

Nevill Drury, ed. *Pathways in Modern Western Magic*. Richmond, CA: Conrescent Scholars Press, 2012. 470 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0984372997.

The late Anglo-Australian Dr. Nevill Drury (1947–2013) was known internationally for his works of popular scholarship, helping to bring an understanding of Western esotericism and contemporary Paganism to a global audience. The book under review here, an edited volume containing contributions from fifteen different scholars and esoteric practitioners, represents his penultimate publication. *Pathways in Modern Western Magic* covers a wide range of different magical groups, from Wicca to Cyber-Shamanism, and from the Golden Dawn to the Left-Hand Path. In doing so, it provides a good primer for those making their first foray into the academic study of Western esotericism or Pagan studies, allowing the reader to appreciate the great variety and diversity found within these broad movements.

Pathways has its origins in *The Handbook of Modern Western Magic*, a volume that Drury was to co-edit for Brill alongside the University of Gothenburg's Henrik Bogdan. When Brill's editorial board rejected many of the contributions as being too emic, Bogdan converted part of the project into a special issue of *Aries* (12, no. 1), while Drury took the other half to Conrescent Press, the U.S.-based creation of doctoral student Sam Webster. Although not an academic press, Conrescent has published the book under a new imprint, Conrescent Scholars, through which it seeks to release peer-reviewed works of scholarship on Paganism, esotericism, and magic that bring together the views of both academics and occult practitioners. This is an ethos that was shared by Drury; as both an esotericist and a scholar, he championed the value of emic, insider perspectives in the academic study of magic. Thus, most contributors to this volume are those who can offer an emic perspective on the subjects that they are studying; they are insiders to the world of magic, practitioners belonging to the traditions they are discussing. Although predominantly emic anthologies on this subject have been published before (James R. Lewis' 1996 *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* springs to mind), most recent volumes of this sort have had a slightly etic focus, and for this reason it is possible to view this book as a counterbalance to such publications.

Drury opens the anthology by advocating the unique utility of emic perspectives. Criticising the views of anthropologist Tanya Luhmann, he instead champions the anthropological perspectives of Jeanne Favret-Saada, Paul Stoller, and Susan Greenwood, all of whom have emphasised the value of “insider-practitioner” perspectives for the scholarly understanding of magical beliefs and practices. In doing so, Drury appears to construct a firm emic-etic dichotomy, which does not reflect the work of anthropologists like Sabina Magliocco who have straddled both positions. Drury’s ideas are expanded on in the following chapter by the anthropologist Lynne Hume of the University of Queensland, in which she defends emic approaches to those who – in her words – “know” magic to exist. Hume is herself a practising Pagan and believer in magic, and in places I felt that her argument veered from advocating emic approaches in anthropology to actively championing the idea that magic objectively exists, which I found difficult to accept.

The next three chapters are devoted to Wicca and other forms of contemporary witchcraft. Dominique Beth Wilson of the University of Sydney starts with an examination of how members of the Sydney-based Wiccan Applegrove coven understand the numinous through material items such as altars and costume, while Iowa State University’s Nikki Bado follows with a broad discussion of the Triple Goddess from her perspective as a feminist and Wiccan. Many interesting points are addressed, although I felt that it was aimed more at a practising Wiccan audience than a (multi- and non-religious) scholarly one. Marguerite Johnson of the University of Newcastle, Australia continues this exploration of Pagan female divinity, exploring the “dark aspects” of this deity. In doing so she looks at a variety of witchcraft traditions, although it would have been good to see parallels drawn with “dark” traditions like Typhonian Thelema or the Left-Hand Path.

An exploration of Neo-Shamanism follows, kicked off by Andrei A. Znamenski of the University of Memphis, who gives a good overview of the subject in the United States; unfortunately, the chapter is slightly marred by some dubious generalisations, such as the statement that “[h]istorically, Americans have been more religious and spiritual than Europeans” (106). Archaeologist and Neo-Shaman Robert J. Wallis of Richmond University, London follows with his discussion of the same subject in Europe, providing an interpretation influenced by the developments of the “New Animism.” Finally, Wallis’ oft-time collaborator Jenny Blain of Sheffield Hallam University proceeds to look at contemporary *seiðr*, a form of Neo-Shamanism based in large part on a practice found in Early Medieval Scandinavia.

