

The Newsletter of the
European Society for
the Study of Western
Esotericism

ESSWE Newsletter

Winter 2018
Volume 9, Number 2

Words from the Editor

– *Chris Giudice*



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Dear members of ESSWE, welcome to the Winter 2018 issue of the *Newsletter*; it is an issue I am particularly excited about, for it really reflects the interdisciplinary direction that the field has undertaken in recent times. The publications showcased in this edition have risen from the usual two to four, and this is a clear indicator of the state of health of our field, and the prolific nature of ESSWE members as authors. The scholar interviews section has been retained, as are conference reports, this time coupled with an inspiring review of an occult art exhibition held at Palazzo Roverella in Rovigo, Italy.

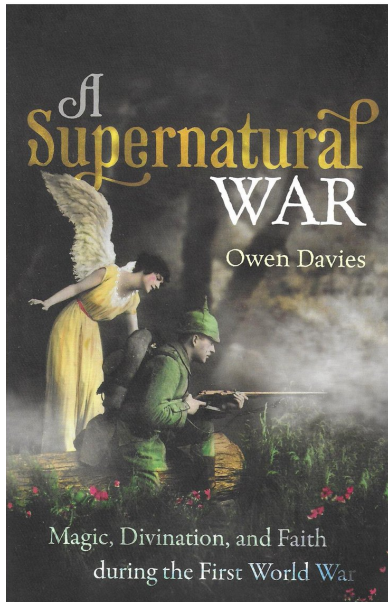
A call for papers for two intriguing special issues of *Pomegranate: the International Journal of Pagan Studies* have been inserted, as I feel that both themes covered by these upcoming studies will be of interest to many readers of the *Newsletter*. Finally the classic section dedicated to upcoming conference in the new year has been substantially extended. In closing this editorial, I urge those who will attend conferences in the upcoming months to write a short report, take some pictures and aid the *Newsletter* in its mission to inform ESSWE members on news concerning the vibrant Western esoteric academic milieu. ♦

New publications by ESSWE members

Professor Owen Davies

A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith during the First World War

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2018)



It was a commonly expressed view during the First World War that the conflict had seen a major revival of 'superstitious' beliefs and practices.

Churches expressed concerns about the wearing of talismans and amulets, the international press paid considerable interest to the pronouncements of astrologers and prophets, and the authorities in several countries periodically clamped down on fortune tellers and mediums due to

concerns over their effect on public morale. Out on the battlefields, soldiers of all nations sought to protect themselves through magical and religious rituals, and, on the home front, people sought out psychics and occult practitioners for news of the fate of their distant loved ones or communication with their spirits. Even away from concerns about the war, suspected witches continued to be abused and people continued to resort to magic and magical practitioners for personal protection, love, and success.

Uncovering and examining beliefs, practices, and contemporary opinions regarding the role of the supernatural in the war years, Owen Davies explores the broader issues regarding early twentieth-century society in the West, the psychology of the supernatural during wartime, and the extent to which the war cast a spotlight on the widespread continuation of popular belief in magic. *A Supernatural War* reveals the surprising stories of extraordinary people in a world caught up with the promise of occult powers. ♦

Dr. Julie Chajes

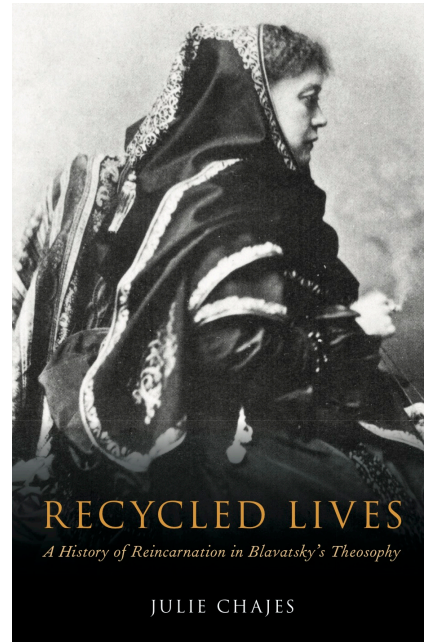
Recycled Lives: A History of Reincarnation in Blavatsky's Theosophy

(New York: Oxford University Press, March 2019)

This study historicises and contextualises the rebirth doctrines of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), the matriarch of the Theosophical Society and one of the

most influential women of the nineteenth century.

It analyses Blavatsky's complicated theories about the cosmos and its divine source as presented in her two seminal Theosophical treatises, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), as well as her articles and letters. The book argues that Blavatsky taught two distinct theories of rebirth and that the later one developed from the earlier. It reveals Blavatsky's appropriation of a plethora of contemporaneous works in the construction of these doctrines and contextualises her interpretations in nineteenth-century intellectual and cultural life. In particular, it explores Blavatsky's adaptations of Spiritualist ideas, scientific theories, Platonism, and Oriental religions, which in turn are set in relief against broader nineteenth-century American and European trends. The chapters come together to reveal the contours of a modern perspective on reincarnation that is inseparable from the nineteenth-century discourses within which it emerged. In addition, it reveals some consequential, perhaps unexpected, and evidently under-acknowledged historical roots of the reincarnationism that is so popular in today's post-modern world. ♦



Edited by Christine Ferguson and Andrew Radford

The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875-1947: Among the Victorians and Modernists

(London: Routledge, 2017)

Between 1875 and 1947, a period bookended, respectively, by the founding of the Theosophical Society and the death of notorious occultist celebrity Aleister Crowley, Britain experienced an unparalleled efflorescence of engagement with unusual occult schema and supernatural phenomena such as astral travel, ritual magic, and reincarnationism. Reflecting the signal array of responses by authors, artists, actors, impresarios and popular entertainers to questions of esoteric spirituality and belief, this interdisciplinary collection demonstrates the enormous interest in the occult during a time typically associated with the rise of

secularization and scientific innovation. The contributors describe how the occult realm functions as a turbulent conceptual and affective space, shifting between poles of faith and doubt, the sacrosanct and the profane, the endemic and the exotic, the forensic and the fetishistic. Here, occultism emerges as a practice and epistemology that decisively shapes the literary enterprises of writers such as Dion Fortune and Arthur Machen, artists such as Pamela Colman Smith, and revivalists such as Rolf Gardiner.

