Equinox, 2013) and expanded German original: Hakl, *Eranos: Nabel der Welt, Glied der goldenen Kette. Die alternative Geistesgeschichte* (Gaggenau: Scientia Nova, 2015). For an early programmatic statement on empirical versus religionist and reductionist method in relation to esotericism, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism,” *Method & Theory in the Study of*

original *ARIES* series was created in the mid-1980s, when this development was just beginning to take off, it was still inspired by explicit spiritual and esoteric agendas. The editorial introduction to the first volume (1985) leaves no ambiguity about that point:

In his *Liber introductorius in Apocalypsin*, composed around 1190, Joachim of Fiore compares the quest for God and the Truth to navigation. Maritime itineraries are multiple, with everyone choosing his own way as the spirit of the wind blows; but this diversity does not need to be a bad thing, for all the mysteries are subject to the Truth, which is one. Thus all navigators, as little as they may know about consulting the stars, will finally arrive in the same haven and the same city. As for the trajectory traversed by their little boat: the sea (as in Ps. 77) will preserve no trace of it.

The metaphors that Joachim of Fiore applied to the understanding of Holy Scripture are relevant to all esoteric research. Those who are not satisfied by the rational explanations of the universe, who reject positivist reductionism and the blinders of scientism, those who are in search of the unknowable, who are attracted by the mysteries of God, Man, and Matter, who are searching for the Spirit in Creation, must also attempt this journey.

*Aries* is there to help them. Like the legendary Ram of the Golden Fleece, it will lead them to the most recent sources of esoteric thinking. The best academic specialists of the Western world have agreed to regularly keep the readers of the journal *Aries* informed about publications relevant to this domain. Their analyses and book reviews will be like so many boundary stones of Hermes, beacons along the roads that lead towards the light.<sup>4</sup>

Such metaphors – scholars engaged in multiple esoteric trajectories over one and the same ocean of Divine Truth that remains unaffected by what happens on its surface, and a journey towards one and the same spiritual haven of Light – are typical of religionism in its most explicit form and may help us understand why “esotericism” could not be understood as limited to “the West” alone. It had to be as universal as Truth itself. At this time it was still considered self-evident that students of esotericism were motivated by some personal spiritual quest.

By 2001, such crypto-theological perspectives were on their way out in the academic Study of Religion,<sup>5</sup> and *Aries* New Series reflected that change. The

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*Religion* 7, no. 2 (1995): 99–129.

<sup>4</sup> “Éditorial,” *ARIES* 1 (1985): 1.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Charlotte Allen, “Is Nothing Sacred? Casting out the Gods from Religious Studies,” *Lingua Franca* (November 1996): 30–40. As far as I know, the history of this theoretical and methodological transformation in the study of religion since the 1980s remains to be written.

adjective “Western” in its title was meant to suggest an emphasis on historical specificity rather than trans-historical universality: the journal was concerned with studying a series of neglected dimensions of Western culture, not with finding spiritual salvation or lifting the veil of Isis. Research of esotericism should be conducted according to normal scholarly methods as practiced in the academy at large, not on the basis of unverifiable *a priori* beliefs or spiritual commitments – no matter how commendable or inspiring these might be in themselves. This development was not just imposed upon “religionists” by their critics, as sometimes assumed by those who regret it; rather, it was part of a process of theoretical and methodological self-reflection among scholars of religion during the period under discussion. Notably, Antoine Faivre himself changed his mind during the 1990s and became a strong supporter and advocate of historical/empirical approaches.<sup>6</sup>

The adjective “Western” was further consolidated around 2005. At that time, the main scholarly organization in the field was the *Association for the Study of Esotericism* (ASE), founded at Michigan State University in 2002, which organized its biannual conferences in the United States.<sup>7</sup> As European scholars began to feel the need for a complementary organization based on their side of the Atlantic, as well as a stronger demarcation from religionist perspectives,<sup>8</sup> in January 2005 they decided to establish the *European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism* (ESSWE). The ESSWE was legally incorporated on April 21, 2005, and has been organizing biannual conferences in Europe since 2007, alternating with those organized by the ASE.<sup>9</sup> The creation of the ESSWE happened to coincide with the publication of the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* in the same year.<sup>10</sup> As the first comprehensive scholarly reference work devoted to the field as a whole, it played an important role in defining its nature and boundaries at that time. As one can see, the adjective had been adopted as a standard part of the terminology.

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<sup>6</sup> On Faivre’s development from religionism to empiricism, see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 334–55.

<sup>7</sup> “About the Association for the Study of Esotericism,” [www.aseweb.org](http://www.aseweb.org).

<sup>8</sup> The ASE and the ESSWE share a common emphasis on historical research, but whereas the ESSWE discourages religionism, the ASE discourages reductionism. Unfortunately, the latter position seems to reflect a misunderstanding of the technical meaning of “reductionism,” described on the ASE’s website as “the denigration rather than the study of esoteric traditions or figures” ([www.esoteric.msu.edu/main.html](http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/main.html)).

<sup>9</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “The Story of ESSWE,” *ESSWE Newsletter* 1 (2006): 2–4. So far, conferences have been organized in Göttingen (2007), Strasbourg (2009), Szeged (2011), Gothenburg (2013), and Riga (2015). The next conference is due to take place in Erfurt (2017).

<sup>10</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005).

## Contesting the Adjective

However, the focus and scope of the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* has been questioned by a number of critics and reviewers, and doubts have been raised about the usefulness or legitimacy of the adjective “Western.” In an important recent discussion, Kennet Granholm concludes that “we should forgo the use of it”;<sup>11</sup> and Egil Asprem asks “[w]hy can we not have a comparative study of esotericism on a truly global rather than a narrowly conceived ‘Western’ scale?”<sup>12</sup> If these critiques would carry the day, the ESSWE would presumably have to be renamed ESSE.

Let us have a quick look at the main arguments that have been adduced. First of all, the scope of “the West” as such has been criticized for being too narrow. With reference to the Brill *Dictionary*, some scholars have argued that Jewish and Islamic esotericism should be given the same amount of attention as Hellenistic, Christian, and post-Christian modern currents.<sup>13</sup> This is an important argument that deserves serious attention, although it must be said that implementing a “comparative esotericism of the religions of the book” is more difficult in practice than calling for it in theory.<sup>14</sup> Others have noted a predominant focus on English, German, French, Italian, and North-American culture at the expense of large European regions such as Scandinavia,<sup>15</sup> and the

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<sup>11</sup> Kennet Granholm, “Locating the West: Problematizing the *Western* in Western Esotericism and Occultism,” in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 31.

<sup>12</sup> Asprem, “Beyond the West,” 5.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Kocku von Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 49. Surprisingly, von Stuckrad’s own introductory textbook is vulnerable to the same critique, since it devotes no more than three pages to Islam (Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* [London/Oakville: Equinox, 2005]; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Textbooks and Introductions to Western Esotericism,” *Religion* 43:2 (2013), 182). Note that, in spite of his focus on “European History of Religion,” von Stuckrad seems to adhere to a notion of global esotericism of some kind: “I do not doubt that large parts of what I understand by esotericism can also be found in other cultures, and that a transcultural and comparative approach can be most valuable for our understanding of esotericism” (*Western Esotericism*, xi–xii).

<sup>14</sup> See discussion in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 14–17. For an important early contribution, see Faivre, “La question d’un ésotérisme comparé des religions du livre,” in “Henry Corbin et le comparatisme spirituel” (Colloque tenu à Paris les 5 et 6 juin 1999), *Cahiers du Groupe d’Études Spirituelles Comparées* 8 (2000): 89–120; and cf. Hanegraaff, “Empirical Method,” 121–24.

<sup>15</sup> Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer, introduction to *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016).

same argument could (and should) be made for all the former Soviet countries as well as for such countries as Greece, Spain, and Portugal. Yet others have noted a neglect of contemporary esotericism as a dimension of global popular culture online and offline.<sup>16</sup> These are all legitimate concerns, even necessary ones, and have led to the emergence of several ESSWE networks focused precisely on these formerly neglected domains: notably the Scandinavian Network for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism (SNASWE), the Central and Eastern European Network for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism (CEENASWE), and the Contemporary Esotericism Research Network (ContERN), next to the independent Russian Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism (ASEM).<sup>17</sup>

But the scope of inquiry could and should be expanded further. Countries such as Israel (represented in the ESSWE context by the Israeli Network for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism, INASWE), Australia, or New Zealand are usually perceived as “Western” from a *cultural* point of view in spite of their *geographical* location in the Middle East and Southward of East-Asia.<sup>18</sup> Hence, if we speak of Western esotericism, we need to make up our minds. Do we mean a geographical space? (if so, where do we draw its boundaries, and why?) Or do we mean a cultural domain? (if so, how do we define it, and why?) There are no easy answers to these questions, not least because they carry highly sensitive political implications: you cannot think about the nature of “the West” for very long – in fact, you probably cannot think about it *at all* – without coming face to face with the painful but unavoidable legacy of Western imperialism, colonialism, orientalism, racism, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, if all these previous questions and inquiries are still concerned with where we draw the internal boundaries of “the West,” then what about “the Rest” – that is to say: everything that is clearly located outside of those

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<sup>16</sup> Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, eds., *Contemporary Esotericism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> See [www.esswe.org/Networks](http://www.esswe.org/Networks).

<sup>18</sup> A classic argument for Western civilization as a cultural rather than a geographical entity is Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (1993): 22–49. For its relevance in the present context, cf. the brief discussion in Granholm, “Locating the West,” 21.

<sup>19</sup> With regard to the concept of “religion,” among many other relevant titles, see for instance Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East”* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999); Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions; or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); and David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville/London: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

boundaries both culturally *and* geographically? Once we have decided to include Islamic esotericism in Europe as a matter of principle, it becomes hard to see why esoteric currents in the Middle East and various other predominantly Islamic regions should not join the party as well. Moreover, it has recently been suggested that what we call “Western” esotericism has such close equivalences in Asian cultures such as India or China that it should make sense to speak of an “Indian,” a “Chinese,” or indeed a far-Eastern “esotericism.”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, scholars of African American religions have (correctly) noted a serious neglect of “black esotericism” in current scholarship,<sup>21</sup> and this has recently led to a program called “*Africana* Esoteric Studies” focused on what they describe as “esoteric” lore and practices in Africa and the African diaspora.<sup>22</sup> Similar initiatives focused on esotericism in Middle and Latin America are currently being implemented as well.<sup>23</sup> To my knowledge (and profound regret), we do

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<sup>20</sup> This is the drift of e.g. Gordan Djurdjevic, *India and the Occult: The Influence of South Asian Spirituality on Modern Western Occultism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), and Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic, introduction to *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, 1–15. I have rather serious reservations about the definitions of “esotericism” and “occultism” on which their arguments are based; but for my present purposes, the fact *that* such arguments are being made by important scholars in the field is more important than the question of whether they are ultimately convincing.

<sup>21</sup> My own statement that “participants in the ‘cultic milieu’ of post-war esotericism have always been, and still remain, overwhelmingly white” (*Western Esotericism*, 131) stands to be corrected in the light of several contributions to Stephen C. Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory and Hugh R. Page, Jr., eds., *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience: “There is a Mystery”*... (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), which demonstrate the esoteric dimension in e.g. the Five Percenters (Biko Mandela Grey, “Show and Prove: Five Percenters and the Study of African American Esotericism,” in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*, 177–97), Nation of Islam (Stephen C. Finley, “Mathematical Theology: Numerology in the Religious Thought of Tynnetta Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan,” in *ibid.*, 123–37; Justine M. Bakker, “On the Knowledge of Self and Others: Secrecy, Concealment and Revelation in Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam (1934–1975),” in *ibid.*, 138–51), Sun Ra (Marques Redd, “Astro-Black Mythology: The Poetry of Sun Ra,” in *ibid.*, 227–45.), or Ishmael Reed (Marques Redd, “Those Mysteries, Our Mysteries: Ishmael Reed and the Construction of a Black Esoteric Tradition,” in *ibid.*, 277–94).

<sup>22</sup> Finley, Simon Guillory & Page, *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*. On a theoretical and definitional level I find this volume’s understanding of “esotericism” extremely problematic (for instance, in a section about “Reinscribing the Boundaries of Western Esotericism” [Stephen C. Finley, Margarita S. Guillory and Hugh R. Page, “The Continuing Quest to Map Secrecy, Concealment, and Revelatory Experiences in *Africana* Esoteric Discourse,” in *ibid.*, 349–52], the authors ignore twenty years of theoretical debate); but again, the important point is *that* such arguments are presently being made.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Jean Pablo Bubello, *Historia del esoterismo en la Argentina: Prácticas, representaciones y*

not yet have a study of Western esotericism on the North Pole region and Antarctica, but surely that is only a matter of time!

### Cycling from Western to Global and Back

What should we think of this trend towards a globalization of the notion of esotericism? Do we want to go along with the suggestion that “esotericism” could be seen as a *global* phenomenon? Or are there reasons to insist that it is something specific to Western culture alone? In my opinion, *both* options are problematic in the extreme. Consider the following string of questions.

If we see esotericism as something global, then does this mean that “it” is universal and remains always the same regardless of context? → Or do we assume, rather, that “it” manifests differently in different cultural environments? → If we assume the latter, then by what criteria do we want to distinguish those supposedly universal features of “esotericism” from its local or culture-specific manifestations? → In either case, does it really make sense to distinguish between an “Eastern” and a “Western” variant of this one single thing called “esotericism” (whatever it might be)? → If we feel that it does make sense to make such a distinction, then where do we draw the boundary, and why? → But then again, why insist on “East” versus “West”? Why not differentiate between “Northern” and “Southern” forms instead, or split the whole thing up into more specific regional variants? → On the other hand, if we look at esotericism as something specifically “Western,” then what is it that makes it so unique and different from all the rest? And where or how then do we draw the boundaries of its “Western” identity? → Isn’t it true that the very adjective “Western” implies logically that there must be an “Eastern” esotericism as well?<sup>24</sup> → Do we understand it as “Western” in a geographical or in a cultural sense? → What happens if “Western” esoteric ideas or practices travel to non-Western cultures, for instance to India? Do we assume that they will behave like Western “tourists” there, so to speak? → Or will they come to stay, and eventually merge with Indian culture to such an extent that the result is something new: a cross-cultural mutation of

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*persecuciones de curanderos, espiritistas, astrólogos y otros esoteristas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2010); and the Center for the Study of Western Esotericism of the Union of South American Nations (CEEU-UNASUR; see information on [www.esswe.org](http://www.esswe.org), under “Affiliated Networks”).

<sup>24</sup> Marco Pasi, “The Modernity of Occultism: Reflections on Some Crucial Aspects,” in *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years’ Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenburg (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 153.

Western esotericism that can no longer be called just “Western” anymore but is now “Eastern” as well? → Or should it be seen, rather, as an “Eastern” development inspired by Western influence? → Do such distinctions make any sense at all, if we wish to understand such new phenomena? → Or do they merely create *mis*understandings based on essentialist notions of “East versus West”: a legacy of Western domination in the colonial era based on Orientalist stereotypes grounded in ideologies of Western superiority? → If so, are we not obliged to get rid of the very notion of “Western” esotericism and start speaking of a global esotericism instead?

As one can see, this series of questions finally leads us full circle. All of them are perfectly legitimate, but we could continue the inquiry forever, without ever resolving the problem or getting closer to a final conclusion. It is not hard to see that the two options (esotericism as something “global”; esotericism as something “Western”) are *both* very hard to maintain in a consistent manner, once we start questioning the assumptions on which they are based and the implications that follow from them. If so, it would seem that we are stuck. How do we escape from this circle?

### Historicizing the Problem

In my experience, what keeps us from resolving a theoretical dilemma is usually not so much the dilemma itself but the fact that we keep looking at it from an exclusively theoretical angle. The best recipe then consists of *historicizing* the problem, by asking ourselves who were the first to encounter it, and why. This means that we move our dilemma out of the timeless mental realm of theoretical abstractions and into our concrete life-world of embodied human beings operating in time and space.<sup>25</sup> The world of theory is a logical world, a world of “either/or,” whereas the world in which all of us are living is an empirical world, a world of “both/and.” In the messy reality where we actually find ourselves, we do not encounter theories. All we encounter is *people* very much like ourselves: human beings of flesh and blood who have been struggling with certain theoretical problems, sometimes for highly personal

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<sup>25</sup> See Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 366 (where I suggest that historiography should ultimately trump theory/metatheory); and further discussion in Bernd-Christian Otto, “Discourse Theory trumps Discourse Theory: Wouter Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy*,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 231–40; and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “The Power of Ideas: Esotericism, Historicism, and the Limits of Discourse,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 253–55, with notes 2 and 6.

and emotionally charged reasons, and who came up with proposals and ideas that (if truth be told) are seldom wholly consistent from a theoretical point of view but have sometimes proven so powerful that they keep deeply influencing our own. In some cases, our predecessors have succeeded in creating the very discursive framework, paradigm, or grand narrative within which we ourselves are still moving today – often without realizing it. As a result, as scholars we often end up playing our parts in *someone else's* story, on their conditions, and within the storylines that they have set up for us. The task then is to take a step backward, try to become aware of those stories, and see whether we might be able to begin writing a different and perhaps a better one.

### A Global Dustbin of Rejected Knowledge

At what point in history, then, do we first encounter the idea of “esotericism” as a Western or a more-than-Western and possibly global phenomenon? In my recent work, I have tried to trace the genealogy of *Western* esotericism, and reached the conclusion that this notion is grounded (perhaps surprisingly) in the virulent polemics of early modern Protestant thinkers around what many of them saw as a continuous tradition of pagan heresy that had begun in very ancient times and continued until the present.<sup>26</sup> These Protestant polemics were adopted by Enlightenment thinkers, who used them for their own ends to present their own worldview as “rational” and “scientific” by contrasting it with what they perceived as the perennial temptation of “superstition” and “the irrational.”<sup>27</sup> This idea of a sharp dualism between “science and superstition,” or “reason and unreason,” is essential to our concerns. We are often told that it goes back all the way to the Greeks, but I believe this to be a mistake. Of course, there is no doubt that in antiquity we find our share of rationalists who sharply critiqued or ridiculed a variety of popular or traditional practices and beliefs; but we do not yet find the dramatic notion of two monolithic “worlds” or mentalities, one defined by the light of reason and one defined by its dark opposite that is in need of illumination. *That* is a modern idea. In fact, I would go so far as to call it the very idea *of* modernity.

In any case, it is an idea with a history, a genealogy. It could not have emerged without a long and complicated previous history of Christian polemics against the alleged dangers of “paganism.” A classic and obvious reference is St Augustine, who imagined the world of Christianity as the City

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<sup>26</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 77–152.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 153–256.

of God opposed to the dark city of pagan error.<sup>28</sup> Such models of light versus darkness speak to the imagination and easily lend themselves to powerful and dramatic narratives of battle and conquest. As a result, imaginary scenarios of a momentous struggle between the forces of light (the light of the gospel, the light of reason) and the forces of darkness (demon-inspired cults, savagery, ignorance, superstition) have played a major role in the history of globalization, beginning with the discovery of the Americas and the Far East, and culminating in the era of imperialism and colonialism.

When explorers and missionaries arrived in Mexico, Peru, India, the various regions of Africa, and so on, they brought their Western models of “paganism” and “idolatry” with them.<sup>29</sup> When Westerners had to try and make sense of native beliefs and practices, they naturally did so by comparing them to *prototypes* that they knew from their own culture and history. As a result, the various religions of colonized peoples were perceived as similar to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, ancient Egyptian religion, and so on.<sup>30</sup> Some degree of positive appreciation for non-Western beliefs and practices was possible in so far as they were somewhat reminiscent of monotheist religion; for instance, the Renaissance model of a *prisca theologia*, based upon a positive idea of “pagan wisdom,” could be used as an interpretative grid or “intellectual filter,”<sup>31</sup> as when Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl described the ruler Nezahualcoyotl (1402–1472) as “a sage even wiser than the divine Plato, who alone has managed to raise himself up to the knowledge of a single ‘creator of visible and invisible things’.”<sup>32</sup> But no such appreciation was possible or even imaginable if pagan beliefs or practices were seen as instances of pagan *idolatry*. The worship of divinities embodied in material objects or images was seen as the unforgivable sin from a monotheist perspective: this was the very “heart of darkness” that defined the essence of the false religion of heathens or pagans.<sup>33</sup> This

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<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed./trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> For a useful introduction to the discourse on “idolatry” in early modern Europe and its relevance to missionary and colonial discourse, see Carina L. Johnson, “Idoltrous Cultures and the Practice of Religion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 597–621.

<sup>30</sup> For Mexico and Peru, see Carmen Bernand and Serge Gruzinski, *De l'idolâtrie: Une archéologie des sciences religieuses* (Paris: Seuil, 1988); and cf. my blogpost “Exterminate all the Idols,” [www.wouterjhanegraaff.blogspot.nl](http://www.wouterjhanegraaff.blogspot.nl). For Southern Africa, see Chidester, *Savage Systems*.

<sup>31</sup> Ildikó Sz. Kristóf, “The Uses of Demonology: European Missionaries and Native Americans in the American Southwest (17–18th Centuries),” in *Centers and Peripheries in European Renaissance Culture: Essays by East-Central European Fellow*, eds. György E. Szönyi and Casaba Maczelka (JATE Press: Szeged, 2012), 167.

<sup>32</sup> Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras históricas*, vol. I, 405; see Bernand and Gruzinski, *De l'idolâtrie*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> For the concept of idolatry in its original Jewish context, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1992). For very striking

perennial error of pagan idolatry is precisely what the missionaries and colonizers believed they encountered all over the world.

I would suggest that these early forms of “comparative religion” are at the heart of our problem of Western versus global esotericism. In describing *Western* esotericism as “rejected knowledge,” my argument is that Enlightenment thinkers began to imagine a kind of cultural “waste basket” or reservoir of practices and beliefs that used to be seen as pagan idolatry by previous generations and were now re-described as dangerous or ridiculous nonsense that deserved no recognition or respect. Its remains should be destroyed and its memories forgotten.<sup>34</sup> The crucial point for our concerns is that the entire traditional amalgam of “pagan superstition, irrational belief, and idolatrous practice” that had been known since Hellenistic antiquity now appeared to be a *worldwide* phenomenon: the explorers and missionaries discovered that it was not just Western but global. In traditional Christian terms, *all* the religions of the world turned out to be forms of “pagan superstition” inspired by the devil – or at the very least they were thoroughly infected by it. In more modern Enlightenment terms, it all amounted to so many forms of irrational magic and occult prejudice.

It is here, then, that we have our first instance of the globalization of “esotericism” – although that particular term was not yet used at the time,<sup>35</sup> and the valuation was still wholly negative.

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instances of the diabolization of American Indians as pagan idolaters, as visualized in the literature read by Jesuit missionaries during the 17th and 18th centuries, see Ildikó Sz. Kristóf, “Missionaries, Monsters, and the Demon Show: Diabolized Representations of American Indians in Jesuit Libraries of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Upper Hungary,” in *Exploring the Cultural History of Continental European Freak Shows and “Enfreakment,”* eds. Anna Kérchy and Andreas Zittlau (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 38–73.

<sup>34</sup> A paradigmatic request for erasing the very memory of “superstitious folly” and destroying its archival remains is Christoph August Heumann, “Von denen Kennzeichen der falschen und unächtten Philosophie,” *Acta Philosophorum* 2 (1715): 209–11 (see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 132–33). On the language of “extermination” as applied to the “idolatrous” culture of native peoples, cf. Hanegraaff, “Exterminate all the Idols.”

<sup>35</sup> Contrary to Monica Neugebauer-Wölk and apparently many of her German colleagues (see Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, “Historische Esoterikforschung, oder: Der lange Weg der Esoterik zur Moderne,” in *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, eds. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, Renko Geffarth and Markus Meumann (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013, esp. 37), it seems to me that the historical genealogy of the term “esotericism” (resp. *Esoterik*, *l’ésotérisme*, etc.), while extremely interesting in itself, is *not* of any decisive importance regarding its validity as an *etic* scholarly concept. Much more important than the question of which particular term happened to be used (*emically*) at any time is the *imaginative formations* to which it was meant to refer (but which might well be referred to by various terms next to “esotericism”). For my understanding of “imaginative formations,” see Hanegraaff, “Reconstructing ‘Religion’ from the Bottom Up” (forthcoming).

## From Rejection to Fascination

This situation did not last. As noted by Gerd Baumann in a brilliant discussion of identity politics,<sup>36</sup> binary oppositions of “good” versus “bad” are always subject to reversal, and the result is a sophisticated dialectics of rejection and desire. The very alterity of the excluded “Other” can turn it into an object of attraction; and once it has been constructed as an “alternative option” in the collective imagination, people who do not like the dominant narrative can easily shift their allegiance to its suppressed counterpart. In this manner, what Enlightenment thinkers rejected as bad could be embraced as good by their opponents, who could use it to construct their own identity in conscious opposition against what they saw as empty rationalism or soulless science. This is exactly what happened: the entire reservoir of “rejected knowledge” became an object of intense fascination for Romantics and other critics of the Enlightenment during the 19th century, precisely *because* of its perceived alterity vis-à-vis socially dominant models of science and rationality.

This reservoir of “rejected knowledge,” whether valued positively or negatively, was (again) perceived as *not* just Western but global. As far as one could tell, it was everywhere and had always been there. The terminology was still very fluid, with many different words and concepts floating around, including “paganism,” “heathenism,” “idolatry,” “superstition,” “fetishism,” “magic,” “mysticism,” “occult science,” “occult philosophy,” “unreason,” or even simply “craziness” or “stupidity.” Some of these terms (such as “superstition”) were too inherently negative to be eligible for neutral let alone positive usage,<sup>37</sup> others (such as “fetishism”) were just a bit too specific to work as a general umbrella term. But a few of the common terms turned out to be both general enough *and* suitable as more or less neutral or even positive concepts. The chief examples were “magic,”<sup>38</sup> “occult science,” “occult philosophy”<sup>39</sup> and

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<sup>36</sup> Gerd Baumann, “Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach,” in *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, eds. Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2004), 20; cf. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 374.

<sup>37</sup> For the genealogy of “superstition,” see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 156–64.

<sup>38</sup> For the genealogy and theoretical problems of “magic,” in relation to the study of Western esotericism, see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 164–77; idem, “Magic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. Glenn A. Magee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). The definitive study on the category “magic” in the study of religion is now Bernd-Christian Otto, *Magie: Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 1–132.

<sup>39</sup> For the genealogy of “occult science(s)” and “occult philosophy,” see Wouter J. Hanegraaff,

(eventually, in a later period) “paganism.”<sup>40</sup> During the 19th century, these terms now entered into the common vocabulary of both scholars *and* a new class of enthusiasts and practitioners. Scholars were studying the “beliefs and practices of mankind, from primitive to civilized man,” usually in terms of an evolutionary narrative with magic at the bottom and science at the top. As for the new class of amateur scholars and practitioners: eventually, many of them began calling themselves “occultists,” and they were proud to speak of “magic” or “occult science” as a force for *progress*, superior not just to conventional Christian religion but also to positivist science.<sup>41</sup> About one thing, at least, they were all in agreement: “magic” or “the occult” could be encountered everywhere around the globe and had been around since time immemorial.