Drury then takes us to explore the ceremonial magic of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain, starting with his own chapter on the magical practices of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, focusing on the group's use of symbolism and visionary texts, and making good use of quotations from practitioners themselves. He follows this with another chapter in which he explores the realms of Thelemic sex magic, and the influence that figures like Pascal Beverly Randolph exerted on the thought of Thelema's founder Aleister Crowley.

Proceeding with the Left Hand Path (LHP), Thomas Karlsson provides a strongly emic discussion of the occult order that he co-founded, the Dragon Rouge. It's an interesting paper, but I disagree with Karlsson's assertion that the LHP is not a religion; he chooses to define "religion" as "various obligations, rules and beliefs that assist the religious person to re-establish a sense of order in a presumed original ideal state" (247), something that does not accord with most recent definitions of the term used within religious studies. The University of Tromsø's James R. Lewis then explores legitimation strategies in American LaVeyan Satanism, looking at how the Church of Satan's founder Anton LaVey (1930–1997) used claims of science to legitimate his arguments, and how subsequent Satanists have used LaVey's magnum opus, *The Satanic Bible*, to legitimate their own arguments. Don Webb, of the University of California, Los Angeles, then offers an emic discussion of the beliefs and worldviews of the Temple of Set, a Church of Satan offshoot of which Webb is a member.

Moving on to the subject of esoteric art, Amy Hale of St. Petersburg College discusses the occult beliefs of British Surrealist painter and writer Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988), although unfortunately she has not been able to illustrate her piece with relevant images of the artists' work. Keeping with the theme, Drury then examines the commonalities between the work of Englishman Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956) and the Australian Rosaleen Norton (1917–1979), drawing on interesting points that are expanded upon in his book *Dark Spirits* (Salamander and Sons, 2012).

The final chapters represent a miscellany of eclectic magical traditions that have received little academic attention before. First up is a chapter from the late scholar and occultist Dave Evans which examines Chaos Magic, followed by a piece from Libuše Martínková of Charles University, Prague, which returns us to the realms of Neo-Shamanism to discuss Techno- and Cyber-Shamans. The anthology's final paper is provided by occultist Phil Hine, and consists of an emic discussion of how Indian Tantra can be adopted within the framework of Western esotericism.

Pathways brings together an interesting and diverse selection of papers on different aspects of Western magic. In doing so it ably accomplishes what Drury did best; producing clear, accessible introductions to the realms of the occult. Established academics will perhaps be frustrated that most of the authors have written at length on the same subjects before, but this should not be of concern for a novice scholar just embarking on their studies, for whom this volume is probably best suited. More problematic is that not all of the chapters are strictly scholarly; those of Hine, Webb, and Karlsson are essentially insider descriptions of their beliefs. They thus provide valuable source material for researchers of these traditions, but do not constitute scholarly papers in themselves. On a related note, I must admit to being a little disconcerted by some of the approaches on offer here, which to my mind verge into the borderlands of apologetics. Although I would commend Conerescent for their new series of scholarly publications, greater editorial discipline would certainly have benefited the work; in particular, the fact that each chapter uses a different system of referencing was a distraction.

The complex issues of the emic versus the etic, and the religionist versus the reductionist approach, have dogged both Pagan studies and the academic study of Western esotericism in recent years, and this work is far from bringing that debate to an end. However, it is particularly timely given the recent charges (made by the likes of Markus Altena Davidsen¹) that scholarship in this field has relied far too heavily on emic, religionist views. *Pathways* constitutes a powerful argument that emic perspectives should have a place in the study of modern Western magical groups.

Ethan Doyle White

¹ See Markus Altena Davidsen, "What is Wrong with Pagan Studies?," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 24 (2012): 183–99.