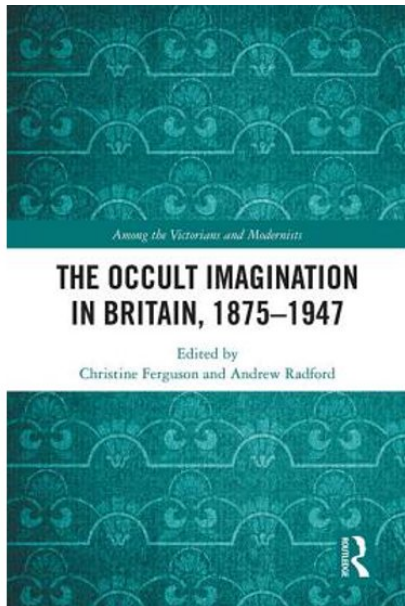


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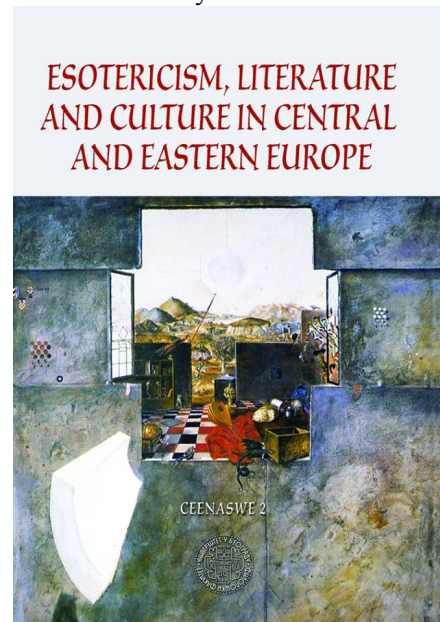
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Esotericisms, Literature, and Culture in Central and Eastern Europe

Edited by **Nemanja Radulović**

(Belgrade: Faculty of Philology, 2018)

The present volume brings together the papers presented at the second conference organized by a chapter of the ESSWE, the Central and Eastern European Network for the Academic Study of Western Esotericism (CEENASWE), at



the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade in 2016. The book promotes a philological perspective to the study of Western esotericism, being partly dedicated to tracking sources and establishing the literary-historical context in which esotericism came into contact with literature. Hence, its ambition is to fill the gaps in literary historiography and to

promote the acknowledgement of esotericism as one of the prominent literary sources in this part of the world. The 20 papers move from pre-modern times up to the modern and contemporary periods, testifying that the reception of esotericism in literature and the arts largely overlaps with the shift of influences as formulated by classical literary history. ♦

Scholar Interviews

- *Chris Giudice*

In every issue of the *Newsletter* one junior and one senior scholar of Western esotericism are interviewed. They are both asked the same questions.

Dr. Gordan Djurdjevic, Department of Humanities, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

I first encountered esoteric subjects – and I would like to point out immediately that I make a distinction between ‘esotericism’ as a conceptual category and ‘Western esotericism’ as one of its historical and cultural manifestations – as a teenager, in the first grade of the high school. I borrowed from a friend a book on yoga by the Serbian author Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski, and it totally blew my mind, occasioning an emergence of a life-long interest in, and a passion for, the subject. This rather slim volume, *The Psychic Training of the Yogis*, approached its topic in a pronounced syncretic style. Its cover was graced by a drawing of, not exactly an Indian yogi, but what looked more like a Thai or Burmese Buddhist monk (the robe was definitely rendered in Theravada style) sitting in meditation. The author argued that Eastern and Western forms of occultism represented branches of the same tree. The appendix contained a short summary of Western ritual magic, which later formed the focus of Slavinski’s several subsequent books. I was thus from the start predisposed – and I am by far not the only one in this regard – to perceive esotericism as a cross-cultural category.

I came across the academic study of esotericism somewhat belatedly. I was a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Asia Studies, working on my Thesis, which dealt with the Nāth yogis. I was going to build it around the translation of a collection of their poetry, but I was having difficulty in an attempt to interpret it in a satisfactory manner. My supervisor kept suggesting that I needed a model on which to base my approach to the material but I felt that all the important things on the subject were already told. And then one day, while rummaging through the stacks of books in the library of the University of British Columbia, I stumbled upon Antoine Faivre’s *Access to Western Esotericism*. All at once, I became convinced not only that I have found my “model” – I was going to interpret the Nāth yogis by



employing the conceptual vocabulary developed in the study of esotericism – but also discovered that there was a field, with departmental chairs, learned societies, conferences, journal, and much more. All my subsequent academic endeavours were in the field, with the additional remark that I have continued to suggest the value and importance of multi-cultural or comparative approaches to the study of esotericism. An example may clarify what I mean by the previous remark. Let us take a look into alchemy: it is an indisputably esoteric discipline. At the same time, we know that there are historical

manifestations of Chinese, Indian, Arabic, and European alchemy. It makes no sense to call alchemy esoteric only when it manifests in the European context. Simultaneously, it also makes no sense to consider all these historical examples one and the same – they are not. We are thus left with a family resemblance between different manifestations of these particular esoteric currents: they are both similar (hence, one can be justified in designating them as esoteric) and different (hence, we can distinguish them as Chinese, Indian, Arabic, European; or, alternatively, Daoist, Hindu, Islamic, Christian; or, to make a further distinction, they could be ancient, medieval, premodern, contemporary). My own contribution to the field is to suggest that some forms of Indian religious traditions are fruitfully approached as esoteric or occult (in particular some forms of yoga and tantra), and to study the influence of these traditions on modern and contemporary Western esotericism or the occult.