As recently emphasized by Kennet Granholm, a particularly important and fascinating dimension of the occultists’ perspective was their embrace of a “positive Orientalism.”<sup>42</sup> The Protestant polemics against “paganism,” picked up and continued by Enlightenment thinkers, had been directed against the dominant Renaissance model of a *prisca theologia* or *philosophia perennis* and its belief in a supreme ancient wisdom that had originated somewhere in the Orient and had been transmitted through the Platonic tradition. This perspective of “Platonic Orientalism,”<sup>43</sup> with its positive appreciation of Wisdom from the East, had been thoroughly discredited by Protestant and Enlightenment

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“The Notion of ‘Occult Sciences’ in the Wake of the Enlightenment,” in *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, eds. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, Renko Geffarth and Markus Meumann (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 73–95 (based in large part upon Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 177–91).

<sup>40</sup> For the genealogy of “paganism,” from the perspective of its relevance to contemporary neo-pagan discourse, see the earlier chapters of Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> For some of these scholars of the occult in “the age of the amateur,” see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, ch. 3. For the relation of occultism to science, see Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014); for its relation to Enlightenment agendas of social progress, see Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), and cf. Pasi, “Modernity of Occultism”; and for its previously ignored relation to Socialism, in the context of Romanticism and Neo-Catholicism, see Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi* (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Heidelberg, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Granholm, “Locating the West,” 22–24; cf. Christopher Partridge, “Lost Horizon: H.P. Blavatsky and Theosophical Orientalism” in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 309–33.

<sup>43</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 12–17ff.

thinkers,<sup>44</sup> and its place taken by *negative* valuations of the Orient as a place of mystical decadence, luxurious superstitions, blind despotism, and social stagnation. It is this perspective, of course, that Edward Said had in mind in his famous critique of “Orientalist” discourse.<sup>45</sup> But Said ignored its positive counterpart, represented by Romantic and occultist thinkers and much more influential than has long been assumed.<sup>46</sup> These thinkers *kept* building upon the Renaissance models of Platonic Orientalism, while developing them into new directions informed by the masses of newly available information about Far Eastern cultures such as India or Tibet.

In short, occultism was seen as something global, and its spiritual center or origin was widely believed to be somewhere in the Far East.<sup>47</sup> How then do we get from here to our current notions of “Western esotericism”? Marco Pasi has convincingly argued that its origins are in the late 19th and early 20th century “Hermetic reaction” against the increasing emphasis among occultists on Eastern wisdom:

With the “Hermetic Reaction” that develops in occultism as a response to Blavatsky’s emphasis on the “Eastern” sources of esoteric wisdom, the idea of a specifically “Western” esoteric tradition takes shape. Jewish kabbalah plays a crucial role in this process. Whereas Mme. Blavatsky tended to devalue Jewish kabbalah by considering it an inferior form of older “Oriental” traditions . . . , later “Hermetic” occultists come to perceive it as one of the pillars of a distinctly “Western” esoteric tradition, together with phenomena such as Rosicrucianism, alchemy, and the tarot.<sup>48</sup>

Groups such as Anna Kingsford’s Hermetic Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, or Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society, all insisted on

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., ch. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

<sup>46</sup> On the relation between Romanticism and occultism, illustrated by the central case of Eliphas Lévi, see Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizismus und Okkultismus*.

<sup>47</sup> *Geographically*, occultists were looking towards the Far East, notably India and Tibet; but *historically*, Theosophists in the wake of Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* (1888) began looking further back than the roots of Oriental civilization, towards the sunken continents of Lemuria and Atlantis, believed to be the home of the third and fourth “root races” (Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester/Toronto: Inner Traditions, 2011), 64–116).

<sup>48</sup> Marco Pasi, “Oriental Kabbalah and the Parting of East and West in the Early Theosophical Society,” in *Kabbalah and Modernity: Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, eds. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 162.

the *specificity* of Western spiritual traditions. Oriental mysticism was considered too alien to the mentality of Western peoples, who should better stick to their own venerable traditions, notably the Kabbalah and Hermetic Philosophy. This argument was *still* based on the notion of occultism as a global phenomenon, but it was supposed to have developed differently in Eastern and Western cultures: “the Western Mind” was believed to be inherently different from “the Oriental Mind.” Within such a framework, it was certainly possible to see Eastern and Western occultism as equal and mutually complementary counterparts, each with their own occult tradition. But in practice, since the discourse just happened to be dominated by European and American occultists in the colonial era, it often carried subtle or less subtle suggestions of Western superiority – even in the work of authors who honestly believed that they were doing the opposite.<sup>49</sup>

By the time we reach the 20th century, we therefore have a situation of intense and widespread curiosity about the entire global reservoir of beliefs and practices that the Enlightenment had tried to reject as irrational superstition. The terminology was still not fixed. “Esotericism” was just one of the many terms that were now floating around, next to a family of concepts with the word “occult” in it (occult science, occult philosophy, occultism, the occult). “Magic” remained a particularly popular umbrella term, although some occultists (e.g. A.E. Waite) now insisted on a superior “mystical” interpretation. Be that as it may, as far as I can see, *nobody* believed that the domain in question was exclusively Western.

## Two Ways of Thinking

This entire domain of thought and practice seemed to be grounded in very basic assumptions, mental practices, or “mentalities,” that were hard or impossible to reconcile with some of the most central tenets of Enlightenment rationalism and positivist science. This is, of course, why they were dumped into the dustbin of “rejected knowledge” in the first place. How could such evidently false beliefs have acquired such a hold over the human mind? Was

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<sup>49</sup> On Theosophical appropriations of Orientalist discourse, and the ironies involved in this phenomenon, see Partridge, “Lost Horizon,” and cf. idem, “Orientalism and the Occult,” in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015). It would be interesting to compare the perspectives of Western Theosophists who travelled to India with those of Westerners already well integrated in Indian society and Indians who embraced Theosophy in the context of their agendas of emancipation and liberation from British colonial rule.

there perhaps something about them that rationalists and scientists failed to see? If so, what was it? Intellectual reflection about the nature of “rejected knowledge” worldwide (its deep structure, its underlying assumptions, its mental habits, and so on, plus of course the question of how it was related to science and rationality) led to the formulation of popular and extremely influential theories that, as I hope to show, are ultimately at the bottom of current debates about the nature of “esotericism.” We are dealing here with an enormously complicated and multifaceted discourse about *Das Andere der Vernunft*,<sup>50</sup> and in what follows I will concentrate on just a few central authors and lines of argument.<sup>51</sup>

One of the most influential voices in the debate was the founder of cultural anthropology Edward Burnett Tylor, who argued that “magic” or “occult science” (he did not differentiate between the two terms) differs from genuine science in being based upon an elementary error of logic, i.e. the false assumption that things or events that we connect in our minds must therefore be connected in the outside world:

The principal key to the understanding of Occult Science is to consider it as based on the Association of Ideas, a faculty which lies at the very foundation of human reason, but in no small degree of human unreason also. Man, as yet in a low intellectual condition, having come to associate in thought those things which he found by experience to be connected in fact, proceeded erroneously to invert this action, and to conclude that association in thought must involve similar connexion in reality. He thus attempted to discover, to foretell, and to cause events by means of processes which we can now see to have only an ideal significance. By a vast mass of evidence from savage, barbaric, and civilized life, magic arts which have resulted from thus *mistaking an ideal for a real connexion* may be clearly traced from the lower culture which they are of, to the higher culture which they are in.<sup>52</sup>

Based on this understanding of “magic” or “occult science,” it all came down to a simple question of education: if one just teaches people to make correct use of their rational faculties, they will cease to believe in magic. Essentially this is still the position of hardline skeptics and new atheists such as Richard Dawkins or Daniel Dennett today. But Tylor was a subtle thinker and eventually realized

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<sup>50</sup> Hartmut Böhme and Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft: Zur Entwicklung von Rationalitätsstrukturen am Beispiel Kants* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983).

<sup>51</sup> A very important strand that will not be discussed here is based upon Max Weber’s thesis of “disenchantment.” See Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*.

<sup>52</sup> Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, vol 1, 1871 (London: John Murray, 1913), 115–16 (emphasis added).

that things were more complex. He tried to keep “magic” or “occult science” apart from the more respectable domain of “religion” (based on “animism,” defined as the belief in spiritual beings), but discovered to his chagrin that he was unable to do so: the categories just kept blending into one another, both empirically and theoretically.<sup>53</sup> At least as worrying was the fact that both magic and religion were deeply involved in yet another phenomenon that puzzled the rationalists: that of mythology. How could even such reasonable people as the ancient Greeks have believed in those wildly irrational stories about the gods? This issue was connected in Tylor’s mind with another universal phenomenon of “primitive culture” that he referred to as “the great doctrine of *analogy*.”<sup>54</sup> It referred to the tendency of human beings to engage in correlative thinking, so that they perceive reality in terms of non-causal correspondences instead of causal relations that can be empirically proven and logically understood. Analogical thinking was closely interwoven with mythology, and Tylor believed that both were now “dying” under the impact of science:

The myths shaped out of those endless analogies between man and nature which are the soul of all poetry, into those half-human stories still so full to us of un fading life and beauty, are the masterpieces of an art belonging rather to the past than to the present. The growth of myth has been checked by science, and is dying of weights and measurement, of proportions and specimens – it is not only dying, but half dead, and students are anatomising it. In this world one must do what one can, and if the moderns cannot feel myth as their forefathers did, at least they can analyse it. There is a kind of intellectual frontier within which he must be who will sympathise with myth, while he must be without who will investigate it, and it is our fortune that we live near this frontier-line, and can go in and out.<sup>55</sup>

One can see that Tylor felt somewhat conflicted about the phenomenon, and some part of him regretted the fact that myth, analogy, and even magic were things of the past. Be that as it may, this staunch rationalist and positivist spent his career trying to somehow make sense of all those “weird” beliefs and practices that the Enlightenment had been fighting as superstitious nonsense.

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<sup>53</sup> Detailed analysis in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “The Emergence of the Academic Science of Magic: The Occult Philosophy in Tylor and Frazer,” in *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, eds. Arie L. Molendijk and Peter Pels (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1998), 254–65, with special reference to Tylor’s neglected article “Magic.” It should come as no surprise that precisely the category of “idolatry” was responsible for blurring the boundary between “magic” (occult science) and “religion” (animism).

<sup>54</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1, 296–97.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

Implicit in his work is the discovery that he was not just dealing with one thing, but with *many*: science and rationality did not just have a problem with “magic,” but also with “animism,” with “myth,” with “analogical” or correlative thinking and, as a result, with “symbols” (as opposed to discursive language and logic). With hindsight, we can see that all these categories had just one thing in common, namely the simple fact that none of them fit the requirements of Enlightenment reason and its brand-new ideal of a “scientific worldview.” We seem to be faced with a situation where one single warrior – the modern Scientist or Man of Reason – is fighting a multitude of “irrational” enemies.

There have been many attempts to reduce the contents of this global reservoir of “rejected knowledge” to essentially one single thing (or, to put it more bluntly, to define the essence of the irrational). Among the most important and influential examples is the French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.<sup>56</sup> His lasting contribution lies in a very simple idea that, however, seems to have been surprisingly hard to entertain for intellectuals at the time when he was writing: that there are two basic and irreducible “mentalities” or “ways of thinking” available to the human mind. The first one could be referred to as “instrumental causality” and works with demonstrable chains of cause-and-effect that can be precisely described and logically understood;<sup>57</sup> the other was referred to as “participation” and works according to different principles. These principles were not so easy to define and describe, however, precisely *because* they do not satisfy the requirements of logic and instrumental causality on which scholars just happen to rely in their normal discursive speech. For instance Stanley Tambiah makes a serious attempt to define “participation,” but with questionable success: it supposedly signifies “the association between persons and things ... to the point of identity and consubstantiality,” it is “indifferent to ‘secondary’ causes (or intervening mechanisms)” because “the connection between cause and effect is immediate and intermediate links are not recognized.”<sup>58</sup> In the end, such formulations do not tell us much more than that “participation” (like the equally incomprehensible doctrine

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<sup>56</sup> For my take on Lévy-Bruhl, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World,” *Religion* 33 (2003): 371–78. For a useful short overview of the “rationality debate” in relation to Lévy-Bruhl’s theory, see Tanya M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 345–56. For a critique, see G.E.R. Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 124–25.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 86.

of “consubstantiality” basic to Trinitarian and Eucharistic theology) is *not* instrumental causality. What it *is* remains as mysterious as ever. Because participation was so clearly opposed to “modern” notions of instrumental causality, Lévy-Bruhl first assumed that it was typical only of “primitive” thought; but by the end of his life, he had concluded that this could not be correct. Both “mentalities,” he concluded, were universal to the human mind and could be found everywhere, not just among the “primitives” but in modern society as well.

Lévy-Bruhl was among the most important early influences on the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. Jung deserves special attention in the present context, because there is probably no other 20th century thinker whose work has been more important and influential with respect to the idea of a “Western” versus a “global” esotericism. Not only did he concentrate on many central aspects of what we now call Western esotericism,<sup>59</sup> but he tried to expand its horizon by exploring its parallels in Eastern cultures and other parts of the world. Jung’s pivotal study *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* (Transformations and Symbols of the Libido, 1911–12) was grounded in the concept of “two ways of thinking.”<sup>60</sup> This idea was crucially indebted to Lévy-Bruhl’s *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* published one year earlier, but also to a theory that had emerged in German Romantic Mesmerism with authors such as Justinus Kerner and Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert.<sup>61</sup> They pioneered the idea of two complementary types of consciousness associated with night and day, the heart and the brain, dream and reason, symbolism and discursive language, nature and society.<sup>62</sup> As far as Jung was concerned, Lévy Bruhl and the Romantic mesmerists were talking about one and the same thing.

Jung’s *Wandlungen* led to the break with Sigmund Freud, which became final in early January 1913;<sup>63</sup> and toward the end of that same year, Jung entered a

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<sup>59</sup> For Jung’s importance to the study of Western esotericism, see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 277–95. Although he did not yet use the term “esotericism,” its centrality to Jung’s work is evident from the sheer list of his research topics: the “occult phenomena” of somnambulism and spiritualist mediumship (in his dissertation), ancient gnosticism, Hellenistic mystery cults, alchemy, the various manifestations of what he called “synchronicity” (astrology, correspondences, natural magic), quantum mysticism, UFO phenomena, and the Aquarian Age.

<sup>60</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido: Beiträge zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Denkens*, 1911–12 (Leipzig/Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1925), 7–35.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Sonu Shamdasani, *C.G. Jung: A Biography in Books* (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 31–32, 53–55.

<sup>62</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 262–66.

<sup>63</sup> Deirdre Bair, *Jung: A Biography* (Boston/New York/London: Little, Brown and Company, 2003), 238.

deep mental and spiritual crisis. In an attempt at self-therapy, he began filling notebooks (the so-called *Black Books*) with accounts of the intense dreams, visions, and fantasies that began to overwhelm him, and these led eventually to a unique manuscript in calligraphic script on parchment that has become known as *Liber Novus* or *The Red Book*. It was kept under lock and key for many years but was finally published in 2009.<sup>64</sup> It shows Jung's existential struggle with the two radically opposed and mutually exclusive "ways of thinking," mentalities, or types of consciousness that Lévy-Bruhl had been talking about. Jung introduces them as the *Geist dieser Zeit* (Spirit of This Time), which uses logic and discursive language and believes in science, and its opponent, the *Geist der Tiefe* (Spirit of the Depth), which uses images and myths to speak about the deeper truths of the soul. It is perfectly clear that this *Geist der Tiefe* represented the suppressed voices of everything that had been dumped into the reservoir of "rejected knowledge" and was now widely seen as incompatible with science and reason: primitive magic, myth, paganism, the occult, symbolism, analogical thinking, and so on. In a real sense, *Liber Novus* documents the return of the repressed.

Throughout his *Red Book* we see Jung struggling with his fear of ridicule and public humiliation. Wasn't all this "irrational" stuff just the bottomless reservoir of human stupidity and silly superstitions? Wouldn't he himself, an internationally respected psychiatrist, be dismissed as a fool or an idiot for paying any serious attention to such topics? Or worse, wasn't this "Spirit of the Depth" really the spirit of unreason and madness? Wouldn't listening to it drive him literally insane?<sup>65</sup> In the end, he decided to accept the risk: rather than rejecting all these visions and fantasies as crazy nonsense, he would take them seriously and try to understand what they had to tell him. The entirety of his later oeuvre is based on that decision, to an extent that we can only begin to understand now that *The Red Book* has become available.

Jung eventually concluded that the various traditions of "rejected knowledge" could be studied and understood *historically*,<sup>66</sup> as a continuous stream that went back at least as far as the mystery religions of Hellenistic antiquity and the gnostic heresies of the first centuries. He thought they lived

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<sup>64</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, edited and introduced by Sonu Shamdasani (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> On the role of madness in Jung's *Red Book*, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Great War of the Soul: Divine and Human Madness in Carl Gustav Jung's *Liber Novus*," in *Krise und religiöser Wahn-Sinn*, ed. Sebastian Schüler (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 286–89.

on in the “Hermetic” science of alchemy through the Middle Ages, were picked up by thinkers such as Paracelsus during the Renaissance, and finally emerged once more in modern “occult” currents such as Mesmerism, Somnambulism, and Spiritualism. To make it all relevant again, and applicable to the needs of “modern man” after the Death of God – the struggle with Nietzsche’s legacy is absolutely central to Jung’s personal struggle documented in *The Red Book* – the tradition of rejected knowledge must now be transformed into a science. However, the scientific *Geist dieser Zeit* had almost killed the human soul by reducing it to reason alone. The new science based upon the *Geist der Tiefe* must therefore be a science of the soul: in other words – and quite literally – a scientific psychology.

If occultists in the final decades of the 19th century were the first to speak of a “Western occult tradition” (a “Hermetic” counterpart to Oriental Theosophy), then Jung seems to have been its second major pioneer. He disliked the Theosophists and tried to keep his distance from “occultists” in general, but his outline of a suppressed “Western” tradition was in fact quite similar to theirs, and it became enormously influential after World War II. But Jung’s ambitions went further than the West alone. The worldviews represented by the *Geist der Tiefe* could not be just cultural artefacts unique to Europeans or Americans, but must ultimately have their basis in the human mind as such. The decisive switch in Jung’s thinking seems to have come in 1928, when the Sinologist Richard Wilhelm sent him his translation of a Chinese text of Taoist alchemy, the *Tai I Gin Hua Dsung Dschü* or “Secret of the Golden Flower.”<sup>67</sup> After reading it, Jung decided to stop working on his *Red Book*, presumably because he realized that this Chinese text was based upon the very same premises as his own visions.<sup>68</sup> Since “The Secret of the Golden Flower” and his own *Red Book* were completely independent products of different cultures, and the previously unknown Chinese manuscript could not possibly have influenced his own work, Jung saw this as decisive proof that (in his own words) “beyond all differences of culture and consciousness, the psyche has a common substrate” that manifests itself in the form of “latent dispositions towards certain identical reactions.”<sup>69</sup> In terms that sound remarkably like modern cognitive science, he insisted that this “collective

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<sup>67</sup> *Das Geheimnis der goldenen Blüte: Ein chinesisches Lebensbuch*, Übersetzt und erläutert von Richard Wilhelm, mit einem europäischen Kommentar von C.G. Jung (München: Dornverlag Grete Ullmann, 1929).

<sup>68</sup> Jung, *Red Book*, 360 (epilogue written in 1959).

<sup>69</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, “Einführung,” in *Das Geheimnis der goldenen Blüte*, 16.

unconscious” common to all human beings is “simply the expression in the psyche of identical neurological structures” that produce “common instincts of representation (Imagination) and action.”<sup>70</sup>

What we see here is yet a further development of the basic idea of “two ways of thinking”: next to the rational perspective of daytime rationality (now conceptualized as the world of “consciousness”), there is the deeper non-rational perspective of the soul (now conceptualized as the world of “the unconscious”). The crucial point for our present concerns is that the historical and empirical manifestations of what Jung henceforth referred to as the collective unconscious happen to cover precisely the entire traditional reservoir of “rejected knowledge.” We are still dealing with everything that Enlightenment science and rationality found difficult or impossible to understand, to accept, and to accommodate.

### Antoine Faivre and Rejected Knowledge

In 1933 (just five years after Wilhelm’s text convinced him of the universal or global relevance of his personal visionary experiences and his studies of Western traditions of “rejected knowledge”), Jung became involved in the famous series of annual conferences known as the Eranos meetings in Switzerland. Due to his personal charisma and the force of his ideas, he became the dominant figure in that context until far after World War II, when other famous celebrities joined the scene, notably Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem, and Henry Corbin.<sup>71</sup> In this context, Eliade most clearly represented the continuing concern of Eranos with *global* comparative perspectives in the study of religion, while Scholem focused more specifically on Jewish “mystical” traditions and Corbin on their Islamic “esoteric” counterparts. Thanks to Corbin, more than anyone else, the term “esotericism” began to play a significant role at Eranos and in related scholarly circles, notably the French *Université de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem*.<sup>72</sup> This terminology was adopted and promoted *inter alia* by another Eranos scholar, Corbin’s younger colleague and friend Antoine Faivre.

Faivre, of course, would become the pioneering scholar who succeeded in

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>71</sup> Hakl, *Eranos*; Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 277–314.

<sup>72</sup> Hakl, *Eranos*, 275–76 (English ed.)/521–24 (German 2nd ed.); Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 341–43ff.

putting “*Western esotericism*” on the map of academic research.<sup>73</sup> Thanks to his influence, the adjective “*Western*” became firmly established – although, admittedly, Faivre’s central concern was not with the West in all its variety but rather with the specifically *Christian* counterpart to Scholem’s Jewish and Corbin’s Islamic traditions. Faivre clearly understood “the West” in cultural rather than strictly geographical terms, as a domain dominated by Christian culture, although occasionally “‘visited’ by some Jewish, Islamic, or even far-Eastern religious traditions.”<sup>74</sup> In this context, he famously presented “*Western esotericism*” as a “form of thought” (*forme de pensée*) characterized by four intrinsic characteristics: correspondences, living nature, imagination/mediations, and transmutation.

Faivre derived his notion of a *forme de pensée* from his colleague Emile Poulat, and it is important to be precise about what the term meant to them. Both scholars insisted that it referred *not* to a theoretical concept residing in some kind of abstract mental space: a “form of thought” could exist only as the product of *specific* historical and cultural conditions.<sup>75</sup> In other words: there is no such thing as “*esotericism*” unless it is incarnated<sup>76</sup> in time and space – in this case as *Western esotericism* or, even more specifically (for both Faivre and Poulat) as *modern Western esotericism* beginning in the Renaissance.<sup>77</sup> It follows that if one were to conceive of an “*Eastern esotericism*” (however defined), *this would necessarily be something else*. By making comparisons between the two, one might discover both differences and similarities, but one should *not* expect to find different manifestations of sameness. This simple point is often overlooked, but is crucial: that two things are similar does not mean that they are identical. On the contrary, it means that they are different!<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 334–55.

<sup>74</sup> Antoine Faivre, *L'ésotérisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 8 (cf. slightly different variations of the passage in later editions and translations; cf. Pasi, “*Oriental Kabbalah*,” 152 with note 4).

<sup>75</sup> Antoine Faivre, “*Émile Poulat et notre domaine*,” in *Un objet de science, le catholicisme: Réflexions autour de l'oeuvre d'Émile Poulat (en Sorbonne, 22–23 octobre 1999)*, ed. Valentine Zuber (Paris: Bayard, 2001), 213.

<sup>76</sup> On the relevance of the term “*incarnation*” in this context, see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 350 note 350.

<sup>77</sup> “*L'ésotérisme n'existe que dans un cadre géo-historique. ... Elle se dégage au temps de la Renaissance*” (Faivre, “*Emile Poulat et notre domaine*,” 213)

<sup>78</sup> Similarity *implies* difference: two different things may be similar to a certain extent, but they can never be the same (for then they are no longer different, and there is no longer anything to compare). This is where we find the exact dividing line between scholarly comparison and religious or esoteric belief: scholarly comparativists may note multiple similarities between

To find out what is really going on in Faivre’s famous definition, I believe we should ask ourselves a simple question: what, according to his four characteristics, would *not* be considered esoteric? The answer I believe to be crystal clear once one sees it: Faivre’s “esoteric” form of thought is in fact the logical counterpart, the rhetorical “Other,” of what we might refer to as the “Enlightenment” form of thought!<sup>79</sup> Correspondences are non-causal connections, in sharp contrast with the instrumental causality (cause-and-effect) basic to Newtonian science. Living nature means that the world is not a dead mechanism or clockwork, as strict materialism would have it. That the imagination is an organ of perception and knowledge is the direct antithesis of Enlightenment (and positivist) empiricism, which typically dismissed the imagination as mere deceptive fantasy, a faculty of illusion. Faivre’s notion of mediation means that there are multiple subtle levels of reality intermediary between pure spirit and pure matter – again in contrast to the one-level (monistic) world of materialism and positivism. Transmutation, finally, means that human beings may go through an interior process of spiritual rebirth and purification modeled after alchemy, in contrast with the putative “rational subject” of Enlightenment philosophy (which must, of course, reject the language of interiority or practices of “spiritual alchemy” as Pietist obscurantism and pseudoscientific nonsense).

The conclusion will perhaps be surprising to some readers, but all of this means that Faivre’s “Western esotericism” is perfectly equivalent to what I have referred to as the Enlightenment’s reservoir of “rejected knowledge.”<sup>80</sup> This

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East and West, but only believers in some religious or esoteric truth will go a step further and claim that these are all the reflection of one and the same true, unchanging, universal, hidden, spiritual reality.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 5.

<sup>80</sup> To avoid any misunderstandings, this does not mean that I would return to the classic Faivrean approach. If Faivre’s definition can be deconstructed as an attempt (perhaps unconscious or unintentional) to capture the structural counterpart of the “Enlightenment form of thought,” this strengthens my thesis that what we mean by “esotericism” is in fact nothing but the reservoir of rejected knowledge: a mental category created by Enlightenment ideologies as the polemical “Other” that they needed to define and demarcate their own identity. The problem with Faivre’s definition lies in its debt to the phenomenological perspectives (broadly understood) that are associated with the Eranos tradition, which have an inherent tendency towards the reification of scholarly constructs and therefore make it hard to avoid essentialist interpretations. In short, if esotericism is presented as a specific form of thought defined by four intrinsic (i.e. necessary) characteristics, it will inevitably be perceived as a “thing” that somehow “exists” in the world out there. By contrast to such a “realist” understanding, grounded in the reification of imaginal concepts, my approach

becomes even clearer if we just slightly reformulate the four criteria: they are really all about analogy and occult correspondences, animism, worlds of the imagination, higher spiritual dimensions, and interior rebirth. By means of his four “intrinsic characteristics,” Faivre in fact defined what the radical counterpart of Enlightenment ideology would look like if one were to systematize it.

### **Enlightenment**

Instrumental causality  
Mechanism  
Monism/materialism  
Rationalism

### **Esotericism *sensu* Faivre**

Correspondences  
Living Nature  
Imagination/Mediation  
Transmutation

From a point of view that is understood as “esoteric” in the Faivrean sense, it is the Enlightenment form of thought that becomes “rejected knowledge.” In short, once again, we are dealing with “two ways of thinking” based on mutually exclusive premises.

## **Not Theory but Method**

Now what are the implications for our dilemma of “Western” versus “global” esotericism? I have been arguing that, ever since the eighteenth century, the contentious reservoir of “rejected knowledge” had been understood as not just Western but global: in Enlightenment terms, not just Europe but indeed the whole world was full of “magic” and “superstition,” full of “irrationality” and “occult nonsense” (while according to the Romantic and Occultist counter-perspective, of course, this meant that the whole world was full of wonderful, delightful, thrilling mysteries!) If this is the case, then should we not follow Granholm’s suggestion and forego the term “Western”?