What is your most fun memory so far from your time in the field?

As far as I am concerned, most fun occurs at conferences. The chance to meet like-minded people and exchange ideas and information with them, in both formal and informal contexts, is precious. I have enjoyed all the conferences I have attended so far, but if I were to single out one of them as being *the* most fun, I would probably mention the most recent one. That was a workshop on the “Occult South Asia,” which took place in the late November of this year at the University of Vienna, organized by Karl Baier and Mriganka Mukhopadhyay. This event also saw the creation of the Occult South Asia Network (OSAN), that I am very excited about and look forward to its future unfolding. I had

absolutely amazing time during the event, not to mention the satisfaction of witnessing a formal recognition of the subfield that I have been engaged in for quite some time.

What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?

In terms of academic pursuits, I am also interested in the study of Hinduism and South Asian religions in general, with more specialized interest in yogic and tantric traditions, and to a lesser degree the devotional currents (bhakti). I am also interested in the phenomenon of religion as such, in particular the theorizing about the category of the sacred. As everyone else, I am also interested in music, film, and art. I also possess an esoteric superpower related to a particular interest: I can smell a good book waiting for me in a used bookstore across the town.

What are the worst things about having this as your speciality?

The worst thing about this specialty is the lack of job opportunities. While the scholars of esotericism perform at an exemplary level, we see comparatively small number of academic positions that are specifically geared towards esoteric studies.

What are the best things about having this as your speciality?

The best thing about specializing in the study of esotericism lies in the fact that the field is extremely rich and varied, and inherently fascinating. Exploring the subject matter that by default focuses on the great questions of existence provides an enormous satisfaction to a researcher. There’s never a dull moment. ♦

Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, PhD Student, Center HHP, University of Amsterdam, Holland

How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?

The beginning was sudden and my “discovery” of Western Esotericism was quite dramatic. I come from India and, therefore, coming from a non-Western society, I hardly had any idea about Western Esotericism. I studied modern Indian history which directed my attention towards the history of the Theosophical

Society as the occult organisation had a prominent presence in colonial India. So when I started reading about Theosophy for pursuing my post-graduate research, I was introduced to a whole new world of Esotericism and Occultism. Therefore, in a way, Theosophy is my entry point to Western Esotericism: the doorway for discovering Western counter-culture.

I am fortunate enough that I received an opportunity to pursue my PhD under the supervision of Prof. dr. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Dr. Marco Pasi at the University of Amsterdam. Besides reading their

works, which many of us in the field of Western Esotericism does, I also had an opportunity to audit their courses in the M.A classes. More I heard their classroom lectures, I developed a better grasp of the subject. Although I cannot say that today I have a sound knowledge about what Western Esotericism is, I definitely have a greater interest on the subject than I used to have a couple of years ago. Needless to say, Amsterdam made me interested in Western Esotericism. Being the first Indian ever to study at the Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP), University of Amsterdam, I developed a natural interest for the field. Once I entered deeper into it, I started discovering the significance of the subject. My academic mind helped me to realise that the Western esoteric currents are not only intrinsic for the Western society but even for the world beyond it. For understanding the South Asian socio-cultural world, it is highly relevant to develop a historical understanding of Western Esotericism. Having said that, I would like to stress, my interest in Western Esotericism is mainly academic: my approach to it is emic to the world of scholars but etic to the world of esotericists.



What is your most fun memory so far from your time in the field?

The study of Western Esotericism involves a lot of fun. The most entertaining thing so far started in the last academic year in Amsterdam and, it is still an ongoing process. The M.A in Western Esotericism, offered at the University of Amsterdam, is a well-known Master's programme which attracts a large number of

international students from Europe and America. 2017 was my first year as a student of Western Esotericism and, also my first year at the city of Amsterdam. It was the time when I made some new friends in the alien world. Most of my friends were (well, they are still my friends) from the M.A programme whom I met while auditing Professor Hanegraaff's, and later Dr. Pasi's, class. Together we organised bi-weekly sessions at Kapitein Zeppos which is a restaurant in the centre of Amsterdam. Initially planned as a study club which could give a community feeling to the students of HHP, these afternoon sessions helped to solidify our friendships. Very soon, jokingly, we started calling our group as "Captain Zeppos Society" and fancied ourselves as a secret cult of the students of Amsterdam. The group still exist and our ritual at the Captain Zeppos Society begins with a cup of tea (or a glass of beer) along with French fries. Now, we can't tell you everything about our 'cult', you know! Our cult members are not permitted to divulge all the details to the outsiders. After all, it's a secret society!

On a more serious note, the students and young scholars of Western Esotericism have carved out space for themselves to discuss various topics related to Western Esotericism. The range of discussion is diverse and also marks a space for free-spirited scholarly discussion on Esotericism outside the classrooms. Honestly, Amsterdam as a city of free speech as well as a city of Western Esotericism provides this space to us.

I had the pleasure of attending my first ESSWE conference last year in Erfurt, which was overall a great experience. Our group includes some fantastic people I was lucky enough to get to know. There were fruitful discussions pertaining to esoteric research, a great deal of drinking and many hilarious antidotes (that are all inappropriate for this publication). Without a doubt the most fun I have ever had at a conference and I am looking forward to meeting my fellow WE researchers again.

What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?

I am a trained elocutionist and reciter. I learned poetry-recitation for thirteen years since I was a kid. It started even before I was enrolled in a kindergarten. Thus the habit is truly ancient in my life. The passion for recitation and poetry reading still exists in me. So whenever I find an occasion, I love to indulge in it. These days it has become more of a means of relaxation for my own whenever I find time outside busy schedule. However, poetry gives me a sense of peace and tranquility. Being a native speaker, I am an avid reader of Bengali poems but I also try to closely follow various genres of poems in English, Hindi and Urdu.

My other interests are quite clichéd for an average middle-class youth of our generation: reading fictions, watching sports such as football or cricket and listening to music.

What are the worst things about having this as your speciality?

Honestly, I haven't yet found anything worse in my field. Perhaps, this highly optimistic claim comes from me because I am a newcomer to the field. I didn't have to go through many troubles as I live a sheltered life under the wings of my supervisors in Amsterdam: both of them being the leading scholars of our field. Nevertheless, when I interact with my Indian peers or even with the historians based in different parts of the world, I realise that many

people do not have much idea about what Western Esotericism is. In that way, our field is still unknown in many parts of the world: this is true at least for the Indian academia. So the problem is, once the younger scholars and the PhDs of our field compete in the larger world, outside the field, our academic speciality can be seen as a very narrow one, or even worse, as an oblivious one. This might create problems in terms of finding future academic opportunities.

However, there is also a silver lining to the above problem. This makes us skilful in an area which no one knows about and, therefore, marking the young experts of our field as the specialists of a subject about which the larger academic world might be interested to hear more. This conversation with the outside world, in turn, would enrich our field in several ways.

What are the best things about having this as your speciality?

I got the opportunity to learn a lot of new topics and intellectual currents as soon as I entered the field of Western Esotericism. For a student of History, nothing could be better than being able to learn about unexplored histories. Entering into the field of Western Esotericism has given me the scope to study more about Rosicrucianism, Swedenborgianism, Freemasonry, Alchemy, Kabbalah, Magic and, of course, about Theosophy. This experience of navigating through a hugely diversified knowledge world is fascinating. Also, in my case, I have a background and academic training in the study of the intellectual and philosophical systems of India. I try to understand the influence of Indian currents and

philosophical discourses within the field of Western Esotericism. Therefore, I aim to develop an understanding of a transcultural history connecting Western Esotericism—particularly modern Occultism and Theosophy—with colonial Indian history. This is one of the major goals of my PhD research. Moreover, in November 2018, I, along with Professor Karl Baier, organised the Occult South Asia workshop in Vienna. This academic event attempted to bridge the gap between modern South Asian cultural-intellectual history and the history of modern Occultism. This is a new direction of research which our field has never seen before and we are planning to develop our work further. The participants in the Vienna conference has also set up an academic group called Occult South Asia Network (OSAN) for the purpose of creating an academic platform where the scholars of different fields can have a dialogue on Occultism's involvement with South Asian intellectual history. We have also planned to integrate OSAN within ESSWE as a thematic sub-group.

So, in a nutshell, this exemplifies that our field has huge potential to develop and take steady steps forward. It's a growing and rising field. This growth and progressiveness of our field prove that there are miles to go: this is the best thing. Therefore, being a specialist in Western Esotericism, I have a scope to contribute both in the research of South Asian history as well as in the study of Western Esotericism. I often see myself as an intellectual and cultural ambassador who could connect two disparate worlds of academia. My PhD research on the Theosophical movement in colonial Bengal as well the Occult South Asia project are two of the major examples of this. ♦

Conferences and Exhibitions Reports

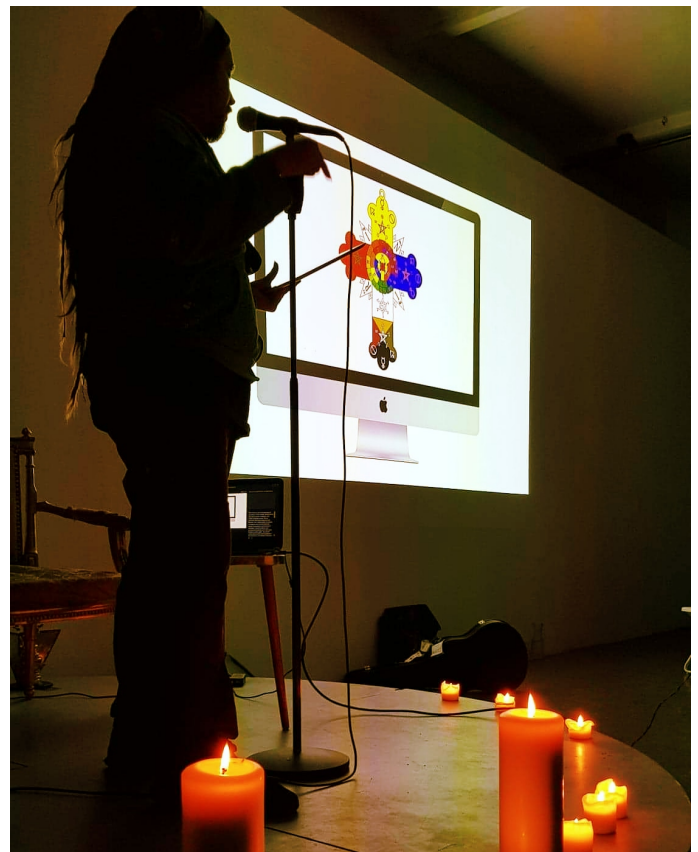
Occulture: Esoteric Conference

16-18 November 2017, Berlin

- Cavan McLuaghlin

Occulture: Esoteric Conference Berlin, took place on 16-18th November, and was “a gathering of magical beings, consisting of two days and three nights of lectures, workshops, rituals, and divination”. It is important to mention, that I was sadly unable to attend the entire conference, but I still feel the full day and two nights that I was present provided enough of an experience to offer this review.