As far as I can tell, there is precisely one good reason to resist that suggestion, and this reason is not theoretical but *methodological* in nature. From a theoretical perspective, it is perfectly possible indeed – perhaps even necessary – to conceive of a global field of human ideas and practices that display a sufficient degree of similarity to study it as one complex whole. As recently suggested by Egil Asprem, it should be possible to study such a field by means of standard methods of cross-cultural comparison, with careful attention to the

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remains “nominalist” (Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 368ff).

relation between culturally determined differences and structural similarities.<sup>81</sup> Scholars who point out that those theoretical features deemed most typical of “Western esotericism” are not just Western but can also be found in many places elsewhere in the world have a strong point: for instance, we might think here of Faivre’s four characteristics, but also of von Stuckrad’s emphasis on hidden, secret, or higher knowledge, or, for that matter, my own emphasis on gnosis, ecstatic or altered states of consciousness, cosmotheism, and so on. All these features can clearly be found all over the world, thereby inviting cross-cultural comparison of their various manifestations. In short, from a *theoretical* perspective based on the search for structural components that lend themselves to comparison, the attempt to keep “esotericism” confined strictly to the West seems a “mission impossible.”

And yet, I believe it makes sense to continue speaking of “Western esotericism.” *Not*, to be sure, for theoretical reasons, but strictly for reasons of method – and more specifically, of *historical* method. As formulated by Bruce Lincoln in his *Theses on Method*, to practice history of religions “in a fashion consistent with the discipline’s claim of title” means

to insist on discussing the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices, communities, and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine.<sup>82</sup>

If we apply historical method consistently, then *our object of study is never “esotericism” in any strict theoretical sense*, for such an object exists only as a theoretical construct in our own heads and not as a historical or empirical reality “out there.” What we should really forego is the illusion that we are studying some kind of “phenomenon out there,” called “esotericism”!<sup>83</sup> Rather, our task

<sup>81</sup> Asprem, “Beyond the West.”

<sup>82</sup> Bruce Lincoln, “Theses on Method,” in *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>83</sup> At this point I have to take issue with some formulations by Egil Asprem, who writes that the various “historicist programmes in the study of esotericism ... revolve around the same hard core: that *esotericism is a specific historical phenomenon, grounded in specific historical events and processes*” (“Beyond the West,” 12; emphasis in original), and states that my historicist perspective looks at esotericism as “an object to be discursively analyzed” (*ibid.*, 19). My perspective is indeed radically historicist (cf. Hanegraaff, “Power of Ideas,” 266–67, with note 29; cf. Michael Stausberg, “What is *It* All About? Some Reflections on Wouter Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy*,” *Religion* 43, no. 2 (2013): 227; Olav Hammer, “Deconstructing ‘Western Esotericism’: On Wouter Hanegraaff’s *Esotericism and the Academy*,” *Religion* 43, no.

consists of studying a wide range of quite specific and different, historically situated personalities, currents, ideas, practices, discourses, communities, or institutions, the representatives of which *may or may not* happen to think of themselves as “esotericists,”<sup>84</sup> or of their perspectives as “esoteric” (or any equivalent term, in any relevant language). If we choose to categorize all these different materials under the heading of “esotericism,” we do so simply because it is helpful to our research agendas to highlight certain things that they have in common and that make them stand out for us as somewhat “similar.”<sup>85</sup> If we categorize them, more specifically, as *Western* esotericism, this is not in order to suggest that they are Western manifestations of “esotericism” in general (that would be the theoretical perspective again!), but simply because the only way in which they appear to us *at all* is as specific products of Western culture. This means that the adjective “Western” is not understood as a qualifier within a larger field (“esotericism”), but is used to highlight the specificity of this particular domain of research.

Seen from such a perspective, the theoretical baggage of “Western esotericism” is in fact quite light. What makes it heavy is the added weight of specific assumptions about the nature of “the West,” with all their far-reaching ideological and political implications. I do not mean to imply that

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2 (2013): 242), but explicitly rejects any understanding of esotericism as “a specific historical phenomenon” or “object” (see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 368–79; cf. “Power of Ideas,” 268–69). In a private communication (24 June 2015), Asprem agreed that these formulations are somewhat ambiguous and should be adapted to avoid misunderstandings.

<sup>84</sup> It is a common misunderstanding that if person X is being discussed within the category of “esotericism,” that automatically makes him/her “an esotericist.” In my opinion, it makes a lot of sense to discuss e.g. Marsilio Ficino as an important figure in the study of esotericism, but it makes little sense to describe him as an “esotericist”: that label did not become available before the 19th century and should not be applied retrospectively. To clarify this point, it might be useful to draw a comparison with the study of homosexuality, again using Ficino as an example. It is clear from his work that he was erotically attracted to males, and this makes him relevant to the history of homoeroticism and homosexuality, but labels of self-identification such as “homosexual” or “gay” were not yet available to him, and it would be anachronistic to describe him as such (see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Under the Mantle of Love: The Mystical Eroticism of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno,” in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008 + New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 184–94, with note 42).

<sup>85</sup> Similarities do not need to be “features” or “characteristics” of “phenomena” or “objects.” From my particular perspective, which is informed by an interest in polemical discourse and identity politics, what they have in common (and therefore makes them similar at least in that particular respect) is simply their acquired status as “rejected knowledge” since the period of the Enlightenment.

by speaking of “Western esotericism” in a strictly methodological sense, we can escape from those burdens – on the contrary, I am sure that we cannot. What I do mean to suggest is that these theoretical assumptions themselves can and should be historicized. Where did they come from, how, and why? As I hope to make clear in the final section of this article, the study of “Western esotericism” is uniquely qualified to push these questions forward into new directions that have not been explored before.

### Comparing the West to the Rest

From my argument so far, it should be clear that I emphatically disagree with the notion that a historical or historicist perspective discourages or excludes comparative approaches.<sup>86</sup> On the contrary, historicism is perfectly compatible with comparative methods and larger theoretical questions: it excludes only those specific theoretical and comparative perspectives that are grounded in the denial of historicity.

One important way of making the historical study of Western esotericism fruitful to larger agendas of cross-cultural comparison on a global scale, I would suggest, is by focusing on the recurring idea of “two ways of thinking” to which I have been calling attention above. As we have seen, Tylor thought in terms of “magic” versus “science”; Lévy-Bruhl of “participation” versus “instrumental causality”; German Romantic mesmerists of the “nightside of nature” versus “daytime rationality”; Carl Gustav Jung of the “collective unconscious” versus “rational consciousness”; and this short list could easily be expanded further (for instance, think of Max Weber’s notion of “enchantment” versus “disenchantment”<sup>87</sup>). Obviously these theories are far from identical. For all their differences, however, they are structurally similar in at least one respect: they all try to respond to a specific *problem*<sup>88</sup> that was caused directly by the remarkable success of modern science and Enlightenment rationality, and its subsequent spread all over the globe. This problem, as perceived by

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<sup>86</sup> As noted by Asprem, “historicists have commonly viewed the comparative method with suspicion.” He correctly interprets this as an unfortunate legacy of the battle against “religionist,” perennialist, or Traditionalist assumptions in the study of religion, and concludes that “[w]hile the rejection of these untenable projects was understandable, a regrettable long-term side effect has been a suspicion of *all* comparativist projects” (“Beyond the West,” 5–6, and cf. 20).

<sup>87</sup> See now Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*.

<sup>88</sup> For the concept of *Problemggeschichte* that is implicit in my analysis here, see Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, 5 and passim; Hanegraaff, “Power of Ideas,” 256.

Western thinkers ever since the 17th/18th centuries, consisted in the simple fact that human beings so often did *not* act rationally but kept holding on to worldviews, ideas and practices that seemed to conflict with the new ideas of science. Even more worrying was the fact that even if the arguments of science and rationality were clearly explained to them, this often did not seem to make much of a difference. On the contrary, one could even observe the phenomenon of *deliberately* anti-rational and anti-scientific reactions, not just among the uneducated but among highly trained intellectuals as well. How could it be that such “superstitious nonsense” was and remained so attractive to so many people? What did it offer them that science and rationality could not? Whence came its power and its appeal? Was there perhaps some kind of mystery about it, something that rationalists just failed to see?

Such questions are at the bottom of all those theories about “two ways of thinking” referred to above. What made them possible and, indeed, inevitable was the momentous confrontation between the new ideologies of rational/scientific modernity and *everything else*. This point cannot be emphasized strongly enough: the confrontation pinned a very recent newcomer, modern Western intellectual culture, against *all* the cultures of the rest of the world and against the *whole* history of humanity roughly prior to the seventeenth century. From a broader perspective of world history, the phenomenon of Enlightenment science and rationality is clearly *an anomaly*: it appeared just very recently, in a relatively small part of the world, although it has been spreading like a virus ever since. Because modern academics are themselves products of this anomalous phenomenon, they are tempted to see it as the norm or the rule against which everything else should be measured.<sup>89</sup> But from a historical perspective, I would argue, it is exactly the other way around. Enlightenment rationality and modern science are the exception; its opponents represent the default.

This fundamental fact keeps being obscured by the influence of extremely influential “presentist” narratives in the history of philosophy and science, all of them rooted in the idea of a “natural,” organic and teleological development of reason from the supposed “birth of philosophy in ancient Greece” to its final triumph in modern science. In fact, I would argue, such historiographies are ideological tools for promoting the project of modernity: grounded in eclectic method,<sup>90</sup> they are designed to “demonstrate” the self-evident superiority and

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<sup>89</sup> T.G. Ashplant and Andrian Wilson, “Present-Centred History and the Problem of Historical Knowledge,” *The Historical Journal* 31, no. 2 (1988), 253–74.

<sup>90</sup> For the crucial phenomenon of “eclectic historiography” on Enlightenment foundations,

historical necessity of the particular worldviews, perspectives, and personal preferences of those who invented them. With Hegel as a particularly obvious example, whenever some thinker has designed (and therefore controls) such a historical narrative, one invariably finds that he himself is situated comfortably at the very summit of the hierarchy and represents the very culmination of world history.<sup>91</sup>

If we are consistent in rejecting such narratives of evolutionary progress as misleading ideologies, we end up with a radical historicism (or rather, *historism*<sup>92</sup>) that thoroughly relativizes the very idea that “reason” can be the normative yardstick for comparing beliefs, worldviews, practices, or mentalities. By necessity, its place will then be taken by an *empirical* approach that seeks to compare the global reservoir of beliefs, worldviews, practices, or mentalities as objectively as possible on the basis strictly of their observable features. If we apply such a global empirical perspective, we should not be surprised to find (for instance) that Antoine Faivre’s four characteristics of “Western esotericism” have such close equivalents elsewhere in the world. On the contrary: how could it possibly be otherwise? What Faivre’s definition really tried to capture – whether intentionally or not, and successfully or not – was the structure of a form of thought, a mentality, a way of looking at the world, or of participating in the world, that has been perfectly natural to the human mind all over the globe and for as long back as we can tell. I suggest that there is much we need to learn about it (for instance, it would seem to be a natural topic for the Cognitive Study of Religion), but we hardly need to *account* for its existence. It is the default. The really surprising and puzzling phenomenon (that we *do* need to understand and account for, even explain) is that, after so many centuries, the human species has quite recently begun to reject, deny, or suppress some of its most natural forms of cognition and experience in favour of a strict, almost ascetic discipline or regime of reason: one that does *not* come so naturally to us at all, but only artificially and at the cost of great mental effort.

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leading to deliberately selective and biased narratives, see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 129–30, 136, 140, 146, 148–52.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “‘Everybody is Right’: Frank Visser’s Analysis of Ken Wilber,” [www.integralworld.net](http://www.integralworld.net).

<sup>92</sup> For this distinction, see Hanegraaff, “Power of Ideas,” 266 with note 29.

## Concluding Remarks

Would it make sense to refer to the many expressions of such “non-rational” ways of thinking, in all parts of the world, by the term “esotericism”? Frankly I do not think so. “Western esotericism” has emerged as a convenient label for the various beliefs, practices, and traditions of knowledge that the Enlightenment has rejected in its own backyard, so to speak. Why would people in Africa, Japan, India, Latin America, or Antarctica, feel any need to import this specifically Western category of “esotericism” to speak about *their* own traditional beliefs and practices – as if Western Europe were still the prototype to which everything else must be compared? In my opinion, it would be yet another form of terminological imperialism if we now tried to project this terminology on to the rest of the world.

To prevent any misunderstandings: the fact that originally European esoteric or occultist ideas and practices have now spread all over the globe<sup>93</sup> is a different matter entirely. That it results in surprising new mutations that are eventually not just Western anymore is yet another matter. Many of those mutations have traveled back to the West, only to be (mis)understood there as the “authentic” voices of non-Western spiritualities, and this is an important and fascinating phenomenon as well. And it does not stop there either, for the dominance of Western popular media ensures that further mutations of those hybrid mixtures are continually fed back to the rest of the globe in turn. All of this is important to consider in depth. The globalization of *Western* (!) esotericism is indeed a major direction for future research, and not least for reasons of linguistic competence it will require intensive collaboration between Western and non-Western scholars. However, *all of this falls within the purview of history, not theory*. On a more theoretical and comparative level, next to the study of Western esotericism (including the globalization of its beliefs and practices) we obviously need to compare beliefs, practices, forms of experience, and so on, wherever we find them. But such research is simply the core business of the comparative study of religion: it already exists, and I do not see that the category of “esotericism” contributes anything new to it.

In sum, my recommendations are as follows. We should (1) hold on to the category of “Western esotericism,” but (2) give very serious attention to the “globalization of Western esotericism,” and (3) promote comparative studies that focus on both similarity and difference. The first two concerns are central to the study of Western Esotericism, whereas the third one pertains

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<sup>93</sup> Bogdan and Djurdjevic, *Occultism in a Global Perspective*.

to the study of religion more generally. With respect to global comparative perspectives, I suggest it is important to try and improve our understanding of those specific “ways of thinking” that Enlightenment science and rationality find so hard to understand, because they resist discursive language and logical analysis. This is perhaps the most difficult part of our task, but it might be the most fascinating too.

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## The Higher Worlds meet the Lower Criticism New Scholarship on Rudolf Steiner

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Rudolf Steiner. *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften über Mystik, Mysterienwesen und Religionsgeschichte*. Edited, introduced and commentated by Christian Clement. Vol. 5 of *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe*, edited by Christian Clement. Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 2013. lxxx + 377 pp. ISBN 978-3-7728-2635-1.

Rudolf Steiner. *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*. Edited, introduced and commentated by Christian Clement. Vol. 7 of *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe*, edited by Christian Clement. Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 2015. cxxx + 498 pp. ISBN 978-3-7274-5807-1.

When Rudolf Steiner died in 1925, he was a prominent public figure in Germany. Whether celebrated or castigated – or, more often, puzzled over – Steiner was somebody who called for comment. Obituaries and memorials appeared across the spectrum of the German press, from the *Börsenzeitung*, the Wall Street Journal of the Weimar Republic, to the Socialist newspaper *Vorwärts*, from the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* to the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*. Even the *New York Times* saw fit to mark the passing of “Dr. Rudolf Steiner, Theosophist.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Dr. Rudolf Steiner, Theosophist, Dies – Leader of Anthroposophical Movement Succumbs in Berne at 65 Years,” *New York Times* (March 31, 1925). Copies of obituaries from the German press can be found in the files of the German Federal Archives: Bundesarchiv Berlin NS5/VI/40345. I would like to thank Christian Clement, Helmut Zander, Egil Aspren,

This degree of public attention at the time of Steiner's death stands in conspicuous contrast to his somewhat obscure origins. Born in 1861 on the periphery of the Habsburg Empire, even his exact date of birth is a point of some contention. By the time he became well-known to a larger audience, Steiner was viewed above all as an esoteric teacher and the founder of the Anthroposophist movement, an attempt to renew and expand the Theosophical tradition in Germany and abroad. The *London Daily Express* captured the typical image of the time, referring to him as "Dr. Rudolf Steiner, the mystic occultist."<sup>2</sup>

But Steiner's early career followed a different path. After studying at the Technical College in Vienna, he established himself in the 1880s and 1890s not as an occult thinker but as a journalist and editor with literary, scientific, and philosophical interests. The "Dr." in his name referred to a doctorate in philosophy received in 1891. Steiner worked for years at the Goethe archive in Weimar, editing Goethe's texts on the natural sciences. In 1897 he moved to Berlin to edit the *Magazin für Litteratur*. He made several unsuccessful attempts to find an academic position. Shortly after the turn of the century, Steiner found his way to well-heeled Theosophical circles in Berlin, joining the Theosophical Society at the beginning of 1902. Within a few months he was named General Secretary of the German branch of the Theosophical Society, an office he held until breaking away ten years later to found the Anthroposophical Society.<sup>3</sup>

Steiner's swift transition from independent free-thinker to esoteric leader has never been easy to explain, one of many details about his intellectual development that have proved challenging for scholars studying Theosophy and Anthroposophy. That is one reason why the new critical edition of selected Steiner texts, arranged and edited by Christian Clement, carries so much promise. By offering careful textual comparisons between the various editions

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Alicia Hamberg, Michael Eggert, and Ansgar Martins for critical discussion of the issues examined here.

<sup>2</sup> *London Daily Express*, April 11, 1921. The brief article, filed from Berlin by an unnamed "Daily Express correspondent," claims that "Steiner's followers for the most part belong to the richest and most important families" in Germany. Other contemporary sources observed that Anthroposophy "seems to have attracted its following largely from the cultured middle-classes, young intelligentsia, physicians, students, artists, and officials, those classes most directly affected by the cultural crisis of post-war Europe." Paul Means, *Things that are Caesar's: The Genesis of the German Church Conflict* (New York: Round Table Press, 1935), 112.

<sup>3</sup> Thorough biographical information is available in Heiner Ullrich, *Rudolf Steiner: Leben und Lehre* (Munich: Beck, 2011), Miriam Gebhardt, *Rudolf Steiner: Ein moderner Prophet* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2011), and Helmut Zander, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Biografie* (Munich: Piper, 2011).

of Steiner's major published works, Clement's project marks a significant step forward in scholarly engagement with Anthroposophy and its ideological origins. It also highlights the ongoing difficulties inherent in any attempt to bridge the gap between esoteric and academic standpoints.

Clement is a former Waldorf school teacher who left his native Germany for an academic career in the United States. After earning his PhD in German Literature at the University of Utah, he is currently associate professor of German Studies at Brigham Young University. The new Steiner edition arose out of Clement's work creating and maintaining the Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, a German-language website designed to make Steiner's texts accessible to a broader readership. In interviews with Anthroposophist media, Clement – who is not an Anthroposophist himself – has forthrightly discussed his sympathetic approach to Steiner. This places him in a productive but conflicted position on the boundary between esoteric and scholarly discourses, an ambivalence reflected in the editorial project itself.

The series of Steiner texts in the projected eight volumes of the *Rudolf Steiner Kritische Ausgabe* include works from Steiner's pre-1900 philosophical period as well as central titles from his mature Theosophical and Anthroposophical teachings. The two volumes under review here are the first to appear; eventually they will form volumes 5 and 7 of the overall set. Each features a distinct pair of works: volume 5 consists of Steiner's 1901 book *Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age* and its 1902 successor *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, while volume 7 centers on Steiner's seminal esoteric text *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, originally published in 1904, as well as its lesser-known sequel *The Stages of Higher Knowledge* from 1905. The edition as a whole is being published in cooperation between the Rudolf Steiner Verlag, the official Anthroposophist custodian of Steiner's collected works, and the distinguished Frommann-Holzboog publishing house, whose origins date to the early eighteenth century. This fact alone is a sign of the new edition's pioneering character; it indicates both a novel openness in parts of the Anthroposophist leadership, and a willingness within established German philosophical circles to engage with Steiner's works. Clement's ability to bring these two worlds together is no small achievement.

Reactions from within the Anthroposophical milieu have been decidedly mixed. Some Anthroposophists have denounced Clement as the agent of an anti-Steiner conspiracy, while others have praised the project for bringing Steiner's writings to a new generation of readers in a textually reliable format. Scholarly responses, though sparse so far, have been equally equivocal, commending Clement's impressive editorial labors while questioning some of

his interpretive assumptions.<sup>4</sup> In his role as initiator and coordinator of the project, Clement has been admirably straightforward in dialogues with critics and supporters alike, depicting his efforts as an attempt to respect Steiner's self-conception while making his work more palatable to modern philosophical readers. At times, this involves a desire to vindicate Steiner philosophically.

How well does this approach work? From a historical as well as a philosophical perspective, the results are uneven. The edition itself is handsomely produced and eminently practical. For each selected text, Clement has gone to the trouble of assembling every version published during Steiner's lifetime, clearly marking all textual variations in the manner of a standard critical edition. This makes the volumes extremely useful for any philosophically informed and historically attentive engagement with Steiner's ideas and their development over time. Moreover, Clement has attempted to track down the original source for every passage Steiner quotes from other authors – a formidable task in light of Steiner's frequent failure to identify his sources – as well as passages where Steiner appears to paraphrase earlier publications. This procedure reveals just how much Steiner borrowed from previous authors, often without attribution. It also underscores a contentious question raised in prior research by other scholars: did Steiner plagiarize from existing texts? Was he trying to pass off others' work as his own, or was he careless and hurried, or was he stitching together disparate elements in ways that weren't meant to be deliberately deceptive?

Though it is true that Steiner's practice was not compatible with the scholarly norms of the time, Clement points out that this was not really his aim in the texts in question.<sup>5</sup> The post-1900 Steiner, in transition to full-fledged occultist, had little incentive to follow academic conventions. His books on mysticism from 1901 and 1902 grew out of invited presentations to Theosophical groups. He did not present those works as scholarly treatises, but saw his role basically as a synthesizer, drawing together a range of sources in order to provide an accessible narrative to his new-found Theosophical audience. Clement shows that the sources Steiner borrowed from were often secondary works offering broad overviews of large philosophical and historical fields.<sup>6</sup> Steiner's method does not expose him as an inveterate plagiarist; it reveals him as an eager speaker and writer looking to put his stamp on the fin de siècle interest in mysticism.

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<sup>4</sup> Clement has collected more than two dozen reviews of the first two volumes at the website he has created to accompany the project: [www.steinerkritischeausgabe.com](http://www.steinerkritischeausgabe.com). The next volume is scheduled to appear in late 2015.

<sup>5</sup> *Schriften über Mystik*, xxx–xxxii.

<sup>6</sup> See *Schriften über Mystik*, xxxi, as well as Clement's thorough *Stellenkommentare*, 234–339.

In addition to providing a rich textual basis and thoroughly researched annotations, the new edition includes extensive introductory and contextual material framing Steiner's works. These sections constitute a substantial portion of the edition; Clement's introduction to volume 7, for example, is nearly as long as the entire text of *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* itself. It is here that Clement's own perspective plays a crucial role. His combination of sympathy and critical acumen works relatively well with Steiner's texts from the transitional period just after 1900, when the future esoteric leader was moving toward Theosophy; the two books collected in volume 5 document this shift. But the same volume also includes a number of notable missteps. Perhaps the most striking is Clement's reliance on a set of ostensible transcripts of Steiner's original 1901–02 lectures to Theosophists that formed the basis for *Christianity as Mystical Fact*.<sup>7</sup> The documents Clement cites are not in fact transcripts of Steiner's original lectures, but ex post facto constructs assembled out of fragmentary notes taken by a Theosophist who was present at the lectures. Though Clement does not mention it, the documents in question were evidently composed several decades after Steiner's death.

The issue at stake here is not merely one of textual integrity – Clement invokes the dubious source in his introduction and commentary, not in the apparatus accompanying Steiner's published text – but one of conceptual and historical accuracy. In the published version of *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, Steiner makes no mention of central Theosophical concepts such as karma and reincarnation. This is not surprising, since Steiner at this stage was still in the process of familiarizing himself with Theosophy's teachings. According to Clement, however, the supposed 'transcripts' refer continually to reincarnation and thus show that Steiner was thoroughly immersed in Theosophical concepts at the time. This claim is unfounded. What the 'transcripts' reveal are the esoteric preoccupations of the Theosophist who compiled the notes; they are not a reliable indication of Steiner's own views in late 1901 and early 1902, which are instead spelled out in book form in *Christianity as Mystical Fact*.

Why does this matter? Clement's ill-considered references to the purported 'transcripts' form part of a larger argument: Like many Anthroposophists, Clement posits a fundamental continuity between Steiner's pre-1900 philosophical works and his post-1900 esoteric teachings. Clement's underlying argument represents a more sophisticated version of a longstanding trope in Anthroposophical discourse, one that presents Steiner as the inheritor and

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<sup>7</sup> *Schriften über Mystik*, xxx, xxxiv, xli–xlii, xliv, xlix–li, lviii–lix, lxiv–lxviii, 288, 296–98, 299–302, 309, 316–18, 329, 332–34, etc.

fulfillment of the legacy of German Idealism. This notion, though often overblown, is not inherently implausible; Steiner's early philosophical works were indeed steeped in the traditions of German Idealism, and a number of classical Idealist thinkers gave serious attention to esoteric themes. Hartmut Traub's monumental 2011 study *Philosophie und Anthroposophie* examines these connections in great detail and offers illuminating insight into the development of Steiner's early thought. Other scholars, such as historian Helmut Zander, have emphasized the discontinuities in Steiner's work before and after the turn of the century.<sup>8</sup> The continuity thesis faces several significant obstacles. Aside from the strikingly divergent character of Steiner's works from different points in his life, his published comments on Theosophy during the 1890s – the decade immediately before his embrace of Theosophical precepts – were unremittingly negative.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, the ongoing scholarly debates over Steiner's intellectual development address a challenging question that does not accommodate easy answers but calls for sustained and careful interdisciplinary analysis. Proponents of the continuity thesis will eventually have to confront the pronounced discrepancies between Steiner's early philosophical writings and his later esoteric teachings. Those discrepancies are essential to understanding the formation of Steiner's ideas and the changes in his worldview over time. Attempts to discount or downplay the differences between the earlier and later Steiner, in the hope of harmonizing those differences into one putatively integrated whole, fail to reflect the complexity of his thought. They do not do justice either to Steiner's early philosophical project or to his later esoteric cosmology, and consequently misjudge the relationship between the two. Clement's edition makes it possible for readers to put together a detailed chronological account of these shifts and changes across Steiner's works, even if some of Clement's own conclusions are open to question.

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<sup>8</sup> Hartmut Traub, *Philosophie und Anthroposophie: Die philosophische Weltanschauung Rudolf Steiners – Grundlegung und Kritik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011); Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland: Theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis 1884–1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). Ulrich Linse offers an original interpretation which departs from both Traub's and Zander's perspectives; cf. Linse, "Libertäre und theosophische Strömungen," in *Handbuch Fin de Siècle*, eds. Sabine Haupt and Stefan Würffel (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2008), 218–37. For an Anthroposophist account see Robin Schmidt, *Rudolf Steiner und die Anfänge der Theosophie* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Steiner's scathing critique, "Theosophen," published in his *Magazin für Literatur* in 1897 and reprinted in Steiner, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Literatur 1884–1902* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1971), 194–96.