Although this event advertised as welcoming both practitioners and researchers (or, indeed, “anyone interested in the open-minded, critical pursuit of illumination and the exploration of esoteric mysteries”), it was clear from the outset, that Occulture was quite heavily skewed towards the practitioner milieu.



One of the most striking and affective aspects of the conference, was the space within which it was held. From the beautiful red candles that led you through the urban

environment, up the stairs, along a balconied walkway and in through heavy metal doors to the black, industrial, club-like interior, the impact was immediate. There was excellent esoteric art spread throughout the building, residing in its plentiful alcoves and corridors, and this certainly seemed to be exactly the kind of place one would imagine Berlin occultists hanging out.



The bulk of the action happened in two primary spaces. The downstairs black space was referred to in the programme, simply as: Below. Predictably then, and to very good effect, the upstairs room was, of course, Above—whited out in stark symbolic and aesthetic polar contrast. The Above space held many of the more scholarly talks and had a more formal feel. In contrast, many of the workshops, performances and less formally presented talks were held in a more suitably relaxed space, complete with floor cushions and lounging audience members. This Below space, unfortunately, had no clear boundary between the café/bar area and the area used for presenting, and although it was fantastic in providing an invaluable conference social space for those all-important liminal discussions and networking opportunities, the chatter sound-clashed with the presentations in an often disagreeable way. Despite there being talks here that had the potential to be quite interesting, such as Ponte Vivx's "Astrology Through the Lens of Intersectional Feminism", and the promise of a workshop offered by occultural celebrities Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone, I heavily favoured the space Above, both in terms of pragmatics and the quality of the presentations given there.

These included Rob Dickens, fascinating and insightful "Reconfiguring The World: Automatic Writing and Authority in The 19th Century", in the morning panel. In the afternoon, Danny Nemu, weaved a poetic tale of meaning and magic in "Keta-Chaos, Ayaanimism and the Demon of the Ulcer" and the ever-engaging Julian Vayne

relayed the central role of "Drugs in Modern Occulture". Presentations from Above were then drawn to a close with a panel that included such practitioner/author luminaries as David Lee, speaking to the great Discordian prank "Operation Mindfuck", and an extended collaborative paper from Scarlet Imprint duo, Peter Grey and Alkistis Dimech, "My Time Is Come: An erotic eschatology of Babalon"—with Grey, rather notably, and quite purposefully, out to cause controversy and ruffle some feathers in the Thelemic community.

The club-like Below part of the venue found its real forte in closing out proceedings, with DJs and dancing into the night.

Not without its flaws, Occulture was nevertheless a vibrant, exhilarating and very welcome addition to the ever-growing collection of esoteric conferences that seek to offer a blend of practitioners and scholarly researchers, and I look forward to returning for its next installment. ♦

Arte e Magia: The Fascination with Esotericism in Europe

**29 September 2018 – 27 January 2019,
Palazzo Roverella, Rovigo, Italy.**

- Michele Olzi



In the last days of September, the art exhibition, *Arte e Magia – The Fascination with Esotericism in Europe*, was inaugurated in Rovigo at Palazzo Roverella. In the wake of previous art exhibitions like *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (1985), at the Los Angeles County Museum, and *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: von Mondrian bis Munch* (1995), at Schirn Kunsthalle Kranfurt, art curator Francesco Parisi wanted to offer to Italian and international audiences a unique opportunity to admire the main artworks from across the world which all represent the intersection between the history of Western Esotericism, Occultism, and Modern Arts. Over two thousand pieces (including paintings, sculpture, etchings, objects, and books) are exhibited in eleven thematic rooms. The topic of the first area welcoming visitors into a path leafing through fifty years of history (from the 1880s to the first years after the First World War) is the “Aenigma, Silence”. Followed by “Temples, Altars, and Esoteric Architecture”, “Sâr Mérodack and the Salon de la Rose+Croix”, “Monte Verità”, “Ex Oriente Lux”, “Devils, Witches, and Magicians”, “The Night and Its Guests”, “Spiritualism”, “Psyche, Cosmos, Aura”, “Archetypes and Ancestral Forms”, “The Magical Sign: Occultism and Esoterism in Graphics”. Among the exhibited artists are Odilon Redon, Paul Ranson, Eugene Grasset, Jean Delville, Felicien Rops, Austin Osman Spare, Paul Serusier, Alberto Martini, Carlos Schwabe, Wassily Kandinsky, Auguste Rodin, Edvard Munch,

Frantisek Kupka, Giorgio Kienerk, Leonardo Bistolfi, Ferdinand Hodler, Hugo Höppener (Fidus), Ernesto Basile, Paul Klee, Johannes Itten, Luigi Russolo, Gaetano Previati, George Frederic Watts, Giacomo Balla, Piet Mondrian, Romolo Romani.

Although most of the artists are featured in specifically themed categories or artistic currents, two main esoteric and occult movements emerged and distinguished themselves in the Nineteenth and Twentieth century cultural scene: Rosicrucian orders and Theosophical Society. Both movements are neatly portrayed as fertile grounds where images and ideas were blossoming throughout the beginning of the modern era. The fact that most of the exhibited artists joined the international society founded by Madame Blavatsky or abided by the aesthetical-esoteric principles of Josephin Péladan’s Rosicrucian manifestos, offers a series of insights into the history of the Western cultural imagination and representative arts.♦

Call for Papers: Journals

The Impact of Traditionalism on Contemporary Magical Communities

For a special issue of *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*

Traditionalism is a philosophical school which has significantly impacted religious communities and political movements in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, yet it remains virtually unknown among scholars and the general public. Yet when Steve Bannon cited René Guénon and Julius Evola as key influences in formulating his political positions, this inspired new interest in the history and ideas informing the growing Alt Right. However, both Guénon and Evola have been known within Pagan and occult communities for decades as esoteric theorists. Overall, the tenets of Traditionalism, which include Perennialism, the cultivation of an initiated elite, the notion of cyclical time, a past golden age and anti-modern sentiments, have increasingly impacted Pagan and occult communities, as some of these ideas are complementary to Pagan and occult aesthetics, values and practices.

This special volume of *The Pomegranate* would feature articles examining the ways in which Traditionalism has influenced Pagan and occult subcultures. Topics could include

- Traditionalism and Pagan or esoteric publishing.
- The intersection of Traditionalist ideas with Pagan values and ethics.
- Neofolk music.
- Traditionalism and Polytheism, Reconstructionism and Heathenry.
- Pagan and occult themes in Traditionalist theory.
- The impact of Traditionalist debates in various orders, such as the O.T.O.
- The impact of Traditionalism on historic individuals relevant to Paganism, for example W.B. Yeats or Kathleen Raine.

Please note that while papers may reflect the impact of Traditionalism on the Alt Right or New Right in relationship to these topics, that we would like to ensure that we focus on relevant philosophies and frameworks explicitly inspired by Traditionalism. If you would like to contribute to this issue of *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* edited by Amy Hale, please submit an abstract of 300-500 words to amyhale93@gmail.com by April 1, 2019. Final Submissions of 5000-8000 words will be due August 1, 2019.♦

Pagan Art and Fashion

A beautiful young woman drapes her long auburn hair over a human skull, pressing it close to her face like a lover. Another, clad in black and holding a wooden staff, poses like a model in a photo shoot on location in an incongruous forest. Long, elaborately decorated fake fingernails like talons grasp shiny crystals, evoking the “just so” beauty of a staged magazine spread. In the world of the Witches of Instagram, the art of photography meets business witchery and feminist activism.

Is it (still) the season of the witch? Luxury fashion house Dior has a tarot-themed collection; witchcraft featured in recent issues of *Vogue* magazine; young witch-identifying women perform “fashion magic”; and an alchemist-fashion designer has invented colour-changing hair dye, inspired by a scene in the 1996 movie *The Craft*. An angry yet luxurious sex-positive feminism is in the air; goddesses, witches and sluts are rising up again, a decade and a half after Rockbitch stopped touring and almost thirty years after Annie Sprinkle’s first workshops celebrating the sacred whore. Exhibitions showcasing the work of living and dead occult artists have been on the increase for several years now, most recently *Black Light: Secret Traditions in Art Since the 1950s* at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, and Barry William Hale + NOKO’s Enochian performance at Dark Mofo in

Tasmania. Multidisciplinary artist Bill Crisafi and dancer Alkistis Dimech exemplify the Sabbatic witchcraft aesthetic; Russ Marshalek and Vanessa Irena mix fitness and music with witchcraft in the age of the apocalypse; DJ Juliana Huxtable and queer arts collective House of Ladosha are a coven; rappers Azealia Banks and Princess Nokia are out and proud brujas; and singer Lanadel Rey admits hexing Donald Trump.

Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies invites submissions of articles (5000–8000 words) for a special issue on Pagan Art and Fashion, edited by Caroline Tully (caroline.tully@unimelb.edu.au). How are Paganism, modern Goddess worship, witchcraft and magick utilised in the service of creative self-expression today? Potential topics might fall under the general headings of, but are not limited to, Aesthetics, Dance, Fashion, Film and Television, Internet Culture, Literature, Music, and Visual Art.

Submissions due June 15, 2019. For information on the submission process see:

<https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/POM/about/submissions> ♦

Upcoming Conferences 2019

7th Biannual Conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism

Western Esotericism and Consciousness: Visions, Voices, Altered States

2-4 July, 2019, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

The history of Western esotericism from antiquity to the present is filled with reports of unusual and sometimes spectacular experiences that are claimed to convey higher, deeper, or even absolute knowledge about the true nature of reality. Some typical examples are the many references to direct supra-rational gnosis, ecstatic experiences, and states of divine mania (madness or frenzy) or possession from antiquity to the present; visionary travels to other places, other worlds, or other levels of reality, as well as to past or future periods and events; visionary encounters with intermediary beings

(for instance angels, demons, spirits, elementals, ascended masters, divinities); the hearing of inner voices, receiving or “channeling” of spiritual messages, and communication with disembodied entities; and ineffable experiences (for instance apophatic unity) that are difficult or impossible to express through normal discursive language. Common to all such reports is that they fall within the general phenomenology of human consciousness and seem to require some kind of modification or alteration of the normal or average mental states that allow us to negotiate consensus reality. All this makes the experiential dimension of Western esotericism (in both its historical and its contemporary social manifestations) extremely relevant to academic disciplines such as cognitive studies, consciousness research, psychology, or psychiatry. ESSWE7 will be the first major international conference to bring these perspectives in conversation with one another in the context of the study of Western esotericism.

On the level of the humanities and the social sciences, we hope that the conference will provide participants with an ideal opportunity for learning about the phenomenology of unusual experiences across the entire historical spectrum of Western esotericism from antiquity to the present. Here the emphasis will be on empirical research

and specialist knowledge about specific historical and contemporary cases. Furthermore, on the level of the study of consciousness, we hope to explore larger and more theoretical questions concerning such topics as the taxonomy and etiology of altered states, their neurobiological foundations, or their relevance to wider concerns such as cognitive functioning or mental health. Here the emphasis will be on how such approaches may help us understand and even explain the rich record of historical and empirical materials central to Western esotericism and, conversely, how these can serve as case studies for the study of consciousness more in general.

ESSWE7 will also be an occasion to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP) at the University of Amsterdam.