The two books that make up volume 5 show Steiner's initial foray into mysticism, but they are not mystical texts themselves. They hint at an author working his way from Haeckel toward Blavatsky, and exhibit Steiner's customary combination of the occult and the scientific. The centerpiece of volume 7, on the other hand, is Steiner's foundational esoteric tract *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, a manual for students of the occult seeking access to the Higher Worlds promised by esoteric doctrine. According to Steiner, the path he outlined offered verifiable knowledge of these Higher Worlds, available to anyone willing to follow his stages of initiation. The book's opening lines declare:

There slumber in every human being faculties by means of which he can acquire for himself a knowledge of higher worlds. Mystics, Gnostics, Theosophists – all speak of a world of soul and spirit which for them is just as real as the world we see with our physical eyes and touch with our physical hands. At every moment the listener may say to himself: that, of which they speak, I too can learn, if I develop within myself certain powers which today still slumber within me.<sup>10</sup>

While Steiner's transitional texts from 1901 and 1902 are often well suited to Clement's sympathetic approach, his reading of *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* is much less persuasive. The latter book represents the first full-fledged presentation of Steiner's mature esoteric epistemology and is one of the canonical works of Anthroposophy. In later editions of the book, Steiner went to considerable lengths to distance his message from his Theosophical predecessors. Much of Clement's interpretation follows this line, even though the material collected in volume 7 abundantly demonstrates the extent to which Steiner drew on previous Theosophical works. In his introduction and commentary, Clement is particularly concerned to dissociate Steiner from Blavatsky. Thus, large stretches of the volume read like an attempt to rescue Steiner from himself, to salvage a philosophically respectable variant of German Idealism from his bold explorations of the Higher Worlds.

Part of this strategy appears to be anchored in a basic misconception about the nature of Western esotericism and the origins of Theosophy. Clement strongly underscores the modern and Western character of Steiner's esoteric form of meditative self-knowledge, something that is unremarkable from a historical point of view. But Clement's assessment in several places suggests a naïve understanding of allegedly Eastern models and their Western

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<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1961), 5.

proponents.<sup>11</sup> This is a point that has bedeviled other commentators keen to distinguish Steiner from his Theosophical precursors and contemporaries; the argument often depends on the notion that there was something genuinely ‘Eastern’ about Blavatsky’s syncretic project in the first place. It overlooks the fact that Theosophy itself was already thoroughly modern and Western before Steiner came along.

This point indicates the most remarkable omission in a volume of more than 600 pages: the lack of any sustained engagement with the ample scholarship on Western esotericism. Aside from Zander’s historical research, which largely serves as a foil for Clement’s own arguments, and the excellent studies by Traub and Baier, Clement does not discuss any of the extensive literature on these topics. There is no mention of the highly relevant research from Wouter Hanegraaff or Olav Hammer, to choose two of the more significant examples, or even the specific studies of Steiner’s esoteric epistemology by Wolfgang Schneider, Heiner Barz, Alfred Tremml, Julia Iwersen, or Heiner Ullrich.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Clement does draw on the pioneering research by Karl Baier, and frequently cites Baier’s *Meditation und Moderne: Zur Genese eines Kernbereichs moderner Spiritualität in der Wechselwirkung zwischen Westeuropa, Nordamerika und Asien* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), but seems to have neglected the broader scholarship on this topic. Relevant studies include Jörg Wichmann, “Das theosophische Menschenbild und seine indischen Wurzeln,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 35 (1983): 12–33; Christine Maillard, “*Ex oriente lux*. Zur Funktion Indiens in der Konstruktion der abendländischen esoterischen Tradition im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, ed. Andreas Kilcher (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 395–412; Kennet Granholm, “Locating the West: Problematizing the *Western* in Western Esotericism and Occultism,” in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Gordan Djurdjevic (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 17–36; Christopher Partridge, “Orientalism and the Occult,” in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (New York: Routledge, 2015), 611–25.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Siegfried Oppolzer, “Anthropologie und Pädagogik bei Rudolf Steiner,” *Paedagogica Historica* 2 (1962): 287–350; Alfred Tremml, “Träume eines Geistersehers oder Geisteswissenschaft? Die Erkenntnistheorie Rudolf Steiners,” *Zeitschrift für Entwicklungspsychologie* 10 (1987): 17–24; Heiner Ullrich, “Wissenschaft als rationalisierte Mystik: Eine problemgeschichtliche Untersuchung der erkenntnistheoretischen Grundlagen der Anthroposophie,” *Neue Sammlung* 28 (1988): 168–94; Wolfgang Schneider, *Das Menschenbild der Waldorfpädagogik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991); Heiner Barz, *Anthroposophie im Spiegel von Wissenschaftstheorie und Lebensweltforschung* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1994); Julia Iwersen, “Epistemological Foundations of Esoteric Thought and Practice,” *Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies* 3 (2007): 3–44; Tore Ahlbäck, “Rudolf Steiner as a Religious Authority,” in *Western Esotericism*, ed. Tore

This is an unfortunate missed opportunity to relate discussion of Steiner's work to the growing body of scholarship on esoteric and occult currents more generally, and it has important consequences for Clement's reading of Steiner. Paradoxically, many of Clement's annotations to Steiner's text seem fundamentally at odds with Clement's stated conclusions.<sup>13</sup>

Similar dynamics arise at other points in volume 7, sometimes in reaction against standard textual procedures. An otherwise minor example illustrates the problem. Discussing Steiner's appropriation of the fictional figure of the "Guardian of the Threshold," introduced in an 1842 novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Clement writes that "critics" of Anthroposophy have raised the "accusation" that Steiner adopted this figure from Bulwer-Lytton's literary work.<sup>14</sup> But this has nothing to do with criticism, much less with accusations; it is a simple statement of Steiner's source. Bulwer-Lytton used a variety of names for the figure – "Dweller of the Threshold," "Haunter of the Threshold," and so forth – and in German translations the phrase "Hüter der Schwelle" soon established itself, sometimes in feminine grammatical form.<sup>15</sup> The phrase appeared in references to Bulwer-Lytton in German occult periodicals in the 1880s, and Steiner himself explicitly cited Bulwer-Lytton's novel in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*,<sup>16</sup> where the phrase is used to describe two important beings encountered in the course of the occult pupil's path of initiation.<sup>17</sup>

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Ahlbäck (Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 2008), 9–16; Andreas Kilcher, "Seven Epistemological Theses on Esotericism," in *Hermes in the Academy*, ed. Wouter Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenburg (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 143–48; Katharina Brandt and Olav Hammer, "Rudolf Steiner and Theosophy," *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, ed. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 113–33. Clement also does not cite Egil Asprem's study *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), which includes a detailed and incisive treatment of Steiner's *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, but Asprem's book appeared just a year before Clement's volume.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, xxix, xxxiii, cxi, cxiv–cxv, 241, etc.

<sup>14</sup> *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, 319.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Zanoni* (London: Saunders & Otley, 1842); *Zanoni: Ein Roman* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1842); the current Anthroposophist edition is *Zanoni: A Rosicrucian Tale* (SteinerBooks, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> See *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, 145

<sup>17</sup> German Theosophist Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden referred to Bulwer-Lytton's "Hüter der Schwelle," in Hübbe-Schleiden's journal *Sphinx*, an important early esoteric periodical, in 1887: Hübbe-Schleiden, "Zöllners Zurechnungsfähigkeit und die Seybert-Kommission," *Sphinx: Monatsschrift für die geschichtliche und experimentale Begründung der übersinnlichen Weltanschauung auf monistischer Grundlage* (November 1887): 321–28. Steiner readily acknowledged the link between his own references to the Guardian of the Threshold and its earlier literary instantiation,

Contrary to Clement's claim that Bulwer-Lytton's fictional creation and Steiner's esoteric figure have "virtually nothing in common,"<sup>18</sup> the parallels are unmistakable. Joscelyn Godwin describes Bulwer-Lytton's "Dweller of the Threshold" as "a hideous personification of one's past thoughts and evil tendencies, which even if not perceived lures the aspirant towards disaster."<sup>19</sup> These parallels are unsurprising in light of Bulwer-Lytton's involvement in proto-Theosophical milieus and the novel's overt Rosicrucian references. Godwin characterizes Bulwer-Lytton as a "pivotal figure of nineteenth-century occultism."<sup>20</sup> Steiner borrowed other elements from the Victorian novelist, such as the notion of "Vril" as an occult force. As Julian Strube has shown in his thorough study of the Vril myth, Steiner played a key role in promoting this idea in Germany.<sup>21</sup>

Clement's discussion overlooks this crucial context. Detailed research by Theodore Ziolkowski and others has established the importance of such literary borrowings for modern esoteric thought.<sup>22</sup> The re-purposing of literary sources for devotional and meditative functions, as well as their refashioning as forms of scripture, testament, and doctrine, has been a prominent feature of

writing that "Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* contains in novel form a description of the Guardian of the Threshold." (*Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, 159)

<sup>18</sup> *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, 320

<sup>19</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 128.

<sup>20</sup> Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 195. See also Bruce Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 12, 26, 56; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 44, 54, 133, 267; Antoine Faivre, *Western Esotericism: A Concise History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 76, 84, 88; Jeffrey Franklin, "The Evolution of Occult Spirituality in Victorian England and the Representative Case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton," in Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 123–41.

<sup>21</sup> Julian Strube, *Vril. Eine okkulte Urkraft in Theosophie und esoterischem Neonazismus* (Munich: Fink, 2013), 77–79, 94–95.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, *Lure of the Arcane: The Literature of Cult and Conspiracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); see the discussion of Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni* on 116–20. Cf. James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle: Open Court, 1976), 497–515; Bettina Gruber, ed., *Erfahrung und System: Mystik und Esoterik in der Literatur der Moderne* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997); Priska Pytlík, *Okkultismus und Moderne: Ein kulturhistorisches Phänomen und seine Bedeutung für die Literatur um 1900* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005); Jeffrey Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Michael Novian, *Von Ariern und Aliens: Völkische Weltanschauung in der Science-Fiction-Literatur vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Marburg: Tectum, 2013); Jan Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis und die Theosophie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014).

emergent spiritual approaches for a long time. It was an especially important element in the modern occult revival out of which Anthroposophy emerged. By ignoring this background, Clement misses another significant way in which Steiner helped shape the contours of Western esotericism in the modern era.

These lapses notwithstanding, volume 7 does provide important material on the Theosophical origins of Steiner's esoteric work, against the grain of Clement's own interpretation. He acknowledges Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater as sources for *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* and devotes pages to tracing Steiner's gradual appropriation of Theosophist concepts.<sup>23</sup> He also offers insight into the shift in tone from Steiner's turn-of-the-century works to his mature esoteric pronouncements.<sup>24</sup> What is missing is a broader sense of the fin de siècle intellectual atmosphere, in Germany as elsewhere, which left such a deep impression on Steiner's subsequent writings.<sup>25</sup>

Steiner was hardly a unique figure around the turn of the twentieth century; there were many others searching for 'higher worlds' in various ways, whether through science or through initiation or through contemplative practice. Understanding Steiner's specific contributions to this search means

<sup>23</sup> *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, xxxvi–xxxvii and xlvi–xlvii.

<sup>24</sup> Contrasting *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* to the 1901/02 texts from volume 5, Clement writes: "Hier spricht nicht mehr eine Stimme, die ein kritisches Publikum durch Argumentation von der eigenen Position zu überzeugen versucht, sondern eine solche, welche die Autorität eines Wissenden für sich in Anspruch nimmt und als Lehrer zu Schülern spricht, d.h. zu Menschen, die den 'Pfad der Erkenntnis' schon beschreiten und insofern bereits für sich eine Vorentscheidung über die Validität des Vorgebrachten getroffen haben" (*Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, xxvii). Steiner's contemporary Hans Freimark was more blunt, offering a vivid first-hand description of his speaking style: "Steiner liebt die hohepriesterliche Gebärde, in seinen Vorträgen und in seinen Schriften. Es ist nicht ohne Eindruck, wenn auf der Rednerbühne der hagere Mann die dunkelglühenden Augen zur Decke richtet, das strähnige schwarze, in die Stirn fallende Haar mit einer ruckenden Kopfbewegung zurückschleudert und die gelblichen schlanken Hände wie segnend hebt. Diese Pose hat Stil. Und ihr entspricht seine Stimme, die von suggestiver Eindringlichkeit ist und die die wunderbaren Tatsachen, die er erwähnt, seinen Zuhörern in einer Weise nahebringt, die man nicht überzeugend nennen kann, wohl aber als überredend bezeichnen muß." Hans Freimark, *Moderne Theosophen und ihre Theosophie* (Leipzig: Heims, 1912), 40.

<sup>25</sup> For context see Helmut Zander, "Der Himmel auf Erden? 'Jenseits'-Konzepte um 1900 und die Traditionen einer monistischen Eschatologie," in *Das Jenseits: Facetten eines religiösen Begriffs in der Neuzeit*, ed. Lucian Hölscher, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 138–51; Renko Geffarth, "Äther, Urlicht, Relativität: Weltformel und 'wahre Erkenntnis' um 1900," in *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, ed. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 440–60; Bernhard Kleeberg, "Gedankenexperimente, Kontrafaktizität und das Selbstverständnis der Wissenschaften um 1900," *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 38 (2015), 7–14.

assessing his work not just in relation to earlier generations of German Idealist philosophy but also in the context of comparable esoteric endeavors in the years immediately prior to Steiner's Theosophical turn – figures such as Franz Hartmann or Carl Du Prel, who anticipated central components of Steiner's mature esoteric outlook.<sup>26</sup> Without taking this context into account, sympathetic readings of Steiner run the risk of wishful thinking, in a fruitless effort to re-cast Steiner's later esoteric teachings as an extension of his early philosophical works. That sort of reading will only appeal to those already committed to Steiner's principles.

In an odd way, Clement's comments sometimes seem to sense this restricted audience, even as his project strives to transcend it. Though he does not make use of the rich scholarship on modern occultism, he regularly draws on Anthroposophical secondary literature. He is particularly indulgent toward the work of Lorenzo Ravagli, a prominent Anthroposophist and editor of *Erziehungskunst*, the chief journal of the Waldorf movement. Ravagli's writings are typical of the effort by Steiner's followers to defend their esoteric worldview against external scrutiny.<sup>27</sup> His publications are Anthroposophical apologies marked by an aggravated tone toward scholars who study Steiner, above all Zander. Astonishingly, Clement at times places Ravagli's polemics against Zander on the same level as Zander's scholarship.<sup>28</sup> Indeed Clement himself often has a notably difficult time taking Zander's research seriously, and frequently portrays Zander as a critic of Steiner rather than a historian of Anthroposophy.<sup>29</sup> This fundamental misconstrual runs throughout both volumes, and significantly vitiates Clement's analysis.

Despite the insights that Clement brings to Steiner's *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, his overall interpretation remains unconvincing. His approach is too imbued with Anthroposophical assumptions and his conclusions fit too

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<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Franz Hartmann, *Ein Abenteurer unter den Rosenkreuzern* (Leipzig: Theosophisches Verlagshaus, 1899); Hartmann, *Unter den Adepten. Vertrauliche Mittheilungen aus den Kreisen der indischen Adepten und Christlichen Mystiker* (Leipzig: Lotus Verlag, 1901); Carl du Prel, *Die Philosophie der Mystik* (Leipzig: Günther, 1885); du Prel, *Die monistische Seelenlehre: Ein Beitrag zur Lösung des Menschenrätsels* (Leipzig: Günther, 1888).

<sup>27</sup> Lorenzo Ravagli, "Zander und die Anthroposophie," *Erziehungskunst* (December 2007): 1373–76; Ravagli, *Zanders Erzählungen* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2009); Ravagli, "Polemischer Diskurs: Die Anthroposophie und ihre Kritiker," in *Rudolf Steiner: Seine Bedeutung für Wissenschaft und Leben heute*, ed. Peter Heusser (Stuttgart: Schattauer, 2014), 332–52.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. *Schriften über Mystik*, xxxiv, or *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, lxxii

<sup>29</sup> Examples include *Schriften über Mystik*, lxxv, and *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, lxxiii, lxxx, and 319.

neatly with Anthroposophical expectations. But it has also exposed a rift within the Anthroposophist movement, with Steiner's more conspiratorially inclined followers convinced that Clement's project forms part of a nefarious plot to sacrifice Anthroposophy's esoteric truths at the altar of academic respectability. Less myopic admirers of Steiner, meanwhile, have greeted the edition with enthusiasm, appreciating its potential for widening the appeal of Anthroposophist ideas. If the former fear that Steiner will be neutralized by scholarly niceties, the latter understand the promise of a refurbished and reinvigorated Steiner clad in the prosaic garb of philosophical Idealism.<sup>30</sup>

A historical approach yields a different story. The search for greater forms of knowledge and spiritual experience beyond the confines of established religion and academic science was a fundamental element of the modern German occult revival. Many of the people drawn to this milieu were highly educated and steeped in German cultural traditions, including the classics of Idealist thought. A large proportion of them came from the ranks of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the educated bourgeoisie. Steiner's background in Idealist philosophy facilitated his remarkably rapid transition to a leading role within the German Theosophist movement. He offered, in effect, exactly what his audience wanted to hear: familiar Theosophical themes presented in the idiom of German high culture, with ample invocation of figures like Fichte and Schelling and Goethe. What Theosophy promised was a "synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy," in Blavatsky's famous phrase, and Steiner was well positioned to provide just that, packaged in ways that appealed to German Theosophists in particular.<sup>31</sup>

After his post-1900 esoteric turn, Steiner emphasized the traditions of German Idealism in a wide range of contexts, such as enlisting them for patriotic purposes in the early years of World War I. Facing this historical situation need not detract from what was innovative in Steiner's thinking. But it is a useful reminder that grand narratives about the unfolding of Spirit in the mode of German Idealism were by no means unique to Steiner, whether before or after his Theosophical turn. This is another reason to pay attention to the

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<sup>30</sup> Recent signs from mainstream Anthroposophist publishers indicate that the anti-Clement faction enjoys considerable support among Steiner's English-speaking followers; see e.g. the new translation of one of the more scurrilous attacks on Clement by Pietro Archiati, a prominent Anthroposophist in German-speaking Europe: Archiati, *Spiritual Science in the Third Millennium: Intellectuality versus Anthroposophy* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge Press, 2015), distributed by SteinerBooks.

<sup>31</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888).

specific features of Steiner's individual texts and heed the particular arguments they make. Thus, for all its flaws, it is essential to recognize the enormous service that Clement has done for all scholars studying Steiner, whatever their interpretive orientation.

The critical edition provides a new basis for future research on Theosophy and Anthroposophy. At its best moments, Clement's familiarity with the philosophical context raises the quality of his analysis far above the level typically found among Steiner's followers themselves. For that very reason, it merits critical attention and debate. And its most debatable aspects go to the heart of Clement's project as a whole. The approach he adopts in the first two volumes all too often reduces the later Steiner to an extension of the earlier Steiner. It cannot account for the fantastic profusion of new ideas that defined Steiner's public pronouncements after his embrace of esotericism in 1902. The explosion of creativity that marks Steiner's post-1900 esoteric works has no precedent in his earlier works. It is not just a sudden shift in tone and style and format, but a profound innovation in content. The fluidity of his categories, the imaginative range of his ideas, the willingness to flaunt established modes of knowledge and challenge conventional conceptions of the world – including recognized philosophical models and existing intellectual frameworks – all signal a fundamental departure from his previous approach to understanding reality. The esoteric Steiner after 1900 was engaged in a daring new project, one that diverged in the most elemental ways from what came before.

For any academic with a sympathetic attitude toward Steiner, it is appealing to re-cast his mature esoteric years as a smooth continuation of his early philosophical explorations. That version of Steiner is comforting and familiar, readily compatible with the premises of the modern academic world. It assimilates Steiner's esoteric teachings into recognizable academic categories. But this approach does not let Steiner's esoteric texts speak for themselves. It does not allow his mature thinking to unfold according to its own categories and its own promises, which were quite different from conventional academic standards. It does not give Steiner's esoteric ideas the breathing room they deserve, the chance to develop on their own terms, to follow their own path. It renders these ideas docile and reassuring rather than provocative and unsettling.

In trying to make Steiner more agreeable to a twenty-first century academic readership, Clement has hollowed out the most challenging and most difficult parts of Steiner's teachings. But it is these very parts that make Steiner such an interesting historical figure. The Steiner we are left with, in Clement's version, is flattened and tamed. The historical Steiner was much more disruptive and

much more ambitious. To lose sight of that unruly side of Steiner, in the hope of streamlining and updating his message, does not do justice to the acute ambiguities in his thinking. Even sympathetic observers must at some point acknowledge this dimension. Though the sanitized Steiner makes a more attractive candidate for admission to the academy, he is scarcely recognizable in an esoteric setting.

For better or worse, that is the Steiner we need to understand. Rather than rehabilitating or legitimating Steiner, the proper starting point for scholarly engagement is the more demanding project of comprehending Steiner. Whatever its interpretive shortcomings, the painstaking textual work that Clement has put in to this new edition make it an invaluable resource for any scholar studying Steiner. It is also a sign of how far scholarship on Steiner still has to go in coming to terms with this enigmatic figure.

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## Exoteric & Esoteric Methodological Reflections on Vol. 7 of the Rudolf Steiner Critical edition

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Rudolf Steiner. *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*. Edited, introduced and commented by Christian Clement. Vol. 7 of *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe*, edited by Christian Clement. Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 2015. cxxx + 498 pp. ISBN 978-3-7274-5807-1.

### 1. Introduction: SKA Volume 7

Volume 7 of the Critical Edition of Rudolf Steiner's Writings, *Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe* (SKA), contains Steiner's two main texts on the spiritual path of knowledge, both of which originally appeared in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis* in the years 1904–1908. The first of Steiner's texts is entitled *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* (How does one Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds?),<sup>1</sup> and the second *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* (The Stages of

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner's text *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* originally appeared in installments in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis* (edited by R. Steiner) from June 1904–September 1905, in issues 13–28. It was first reprinted in a special edition of the journal in 1907/08, and then published in book form in 1909, with further main editions in 1910, 1914, 1918, 1919, 1920, and the final "Ausgabe letzter Hand" edition of 1922. (For details of the history of the editions, cf. C. Clement's introduction, SKA 7, pp. civ–cxxiv). The book is volume 10 in the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (GA). In English, the text is available in various translations, including: *Knowledge*

Higher Knowledge), which was conceived as a continuation or “intermediate reflection” on the former text.<sup>2</sup>

Chronologically, volume 7 is actually the second volume overall to appear in the Critical Edition, and again it is competently introduced and commented by Christian Clement, and published in a fine and attractive edition by the German academic publisher Frommann-Holzboog. Volume 7 begins with a foreword (vii–xvi) by the late Gerhard Wehr, who argues that Steiner’s aim in these writings was to furnish a Western path of knowledge that led to spiritual independence on the part of the student. Wehr sees parallels between Steiner’s views and those of Jacob Böhme and J.W. von Goethe, as well as an inherent connection with the concept of devotion in the Christian mystics of the middle ages. Next follows Clement’s consistently illuminating 120-page introduction (xix–cxxx) in which he carefully outlines the general character of the theosophical-anthroposophical path of knowledge, and the historical context, genesis, content and reception of the two texts in question.

As mentioned above, the heart of the volume is Steiner’s two works *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten* (3–163), and *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* (165–209), presented for the first time in a scholarly critical edition, that is to say, where all the textual variations, additions, omissions and modifications have been noted. The schooling outlined by Steiner in these writings is that of the knowledge and spiritual awakening of the higher self, or the “birth” of the “higher human being.” (32) The practical means for reaching this goal primarily consists in *meditation*, in a strengthening of one’s cognitive abilities and moral qualities. In Steiner’s sense, there is nothing obscure or nebulous about meditative activity, much less is it related to any kind of spiritualism or mediumistic lowering of consciousness, rather it is based on fully wide-awake and conscious thinking: “One has to construct one’s thoughts in a clear, lucid and definite manner.” (34) The student commences the spiritual path by first cultivating a specific and basic mood of soul – that of a genuine “devotion

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*of the Higher Worlds: How is it Achieved?* trans. D.S. Osmond and C. Davy (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1976). All translations from the German in the current article are my own.

<sup>2</sup> The text *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* was published by Steiner in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis* in five installments in issues 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, from October 1905–1908, and originally termed as an “Zwischenbetrachtung zu dem Artikel ‘Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse höherer Welten?’” (SKA 7, 167). The first book edition appeared posthumously in 1931, edited by Marie Steiner (cf. C. Clement’s introduction to SKA 7, cxxiv–cxxv, for further details). It is volume 12 in the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (GA). Among others, the text is available in English under the title: *The Stages of Higher Knowledge*, trans. Lisa D. Monges and Floyd McKnight (Spring Valley/New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1974).

to *truth and knowledge*.” (21) In contrast to certain theosophical conventions of the time, in which knowledge was based on the reverence for and dogmatic authority of a spiritual leader,<sup>3</sup> Steiner stresses the inviolable principles of the freedom and autonomy of the student on the path of knowledge: “It must be emphasized that with regard to higher cognition it is *not* a matter of reverence for people, but of reverence for *truth and knowledge*.”<sup>4</sup> The activity of meditation and a dedication to the ideals of truth and knowledge should be accompanied by a number of preparatory exercises, including: learning to distinguish “the essential from the inessential” in all things (28), an exact and accurate observation of the world of nature (38–44), a heightening of one’s own ethical behavior (54), and the cultivation of personal characteristics such as patience, humbleness, modesty, respect, empathy, understanding, fearlessness and gratefulness (70–86). It is crucial for the student not to waver from the highest principles of “truthfulness, sincerity and honesty,” (92) to retain healthy, “logical and rational thinking” (93) at all times, and to unfold a confidence in and love of one’s fellow human beings: “And this love of humanity has to gradually extend to a love of all beings, indeed, to a love of all existence.” (84) The third stage after those of preparation (*Vorbereitung*) and enlightenment (*Erleuchtung*) is that of initiation (*Einweihung/Initiation*), in which the “true names” of things become revealed that are the “keys” to higher knowledge (59). According to Steiner, this stage is characterized by the greatest possible cognitive discernment in one’s judgments: one possesses an ever sounder and healthier capacity to distinguish between mere personal illusion, fantasy, preconceptions and prejudices, and true reality (65–68).

The second text, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, presents one of Steiner’s most detailed expositions on the relationship between ordinary sense cognition and his further tripartite classification of knowledge into “imagination,” “inspiration” and “intuition.” Steiner calls his presentation here the “epistemology of esoteric science.”<sup>5</sup> The general four elements of knowledge corresponding to Steiner’s fourfold classification are i) the object (*Gegenstand*); ii) the representation (*Vorstellung*), also called the image or picture (*Bild*); iii) the concept (*Begriff*); and iv) the I (*Ich*). Each of these four elements may form the starting point of a new mode of cognition, and this is to be conceived in a hierarchical sense, passing from the ‘lower’ cognitive mode of

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Clement’s analysis of these important points, among others, in SKA 7, CV, 215, 224.

<sup>4</sup> “Betont muß werden, daß es sich beim höheren Wissen *nicht* um Verehrung von Menschen, sondern um eine solche gegenüber *Wahrheit und Erkenntnis* handelt.” (SKA 7, 23).

<sup>5</sup> “*Erkenntnislehre der Geheimmwissenschaft*” (SKA 7, 167).

outer sense impressions and material objects, through to pictorial and then conceptual knowledge, and finally to the ‘highest’ form of I-based knowledge (167–73). As Steiner says of the latter: “The perception of one’s own ‘I’ is the model for all intuitive knowledge.”<sup>6</sup>

Stimulating too is Clement’s 140-page commentary directly following the two texts (213–353). His remarks here make a substantial contribution to the research by not only locating many of Steiner’s references, but also correctly pointing out various related historical, religious, artistic, philosophical and mythological conceptions. The volume is supplemented by a selection of documents pertaining to the ritual aspects of Steiner’s esoteric school (355–441), a bibliography (443–64), and an index of topics (465–97).