Keynote lectures

- Prof. Yulia Ustinova (Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel)
- Prof. Karl Baier (University of Vienna, Austria)
- Prof. Sonu Shamdasani (University College London, United Kingdom) ♦

Donner Institute Symposium

Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences

5-7 June, Åbo/Turku University, Finland

Conference website: www.abo.fi/esomyst

Hashtag: #esomyst2019

Facebook

event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1954347284622536/>

This multidisciplinary conference approaches the traditions of Western esotericism and mysticism from a cultural-historical perspective. The aim is to analyse the diverse influences of esoteric ideas and practices and the various forms of mysticism in their cultural-historical surroundings. We promote approaches that focus on individuals, groups and networks, and various archival source materials, but we also welcome papers dealing with esoteric or mystical textual traditions.

The conference will consist of keynote lectures and sessions that can be either traditional paper sessions or roundtable talks, panels and/or artistic performances. The social program of the conference will consist of e.g. esoteric and occult walking tours in Turku and artistic performances (plans for an event together with Art Teatro Circus -group). An excursion to the exhibition on Finnish art and clairvoyance at the Gallen-Kallela Museum (Espoo/Esbo, 11.5.–8.9.2019) is also being planned. The exhibition is part of the research project *Seekers of the New* and is curated by Nina Kokkinen.

Keynote speakers:

- Per Faxneld, senior lecturer/associate professor at Södertörn University, Stockholm
- Christine Ferguson, professor in English Literature at the University of Stirling
- Olav Hammer, professor in the Department of History, Study of Religions at The University of Southern Denmark
- Maarit Leskelä-Kärki (PhD, Adjunct Professor), University Lecturer at the Department of Cultural History at the University of Turku

The expert symposium is arranged jointly by the Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural history and the research project *Seekers of the New: Esotericism and the transformation of religiosity in the modernising Finland* at the University of Turku. The project is funded by the Kone Foundation.

To apply, please send an abstract (or panel proposal with abstracts) of approximately 150 words to the Donner

Institute, donner.institute@abo.fi, no later than 31 December 2018. Letters of acceptance will be posted no later than 31 January, 2019.

On behalf of the organizing committee,

Björn Dahla

**Association des Étudiant(e)s Gradué(e)s
en Littérature Anglaise de l'Université
Laval**

*Divinity and the Supernatural in Literature
at the Millennium*

**22.23 March 2019, Université Laval,
Canada**

Divinity and the Supernatural in Literature at the Millennium

deadline for submissions:

January 11, 2019

full name / name of organization:

Association des Étudiant(e)s Gradué(e)s en Littérature Anglaise de l'Université Laval

contact email:

aeglea@asso.ulaval.ca

Much attention has been given to recent American studies showing a dramatic increase in the numbers of those who distance themselves from religious affiliation. Here in Quebec, it is approximately 50 years since the Quiet Revolution, a political movement that wrested control over health and education from the Catholic Church to a secular government. Today in Montreal, fewer than 4% of the population regularly attends mass, a trend that echoes the situation in Europe (1). Simultaneously, there is a growing interest in non-denominational spirituality as well as narratives that feature unreal elements, such as we see in fantasy, magic realism, or science fiction, suggesting that the supernatural still maintains a strong draw on some level for many, although perhaps in a new way.

In addition to its foundational role in delineating doctrine within organized religion, literature has always been a medium for challenging dominant narratives, exploring philosophical questions, and attempting to define the zeitgeist. In this spirit, the Université Laval's Graduate Conference for English Literature proposes to provide a welcoming environment for graduate student presentations that inquire into the state of the belief in the supernatural in our culture as it is presented in literature. We are open to a range of theoretical and critical approaches, as well as other forms of narrative media. Presentations will be 15-20 minutes, in French or English. Suggested topics include but are not limited to:

the poetics of religious representation in literature

how the metaphysical is understood in societies that privilege scientific "ways of knowing"

the modern miracle: how are they identified and interpreted?

links and overlap between magic and religion

nations' historical relationships with a particular institutionalized religion (Ireland, for example) and how that has evolved over time

how questions about religion, secularization, or the supernatural/metaphysical are approached in YA literature or coming-of-age stories

religious representation in Quebecois literature

religion's role for minority or oppressed peoples, such as: African American (ante- or post-bellum), Caribbean, African, First Nations and Indigenous, Immigrants

The conference will be held on March 22-23, 2019 on the UL campus. We invite graduate students (MA, PhD, as well as advanced undergraduates) from various disciplines (Literature, Translation Studies, Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Indigenous Studies, History, etc.) to submit proposals. Visit the website for information on post-conference publishing opportunities. Please submit an abstract of 250 words and a biography of 50 words to: aeglea.ulaval@gmail.com. Include your name, affiliation and degree program, e-mail address, equipment needs, as well as the title of your presentation and upload the document as both PDF and Word attachments. The deadline for proposals is Friday January 11, 2019. You will be informed of our decision by February 1, 2019.

<https://aegleaulaval.wixsite.com/lit-conference>

Trans- States

The Art of Revelation

13-14 September 2019, University of Northampton, England

Trans-States.org

Keep up to date with the conference via our FB page and twitter account.

www.facebook.com/transstates/

www.twitter.com/Trans_States

trans- prefix meaning: across, beyond, through, on the other side of, to go beyond

state: a condition or way of being that exists at a particular time

An unabashed play on words, a 'trans- state' is, among other things, a *coincidentia oppositorum*. An alchemical wedding that defines the fixed place, where boundaries are actively transgressed. In many ways, this point of intersection—this crossroads—is where the role of the

magician, mystic and artist collide. Where each can play a role in revealing the neoteric and the numinous, while making ruinous the antiquated and the corrupt. Revelation and revolution are often intimately linked; the sudden and violent unveiling of the truly novel, utterly alien, and ineffably Other, brings with it the upheaval of our very foundations—that of the individual, and of the societies we build. The art of revelation, is the art of cataclysm and catharsis.

The first Trans- States conference, *The Art of Crossing Over*, themed itself upon the Major Arcana card, The Hanged Man, and focused solely on boundary crossing, liminality and the queering of normativity. This upcoming Trans- States conference, *The Art of Revelation*, themes itself upon The Tower. As such, it seeks to broaden its scope to include the shock and awe of revelatory and paradigm-shifting occultural experiences; the impact and implications of anti-structure, of alterations in consciousness and of the revolutionary aspects of paranormality.

This is a transdisciplinary conference that will explore the complex interrelationships between contemporary occulture, revelation, non-ordinary states of consciousness, power, structure, textuality and deconstruction.

Confirmed Keynotes

We are pleased to announce that we already have three extremely exciting keynote speakers confirmed:

- **Wouter Hanegraaff** – Professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- **Jeffrey Kripal** – Professor Kripal holds the J. Newton Rayzor Chair in Philosophy and Religious Thought at Rice University, Houston, Texas.
- **Daisy Eris Campbell** – Writer, actor and director. Campbell recently adapted Robert Anton Wilson's cult autobiographical book *Cosmic Trigger* for the stage

Call for Proposals

As further guidance for proposal ideas, all proposals should relate to one or more of the following: contemporary esotericism, mysticism, spirituality, psychedelics, occulture AND—

- revelation or other highly 'productive' altered states of consciousness (gnosis, channeling, alienated agency, creative dissociation, etc.).
- (oc)cultural production (with specific focus on revelation and altered states of consciousness).
- cultural criticism; literary and critical theory.
- political dissidence; political extremism; radicalism; revolution.
- psychosis.
- trauma; ordeal.
- anti-structure; fragmentation.

We welcome proposals by academics, independent scholars, practitioners and artists.

We aim to promote not only the blending of disciplines, but also non-normative approaches to the theme. As such, joint proposals, collaborations, practitioner-based activities, pre-formed panels and performances are very welcome, as well as individual submissions and papers. We also welcome short film screenings; exhibited works; visual art; sound art; installations; visually interactive talks and workshops.

This list of 'trans- states' from the first conference may help provide additional inspiration:

Transcendental
Transformation
Transmutation
Transmedia and transnarrative
Transgender, Transexual, Gender Queer, Androgyne
Transitions and liminality
Transmissions
Transcultural
Transdermal and body modification
Transfixion
Transference
Transdisciplinary
Transfiguration
Transgression
Transhumanism
Transmigration and metempsychosis
Transnatural art and design
Transpersonal
Transubstantiation

What to send:

Abstracts or proposals should be a maximum of 300 words (images, links to video or other visual aids may also be included, especially for exhibition/performance related proposals).

If you wish to present *and* exhibit/perform, please

provide a separate (although by all means directly related) proposal for each, along with your bio. In the case of performances or other logistically complex activities, please include details in your proposal of any additional requirements you may have.

Unless otherwise requested, standard presentation slots will be 20mins, with 10mins for questions. Performances can of course be longer, or shorter, depending on content/context. (We have had performances running for a couple of minutes, and long-form pieces running for hours. Simply provide a rationale for your proposed activity).

You should also include a short bio of no more than 200 words, and a current digital photo/image that depicts you (or your work). Please send portrait images (i.e. portrait not landscape: tall on the longest side, rather than wide on the longest side).

Finally, include any social network links, website/blog info and contact information that you are happy to be shared with the general public, should you be accepted, on the Trans- States website. (See below for a full list of external links we will support).

The document should be sent in the following format:

- (1) contributor(s)
- (2) any affiliation, as you would like it to appear in programme
- (3) email
- (4) title of proposal
- (5) body of abstract/proposal(s), (max 300 words, per proposal)
- (6) bio (max 200 words)
- (7) any social networks links and website/blog info.

Please use the **subject line: Trans- States Conference Submission**

All submissions should be sent by **Wednesday 6th March**, as an email attachment (text document or PDF) to the following address: cavan@trans-states.org.

Applicants may be from any background, with no minimum education levels, although are expected to demonstrate expertise in their area of interest. This must be summarised in the biography.

Additional Info:

Social network links, website/blog info and contact information can be added to your speaker page on our website, should you be accepted.. You can (if you wish)

supply us with any of the below links. Please stipulate which type of link it is and include the entire URL. For example:

Twitter: https://twitter.com/Trans_States

Graduate Student Conference

Natural Not Yet Understood: The Supernatural from Antiquity to the Medieval Period

13 April 2019, Brandeis University, Boston, USA

Keynote Speaker: Professor Debbie Felton, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Humans have always been drawn to the idea of creatures and worlds that exist alongside or outside of our own. These extraordinary ideas can take many forms, from average people with usual abilities to worlds of the dead and fantastic beasts. But as Elbert Hubbard once said, "The supernatural is the natural not yet understood." Today, we have realized that many of the past's supernatural events were simply misunderstood natural phenomena. We seek papers roughly 10 minutes in length that explore this idea of the supernatural of the distant past either within its original context or through a modern lens.

Possible topics include: Ancient religion, cultic practices, divination, ghosts and spirits, magic and witchcraft, monsters and the monstrous, mythology, and the preternatural more generally. We welcome submissions that touch on these and similar topics from graduate students of all levels and from disciplines including: Anthropology, Art History, Classics, Comparative Literature, History, Jewish Studies, Near Eastern Studies, Philosophy, Religious Studies, Sexuality Studies, and Women's Studies. Abstracts of no more than 300 words must be received by January 31, 2019. Please submit an anonymous abstract to brandeisclasgradconf@gmail.com in PDF (.pdf) format. AV support will be provided.

Please send all questions to the conference committee: Derrek Joyce (djjoyce@brandeis.edu), Matthew Previto (mjp6853@brandeis.edu), and Katherine Riggs (kriggs93@brandeis.edu). ♦