As is natural for any work of nearly 630 pages, SKA 7 contains a small number of minor factual errors and lacunae, and it is possible to disagree with certain of the editor’s decisions and interpretations. For instance, the unattributed poem “Wenn die Rose selbst sich schmückt...” cited by Steiner, is by the poet Friedrich Rückert and not Angelus Silesius (110, 297). Steiner’s sharp distinctions between illusion, image consciousness, artistic productions, and spiritual reality could have been more forcefully insisted upon at times by the editor (e.g. 322); and I disagree with Clement’s contention that Steiner’s conception of the “Meister” (Masters) was taken over from theosophical literature (222–23). Among others, the idea is found in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, just as Steiner personally spoke of Goethe as one of the “greatest German Masters” already in a letter of 1889,<sup>7</sup> as well as publicly stating in 1900: “[I]f I have had a Hermes [on the journey to Hades], it was not Nietzsche, but Goethe.”<sup>8</sup> In the chapter on “Control of Thoughts and Feelings,” when Steiner speaks of the “purification” (*Lauterkeit*) of one’s moral character (57) and intimates a relation to the virtues of “courage and fearlessness” (62, 255), it might have been worth pointing to the related conception of *katharsis* in the 1904 essay “Aristoteles über das Mysteriendrama” in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis*. In this regard, instead of/or in addition to the ritual documents in the appendix, perhaps other published texts from *Lucifer-Gnosis* could have been included that directly relate to Steiner’s path of schooling, such as his essays “Einweihung und Mysterien,”

<sup>6</sup> “Die Wahrnehmung des eigenen ‘Ich’ ist das Vorbild für alle intuitive Erkenntnis.” (SKA 7, 172).

<sup>7</sup> Letter of R. Steiner to R. Specht, Weimar, 9 August 1889, *Briefe I: 1881–1890* (Dornach/Switzerland, 1985), 204.

<sup>8</sup> R. Steiner, “Goethe-Studien. Moral und Christentum” (1900), in *Methodische Grundlagen der Anthroposophie, 1884–1901* (Dornach/Switzerland, 1989), 208.

“Okkulte Geschichtsforschung” and “Von der Aura des Menschen.” Other relevant inclusions from around the same years might have been Steiner’s reviews of books by Mabel Collins, Annie Besant and Edouard Schuré, which could have perhaps better underscored the parallels and divergences between Steiner’s path and the theosophical literature of the time. A person index to complement the subject index would also have been helpful.

Notwithstanding these points, one has to admit that the editor has for the most part subjected these texts to a nuanced, balanced and comprehensive textual analysis that has been hitherto lacking in academic studies of Steiner. The considerable contribution that this volume makes to current Steiner scholarship may be further illustrated by means of a number of specific examples.

## 2. Metamorphosis as Meditation

Volume 7 of the Critical Edition is a further confirmation of the importance of first examining Steiner’s Goethean natural-scientific work in order to better comprehend his later published writings on spiritual topics. To take a concrete case: in 1790 the poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe published a scientific essay on the metamorphosis of plants. Here Goethe set forth the organic unity of the plant: despite the differences between the separate “external” parts such as the stem and the petal, they were united into a living whole by means of certain laws and modifications. He called this principal law the “metamorphosis” of the plant. According to Goethe, a correct understanding of this law allows one to grasp the “secret relationship (*gebeime Verwandtschaft*) among the various external parts of the plant, such as the leaves, calyx, corolla, and stamens, in which they successively develop out of one another as it were.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the goal of the researcher is to scientifically study and explain this hidden interaction: how an invisible law is related to the revealed external or sensible parts. Goethe furthermore expressed this law and the aims of the researcher in poetic form, in a poem also entitled “The Metamorphosis of Plants.” One should strive to grasp this “secret law” (*geheimen Gesetz*) or “sacred riddle” (*heiliges Rätsel*), and once this is done, one will find oneself in a “higher world” (*böhere Welt*), that is to say, in a world completely different from the outer or lower sense world.<sup>10</sup> Despite Goethe’s treatise and poem

<sup>9</sup> J.W. Goethe, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Gotha: Ettingersche Buchhandlung, 1790), 2.

<sup>10</sup> J.W. Goethe, “Schicksal der Druckschrift”, *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 1, ed.

being couched in the mystery language of sacred riddles and higher worlds, the cognitive path in this domain is still a wholly scientific one. There is nothing mystical or unclear about it. In fact, this path of cognition is not unlike that of the mathematician:

We have to learn from mathematicians, and even there, where we require no calculation, we should proceed as though we were accountable to the most stringent geometer. For on account of its deliberation and purity the mathematical method immediately exposes every jump in an assertion.<sup>11</sup>

Turning to Steiner, one sees that his earliest scientific writings of 1884 concern precisely this Goethean conception of how to understand the “living concept” and higher laws of plant metamorphosis, the organic transformation of the seed into a plant, and then into a new seed, expressed in the visible-sensible process of plant expansion and contraction.<sup>12</sup> In his Introduction to SKA 7, Clement insightfully recalls how the meditative image of the metamorphosis of seed and plant is also a key example in Steiner’s 1894 chief philosophical work, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (The Philosophy of Freedom).<sup>13</sup> Steiner’s main point in this philosophical text is that human beings are also given the possibility of undergoing a metamorphosis. However, in the human being this has to occur in freedom and out of their own forces of perception and cognition: “In the object of perception, man is given the possibility of transforming himself, just as there lies in the plant seed the possibility of becoming a whole plant.”<sup>14</sup> In a subsequent passage of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* Steiner immanently links these ideas of human freedom, metamorphosis and monistic knowledge with the striking image of a rose seed and plant: “Everyone of us is called upon to become a *free spirit*, just as every rose seed is called upon to become a rose. In the domain of genuine ethical acting, monism is therefore a *philosophy of freedom*.”<sup>15</sup>

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R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1884), 97–99.

<sup>11</sup> J.W. Goethe, “Das Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt” (1793), in *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1887), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Steiner, Einleitung, *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1884), xvii–xxxiv.

<sup>13</sup> SKA 7, XLIV.

<sup>14</sup> “Es ist in dem Wahrnehmungsobjekt Mensch die Möglichkeit gegeben, sich umzubilden, wie im Pflanzenkeim die Möglichkeit liegt, zur ganzen Pflanze zu werden.” R. Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (Berlin: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1894), 158.

<sup>15</sup> “Jeder von uns ist berufen zum *freien Geiste*, wie jeder Rosenkeim berufen ist, Rose zu

What was scientifically and philosophically presented by Steiner in 1884 and 1894 respectively as the organic process of metamorphosis in the plant and human being, reappears in 1904 in *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* as one of the central meditations on the theosophical-anthroposophical path of knowledge: “You place a small plant seed before yourself. [...] Picture to yourself: what is invisible [in the seed] will later become transformed into the visible plant, which I have before me in form and color. One dwells on the thought: *the invisible will become visible*.” (50) According to Steiner, actively and consciously meditating on ideas such as these, in conjunction with the other practical exercises, ultimately leads to the birth and knowledge of the higher self: “Thus, meditation is the way that also leads the human being to the knowledge and intuition of the eternal, indestructible core of his being.” (35) This path and experience was not new to Steiner in 1904; he was convinced he had already discovered the faculty in himself for intuiting his own eternal being decades earlier in January 1881 while a 19 year-old science student at the Technical College of Vienna.<sup>16</sup> And like Goethe, on account of its rigor and transparency Steiner too considers mathematical thinking as one of the best cognitive models for the student on the spiritual path: “Mathematics is therefore the most easily acquired preparatory training for the occultist who seeks to rise to bright and radiant clarity in the higher worlds, and not to a dim sentient form of ecstasy or dreamy premonitions.”<sup>17</sup> Steiner links the different fields of the Goethean theory of metamorphosis, mathematics and anthroposophical meditation, because for him all three lead to a similar goal: they assist the student in developing sense-free or “pure thinking” (*reines Denken*), i.e. the ability to pass from sensible perceptions and intuitions to supersensible ones.<sup>18</sup>

Hence, one can only agree with Clement in his commentary when he likewise points out the necessity of understanding this later seed and plant meditation in the light of Goethe’s morphological conceptions, and where the idea of “intuitive judgment” (*anschauende Urteilskraft*) may be viewed as

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werden. Der Monismus ist also im Gebiete des wahrhaft sittlichen Handelns *Freiheitsphilosophie*.” R. Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (Berlin: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1894), 168.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. R. Steiner to Josef Köck, 13 January 1881, *Briefe I* (GA 38, 13).

<sup>17</sup> R. Steiner, “Mathematics and Occultism” (Mathematik und Okkultismus), a 1904 text reprinted in: *Philosophie und Anthroposophie 1904–1923* (Dornach/Switzerland, 1984), 7–18. Clement has also included some of the ritual texts in SKA 7, in which mathematics – the example of an ideal circle for instance – is also presented as a solid preparatory path of knowledge (cf. SKA 7, 387–88).

<sup>18</sup> On “reines Denken” (pure thinking), or a new higher kind of thinking, cf. Clement’s commentary, 220–21, 335–36.

the “immediate model of Steiner’s concept of imagination, as the first supersensible stage of knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> As Clement puts it: “Thus, already here [in *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*] we find clearly expressed the basic conception of anthroposophical meditation, the idea of a methodically executed metamorphosis of the ordinary human faculties of perception and thought.”<sup>20</sup> There are naturally considerable differences in the formats, content, and arguments of Steiner’s early and later writings, yet one of the aims of historical-critical Steiner research should be to objectively explore precisely these divergences and correspondences between works like *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* and the texts in SKA 7.

### 3. Goethean Esotericism

As we saw, according to Goethe, in the sphere of science the scientist should aim to understand how a “geheimen” (secret), i.e. *invisible* but open principle of nature such as the law of metamorphosis is expressed in the *visible* world of nature. Here we have a twofold process: the outer, sensible parts of nature, and the initially hidden higher law that only appears to the scientist once they have brought the outer parts together into an organic whole. The law of plant metamorphosis can be clearly “seen” as it were, and therefore may be termed an *open secret* (*offenbares Geheimnis*) of nature. Goethe’s conception is a form of active and open scientific esotericism because these laws are ultimately visible for anyone who makes the intellectual effort, who is able to scientifically harmonize the sensible and spiritual aspects of nature. Here the abstracted part is the exoteric element, whereas the living whole is esoteric, and dangers and errors arise when one confuses the two.<sup>21</sup>

Commentating on Goethe’s scientific writings in 1897, Steiner linked onto and expanded this Goethean thought.<sup>22</sup> Steiner likewise classifies a consider-

<sup>19</sup> SKA 7, 248. In a similar vein, see Clement’s introduction, lxvii. Cf. Clement’s further reflections on this point in his commentary, 248–52.

<sup>20</sup> SKA 7, xlv–xlvi.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J.W. von Goethe, *Sprüche in Prosa*. “Man tut nicht wohl, sich allzu lange im Abstrakten aufzuhalten. Das Esoterische schadet nur, indem es exoterisch zu werden trachtet. Leben wird am besten durch’s Lebendige belehrt.” (It is not good for a person to dwell too long in abstractions. The esoteric is only harmful to the extent it seeks to become exoteric. Life is best instructed by means of the living) in: R. Steiner, ed., *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1897), 377.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of Steiner’s comments on esotericism prior to 1900, see Robin Schmidt,

ation of the single, abstracted parts as exoteric, while the view of the whole as an organic totality, which is won from the phenomena themselves, is to be considered as an esoteric concept: “A concept is esoteric when it is viewed in relation with the phenomena, and from out of which it is obtained. [A concept is] exoteric when it is viewed as an abstraction, isolated in itself.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, confining one’s vision to the single parts is merely an exoteric form of cognition, compared with knowledge of the esoteric whole:

Truths that belong to an entire system of views, can for the most part only be correctly understood and valued in this connection. One then calls their deeper sense, which they cannot have in isolation, the esoteric sense. The latter will only be familiar to someone who knows the entire corresponding circle of conceptions, to which the single elements belong. Truths that are immediately understandable in themselves apart from all their connections, are termed exoteric truths. The superficial manner of tearing esoteric truths out of their connections and immediately treating them in an exoteric manner can lead to the gravest errors.<sup>24</sup>

This public 1897 discussion of Goethe’s conception of esotericism was not a recent interest for Steiner; seven years earlier Steiner had already privately communicated to the renowned Vienna theosophist Friedrich Eckstein his conviction that “Goethe was an esotericist in the best sense of the word,”<sup>25</sup> discussing in relative detail with him the “open mysteries” and “esoteric” secrets of Goethe’s poetry.

It could also be argued that Steiner’s pre-1900 Goethean-inspired conception of active and open esotericism is a key principle in the post-1900 text *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*. In the preface to the 1910 book edition Steiner says that the text requires *active and comprehensive* readers, clearly stressing that its most essential truths are not to be found in a single part or

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*Rudolf Steiner und die Anfänge der Theosophie* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2010), especially chapter V, 107–22.

<sup>23</sup> Original German: “Esoterisch ist ein Begriff, wenn er im Zusammenhange mit den Erscheinungen betrachtet wird, aus denen er gewonnen ist. Exoterisch, wenn er als Abstraktion abgesondert für sich betrachtet wird.” In: *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1897), 377, footnote.

<sup>24</sup> Steiner’s remarks are a commentary on the section “Lust am Geheimnis” in the chapter “Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre” of Goethe’s *Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colour) in: R. Steiner, ed., *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1897), 127, footnote.

<sup>25</sup> “Goethe ein Esoteriker in des Wortes bester Bedeutung war”; letter of R. Steiner to F. Eckstein, Weimar, November 1890, *Briefe II* (GA 39: 54).

passage, but in a close and wide-ranging understanding of the whole: “An intimate and living familiarity with the book is necessary; the presupposition is to be made that *one* thing is not solely to be grasped merely through what is said about this thing as such, but also by what is said about something else. One will then obtain the conception that the essence is *not* to be found *in one truth*, but in the harmonization of them all” (16).

In terms of esoteric traditions, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* lists three main methods of spiritual schooling, the Eastern, the Christian and the Rosicrucian, and characterizes them with regard to the level of the student’s dependence on the teacher. For Steiner, the Eastern is the most dependent, the Christian is in the middle, and there is absolute independence and freedom between the student and teacher in a true Rosicrucian schooling (190). With regard to his own scientific methodology and cultural and artistic presentations, and to the extent he did not make appeals to authority, even to the authority of the name of this tradition, Steiner saw his own path as following the Western Rosicrucian one.<sup>26</sup> More detailed academic studies are required to determine whether Steiner was here linking onto the oldest historical Rosicrucian documents, or certain later conceptions found in Goethe (for example in his Rosicrucian poem *Die Geheimnisse*), or more contemporary principles and works connected with the Theosophical Society. She may be wrong in her assessment, but it is still interesting to note that at the same time as Steiner was making these distinctions in *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, Annie Besant saw the essential divergences between her path and Steiner’s in precisely these Rosicrucian terms, as she explained in a 1907 letter to Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden:

Dr. Steiner’s occult training is very different from ours. He does not know the eastern way, so cannot, of course, teach it. He teaches the Christian and Rosicrucian way, and this is very helpful to some, but is different from ours. He has his own School, on his own responsibility. I regard him as a very fine teacher on his own lines, and a man of real knowledge. He and I work in thorough friendship and harmony, but along different lines.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In the 1910 work *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* Steiner explains that he did not call the contents of the book ‘Rosicrucian’, even though it contains a rose-cross meditation, because it would be appealing to the authority of an ancient name. He wished to appeal only to the truth of the presentation itself. Cf. R. Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989), 22–23, 359.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of Annie Besant to Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, 7 June 1907; cited in Steward C. Easton, *Rudolf Steiner: Herald of a New Epoch* (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1980), 169.

#### 4. Ideological or Immanent?

Many of the misunderstandings and disputes associated with this *Kritische Ausgabe* concern Clement's editorial work in trying to accurately determine the most essential and influential textual sources in Steiner's writings. This is exactly the right approach for a critical edition. In my opinion the reason why Clement has had such success in ascertaining Steiner's philosophical and literary sources is due to his essentially immanent reading of the texts. In a correct application of the immanent textual method one does not approach an author's works with preconceptions and ready-made theories as to their cultural significance and spiritual traditions, but *firstly* one tries to allow the writings themselves to guide this determination and to critically understand them on their own merits. *Subsequently* one of course moves outside of the texts and then compares them with other historical writings, documents and figures. This valid and important scholarly method seems to have been misunderstood by a number of Clement's critics.

Clement's precise work so far on the SKA reveals that a sizable portion of the content of Steiner's post-1900 texts is closely interlinked with the philosophical, cultural and religious traditions of Goethe and the German idealists. This fact has now had radical consequences for contemporary Steiner research. Here his findings partly agree with those of Hartmut Traub in his 2011 monograph *Philosophie und Anthroposophie* (xxxix) and a number of other researchers, yet often appear to be in conflict with the conclusions of scholars like Helmut Zander (xxx, 252, 320, etc.). Naturally, after 1900 Steiner's writings continue to discuss the conceptions of other late 19th century figures, such as Ernst Haeckel or the philosophers Nietzsche and Friedrich Theodor Vischer. And this is not to forget that the first audiences of Steiner texts were predominantly theosophically-schooled readers, hence there are references to some of the standard theosophical works of the period. What is notable about Clement's findings is that whereas many of Steiner's lectures from around 1902–1908 are replete with conventional theosophical ideas, structures and terminology, Steiner's written published works are much less so. And if Steiner engages with the theosophical literature in his published writings, he frequently transforms or enlarges upon it, so that the reader has to actively penetrate through the outer linguistic layers and composition to the inner concepts, otherwise the reader runs the risk of misunderstanding them, of taking the letter or image to be the spirit.

At this point it is worth concluding with a brief examination of a highly

disputed example of this in the research literature: Steiner's narrative presentation of the two "Guardians of the Threshold" in *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* In my view Clement correctly argues that the *principal* textual sources for Steiner's two guardians is not the novel *Zanoni* by Bulwer-Lytton, as a number of commentators seem to think.<sup>28</sup> Nor are the two guardians any sort of new invention on Steiner's part. What then are the most *essential* textual sources for Steiner's concepts of the two guardians? The encounter with the initially demonic figure of the "Lesser Guardian" is derived from the death-experience and journey to Hades that is portrayed in ancient Greek and Roman writings, such as the hound Cerberus guarding Hades, or Odysseus's descent to the underworld in book XI of Homer's *Odyssey*, or Proserpina or Isis in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, or the Zoroastrian tradition in Menippus (142–49, 256–58, 319ff.). According to Steiner, after successfully traversing the death experience and encounter with the Lesser Guardian, the candidate comes to know their own "double-nature": the shadow sides of their life and destiny – and ultimately their higher and eternal self (153). The encounter with the figure of the "Greater Guardian" is essentially derived from the Bible, especially the Christian gospels and the death experience of Christ in the "Mystery of Golgotha" (148, 150–57, 233, 258, 319–31). Steiner's text specifically refers to the "cherub with the flaming sword at the gates of paradise" (*Genesis* 3:24) on the one hand (155), and points to the figure of Christ by evoking the image of the parable of the ten virgins and their lamps on the other (148) that is found in the *Gospel of Matthew* (25:1–13). With regard to the gospels, I would be even more specific than Clement, and argue that Steiner's Greater Guardian (150–57) is predominantly based on the depiction of Christ as the Good Shepherd in Chapter 10 of the *Gospel of John*. The Good Shepherd is at once the gatekeeper and door itself, a guardian who is to pass through his own death experience by laying down his life for others, and, significantly, is initially also thought to be "demonic" (John 10:1–21). In line with the Christian teachings, one can only enter the heavenly worlds and receive eternal life by crossing over the threshold attended by this gatekeeper, by passing through this door and this door alone (John 10:1–3, 7–9). In this

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Olav Hammer, who concludes that Steiner appropriated this 1842 literary fiction in order to stimulate a new belief system in the reader: *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 157–58; and Per Faxneld, "Secret Lineages and de Facto Satanists: Anton LaVey's Use of Esoteric Tradition," in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), 89.

sense, the final two chapters of Steiner's 1904/05 text reveal a direct parallel with his conception of esoteric Christianity, particularly its Johannine form, in his 1902 *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. Just as the ancient mystery traditions for Steiner lead to and have their culmination in the new and fully open Christian mysteries, so the death experience of the candidate with the Lesser Guardian, echoing the ancient literary depictions of the journey to Hades, leads to and culminates in a new understanding and experience of Christ as the guardian to the higher spiritual worlds. Steiner's textual sources for these two guardians are not "covered up", but are directly cited in other sections of the 1904/05 text itself – when, for example, Steiner specifically recommends *The Gospel of John* and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* as inspired models of spiritual literature (77) – as well as in his earlier 1902 *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. In line with the principle of open and active esotericism, it is a matter of the reader bringing all these conceptions together.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, Bulwer-Lytton's "dweller" figure from his 1842 novel *Zanoni* is also definitely cited by Steiner (145); that is not the problem. Indeed, Clement here analyzes and compares the dweller figure in *Zanoni* and Steiner's two guardians at length, acknowledging the role played by the former, but rightfully drawing the conclusion that this figure is simply too insufficient, unsubstantial and different to be Steiner's sole and principal textual source (319–24). For Steiner, although it relates to an inner experience, Bulwer-Lytton's dweller is essentially a *degenerate* outer sense image generated out of material smoke (145). Hence, anyone giving chronological priority to this modern novelistic image, over the original ancient tradition of the journey to Hades, would not only be subjecting Steiner's text to an anachronistic reading, but furthermore confusing an external artistic depiction with what is intended to be a profound and realistic inner experience.

The unusual presentation of Steiner is one of the most original aspects of his contribution to the problem of possible modern experiences of Hades and Christ: Steiner's description is not a slavish copy of the ancient reports of the descent to the underworld, or of the Good Shepherd in the *Gospel of John*,

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, many of the different interpretative findings concerning the two guardians of the threshold rest on how a scholar answers the question: what are the *primary* textual sources for Steiner, and what are the *secondary* ones? Adherents of the Bulwer-Lytton interpretation often render subordinate or reject outright the ancient literary and religious references in Steiner's text, as well as ignoring his earlier writings and conception of esotericism, inverting the chronological and experiential order of the guardians and minimizing the many significant differences between the two figures. Starting from these wholly different premises and textual sources they not unexpectedly arrive at a wholly different conclusion to mine.

rather he artistically transforms and builds on them to present his views in a new narrative form. As Clement notes, this narrative form of presentation is similar to Steiner's 1912 third mystery drama, which is also entitled *The Guardian of the Threshold* (lxviii). In both presentations the reader or spectator must not remain at the mere artistic images, but must seek to grasp the underlying spiritual reality.

Clement's assessment that many of the references in Steiner's works come from Western cultural and esoteric traditions has not been well received in certain quarters, especially by scholars who have argued for Eastern theosophical sources. If the general direction of Clement's research findings is correct, then a number of influential contemporary interpretations are indeed either erroneous or in need of reevaluation. Instead of trying to critically refute him, however, some critics have attacked Clement's personal background, academic qualifications and institution, and (implicitly or explicitly) accused him of ideological motivations. I think that is both unfair and inaccurate. It seems that these critics are more often than not confusing Clement's immanent textual approach – which, as mentioned, is a perfectly justified and legitimate scholarly method – with someone who places their own personal beliefs into the texts. Naturally, every scholar must be continually on guard against the latter, whether they are a fervent Kantian, Republican, theosophist, or Protestant theologian. A true scientific researcher should of course never allow his or her personal beliefs or political convictions to distort their interpretations.

If a scholar projects continuity or unity onto a text when there is none, this too should be rejected as unscientific. However, the inverse principle also holds: if a researcher is able to competently demonstrate that specific concepts, methods, structures or arguments are carried over by an author from his earlier to his later writings, this should not be dogmatically rejected as an impossibility, or superficially dismissed as an 'ideological' reading. Or to put it another way: all theses concerning rupture in Steiner's work also have to be critically demonstrated by means of the texts themselves, and not naively assumed beforehand as something self-evident. It is obvious that Steiner's writings after the turn of the century are vastly different from his earlier ones in many respects. But – to borrow a familiar image from Goethe – the question for a validly employed immanent and non-retrospective reading is whether the philosophical, scientific and esoteric seeds in Steiner's early works are organically present in, or even give rise to, some of the flourishing plants of his later period.

Clement's insightful and generally convincing results seem to speak for the

soundness of his approach. But every academic can make errors, and a critical researcher should not simply accept the opinions espoused in the secondary literature or by book reviewers. I therefore encourage interested scholars to carefully examine both Clement's commentaries and the original passages of Steiner in order to arrive at their own independent judgment of these issues. Or, better still, to critically overturn Clement's findings if they are able.

To conclude: volume 7 of the SKA furnishes another positive, radical and thought-provoking chapter in critical Steiner research. Any scholar genuinely interested in close textual and historical-critical readings will be thankful to the editor and publisher for making these writings available in such a transparent, accessible and engaging edition.

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## Patterns of Magicity A Review of *Defining Magic: A Reader*\*

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Michael Stausberg and Bernd-Christian Otto (eds.). *Defining Magic: A Reader*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2012. xiii + 281 pp.

**Magic, n.** An art of converting superstition into coin. There are other arts serving the same high purpose, but the discreet lexicographer does not name them.

Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*.

Ambrose Bierce's satirical quip on magic did not make it through editorial selection for this anthology of perspectives on how to define the problematic term. Nevertheless, Bierce targets a revealing detail in a deliciously subversive way: Definitions of "magic" are often woefully underdetermined by historical and ethnographic data, and the use of the category thus typically relies on the (often ideological or theological) discretion and sensibilities of the lexicographer rather than on whether or not the features the term picks out belong exclusively to certain clearly defined phenomena. Distinctions between "magic" and "religion" tend to conceal the fact that the practices and beliefs thus labelled overlap significantly on the ground. Why is praying for the defeat of a military foe part of "religion," but casting spells on the same enemy

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“magic”? Can we uphold distinctions like these without recourse to theology?

This and many other problems in the study of magic are outlined and documented in *Defining Magic: A Reader*. Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg have created a reader of generally influential texts on magic, spanning from antiquity to the present, with a focus on classics in the academic struggles to define the concept for the sake of historical and ethnographic analysis. In addition to reprinting twenty previously published texts, the editors have also commissioned five new articles from contemporary scholars known for their theoretical contributions to the study of magic. The result is a valuable, although not flawless, collection that serves as a useful roadmap to novices in the study of magic. To more established scholars it may serve as a crucial reminder of the confusing state this concept has gotten us into. But it also suggests some interesting new pathways to escape that precarious situation.

## 1. The selection

The composition of *Defining Magic* is notable for an unconventional choice of starting with ten texts labelled “historical sources,” spanning from Plato and Plotinus to Diderot and Blavatsky, before continuing to theoretical texts from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. There is a good point to doing this, which becomes clear by reading the useful editorial material in the book and paying attention especially to the most recent theoretical contributions. Several patterns of meanings connected to “magic” and its cognates start taking shape in the earlier, mostly Greek, source texts. These patterns trickle through the middle ages and eventually feed into the derisive statements on magic in the Enlightenment, before getting picked up again in occultist understandings in the nineteenth century.

Eventually, the various permutations of these words and meanings create a broad semantic field which later scholarly attempts to define “magic” draw upon. Reconstructing some of this development through a broader combination of texts is thus a major asset. It encourages a parallel reading of texts that automatically historicises the concept.

That is not to say that the particular selection of texts is beyond reproach. For the earlier period, critical eyes will not fail to notice a bias towards Greek and Latin sources, to the neglect of Egyptian, Hebrew, and Arabic material. Moreover, there is a predominance of texts where “magic” and cognates are used derogatorily, with the omission of “pro-magic” authors and theurgists such as Iamblichus, Proclus, the hermetic texts or the *Chaldean Oracles*. This

focus on “magic” as a negative label applied to others is entirely in tune with some currently dominant theoretical positions, but it might obscure a more complicated history of use.

One notable exception is that the editors include two very interesting definitions from the *Suda* (ca. 970 CE) – the most comprehensive and influential surviving encyclopaedic work from the Byzantine Empire. In sharp contrast to developments in the Latin west, the *Suda* distinguishes clearly between *mageia*, *goeteia* and *pharmakeia*, and attributes different values to them. While *goeteia* (“sorcery”) and *pharmakeia* (“witchcraft”) were considered bad and depraved practices, *mageia* (“magic”) was wholly positive: “It is the invocation of beneficent spirits for the production of something good; like the oracles of Apollonius of Tyana.” (47) This understanding appears more in line with the neoplatonic theurgists. It would in fact resurface in the west, too, during the Renaissance rehabilitation of magic, especially in Agrippa von Nettesheim – although in a different text of Agrippa’s than the one reproduced in this volume. The apparent continuity of this line of thinking about magic in the Byzantine world raises the question of a strikingly different and completely underexplored trajectory in the conceptual history of magic. As the editors ask: “was the term *mageia* generally used in a positive sense in medieval Constantinople?” (46) This appears to require further research.

The neglect of the renaissance revival of magic is another notable omission in the source material, as is the complete absence of medieval pro-magic texts culled from the grimoire tradition. Between Aquinas and Agrippa (both included) there is much else that must be explored for a sufficient picture of medieval and Renaissance conceptions of magic to emerge – from *Liber Iuratus* to Ficino, Pico, Lazzarelli, or Dee.<sup>1</sup> Finally, to use one minor text by Blavatsky as the sole representative of post-1800 source texts on magic seems thin. After all, people have never written more about magic as a positive form of practice than during this period, stretching roughly from the mid nineteenth century until today, nor has the practitioner’s literature on magic been more diverse.<sup>2</sup> The poor selection of modern and contemporary magical texts reinforces an unfortunate impression that magic belongs to the past, whereas in fact “it” has

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<sup>1</sup> For some of the complexity of understandings of magic in this period, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols,” *Esoterica* 2 (2000): 1–44; Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Egil Asprem, *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

never been more vital than during modernity.

Moving on to the part of the volume that seems more central to the aim of the book (i.e. to provide readings of attempts to define the concept for *academic work*), critics may notice other curious omissions. Seminal texts by E. B. Tylor, J. G. Frazer, Mauss and Hubert, and Emile Durkheim fill the section on “Foundational Works of the Academic Debate.” The list of notable absentees, however, includes Freud and Weber, who have inspired entire schools of later theorizing. Part three on “Mid-Twentieth Century Approaches” includes seminal texts by van der Leeuw, Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski, Horton, Tambiah and Leach, but it also omits influential contributions by people such as Lévy-Bruhl, de Martino, Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, or Rodney Stark. Indeed, it seems possible to create an entirely parallel anthology with a completely different set of authors and texts.

While some of these omissions are indeed problematic, I do not think they undermine the project too much. The editors Otto and Stausberg are in fact very clear on what is missing, and provide helpful and rich discussions of the broader literature in their editorial introductions to the four main parts, and to each individual text. This material is extremely helpful, and effectively embeds the selected texts in a broader context. Readers who wish to extend their view can easily use this as a road map and pursue the references on their own.

One other aspect of the selection process deserves to be mentioned. In the case of this book, it is clear that the editors are in fact *not* to blame for the omissions. Copyright structures and commercial aspects of the academic publishing industry have clearly put unwanted and artificial restrictions on their work. The editors discreetly vent their frustration in the introduction: “in several cases there was an unfortunate mismatch between the royalties requested by some publishers and the budget at our disposal, so that we were unable to reprint some texts we would otherwise have wished to include.” (13) It is unfortunate that some publishers have discovered the use of royalties as an extra revenue stream when selling academic work back to the academy that produced it. The result is that a well-conceived resource planned by two leading specialists is prevented from reaching its full potential. The dissemination structures that are supposed to further the academic community instead become an impediment and an obstacle to the effective development and communication of knowledge. In the face of such commercial obstacles, however, the editors have done a formidable job in making use of the material available to them and presenting it in a form that takes maximal advantage of each text.

## 2. The introduction

Stausberg and Otto's introduction to the volume is an excellent example of this productive work. More than just an introduction to the various texts of the book, this piece is itself an original contribution to the ongoing discussion about what to do with the troubling term "magic." This contribution consists, to begin with, of an effort to systematise the definitions that are out there. For example, Otto and Stausberg present a catalogue of frequent denotations of the term "magic" as encountered in both practical and scholarly literature, consisting of thirty-five bullet points (9–10). Magic is said to be coercive, manipulative, immune to falsification, a non-legitimate way of dealing with the supernatural, egocentric and antisocial, lacking institutional structures, a label for marginalizing outsiders, an illocutionary or performative speech act, or an art of creating illusions – to name but a few of the examples.

What to do with this bewildering set of features? It is of course possible to divide and classify them in various ways, propose a loosely defined polythetic family-resemblance definition, or try to force some key features into an ideal or prototypical structure in order to reconstruct an etic category of "magic." There are serious problems with all of these approaches, however, and the sheer breadth of the semantic field of magic is only the first and most practical challenge. If we factor in the various ideological, ethnocentric and theological implications involved with most available previous definitions, there is little wonder why an increasing number of scholars over the past few decades have opted for eliminating the category altogether: "magic" does not exist as a stable phenomenon in the world, and should therefore not exist as a category either.

Stausberg and Otto do not settle for anything quite so simple. Their suggestion is in fact rather novel:

Instead of instinctively interpreting the occurrence of a limited number of features from our catalogue as evidence for the existence of a family-like concept, we suggest splitting the extended tribal family into a number of nuclear families. Instead of instances of "magic", we suggest speaking of *patterns of magicity* (10; my emphasis).

What does this shift imply? Essentially, it is a shift away from the endeavour of producing a new definition that would add to the dozens of existing ones, towards a systematic effort of classifying what various people writing about magic have in fact been interested in when using this concept. This seems to me a much needed effort that may provide a better ground for

future discussions. More importantly, it may solve the problematic disconnect between those eliminativists coming at “magic” from a discursive perspective interested in plays of power and authority, and those historians, ethnographers and comparativists who wish to employ the term to study specific features of human behaviour. In the words of the editors:

One might argue that abandoning the term “magic” only risks silencing us by depriving scholars of ways of addressing these persistent observations; after all, amulets, curses, healing procedures and other such things exist and it is easy enough to find practices that can be characterized as manipulative or that are typically performed on critical occasions ... In other words, should we stop speaking of “magic” even when we cannot help observing perceived evidence for it? (10–11)

There is “something there,” but is “magic,” given its troubled history and semantic fuzziness, the best way to categorize it? Otto and Stausberg think not, and this is precisely where “patterns of magicity” come in as an alternative way to construe the debate:

Our point is that even if such phenomena impose themselves on observers ..., as scholars we should, indeed, stop treating these observations as evidence for “MAGIC”. Instead, we should either just speak of amulets, curses, etc., or of private rites (rather than intuitively and unreflectingly allocate them to a single overarching macro-category). ... “Patterns of magicity” do not automatically involve “MAGIC” (as the supreme meta-category), nor are they “magic” (as referring to ontological features), but they are a way of dealing with cross-culturally attested observations. “Magicity” acknowledges the fact that they were traditionally assigned to the overall category “MAGIC” in which we have stopped believing. As we see it, based on a meta-analysis of definitions and theories of “magic”, and the catalogue of objects to which that category is applied, future work should seek to model such patterns. (11)

For now, Otto and Stausberg propose coding and classifying different senses of “magic,” using short-hand subscripts to distinguish, for example, the concept of magic as “word efficacy” ( $M_{\text{WOR}}$ ) from “magic as signs” ( $M_{\text{SIG}}$ ) and “magic as harmful rituals” ( $M_{\text{HAR}}$ ). The idea is that with such coding one could identify basic ascriptions and look at their combinations in various real-life constellations as well as in scholar definitions. I see significant overlaps here with the “building-block approach” that Ann Taves has recently been developing for tackling complex cultural concepts in general and for “religion” in particular.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of*

### 3. Contemporary voices

That we need a systematic approach along the lines of what Stausberg and Otto suggest is in my view confirmed by looking at the five contemporary pieces representing the current state of the debate. The five authors represent anything but a consensus. However, through a broader framework of “patterns of magicity” we might be able to at least put them in a fruitful dialogue.

Susan Greenwood’s chapter on what she calls “magical consciousness” stands out the most from the rest. Drawing on her experience as both an anthropologist and a contemporary practitioner of magic, Greenwood offers a view on magic as a mode of consciousness, a “specific and intrinsic mode of mind” that is universally human (198) and allows one to communicate with spirits (208–10). Connecting “magical thinking” to imagination and defining it as “creative thinking that goes beyond the immediately apparent” she seems to have an extremely broad definition, with some nods to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s notion of “participation.” Ultimately, however, the view is derived straight from some contemporary magicians’ self-understanding of what magic is and how it works. Unfortunately, Greenwood also borrows the scientifically unsupported notion that the two hemispheres of the brain are connected with two distinct styles of thought (203-04, 209-10) – apparently nailing “magical consciousness” to the right hemisphere. This pop-psychological view is not uncommon among contemporary pagans, but it harmonizes badly with current science of the mind/brain.<sup>4</sup> In the end, Greenwood’s essay moves from defining and theorising “magic” to showing how magic is, in her words, a “legitimate source of knowledge.”(208) After an obligatory overview of the bad “Cartesian” dualistic split that we supposedly still suffer from, she draws on Gregory Bateson to make a (considering the circumstances, suspiciously

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*Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Taves, “Reverse Engineering Complex Concepts: Identifying Building Blocks of ‘Religion,’” *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 15.1–2 (2015): 191–216. See also Egil Asprem, “Reverse-Engineering ‘Esotericism’: How to Prepare a Complex Cultural Concept for the Cognitive Science of Religion.” *Religion*, online 22 Sept. 2015, DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2015.1072589.

<sup>4</sup> Greenwood seeks support for some of her claims in the book by psychiatrist Ian McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), which attempts to revive the notion that hemispheric differentiation underpins vast cultural differences. For a short critical review, see Owen Flanagan, “The Vast Left-brain Conspiracy,” *CultureLab*, 21 December 2009 (URL: <https://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2009/12/the-left-brain-plot-for-world-domination.php?DCMP=OTC-rss&nsref=online-news>).

dualistic) point about how “spirits are real” when you are in right-brained magical consciousness, even though they are not when you use your left-brained analytical thinking. Two separate worlds, accessible through separate forms of consciousness.

If we follow the patterns of magicity approach, Greenwood’s views on magic appear much more closely related to those of (some) contemporary Wiccans than those of her colleagues. I say this with some reservation, however, for Greenwood is not alone in deriving her framework from contemporary magicians: rather, she represents a small subculture of scholars of magic that openly advocate the integration of scholarship and (magical) practice, often under the banner of “pagan studies.”<sup>5</sup> The fact that this text could just as well have been included in the contemporary *sources* of “magic” rather than “contemporary approaches” shows just how difficult it is to separate emic from etic, insider from outsider in the academic study of magic.

Christopher I. Leirich, known for his work on Renaissance magic in books such as *The Language of Demons and Angels* (2003) and *The Occult Mind* (2007), takes us back into the thicket of theoretical problems involved with establishing sound definitions in the academic study of anything. While no definition of magic emerges from his discussion, the key point is that we have to continue trying. The definitional pursuit is a process, and challenges do not mean we should stop. Thus, borrowing the format of Clifford Geertz’ influential definition of religion, Leirich points rather to five criteria that should, in his opinion, be fulfilled for definitions of magic. Perhaps the most valuable among these is the point that the conflict over whether magic is particular or universal is misguided: instead, definitions of magic should aim to be *generalizable*, which Leirich rightly notes is not the same thing as universality. Generalizability requires working inductively on some level, but it also appears that it can only be achieved against the backdrop of a theoretical framework that directs the empirical effort according to set methodological principles. If not, the endeavour becomes a game of unfixed associations and correspondences – much like what some would call magical thinking. This tendency was also a central focus in Leirich’s *Occult Mind*.

Kimberly B. Stratton is known for her deconstructionist and largely gender-focused research on discourses on magic and witchcraft in antiquity.<sup>6</sup> In keeping

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<sup>5</sup> On this, see Markus Altena Davidsen, “What Is Wrong With Pagan Studies?” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 (2012): 183–99.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

with this previous work, Stratton is primarily interested in *labelling practices* as they take shape in discursive formations that create structures of alterity with real-life social implications. Magic for her has nothing to do with practices, rituals, ways of thinking, special objects, special powers, or anything of the sort. At best, it is a social discourse *about* such practices. “Magic” denotes “culturally specific ideas about illegitimate and dangerous access to numinous powers.” (245) This quotation, however, introduces a notable ambiguity about the relation between discourse and objects of discourse: are we talking about discourses fixed by a notion of “illegitimate and dangerous access to numinous power”? Or should we listen to the more radical proposal on the following page: “What gets labelled magic is *arbitrary* and depends upon the society in question”? (246; my emphasis) These two claims appear to be at odds with each other, for if it is about discourses on access to “numinous power,” then the application of “magic” is not strictly speaking arbitrary, but rather contingent on what is considered “numinous” and “powerful.”

The source of this ambiguity is, perhaps, found in Stratton’s aim to strike a balance between two dominant present-day approaches to magic: those who want to ditch the overarching second-order concept while focusing solely on emic categories, and those who wish to create a better category that can be employed for useful comparative research. This agenda is entirely in keeping with the aims of this volume at large. In practice, however, Stratton leans closer to the first of these two trends. One could, for example, conceivably use this framework to do comparisons that focus on discursive formations of alterity across different cultures and historical periods, but even this will need further calibration before offering a manageable research program. As Stratton writes, after emphasising the particularity of the Western, European (or Mediterranean?) discourse on magic:

This is not to say that non-European cultures do not have similar discourses of alterity which resemble magic; but it is important to clarify that those discursive formations have their own history, social dynamics and local variations that are essential to comprehending them as cultural products. (248)

Instead of comparative research on “magic,” we could envision parallel histories of alterity across cultures, where “magic” would be one such discourse in “the West.”

Interestingly, it becomes clear at the end of Stratton’s article that she cannot do without a consideration of “what people actually did” in order to make her most important point: that the discursive formation of “magic” in antiquity

shifted considerably, whereas the *practices* remained stable:

In all these cases, from curses to amulets, *the practice of magic* ... was amazingly consistent across the Mediterranean world ... Significantly, despite this *consistency in the material remains of magic, representations of magic* from different times and places diverge in an extraordinary way from the material record ... (254; my emphasis)

In other words, the argument rests on an operative distinction between the practice of magic and its material remains on the one hand, and *representations of magic* on the other.

Randall Styers' contribution continues the focus from Stratton's article. Styers is well known for his 2004 book *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World*. It made a persuasive and influential argument that the category "magic" reflects the struggle of moderns to purify the concepts with which they describe themselves (e.g. "science," "reason," "religion"). Thus magic is inseparably connected to Reformation, Enlightenment, imperialist, and colonialist projects of identity formation and ultimately of domination. Styers' essay in the present collection is a crash-course in this by now rather familiar view. Styers is the most direct eliminativist among the theoreticians sampled in this volume, and as such it may be valuable to quote one passage that again highlights the tension between eliminativism and those who seek to do something new with the term. Styers writes:

[I]t appears that there is little value in attempting to formulate a definition of magic as some type of *stable object of study*. The term is too amorphous and shape shifting – and its deployment too polemical – ever to offer up any meaningful conceptual clarity, particularly in any type of trans-cultural or trans-historical fashion. (258; emphasis added)

The key here, I suggest, is "stable object of study." We have to agree with Styers that the concept of "magic" taken on face value is useless for comparative research. We also agree that it is *inappropriate*, if not impossible from a logical point of view, to try and stabilise it through stipulated definition. In other words, if we insist on seeing all usages of the term throughout history together, there is no doubt that the word is amorphous and shape-shifting (few terms wouldn't be). But *singular* uses of the term within this broad semantic field may very well point to stable objects of study. This is precisely what the "patterns of magicity" approach would seem to suggest. We could, for example, argue that "manipulative ritual practices" constitute a stable object, analytically construed,

that can be studied cross-culturally and cross-historically. Whether or not we want to call such rituals “magic,” of course, is another question.

On this note, it seems appropriate to end with some reflections on the one essay that does argue for a new, stable definition of the concept that enables broad-scale comparisons. Jesper Sørensen is notable for the book *A Cognitive Theory of Magic* (2007), based on his doctoral dissertation, and for his involvement with a number of recent studies applying neurocognitive and experimental approaches to ritual action.<sup>7</sup> Sørensen’s contribution to *Defining Magic* recapitulates the key points of that work, updated with some new experimental results and conceptual developments.

Sørensen provides a useful contrast to both Stratton and Styers: while their focus was on discourses that construe certain practices (of others), Sørensen’s is on how to theorize certain stable, pan-human features of ritual behaviour. Thus we have moved from the “representations of magic” to the “practices of magic,” to use Stratton’s perhaps unintentional, but nevertheless apt, distinction.

Sørensen approaches ritual by drawing on tools from the cognitive sciences, especially theories on metaphors and conceptual blending coming out of cognitive linguistics. He attempts to refine what he considers to be the prototype of “magic” (that is, its most central features and examples), identify cognitive elements required for its operation and thus turn the category into a set of experimentally testable propositions about ritual actions and agent-level interpretations of ritual efficacy. On these grounds he is able to make distinctions between different types of rituals, and even make some predictions about the relation between ritual form and notions of efficacy (235–39). This work should be seen in the context of the long-standing endeavour within the cognitive science of religion to theorise ritual forms.<sup>8</sup>

While I am sympathetic to the general thrust of this approach, there are also problems here. First of all: why continue insisting on a difference between *religious* and *magical* rituals? Would it not be less confusing to treat “ritual” on its own (or better yet: ritualized action), and delineate various types based on fine-grained analysis of bottom-up cognitive processes that account for

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<sup>7</sup> See e.g. the overview in Uffe Schjoedt et al., “Cognitive Resource Depletion in Religious Interactions,” *Religion, Brain, & Behavior* 3.1(2013): 29–86.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2004).

universal differences, without invoking these higher-level concepts when classifying them? Sørensen clearly recognizes the problem, and spends the last few pages of the essay in an apologetic mode (239–41). His proposed solution is to abandon classification of rituals *as* magical or religious, in favour of a focus on magic as “an *interpretive strategy* towards ritual actions utilized by individuals in particular situations.” (240) But does this resolve the problem? Indeed, does Sørensen even *need* the term “magic” to do the work that he does so well? Doesn’t the labelling and juxtaposition of these two interpretive strategies to rituals just perpetuate unnecessary semantic confusion and even false disagreement with the important discourse-oriented analyses that occupy scholars such as Stratton and Styers? It seems we could avoid some equivocation issues by dropping the terminology and use other, more descriptive, terms.

This is precisely the sort of problem that Stausberg and Otto’s “patterns of magicity” approach – and, I would suggest, the related building-block approach – might help us resolve. Sørensen’s cognitive theory could, for example, be construed as being specifically about ritual efficacy ( $M_{\text{EFF}}$ ) rather than “MAGIC” as such. This, it seems to me, would enable us to do several forms of important and complementary work in parallel, without getting into fruitless disputes over who has figured out “the right way” to circumscribe “MAGIC.” Providing a framework that enables future students and scholars to see the compatibility of different approaches to “magic,” and a language in which they can specify the level they are working on, is *Defining Magic’s* greatest achievement.

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## Book Reviews

Damon Zacharias Lycourinos, ed. *Occult Traditions*. Colac: Numen Books, 2012. 308 pp. ISBN: 978-0987158130. \$29.95.

To speak with Bruce Lincoln, studying religion means historicizing that which often poses as transcendent. The history of religions critically examines religious claims, seeking to uncover the historical and cultural circumstances through which they came to be regarded as timeless truths.<sup>1</sup> Thus, studying religion challenges the mechanisms through which these systems create meaning and gain legitimacy. Western esotericism often relies on notions of tradition or eternal wisdom passed down through the ages, its timeless essence unshaken by the mundanities of political struggle and sociocultural change. However, the ability to distinguish between truth claims and truth; to recognize how the historical, cultural, and political have fundamentally shaped that which masquerades as transcendent; in essence, to de-mystify the mystical, must be the starting point of all sound research on esotericism.

Naturally, this does not mean that practitioners cannot conduct sound research. Armed with an awareness of the potential pitfalls and the vital differences between emic and etic perspectives, it is undoubtedly possible to be an excellent scholar of one's own religion or spirituality. Failure in this regard results in speculative universalizations, anachronism, and occlusion of power relations. Sadly, *Occult Traditions*, described on the back cover as the collaborative endeavour of scholars and practitioners alike, provides abundant proof of this.

*Occult Traditions* covers a rich selection of topics. Three chapters – two by

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8, no. 3 (1996): 225–27.

editor Damon Lycourinos and one by Aaron Cheak – deal with the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM). Christopher A. Plaisance bridges the gap between antiquity and early modernity with chapters on the legacy of Neoplatonism in occult theology as well as medieval and renaissance angel magic. David Rankine, Ioannis Marathakis, and Christopher A. Smith address different aspects of early modern and modern magic books. The volume also treats modern occultism, in a chapter on Julius Evola by Lycourinos, and two chapters on Wicca by Sorita D’Este and Melissa Harrington respectively. Gwendolyn Toynton discusses divinatory practices and Thai Buddhism, respectively, in two chapters. In addition, the work includes chapters on ancient Egyptian religion, the use of incense, and a number of outlines for magical ritual, by Lycourinos, Matthew Levi Stephens, Companion Abraxas, and Tess Dawson.

Regrettably, the wide historical and geographical scope comes at the expense of context and coherence. The reader is not offered an intellectually satisfactory explanation as to how, for instance, the PGM, Icelandic magic, and Buddhism in Thailand fit together as part of an interconnected “occult tradition.” The selection appears arbitrary, and possibly based on what the editor and contributors personally find most appealing. Contrary to reigning academic standards, *Occult Traditions* does not treat esotericism or occultism as a group of genealogically linked systems, texts, or ideas, or as a discursive field produced through particular historical processes.<sup>2</sup> Instead, it appears to view its subject matter as a unified tradition based on a set of loosely defined criteria, supposedly constituting its perennial “essence.” This was a common view in the early years of esotericism research, inspired by the ideas of figures such as Mircea Eliade and partly due to the influence of Traditionalism. More recently, this approach has come under criticism as it downplays historical and cultural specificity in favour of an illusory trans-historical coherence.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it hides the role that scholars have played in constructing esotericism as an object, as well as the power relations inherent to this process.<sup>4</sup>

*Occult Traditions* draws on a romanticized view of a sort of spirituality of

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London; Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm, “Constructing Esotericisms: Sociological, Historical and Critical Approaches to the Invention of Tradition,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Asprem and Granholm (Sheffield; Bristol: Equinox, 2013); Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*; see also Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) for a more recent example of this approach.

<sup>4</sup> Asprem and Granholm, “Constructing Esotericisms.”

subversion, manifesting throughout history and offering an alternative to hegemonic religious dogma to those brave and curious enough to explore it. In her foreword, Toynton waxes lyrical about a time when “both magic and religion worked together to contact the divine.” (11) In her view, the anthology shows occultism’s authenticity and ancient roots, clearly distinguishing it from the “rootless” New Age. Lycourinos in his introduction describes a succession of people throughout history embodying “a visible representation of spiritual virility ... aligning themselves purely with the laws of the pure forces of the cosmos.” (17) He proposes a definition of occultism as “the theory and practice of specific fields of discourse involving a particular human awareness and performance within a worldview characterized by a resistance to the dominance of either sterile logic or doctrinal faith.” (15)

Ahistorical concepts such as “spiritual virility” and “pure cosmic forces” do not explain how or why occultism has developed in such disparate ways over time. Moreover, it remains unclear why this supposedly perennial quest for hidden wisdom is often conspicuously influenced by contemporary discourses, power negotiations, and cultural exchanges. Historical reality also challenges the idea of a coherent, timeless tradition. Lycourinos and Cheak unconvincingly try to solve the problem posed by the syncretistic elements of their subject matter by attributing them to a “natural receptivity” in magic. As it is not made clear how this supposed receptivity differs from syncretism in actual practice, these statements appear to be part of a strategy to present particular beliefs or practices as more enlightened than others, by denigrating those that do not comply with a supposedly unified tradition.

Several of the authors base their distinctions on similarly emic notions. Smith, Rankine, Lycourinos, and Cheak regard magic aimed at fulfilling material needs as inferior and less worthy of study than more theurgically oriented practices. In his chapter on the Icelandic *Galdrabok*, Smith dismisses spells that involve elements of Judeo-Christian doctrine as not being examples of “real” magic. This conclusion seems mostly to be based on his personal preferences, as Judeo-Christian borrowings are more common than not in spellbooks from this time, and are indeed present in parts of the PGM as well as the entire grimoire genre. Toynton disparagingly distinguishes between omen divination and what she scathingly refers to as passive “superstition,” in contrast to the active seeking out of portents. Rankine refers to the Faustian devil pact detailed in a famous grimoire as something that “only a desperate man with no magical experience would consider.” (104) Again, this appears to be Rankine’s personal opinion as a magician rather than a scholarly assessment.

The supposed inferiority of magic aimed at personal gain has problematic political implications. In early modern Europe, alliances with the Devil were often sought by those with limited access to worldly power.<sup>5</sup> The eclectic magic outlined in the grimoires can partly be seen as a spirituality of resistance through which people could articulate desires outside of the frameworks of church hegemony. Dismissing such practices simply because they are directed at material gain misses a crucial point about their subversive power.

While magic practitioners are entitled to their personal preferences, it is troublesome when arbitrary value judgments regarding what occultism “ought” to be are touted as scholarship. The dichotomies between “pure” religiosity and “syncretism,” “superstition,” or “popular belief” are artificial constructs, often invoked by those already in power to solidify religious hegemony. The constructed traditions are rarely as coherent, lofty, or pure as their advocates would have them, but often involve strong elements of syncretism and pragmatism based on subjective preference. This is clearly the case in *Occult Traditions*, many of whose contributors seem to base their ideas of what “true” occultism is on personal preferences. This strategy has frequently been employed by religious institutions, which establish artificial concepts of religious purity in order to suppress subaltern voices.<sup>6</sup> One example of this is how the Catholic Church has contributed to the marginalisation of women, the working class, and LGBTQ people by labelling their beliefs and practices superstitious or even satanic, simultaneously promoting the viewpoints of its male, middle-class leadership as orthodox.<sup>7</sup> Rather than reproduce such dichotomies, scholars should seek to understand the processes through which certain forms of religiosity are classified as purer or nobler than others. Several of the chapters in the anthology constitute fascinating source material for future studies in this area.

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<sup>5</sup> Soili-Maria Olli, *Visioner av världen: hädelse och djävulspakt i justitierevisionen 1680–1789* (Umeå: Institutionen för historiska studier, Umeå universitet, 2007); Mikael Häll, *Skogsrädet, näcken och djävulen: erotiska naturväsen och demonisk sexualitet i 1600- och 1700-talens Sverige* (Stockholm: Malört, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lena Gemzöe, *Feminine Matters: Women's Religious Practices in a Portuguese Town* (Stockholm: Dept. of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, 2000); Manon Hedenborg-White, “Death as a Woman: Santa Muerte and Religious ‘othering’ in Mexico,” in *Vile Women: Female Evil in Fact, Fiction and Mythology*, eds. Anthony Patterson & Marilena Zackheos (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Chesnut, *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gemzöe, *Feminine Matters*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*.

Deconstructing truth claims that masquerade as transcendent and apolitical is a vital step towards uncovering religious power relations. Failing to do so, one instead risks cementing existing hierarchies. A potent example of this is Lycourinos' chapter on radical-right thinker Julius Evola. Lycourinos writes that the popularization of sexual magic in the late 19th century is based on affirmations of the individual as an "ultimate force in the universe" and the tremendous power of free will (210). This description betrays an uncritical stance towards emic understandings of modern sexual magic, and disregards the power negotiations permeating its development. Lycourinos neglects to mention that Evola did not view all individuals as supreme universal forces. Evola believed women incapable of spiritual advancement in their own right, and saw women as mere helpers and tools for the male magician.<sup>8</sup> Analysing Evola's work without taking his misogyny into account has problematic political implications, as it runs the considerable risk of normalising these ideas. Moreover, the idea of the sex magical discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth century being a manifestation of cosmic truth or eternal human urges is challenged by the fact that it is so clearly influenced by contemporary medical discourses on sexual difference, the emphasis on gender as complementary in society at large, and the elevation of a heterosexual "ideology of pleasure" in response to the perceived threats of homosexuality and promiscuity.<sup>9</sup>

Despite there being several scholars among its contributors, it is unclear whether *Occult Traditions* is intended to be an academic work. Most of the contributions betray a fundamental ignorance of the theoretical and methodological advances made in esotericism research in recent decades, and with the exception of Christopher A. Plaisance's contributions, the chapters are clearly coloured by the authors' spiritual convictions. Large parts of the book are marred by a blurring of emic and etic perspectives, producing a form of normative, occult theology that promotes the authors' religious views under the guise of scholarship. While this is unlikely to affect academic discourse on esotericism at large, scholarly examinations are highly valued in the esoteric milieu and are often cited (sometimes contrary to the intentions of the scholar)

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<sup>8</sup> Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2001), 157–66.

<sup>9</sup> Pia Laskar, *Ett bidrag till heterosexualitetens historia: kön, sexualitet och njutningsnormer i sexhandböcker 1800–1920* (Stockholm: Modernista, 2005); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

for purposes of legitimacy and authority.<sup>10</sup> This can contribute to cementing existing power relations, especially when misogynist or racist views are normalized and treated as politically unproblematic. As the book presents an attractive range of topics, and some of the chapters are actually adequate introductions to their subject matter, the volume may also confuse students or scholars in other fields seeking to gain an understanding of what esotericism research is all about. Although the field has come far in recent years and can boast a number of world-class scholars, its position is still somewhat fragile in the broader context of academia. Thus, the discussions surrounding how to do research on Western esotericism beyond apologeticism and theology must continue.

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<sup>10</sup> Asprem and Granholm, “Constructing Esotericisms.”

Frank Klaassen. *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013. x + 280 pp. ISBN: 978-0-271-05626-5. \$69.95.

One of the key questions in the history of European “learned magic” in recent decades has concerned the putative novelty of the works produced by Renaissance magi. Did scholar-magicians like Ficino, Agrippa, and Dee constitute a radical break from the magical practices of the Middle Ages, or is the *longue durée* that binds them more salient? The notion that the humanist magicians constituted a distinct break with the past has long been popular among Renaissance scholars, especially in the wake of Frances Yates’ now half a century old work. Along with a broader reevaluation and rejection of the Yates paradigm, however, scholars have come to ask how much of this novelty was really in the eye of the beholder – a product of selection and confirmation biases on the part of scholars who needed to see the Renaissance as an age of novelty, progressive thought, modern values, and philosophical sophistication, contrasted with the “dark ages” and its superstitious “dirty magic.”<sup>1</sup>

Frank Klaassen belongs to a cast of historians who not only argue that the novelty of Renaissance magic is greatly overblown, but proceed to excavate the manuscript traditions that link medieval and early modern magic through meticulous archival research. *The Transformations of Magic* presents Klaassen’s work in monograph form for the first time. The book is published with Pennsylvania State University Press’s “Magic in History” series, where it stands in good company with other titles by key scholars in this revisionist current, including Claire Fanger, Richard Kieckhefer, Benedek Láng and others.

One of the things to commend this useful book is its clearly articulated and consistently executed methodology. Instead of focusing strictly on the substantial content of medieval and early modern magical books and manuscripts, Klaassen approaches them from a forensic angle, asking whether we can learn something new from considering the physical manuscripts themselves: that is, “their mise-en-page, their organization, the works with which they were bound together, and how they were recorded in inventories and catalogues.” (iv) Paying attention to these material details allows Klaassen

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<sup>1</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 80–81.

to get at the editorial decisions that were made by scribes, and assess their role in shaping the transmission and gradual reinterpretation of the library of magic texts. Mildly quantitative analyses of what kinds of texts were bound together with each other at various times also offer important clues to understanding the subtle shift in perceptions of magic (70–75). In fact, it is precisely this sort of analysis that makes it possible for Klaassen to formulate one of the big questions that the book tries to answer: Why is it that, numerically speaking, the class of texts known as “image magic” went into decline around the 16th century, while the class of “ritual magic” persisted? Moreover, why did image magical texts stop being transmitted separately and instead become embedded in collections primarily concerned with ritual magic?

The distinction between image magic and ritual magic is thus central to the book’s project. By image magic, Klaassen (and others with him) means practices that draw upon astrological images and talismans for effecting changes in the natural world, whether related to medicine and healing or the acquisition of wealth and material success. Drawing on a philosophical framework lifted from late Neoplatonism, this type of “magic” (typically, these texts do not themselves use this term) would commonly be seen as a form of *magia naturalis* related more to disciplines such as natural philosophy and medicine than to theology and religion. In terms of causal mechanisms, the images were thought to be effective by correspondences and *qualitates occultae* rather than the mediation of spirits. By contrast, “ritual magic” denotes magical operations that explicitly deal with the summoning of angels, demons, or other spirit beings, presenting techniques for binding, questioning, and entering into conversation with them, or receiving visions, prophecies, and higher knowledge.

As Klaassen shows, these two traditions were almost completely distinct throughout the Middle Ages, being transmitted in separate streams. In seeking answers for why they transformed and eventually merged, Klaassen moves from his forensic analysis of manuscripts to what is essentially a “problem history” of medieval and early modern magic.<sup>2</sup> The transformations of the two magical text traditions – both in terms of content and patterns of transmission – are linked to quite specific dilemmas faced by authors, scribes and practitioners. Through a clever narrative strategy, Klaassen introduces these problems by focusing on two concrete practitioners: an unknown apothecary worried about his soul after acquiring wealth through the use of image magic, and the monk

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<sup>2</sup> On problem history, see Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

and magician John of Morigny, the author of the 14th century *Liber florum celestis doctrinae* and its largely autobiographical prologue, *Liber visionum*.

The two dilemmas are succinctly summarized in Klaassen's introduction:

The apothecary must decide whether to believe that an astrological image that made him rich derived its power from occult natural properties or from deceptive demons. Brother John, by contrast, struggles to reconcile the fact that ritual magic was transmitted in books – books that one should assume were corrupt – but could only be learned, practiced, and understood through experiences that were not really communicable through the written word. (2)

In other words, the problem in image magic is one of *attribution* and *discernment*: are the images causally efficient due to natural properties and forces, or (presumably demonic) spirits? How can the practitioner tell the difference in specific cases? For ritual magic the problem is a different one: how does the practitioner know for sure that s/he is learning from a legitimate source, and that the experiential knowledge obtained is authentic and genuine?

Klaassen's argument is that these two problems had a creative effect on the transformations of magic in the late medieval and early modern periods, as practitioners tried to solve the dilemmas. For image magic, the predominant solution was provided by scholastic rationalism, which offered ways to ensure the legitimacy of images if they could be given broadly naturalistic explanations. Thus, Klaassen demonstrates the influence of scholastic natural philosophy not only on the interpretation of magical texts, but also on their selection and transmission. The vehicle of this transformation is above all the 13th century *Speculum astronomiae*, which became the foremost authoritative treatise on whether astrological images were lawful or contrary to nature (i.e. demonic). Late-medieval scribes and collectors had the *Speculum* at hand when transcribing astrological texts, as evidenced by the fact that they were frequently bound together. According to Klaassen, the effect of the *Speculum*'s editorial influence was that, by 1500, the extant set of image magical manuscripts was drastically reduced from about forty to two. Moreover, the two texts that continued to be copied and circulated – Thābit ibn Qurra's *De imaginibus* and a work on astrological images attributed to Ptolemy – were heavily redacted to make sure no ritualistic elements were left (28–29). Works that had previously been quite popular, such as the *Liber lune*, had embedded astrological images in elaborate practices of suffumigation and the drawing of the names and magical squares of planetary spirits. Following the heresiological criteria established by the

*Speculum*, such ceremonial elements were certain signs of demonic intercession, and reason to condemn a manuscript. Scribes largely heeded this call, and sought to edit out ceremonial traces from the few texts that were passed on.

The resolution to Brother John's dilemma is of a very different order. While image magic could be discerned by reference to an authoritative text, which then stabilized the transmission process, the core dynamic driving the textual tradition of ritual magic is an iterative relationship between instructions for practice and repeated alterations of ritual texts based on private, subjectively convincing revelatory experiences effected by these ritual techniques. Klaassen makes an intriguing, and in my view convincing argument that the development we see from the *Ars Notoria* via works like the *Liber florum* and the *Liber juratus*, to the famous experiments of John Dee and other, lesser known transcripts of early modern angel summoning, is driven by author-magicians who cast themselves as divinely sanctioned, visionary editors. They treat earlier texts as recipes for achieving experiential knowledge, and proceed to modify the texts, in a pragmatic fashion, to accord with knowledge obtained from practice and experience. This has resulted in an enduring but constantly changing stream of visionary practice texts, which may, in fact, be traced all the way to the present day.

Understanding the dynamic of this textual tradition, then, it becomes paramount to focus on the experiential dimension of learning to have visions, and using these to alter ritual practices. The close reading of practices involved in some of these texts, and Klaassen's suggestion that processes of training, attentiveness, and mental disciplining were at work in ritual magic is thus, in my view, a significant call for further work. Above all, it cries out for further explication in terms of the cognitive science of religion. Tanya Luhrmann's work on the role of inner sense cultivation in so-called kataphatic (i.e., imagery oriented) prayer traditions seems an extremely relevant connection.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Klaassen's valuable remarks on the *autopoiesis* of ritual magical texts suggests fruitful lines of inquiry that similarly require a more interdisciplinary methodology and affords comparisons with contemporary magical practice.

The mixed methodology, the insightful analysis of individual texts, and the questions visited in the process are all major strengths of *The Transformations of Magic*. Where the book is less successful is in providing clear and satisfying conclusions to the main task it sets itself, namely of explaining *why* image

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Tanya M. Luhrmann and Rachel Morgain, "Prayer as Inner Sense Cultivation: An Attentional Learning Theory of Spiritual Experience," *Ethos* 40, no. 4 (2012): 359–89.

magic declined and got incorporated into the ritual magical corpus after 1500. While Klaassen provides lucid analysis of fascinating material, the prose tends to get repetitious and summary in places where one would expect concluding points. The best example is in the handling of the why-question after having demonstrated that Renaissance magicians (contrary to received opinion) were generally more interested in ritual magic than scholastic image magic. While a number of hypotheses are visited at various points throughout the last two chapters of the book – including the anti-scholastic rhetoric of the humanists, the rise of Protestantism, the secularization of monasteries and a hypothesized demographic shift in magical practitioners – Klaassen never clearly takes a stand among the alternatives, or develops a new thesis. Instead, the final conclusion (215–16) evades the real issue by stating in somewhat circular fashion that “medieval ritual magic and Renaissance magic held similar assumptions, sought similar goals, and often employed nearly identical techniques.” But, since Klaassen has already explained this commonality in terms of a direct influence from the medieval ritual magical material, the ensuing affinity cannot be invoked as explanation for the selection.

Despite shortcomings of this type, *The Transformations of Magic* is an inspiring and innovative work of scholarship on illicit learned magic. It sheds new light on problems with the transmission and transformation of magical traditions in a systematic manner. But more than this, it opens up important new vistas of inquiry for scholars interested in the *longue durée* of ritual magical texts, and suggests that more work is required on the complex, culturally productive relationship between experience, discernment, ritual technique, and textuality in Western magic.

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Sheila A. Spector, ed., trans. Francis Mercury van Helmont's *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2012. viii + 178 pp. ISBN: 9789004226555. €99 / \$132.

The important scholarship of Alison Coudert on Franciscus Mercurius Van Helmont (1614–1699) has contributed to a revival of interest in this intriguing figure. Well respected by John Locke, Gottfried Leibniz and Anne Conway, F. M. Van Helmont had a complex profile: like his more famous father Jan Baptist (1579–1641) he was a passionate alchemist and physician but, unlike him, he had a sustained and deep understanding of Jewish Kabbalah. He was also impressively erudite: despite complaining that his father did not teach him Latin, F.M. Van Helmont managed not only to master this language, but also Hebrew and Syriac. His talent for languages is proven in a book called *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae*, where he cites from the Hebrew Kabbalah and the Syriac New Testament.

This little work, which first appeared as an anonymous appendix to Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata*, is the subject of an English translation by Sheila A. Spector. The Latin title is rendered here as *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*, a title which already raises some questions. Why does Spector prefer the modern-sounding and unusual word “Kabbalism” to the much more customary “Kabbalah” or, as in the original text, “Kabbala”? The transformation of “Kabbalah” into an “-ism” makes it sound like a modern religious movement, if not a separate religion from Judaism.

The translation in itself is generally acceptable, though there are some issues, mainly caused by Spector's choice not to translate Biblical passages but render them according to the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible. This modern version does not always match well with the Latin Vulgate Bible Van Helmont used. Consequently, the translation lacks the subtlety of Van Helmont's interpretation of the Latin text. For instance, at page 42, Van Helmont cites Genesis 1:1 as “*Per Principium (i.e. Messiam,) creavit Deus coelum & terram,*” which Spector translates as “In the beginning God (i.e. the Messiah) created the heavens and the earth.” (44) The intention of Franciscus is clearly lost here, since what he says is that the Principle (*Beresbit*) is the Messiah, not that God is the Messiah (which makes little sense). At page 46, Spector also uses ESV to translate “*Primus homo terrenus de terra: Secundus Homo Dominus (sive:*

*Tetragrammaton) de coelo*” as “The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven [as the bone of the Tetragrammaton].” Yet Van Helmont’s interpolation on the Tetragrammaton refers to God (“*Dominus*”) not to “heaven.” Calling heaven “the bone of the Tetragrammaton” is not warranted by the text. Other translation choices are also disputable: for instance, at page 44, Franciscus calls the first Adam “*cogitatio suprema*”; this should have more appropriately been translated as “supreme thought” rather than “supreme knowledge” as Spector renders it (45). Such examples suggest that the English translation should always be compared with the original Latin.

In addition to the translation, Spector also provides an introduction, which offers a helpful explanation of Lurianic Kabbalah but can be misleading. First, Spector misrepresents Van Helmont as a “theologian” (2); in fact, in the period “theology” was a higher degree that was acquired after the liberal arts (three-year) degree. Yet Van Helmont never attended university. He was more of a self-trained virtuoso that in *Adumbratio* styled himself as a “Christian philosopher.”

More problematically, Spector claims that Van Helmont’s primary intention in *Adumbratio* was not to convert Jews to Christianity but “to attract Christians to Kabbalism.” (19) Leaving aside for a moment the issue of what this “Kabbalism” might be, F.M. Van Helmont is outspoken that the purpose of his work is to serve for the conversion of Jews. Why doubt this intent? Spector is basing her conclusion on rather questionable speculation: according to her, Van Helmont would have been aware that “only those Jews who had already decided to convert would initiate a dialogue by inviting a Christian to undermine Judaism.” (19) Moreover, she assumes that Van Helmont would have equally known that an aggregate of passages of the New Testament would never have converted a Jew.

Spector seems to be projecting modern presumptions on Van Helmont. First of all, her assertions are not sufficiently grounded in any in-depth understanding of the Flemish virtuoso’s character. For instance, what makes her think that he would have had such a clear perspective on how a conversion would or would not be achieved? What evidence supports her argument that Franciscus would have been so devious as to write a book that claims to convert Jews in order to, in fact, “convert” Christians? Secondly, Spector does not seem to have studied the issue of conversion in the period at any depth. In fact, she assumes without any evidence that a Kabbalist would never have engaged with Christian arguments in the period.

Apparently unconcerned with historical fact, Spector goes even further with her suppositions. Van Helmont, she tells us, rejected organised Christianity,

and believed in a form of gnosis “that obviated the need for intercession by any religious institutions.” Not only this, but Van Helmont actually thought that the Kabbalistic Zohar “would have at least as much historical authority as the Greek New Testament.” (20) All these stark statements culminate with the affirmations that Van Helmont wanted to replace Church doctrine with Lurianic Kabbalism and that in *Adumbratio* he deceitfully “superimposes a veneer of Christianity over Lurianism.” The evidence for these radical assertions? Spector gives no citations; we are supposed to take them at face value. If we did not know Van Helmont lived in the 17th century, we could conceive of him as a non-Christian worshipper of a new religion called “Lurianism” or “Kabbalism.” He could be perceived as an early modern Madonna joining the New-Age Kabbalah Centre. In reality, historical evidence shows that, while proffering unorthodox doctrines such as the transmigration of souls, Van Helmont saw himself as a Christian thinker. Nominally Catholic, Van Helmont did not wish to attach himself to any Christian sect, but felt closest to the Quaker movement.

It is fairly clear that history does not play a role in Spector’s analysis. In fact, her arguments depend on purely textual analysis. Yet they too are unconvincing because they are grounded in the aforementioned assumptions. For instance, Spector claims that the last two lines of the introductory epigraph are “deliberately incoherent” or that the Christian philosopher’s reference to “that person we call the Messiah” is an “abstract vocabulary” that can be interpreted ambiguously (21–22). This is forcing the text in ways that are not warranted at all; for me, as an early modern scholar, there is nothing particularly ambiguous or incoherent about Franciscus’s statements. In fact, they strike me as much clearer than those of his father, Jan Baptist, whose Latin is complex and abstruse. Yet no one has accused Jan Baptist of wishing to convert anyone away from Catholicism (his proffered religion).

Moreover, a quick examination of the book shows that it is mainly comprised of an exposition of the “Christian philosopher,” who is clearly an alter-ego of Franciscus himself. Yet it seems somewhat absurd that Franciscus would cast himself as a “Christian philosopher” without actually identifying as one, as Spector suggests. That Franciscus’s statements on behalf of Christianity are insincere seems an equally far-fetched claim.

In fact, the tenuous position of Spector’s argument is such that it leads to rather strange and self-contradictory arguments. For instance, she claims that in one section “Van Helmont abandons his pretext of converting Jews,” (23) yet in another he “resumes his evangelical pose.” (24) We are not told why he would

be so inconsistent. More surprisingly, the last phrases of the essay seem to completely abandon her previous arguments on behalf of Van Helmont's "fake conversion intent" and of his hidden "Lurianism." Spector now admits that Franciscus "insists that Jewish conversion is a necessary component of restoration." She also states that Van Helmont was a Christian "in the sense that he believed Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the Messiah." (25) Thus an essay on how Van Helmont wished to direct Christians to "Kabbalism" ends by admitting that these claims are incorrect.

Clearly, Franciscus was a heterodox Christian. Yet there is no in-text evidence that he wanted to destroy "Church doctrine" and replace it with "Lurianism." After all, the primary Christian doctrine is the New Testament, and *Adumbratio* spends an inordinate amount of text approvingly discussing its precepts. Although Van Helmont's sympathies leaned toward the Lurianic Kabbalah, this did not mean that he did not believe in Christ and the New Testament. We can conclude that Van Helmont's inclination toward the Lurianic Kabbalah was not dissimilar to Jacob Boehme's theosophical speculation. Like Boehme and others of the era, Franciscus looked for esoteric explanations of Biblical truths, seeking to complement the Bible's exoteric doctrine with what he saw as an esoteric complement transmitted by word of mouth. This was not an uncommon belief at the time, and did not make Franciscus less Christian or less intent on converting Jews. Rather, it is more likely that he thought that by revealing the concordance between Christianity and Lurianic Kabbalah educated Jews would see that the Messiah was really Christ.

Spector should be commended for bringing Van Helmont's text on Christian Kabbalah to a wider audience. The reader is advised to read Spector's book as a primary source, using the English translation as an aid tool for the original Latin. Spector's introduction to Lurianic Kabbalah will also prove helpful; however, in order to properly understand the intentions of the text and the figure of F.M. Van Helmont one should still refer to the works of Alison Coudert.

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Angel Millar. *The Crescent and the Compass: Islam, Freemasonry, Esotericism, and Revolution in the Modern Age*. Colac: Numen Books, 2015. 218 pp. ISBN 978-0994252548. \$19.95.

The field of “Western esotericism” has witnessed a recent and long overdue upsurge in studies on global, “non-Western” and/or non-white forms of “esotericism.” Such is evidenced, for instance, in the anthologies *Occultism in Global Perspective* (2013) and *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience* (2015), but also in the topics discussed during the most recent conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), “Western Esotericism and the East.” In line with these enterprises, the study of the interstices between (Western) esotericism and Islam, and of Islamic forms of “esotericism,” is gaining ground. Angel Millar’s timely book, *The Crescent and the Compass: Islam, Freemasonry, Esotericism, and Revolution in the Modern Age* could be considered part of this promising new context. It is important to note, however, that Millar’s survey is written for a general audience.

As the title indicates, Millar, a journalist and author, sets out to explore the connections between Freemasonry – and affiliated esoteric movements and currents – and Islam. With regard to the former, Millar vows to be concerned with more “secretive, esoteric, and spiritual forms of the fraternity” and, with regard to Islam, with “spirituality and radical thought,” primarily “over the last century and a half.” (13) These vague parameters do not become much more concrete, but we cannot dismiss the possibility that this lack of clear geographical, historical, or conceptual boundaries is a strategic move on Millar’s part, as it offers him ample room to include a very heterogeneous set of subtopics and people. In fact, in describing ideas of such widely diverse figures as Noble Drew Ali, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, Anders Behring Breivik, and René Guénon, among many others, it seems as if one of the main goals of *Crescent and the Compass* is to provide an overview of the manifold persons, movements, currents, and institutions that in one way or another are grounded in, are connected to, or espouse ideas about Islam *and* Freemasonry, in diverse geographical, cultural, social, and historical contexts.

Millar draws his ambitious web of historical connections in eleven short chapters, complemented by an introduction, conclusion, and afterword. The first provides an introduction to Sufism; chapter two then offers a primer

to its connections with Freemasonry. It explores many of the instances in which the two “meet,” from the union of Freemasonry and Sufism in Turkey to ostensible parallels in initiation rituals. The remaining nine sections each address a different context in which Islam has encountered Freemasonry and affiliated organizations, and/or the other way around. Masons, for instance, have sought inspiration in Islam, as is the case with those affiliated with the Noble Order of the Mystic Shrine; Muslims, alternately, have joined Masonic lodges, as al-Afghani did. Likewise, Millar successfully directs our attention to the anti-Masonic tendencies in the Middle East, and to the interplay between Masonic influences and anti-Masonic tendencies in Breivik’s manifesto.

We should applaud Millar’s attempt to demonstrate and underscore this wide variety, which definitely is the text’s major strength: Millar argues convincingly that the historical connections between Muslims and Freemasonry are much more abundant, and much more complex, than is usually given credit for. Moreover, Millar successfully demonstrates that the relationship between Islam and Freemasonry is constantly shifting. For instance, whereas nineteenth-century Islamic reformers believed in Freemasonry’s revolutionary potential to assist in their anti-colonial struggles, contemporary Islamists interpret the fraternity as the sinful root of American culture and society. Likewise, Freemasons were drawn to Islam for a variety of reasons, for instance because of an interest in Islamic “mysticism” or because it offered an alternative to Christianity. However, the excess of case studies is also the text’s foremost weakness. Due to the enumeration of such a large number of events and connections it is difficult not to get lost in the abundance of details, which are sometimes informative and entertaining, but often unnecessary and excessive. One would have wished that Millar had been more critical in debating which connections to explore.

One should note that Millar’s text also seems to have a second, underlying aim. In addition to exploring the connections between Islam and Freemasonry, Millar seeks to push his own spiritual agenda, which he makes explicit towards the end of the text, but that haunts most of his chapters: all religions, he argues, share a mystical core or essence, and the West should venture a quest to discover this “gnosis.” (181) This “turn towards the divine” would then not only provide solace from the abundance of secularism, capitalism, materialism, and consumer culture in the modern West, but also offer a much-needed, more positive take on Islam that goes beyond the empty signifiers of “multiculturalism.” Such an approach to religion, and esotericism more specifically, although popular in the heydays of Mircea Eliade and Traditionalism, is largely dismissed in

today's academy for its trans-historical and even a-historical tendencies. That said, Traditionalism does feature frequently as subject matter in *Crescent and Compass*. Millar's sympathetic attitude towards it could not only explain its curious prominent role in the text, but also his ideas on the relationship between modernity, religion and spirituality.

To be sure, it seems that for Millar, certain "esoteric" forms of Islam in particular, such as Sufism, are a crystallization of the "gnosis" that he urges the West to find. In other words, Millar seems to suggest that his Western readers should take cue from the esoteric forms of Islam that he claims underly the ideas of many of his protagonists. Unfortunately, though, Millar occasionally interprets their ideas through the prism of his own spiritual agenda when the actual evidence is inconclusive. Take, for instance, the chapter on Shaykh Abdullah Quilliam (1856–1932). Quilliam was an early convert to Islam and founder of the UK's first mosque, but was also heavily involved with "fringe masonry." Miller argues that Quilliam seemed to consider Islam as part of the same elite underground spiritual milieu as fringe Masonry, a milieu in which people drew "on ancient, and non-Western religions, and that sought to discover a secret common thread – either historical or theological – between them." (71) However, as the evidence for the latter claim is largely absent from the text, Millar seems to overstate this last point, and does so in light of his own ideological commitments.

The chapter on the role of conspiracy theory in Islamic fundamentalist thought could, on the other hand, be interesting for readers of this journal, not only given the absence of Islamic voices in standard works on conspiracy theory, but also because conspiracy theories in Muslim societies seem to have a very different emphasis than their Western counterparts, which today often link Masonic lodges to the establishment of a secret and totalitarian "New World Order." One can construe from Millar's text that in the Islamic world the emphasis often seems to lie on Masonic influences on cultural values. Millar conveys that "Islamists" regard the West as fundamentally "freemasonic" in nature, and thus see the Craft as the root of such Western "evils" as women's rights and pornography: a (Judeo-)Masonic conspiracy to corrupt "Muslim culture." (131) Such theories are, according to Millar, part and parcel of the current Islamist anti-Western propaganda, yet have been part of Islamic cultures and societies since the nineteenth century, rooted as they were in European conspiracy theories, in particular *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The next chapter, "Black Nationalism in the USA," has the potential to be just as informative, given the frequent neglect of African American voices

in these sorts of texts and the academic study of (Western) esotericism in general. What's more, we encounter here for the first time instances in which Freemasonry played an important role in the actual formation of what could be considered Islamic religions, such as the Moorish Science Temple of America and the Nation of Islam. Millar's section on Prince Hall Freemasonry is indeed instructive, as it conveys the importance of Freemasonry's radical and transformative potential in nineteenth-century black communities. However, his discussion on the influence of the Order and other esoteric streams in the religious thought of Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad is considerably less illuminating. Millar seems more concerned with simply listing the esoteric streams and currents that influenced Ali and Muhammad, and the potential (if highly debated) roots of their esotericisms, rather than outlining which ideas influenced these religious leaders, and the ways in which these ideas transformed, altered, or enriched their thought.

This chapter is therefore one of the least compelling ones, especially when we consider that Millar *does* display the ability and desire to analyze the content of the connections in a few of his other chapters, such as the aforementioned one on Quilliam and his chapter on the role of esoteric ideas in the politics and thought of Ayatollah Khomeini. The quality of the chapters fluctuates too much, which amounts to a considerably less compelling read. Yet, we should credit the author for bringing such a diverse group of voices on esotericism, Freemasonry, and Islam together in one book. Millar is right: there *is* a lack of scholarship on this topic and if anything, *Crescent and the Compass* is evidence of the fact that we need more—much more—research. Millar's text and subject therefore offer a glimpse of the exciting road that lies ahead of us.

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Giulio Busi and Raphael Ebgi. *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Mito, Magia, Qabbalah*. Milano: Einaudi, 2014. cvi + 454 pp. ISBN: 9788806198381. €80.

The latest work of Giulio Busi is a wondrous crossover between different literary genres and fields of research: in a bold attempt to blend together biography and the staggering variety of Pico's intellectual interests with a sound critical approach, this book is almost as complex and as multilayered as the Count's personality itself. And it probably couldn't be done otherwise; the book differs from other studies of Pico's philosophical work, developing a new approach. While drawing from the established critical sources (many of which are previous works by the same authors), Busi and Ebgi take an additional step and propose a different point of view on Pico's opus. Rather than piecing together the Count's often conflicting ideas and conclusions into an univocal interpretation, the authors explore Pico's works from a specific standpoint: *Myth, Magic, Kabbalah*. From the title it is clear that the main focus of the analysis is centered on mystical and esoteric elements (from Zoroastrian astrology to Neoplatonism, from Greek and Roman poetry to magic and *Kabbalah*), but the authors do not impose this point of view. It naturally emerges from the way that the argument is carried out.

Of course this kind of approach has its limits and is not indisputable. For example, the authors show a clear preference towards Pico's work of the year 1486 (*900 theses*, *Oration on dignity of man* and the *Apology*) and show little interest for later works such as *Heptaplus* and *On being and Unity*. But it's difficult to dispute this approach since 1486 is clearly the pivotal point in the Count's life and the *900 theses* stands out as one of the most original and challenging philosophical proposals of the Renaissance. True to his philological background, Busi aims to present as much material as possible while giving thorough information to support the proposed interpretation. But in order to do so he has to make sense of the chaotic variety of Pico's interests and provide a point of view that enables the reader to pierce the shroud of darkness surrounding his hermeneutics. In Busi's own words:

What to do with a guy like this? One option is to state that the confusion of topics is a result of the confusion of ideas, thus giving up the attempt to order Pico's universe. Or, and it's our choice, it's possible to go by trial and error and to jot on paper the few things that appear certain. The major symbolic tropes, the most

important images necessary to tread the rest of Pico's work and to unearth solitary landscapes, the insights hinted at but never explained by the Count. A method like this has some obvious limits. *Myth, magic, kabbalah* cannot glut the Count's omnivorous hunger; they are, nonetheless, the pivot of his system, and in the *scala sapientiae* that he lays out before our eyes in the *900 theses*, these three rungs are closely clutched together at the top of the ladder and lead directly to the hatch of the heavens. (xlvi, my translation)

Unlike Wirszubski's *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* – as well as other previous works by the authors – the aim of this work is not to depict the background and the fabric of this historic encounter between Jewish *Kabbalah* and Renaissance Neoplatonism but rather to expound on Pico's obscure doctrine in light of the priority he attributes to magic and *Kabbalah*. This book raises a question: what is the meaning of Pico's curiosity towards *Kabbalah*? Is it a juvenile infatuation or is it the key to unlock the Count's vision and fully understand the humanistic culture of the Renaissance? While it strongly hints towards the second option this book does not provide an unambiguous answer, and the reader must figure out his own approach to the problems, symbolical tropes and queries outlined by the authors.

The content and style are a challenge; on almost every page the reader is confronted by a different problem – or symbol, or reference to a different author – and the linguistic style, instead of making the reading more fluent, makes it more complicated: analogy, metaphor, play on words are all instruments used by the authors to bedazzle the reader – almost as if this highly allusive style is intended to mimic Pico's flamboyant manner. While this can be confusing – especially if the reader does not handle Italian well – I found this linguistic imitation helpful to get used to Pico's style and to comprehend his approach.

The book is divided in two main parts, the first written entirely by Busi and the second mostly by Ebgi. The first section is more conventional, serving as an introduction that provides the general context of the life and philosophy of the Count of Mirandola, as well as the hermeneutical coordinates that will be developed. Busi illustrates one of the cornerstones of his approach to Pico's thought and to the *900 theses* in particular: commenting on one of the Count's favorite parts of Plotinus's *Enneads* – where the philosopher describes the soul's ascent to God as a “passing of solitary to solitary” – Busi describes how Pico develops this idea in the *900 theses*, describing the passing of the individual soul and of the One in terms of the cabalistic concept of *tzimtzum*, the contraction of God. According to Busi, the knowledge of *Kabbalah* allows Pico to solve many of the contradictions that arise between Greek philosophy

and Christian faith: in this case the kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum* enables Pico to describe the “passing of solitary to solitary” as an imitation of the transcendence of God, establishing an agreement between Plotinus and the holy scripture through the kabbalistic interpretation of the Torah. In Pico’s hands the “passing of solitary to solitary” is interpreted as an allusion to Exodus 25, 22: just as God manifests his presence by contracting his infinity into a single point between the Cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant, so in order to reach for God, the mystic needs to reproduce this movement – the *tzimtzum* – and concentrate on the “center of his unity.” Only by fleeing from the external world will he be able to meet God in his own solitude.

Moving on, the second part is rather peculiar because it is organized like a dictionary: each chapter discusses and elaborates a single symbolical trope. Here Ebgi analyzes each item with great detail and attention both to Pico’s edited texts and to the main sources of inspiration for his philosophy. This creates a set of very dynamic images, with each item synthetically describing the whole creative process of the Count’s short-lived philosophical career. For example, the entry “Kiss” perfectly shows the evolution of Pico’s thought: by arranging the material in a chronological order the author outlines the silhouette of the Count’s thought process through the most intense years of his life. The chapter begins referencing his early poetry, underlining the sensual side of this work as well as the debt to classical authors such as Moschus, Tibullus and Apuleius. As the chapter goes on, a more spiritual conception of *kiss* emerges, but rather than repeating established notions such as Plato’s, Pico uses these ideas to cleave through the ordinary conception of this symbol: Venus’s sensual kiss becomes the deathly kiss bestowed by God on Moses, a symbol of divine rapture and spiritual communion with God. However, instead of replacing the first image with the latter Pico employs this exegetical method to deepen the meaning of the *kiss* in an attempt to explain the ambiguous double nature of love: how can love be at the same time the strongest spiritual force and a source of sorrow for the one afflicted by it? Completely aware of the complexity of the phenomenon, Pico relinquishes the need to give a definition of love, and instead uses all kinds of tools to expound this idea; in his pages, *Kabbalah* and philosophy, Jews, Christians and Greeks, poets and prophets, everyone and everything cooperates to apprehend the mysteries and contradictions of reality.

All in all the 32 entries of this symbolical dictionary depict a very thorough picture of Pico’s thought, a picture where complexity is never dropped in favor of simplification and the hermeneutical guidelines are just developed

enough to make the book approachable without imposing a fixed point of view on the reader. The result is brilliant, even though the reading can be very demanding, and even frustrating if one is not used to being confronted with such a wild variety of ideas and authors. To any Italian reader interested in esoteric themes – or even just drawn by the Count's mysterious charm – this book is an essential read. It opens a new dimension for studies on Pico and digs deeply into his most arcane doctrines; let's hope that this work will someday find a translator.

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Ithell Colquhoun, with an introduction and notes by Richard Shillitoe and Mark S. Morrisson. *I Saw Water: An Occult Novel and Other Selected Writings*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. 201 pp. ISBN: 978-0-271-06423-9. Hardcover \$54.95/Paperback \$32.95.

It is difficult to understand how Ithell Colquhoun's *I Saw Water*, an exemplary work of surrealist fiction, failed to be published upon completion in the 1960s. Now, after half a century, the novel finally comes to print (based on a 1967 typescript) at the able hands of Richard Shillitoe and Mark S. Morrisson, who also provide a comprehensive introduction and in-depth notes that provide context for some of Colquhoun's more obscure allusions. The editors also include a number of short essays and poems (some previously unpublished) that display her interest in esoteric subjects such as occult colour symbolism, alchemy, and the Tarot. Both these texts and the novel itself are complemented by nine brilliantly coloured reproductions of Colquhoun's surrealist paintings, for which she is, perhaps, best known. The publication also features an extensive bibliography—no doubt an extension of the one already maintained by Shillitoe on the web.<sup>1</sup> The focal point of this publication, however—and its greatest treasure—is *I Saw Water*, a surrealist splashing of image and colour onto a dream-like tapestry woven with the myths and symbols of Christianity, alchemy, geomancy, Druidry, Wicca, and ceremonial magic. These traditions are only a few of the tributaries that stream harmoniously together, floating Colquhoun's effort to bypass the rational and connect with the reader on a more primal level—unconscious mind to unconscious mind.

Colquhoun considered *I Saw Water* to be less the product of creative fiction writing and more a collage of 'found' textual snippets—a sort of automatic writing in which dream records were combined with conscious narrative. The dreams from which she gathered material to shape the characters, settings, and themes of the novel were recorded over a 20 year period—from sometime in the 1940s as her activities amidst London's influential surrealist circle began to wind down along with the movement itself, to mid-60s Cornwall, where she had permanently resettled in 1956. After these decades of dream recording, Colquhoun set to work to synthesize these 'found' narratives with a more

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ithellcolquhoun.co.uk/bibliography.html>

linear form of story construction. The result is *I Saw Water*, a tale that relies on the Theosophical concept of a second, astral life that awaits the self between physical death and rebirth. Most of the characters in *I Saw Water* occupy Ménéec, an ‘Island of the Dead’ (41) where inhabitants await a moment of realization that will allow them to progress to their next physical reincarnation or, perhaps, elevation into rebirth on a higher plane.

The novel begins with little suggestion of the surreal, ethereal scenes that are to come—as Colquhoun’s central character—Sister Brigid in astral form; Emma de Maine in her former physical life—wanders the seaside hills of Brittany, tending the herds and flocks belonging to her ‘Parthenogenesisist Order.’ By the third chapter, however, the narrative flashes back to Sister Brigid’s early life as a postulant, a time ‘seen as through torn clouds, which half-disclose a distant panorama’ (58). With the flashback the narrative thus takes on a spatially and temporally disjointed dream perspective. From this point Colquhoun rarely returns to the realist mode, though comprehensible plot-lines continue to progress through the somnambular onslaught of colourful vignettes that come together, sometimes only tangentially, to carry the novel forward. Despite this progression, there is little linearity; characters and settings appear from nowhere—just as in a dream. Even the more established characters lack much in the way of consistency—they are villains in one moment, heroes in the next, as in the case of Sister Brigid’s lover who appears to her as a sort of vampiric capitalist but then quickly morphs into the target of a Byronic tryst (97, 103). These inconsistencies would be failings in most other narratives, but they lend well to the dream experience of *I Saw Water*. Colquhoun’s aim seems to be that of the Romantic poet—the evocation of feeling and experience through the sharing of dream, metaphor and vision. *I Saw Water* is thus no page-turner, but it is a feast for the reflective mind.

Part of the dream feel of Colquhoun’s surrealist novel is lent by her heavy reliance on symbolism that proves obscure for what the editors call the ‘nonspecialist reader’ (2)—myths, images, and practices derived from Catholicism, Celtic lore, and a number of different esoteric traditions, including modern forms of pagan practice just beginning to gain significant traction at the time of the novel’s publication, particularly Druidry and Wicca. Colquhoun’s motivation for integrating so much esoteric material seems fairly clear. She no doubt wished to explore and express her experiences with ceremonial magic, modern pagan activity, and Christian practice. Because *I Saw Water* is collaged from dream life and personal experience, it offers fascinating insight into the complex processes of expression and exploration of personal experience that

lie behind Colquhoun's fictional portrayals of setting, character, and action—a close relationship between fiction and reality that seems to be found more often in occult literature than elsewhere, perhaps because of the inherent narrativity of esoteric knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Of course, her frequent personal involvement with the traditions that underpin the symbolism in the novel indicates that such phenomena was not obscure for Colquhoun, but it is likely that she saw value in its obscurity for others. Marginal Catholic saints, pagan traditions, alchemical lore and occult colour symbolism all help perpetuate the ethereal and the abstract in the novel, bypassing rational modes of interpretation in favour of the unconscious glimpses targeted by surrealist artistic practice.

In an attempt to mitigate this obscurity and make the novel more accessible for a wider readership, Shillitoe and Morrisson take great pains to contextualize unfamiliar concepts and symbols for the reader, particularly those related to the esoteric traditions. Morrisson, a scholar of literary modernism and historian of esoteric movements, and Shillitoe, who recently analyzed Colquhoun's synthesis of art and magic in *Ithell Colquhoun: Magician Born of Nature* (2007), are well suited to this task. Their 36 page introduction covers a wide range of topics—surrealism, occultism, geomancy, Breton geography, nature worship, the tripartite goddess, dream theory, astral travel, Kabbalah, alchemy and the late Victorian emergence of the female magician are all introduced as part of the editors' effort to explain unfamiliar concepts and suggest 'important lines of analysis' (2). 27 pages of endnotes are also provided to contextualize and interpret Colquhoun's allusions to everything from etheric light (84) to rhubarb (108).

Both introduction and notes are enormously helpful in granting the reader almost effortless comprehension, but it must be asked whether the analytical approach taken by the editors honours Colquhoun's original intentions for *I Saw Water*. Shillitoe and Morrisson's approach unquestionably prioritizes rational reading faculties over the surreal, unconscious experience the author intended. Perhaps with this problem in mind, the editors have placed the notes at the end of the novel; those readers looking to access the surrealist exchange of unconscious understanding can do so by assiduously avoiding both the

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<sup>2</sup> On esotericism and narrative see Andreas Kilcher, "7 Epistemological Theses," in *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijnenburg (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 147. For a discussion of a similar relationship between the masonic-Rosicrucian experiences of British fantasist Charles Williams and his seven novels of occult fiction, see Aren Roukema, "A Veil that Reveals: Charles Williams and the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross," *Journal of Inklings Studies* 5, no. 1 (2015).

introduction and the editors' notes. Still, the problem of respect toward the priorities and intentions of the author remains. Colquhoun offers her own notes of context where she seems to feel a need (e.g. 88). She also included her own preface, which partially explains the concept of the second, aphysical life after death. In large part, however, she seems to have intended the allusions and metaphors of the 1967 version to stand for themselves. A passage from Colquhoun's commentary on one of her paintings, 'Dance of the Nine Opals' (1942—included in this publication, 165–66) indicates that she may have seen further clarification as impossible, given the 'found' nature of the images, symbols, and settings of *I Saw Water*: 'When a picture comes directly from the unconscious, it is almost as difficult for the artist as it is for the spectator to say what it means.' The interpretation of meaning delivered via the artist's subconscious therefore remains relative to the experience of the reading subject. While Colquhoun proceeds in the same essay to interpret and offer context for the images in 'Dance of the Nine Opals'—thus at least somewhat supporting the editors' method—I would (rather stodgily) suggest that the creator of a work has more place to do so than a critic. At times the notes attached to *I Saw Water* present a danger of limiting the reader's understanding of the novel to the parameters set by the editors' interpretation of meaning; in such a layered, multivalent work, this bracketing inevitably reduces the full potential of direct reader interpretation and experience. Examples of such notes are found on pages 149, 153 and 157, where interpretation of particular event sequences or dream snippets accomplish a task for the reader that could have easily been performed themselves. I don't wish to suggest that there is no place for the critical extrapolation of meaning seen in such literary interpretation, but it doesn't seem fitting in the context of supplementary notes attached to a surrealist novel.

That said, despite these few overzealous interpretations and perhaps a little too much contextual information, Shillitoe and Morrisson do a masterful job of providing historically accurate, well-balanced, appropriate information for the reader to digest along with the novel itself. Those looking to better understand Colquhoun's philosophy, thought processes, and artistic method will appreciate the approach taken, as will those interested more in comprehension than in experiential, visionary reception of the written word. Inevitably, given the scope of Colquhoun's references, readers will sometimes find themselves wondering why particular obscurantisms are defined and contextualized while others are left to stand alone. For example, a mysterious reference to a group of children running before Sister Brigid shouting 'Aha!' (64) would become

much clearer in the context of Aleister Crowley's *Aha!* or *Liber CCXLII*. In the preface of this volume Crowley states that the dialogue which makes up the majority of the text is intended 'for the instruction of the little children of the light.'<sup>3</sup> There is little doubt that Colquhoun would have encountered this text as a member of the Ordo Templi Orientis, a Crowleyite magical order, so the connection seems clear. It could also be argued that the editors could have spent more time contextualizing Colquhoun's heterodox Christian beliefs, particularly since this context would help the reader unfamiliar with Christian imagery and tradition understand a novel that, on balance, is built more on Catholic material than that of any other spiritual tradition. However, since the notes and context can already seem overwhelming, the editors likely made the right choice in assuming that this material would already be more accessible to the average reader.

Such oversights are, moreover, unavoidable given the wide symbolic vistas through which Colquhoun's creativity wanders. Those interested in the historical context provided by Shillitoe and Morrisson will encounter high-grade research performed by experienced scholars, who clearly have an excellent grasp of the complexity of the traditions Colquhoun draws upon. The editors tiptoe adroitly through the tripwires and land mines that seem to lie between historical or discursive approaches to esoteric knowledge and the interpretations of those more closely invested in it—never finding themselves with a need to offer value judgments on the belief systems of Colquhoun or those who influenced her. This quality editorial contextualization and analysis, combined with the valuable supplemental materials, enrich an already impressive novel—a surrealist enchanting viewed through jagged dream fractals.

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<sup>3</sup> Aleister Crowley, *Liber CCXLII*, [https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/downloads/equinox%201\\_%203/aha/aha.pdf](https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/downloads/equinox%201_%203/aha/aha.pdf) (accessed June 14, 2015).

Thomas Karlsson. *Amongst Mystics and Magicians in Stockholm*. Gothenburg: Belzebez, 2014. 140 pp. £29.<sup>1</sup>

The Dragon whispered my name. Not my usual name, but my true name, my eternal name. The Dragon slowly coiled in front of me, and the scales sparkled like millions of diamonds, in all colours of the universe. The Dragon whispered to me again. It whispered its own name. I fell over on the ground with surprise, and twisted from laughter. I cried from happiness. The Dragon. So close. And yet so far away. (135)

In *Amongst Mystics and Magicians in Stockholm*, Thomas Karlsson, a scholar of religion<sup>2</sup> and the founder of the magical order Dragon Rouge (Ordo Draconis et Atri Adamantis), relates occult experimentation and experiences he and his fellow travelers went through during the years 1989–1991. That is, experimentation and experiences which were part of, and eventually led to, the founding of Dragon Rouge. The order has since grown into one of the most prominent occult organizations in the West, and today has a number of active lodges both in Sweden and abroad.<sup>3</sup>

*Amongst Mystics and Magicians* was originally published in Swedish in 2012. The English language translation is relatively fluent, but there are quite a few minor errors in the text, which could have been corrected by more rigorous proof-reading. According to the publisher, *Amongst Mystics and Magicians* is the first release in a trilogy concerning the history and development of Dragon Rouge, so hopefully the publisher pays more attention to proof-reading with the following parts of the trilogy.

The author himself describes the work at hand as a “reading mystery” which

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<sup>1</sup> This review was originally published as a blog post on the author’s blog, <http://angleso-vdisruption.blogspot.fi/2015/03/rest-in-arms-of-dragon.html>, but is published here in a revised form.

<sup>2</sup> Karlsson has a PhD in History of Religion from Stockholm University. He also has a teaching position in the mentioned university.

<sup>3</sup> Dragon Rouge has also become subject of academic enquiry, e.g. Kennet Granholm’s dissertation, *Embracing the Dark: The Magic Order of Dragon Rouge – Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2005) and his further study, *Dark Enlightenment: The Historical, Sociological, and Discursive Contexts of Contemporary Esoteric Magic* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014.)

should function as a key to the other side of reality (4). Thus the dedication to the demoness Lilith – the gate to the unknown (1.0°) in the initiatory scheme of Dragon Rouge.<sup>4</sup> It is rather easy to agree with the author's perception of his work; *Amongst Mystics and Magicians* is not a matter-of-fact, well-balanced and dry academic presentation of Dragon Rouge and the factors that led to its formation. It is, on the contrary, much more like a travelogue spiced with a sinister and paranormal twist. Karlsson's academic background, keen intellect and obviously wide erudition shine through, but in *Amongst Mystics and Magicians* he is not writing as Dr. Karlsson – he is more like one of those shadowy figures in H. P. Lovecraft's Gothic horror stories; someone who, by the feverishly dancing campfire, tells wild and astounding stories which are both alluring and spine-chilling.

The story told in *Amongst Mystics and Magicians* is full of intrigue, interesting characters and paranormal happenings. The focus on those individuals who were there in the beginning of Dragon Rouge, their personal experiences with the occult and the transformations that followed, as recollected and narrated by Karlsson, make it a rather unique work. This is not to say that the occult world – and especially darker hues of it – has a shortage of subjective histories, but, in contrast to more well-known and readily available publications,<sup>5</sup> the work at hand convinces with its down-to-earth sincerity. Accordingly, the characters – including Karlsson himself – are not polished to a point of being just billboards for Dragon Rouge's esoteric philosophy and practice, but are brought out in a way that makes them seem lively and credible. A fine example of this is one of the most colorful characters in the book, Varg:

At the same time he [Varg] was grounded, street smart, and completely disrespectful to all powers, both earthly and otherworldly. He happily provided old gods and demons with playful nicknames. After having invoked demon Beelzebub with grave seriousness, in a dark room only lit by black candles, and filled with heavy incense, he could suddenly round off the ritual by announcing that Bubbe, meaning Beelzebub, thought that we should go and have a beer at the pizzeria. (19)

Even though one could be forgiven for dismissing Varg as just another carefree

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Karlsson, *Qabalab, Qlipboth and Goetic Magic* (Jacksonville: Ajna, 2012), 112.

<sup>5</sup> Blanche Barton, *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Authorized Biography of Anton LaVey* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1990) and Stephen Flowers, *Lords of the Left-Hand Path: A History of Spiritual Dissent* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2012), to name just a few. One could also point to the rather voluminous literature focused on the Order of Nine Angles and its founder, Anton Long.

and easy-going psychonaut, he, in fact, points to a quite important feature in the early Dragon Rouge, that is free and open experimentation of the occult kind.

When reading through *Amongst Mystics and Magicians*, one is faced with a collection of household names in modern esotericism (e.g. Aleister Crowley, Kenneth Grant, Anton LaVey) as well as more surprising authors (e.g. Benoît Mandelbrot, Hannes Alfvén<sup>6</sup>), which, of course, provides an interesting view of the mystical and philosophical basis of the order. But more interesting still is how the sources are translated into lived and empirical experiences through practice and experimentation. The book is a treasure trove for someone interested in the practical side of Dragon Rouge, as there are vivid and detailed depictions of magical workings from simple meditations to ceremonial rituals. In most cases these workings are also accompanied by participants' personal reflections, providing yet another angle to the practical side of Dragon Rouge.

While Dragon Rouge underscores personal experience in its magical curriculum, its varied pursuits also have a very rigorous philosophical grounding. There is a strong opposition to the nihilistic tendencies characteristic of the time, and, conversely, a stout dedication to the ideals of a true Renaissance man (48, 58–59). Accordingly, it is rather easy to recognize the dividing lines and connecting ties between Dragon Rouge and other such organizations, e.g. the Church of Satan and Temple of Set.

While Anton LaVey's *The Satanic Bible* seems to have provided at least some inspiration, especially in terms of imagery, his carnal philosophy – not to mention his cynical tendencies – probably held very little interest for Karlsson and his circle of friends (21–22). The Temple of Set, on the other hand, comes out in a much more positive light. In a way it seems that the Temple of Set influenced Dragon Rouge to a rather significant extent, even though its role in the text is quite limited. The connection is there – e.g. through Varg and his American-based magical teacher – but Karlsson never gets into specifics (21, 37–38, 100–101). Also, at this point it is worth noting a certain resemblance between the founding myths of both organizations: i.e. Set dictating *The Book of Coming Forth by Night* to Michael A. Aquino and Thomas Karlsson receiving the prophecy to build a temple for the Red Dragon in Marrakech, Morocco. Both of these instances point, of course, to the shared influence of Aleister Crowley. Then again, *Amongst Mystics and Magicians* is just the first part of a trilogy; hopefully the following parts will shed more light also on Michael A. Aquino and his Temple of Set. There is no need to stretch the alleged

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<sup>6</sup> A mathematician and a plasma physicist, respectively.

connection between Dragon Rouge and Temple of Set too far, though, as the book at hand provides ample evidence for Dragon Rouge having had its own voice and course since the very beginning.

The qliphothic qabalah which has, since the early days, become one of the mainstays of Dragon Rouge, is not heavily present in *Amongst Mystics and Magicians*; Karlsson's interest in Jewish mysticism gets mentioned here and there, but it is not a very dominant feature in the text. Nevertheless, the other side of qabalistic occultism, *Sitra Abra*,<sup>7</sup> shines forth from between the lines which depict the early magical experiences of Dragon Rouge. An important facet in this is a conscious *turning away* from a civilized and orderly urbane environment towards a dark and chaotic world represented by nature. It is here, beyond man's civilizing efforts, where a dedicated seeker may find his/her initiation to the other side of existence. The appreciation of wild and untameable nature as a place for initiation also marks Dragon Rouge as quite different from the American groups mentioned earlier, which, usually, tend to conduct their magical workings in an urbane manner. This appreciation of nature has a distinctly Scandinavian pagan element in it.

Its rather modest number of pages notwithstanding, *Amongst Mystics and Magicians* is a highly interesting and informative publication for the scholar of modern-day Western occultism and the interested layman alike. As a first-person narrative about the birth of one of the most prominent occult organizations in the West it is also quite unique, especially because of its down-to-earth sincerity and credibility. Accordingly, for someone interested in Dragon Rouge – or in the inner workings of a contemporary esoteric association in general – there is plenty of food for thought in this slim volume.

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<sup>7</sup> *Sitra Abra* ("The Other Side") is the opposite of *Sitra de-Kedusha* ("the holy side") in qabalistic mysticism, see Karlsson, *Qabalah, Qlipboth and Goetic Magic*, 80–81.

