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Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema

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Editorial contacts:
Jimmy Elwing: jimmy.elwing@correspondencesjournal.com
Aren Roukema: aren.roukema@correspondencesjournal.com

Associate Editor
Allan Johnson: allan.johnson@correspondencesjournal.com

Book Review Editor
Egil Asprem: egil.asprem@correspondencesjournal.com

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Editorial:
Celebrating Our Wood Anniversary

Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema

Five years ago, we published the inaugural issue of *Correspondences*, which makes this volume a celebration – our Wood anniversary. What a journey it has been. For those of you who are late to the party, let us recapitulate what we've been doing these past years.

As described in our first editorial,[1] the idea behind the journal came in 2012 when we were both working with a student journal at the University of Amsterdam. We saw space and need for a web-based, globally accessible, open access journal devoted to the academic study of Western esotericism, and formed *Correspondences* to fill that gap. After much hard work and many mistakes, we proudly presented the first issue during the summer of 2013.

Since then we've made many additions and adaptations: We welcomed Dr. Egil Asprem, already an active member of our Editorial Board, as our Reviews Editor; changed our publication model to allow advance versions that give researchers the opportunity to present new work much more quickly than non-web-based publication models; and added another member to the *Correspondences* family in Dr. Allan Johnson, who has been working diligently to improve the journal's digital infrastructure. With Allan at the helm, we switched the journal's management and publishing software to Open Journal Systems (OJS). Allan is also the hidden hand behind our Facebook and Twitter feeds (see facebook.com/correspondences and twitter.com/corrjournal).

And so came 2017. In this year's volume we're happy to bring you three excellent research articles: Wouter J. Hanegraaff provides an examination

1 Jimmy Elwing and Aren Roukema, "Editorial," *Correspondences* 1, no. 1 (2013): 1–4.

of modern Theosophy and its practice of clairvoyance; James F. Lawrence performs a word history on the term *correspondentia* and tracks succeeding circles of the neologism's utility; and Julie Chajes details reincarnation as outlined in H.P. Blavatsky's writings. We're also excited to provide a review article on recent publications in the study of Satanism, penned by Ethan Doyle White. These articles, in addition to book reviews by František Novotný, Stanislav Panin, Justine M. Bakker, Jay Johnston and Julian Strube, form our anniversary volume.

To conclude this anniversary retrospective, we'd like to express our appreciation to all the authors, editorial board members, friends and colleagues without whom this journal would not have been possible. We would also like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to all the peer reviewers who have ensured the research quality of the articles considered for publication in *Correspondences*. Thank you for graciously giving of your time, expertise and energy.

Many thanks to those who have helped with peer review:

Susan Aberth, Egil Asprem, Henrik Bogdan, Jean-Pierre Brach, John Buescher, Dylan Burns, Yossi Chajes, Gordan Djurdjevic, Jacob Dorman, Ethan Doyle White, Claire Fanger, Laura Follesa, Robert Gilbert, Christian Giudice, Jocelyn Godwin, Kennet Granholm, Christian Greer, Fredrik Gregorius, Mikael Häll, Julie Chajes, Olav Hammer, Wouter Hanegraaff, Manon Hedenborg-White, Boaz Huss, Christopher McIntosh, Johan Nilsson, Hugh Page, Marco Pasi, Jesper Aa. Petersen, Christopher Plaisance, Jake Poller, Tim Rudbøg, Yosef Schwartz, Mark Sedgwick, Douglas Shantz, Jonathan Strom, Julian Strube, Philip Laurence Tite, Judith Weiss, Susanna Åkerman.

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The Theosophical Imagination

Wouter J. Hanegraaff
E-mail: w.j.hanegraaff@uva.nl

Abstract
It is well known that the worldviews of modern Theosophy are based largely on authoritative claims of superior clairvoyance. But what did clairvoyance really mean for Theosophists in the decades before and after 1900? How did it work? And where did the practice come from? I will be arguing that the specific type of clairvoyance claimed by Theosophists should not be confused – as is usually done in the literature – with its Spiritualist counterpart: while Spiritualists relied on somnambulist trance states induced by Mesmeric techniques, Theosophists relied on the human faculty of the imagination, understood as a superior cognitive power operating in a fully conscious state. As will be seen, this Theosophical understanding of the clairvoyant imagination can be traced very precisely to a forgotten nineteenth-century author, Joseph Rodes Buchanan, whose work was subsequently popularized by William and Elizabeth Denton. Buchanan's theory and practice of "psychometry" is fundamental to the clairvoyant claims of all the major Theosophists, from Helena P. Blavatsky herself to later authors such as Annie Besant, Charles Webster Leadbeater and Rudolf Steiner.

Keywords
Theosophy; Imagination; Clairvoyance; Somnambulism; Psychometry; Helena P. Blavatsky; Joseph Rodes Buchanan; William Denton; Elizabeth Denton; Charles Webster Leadbeater

1. Blavatsky's Clairvoyant Practice

In an undated letter to her younger sister Vera, written probably around 1876, Helena P. Blavatsky described how the goddess Isis herself inspired her first book. Because the passage is of great importance to what will follow, it must be quoted here at some length.

> Well, Vera, whether you believe me or not, something miraculous is happening to me. You cannot imagine in what a charmed world of pictures and visions I live. I am writing *Isis*; not writing, rather copying out and drawing that which She personally shows to me. Upon my word, sometimes it seems to me that the ancient Goddess of Beauty in person leads me through all the countries of past centuries which I have to describe. I sit with my eyes open and to all appearances see and hear everything real and actual around me, and yet at the same time I see and hear that which I write. I feel short of breath; I am afraid to make the slightest movement for fear the spell might be broken. Slowly century after century, image after image, float out of the distance and pass before me as if in a magic panorama; and meanwhile I put them together in my mind, fitting in epochs and dates, and know *for sure* that there can be *no mistake*. Races and nations, countries and cities, which have for long disappeared in the darkness of the prehistoric past, emerge and then vanish, giving place to others; and then I am told the consecutive dates. Hoary antiquity makes way for historical periods; myths are explained to me with events and people who have really existed, and every event which is at all remarkable, every newly-turned page of this many-colored book of life, impresses itself on my brain with photographic exactitude.[1]

Of course, the letter was written in Russian, and we happen to have no less than three different English translations.[2] The most correct one, printed above, was made by Blavatsky's niece Vera V. Johnston and published in the periodical *The Path* in 1895. Boris de Zirkoff's translation (in the long introduction to his corrected version of *Isis Unveiled*, published in 1972) is somewhat different but quite accurate as well.[3] Interestingly, however, the earliest and most frequently quoted version also turns out to be the least reliable. This one appeared in Alfred P. Sinnett's biography *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky* (1886) and

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[1] Anonymous, "Letters of H.P. Blavatsky, II," *The Path* 9, no.10 (January 1895): 300. The Russian original appeared in *Russkoye Obozreniye* 6 (November 1891): 274.

[2] I am grateful to Kateryna Zorya for preparing a meticulous line-by-line comparison between the three translations and the Russian original.

[3] Boris de Zirkov, "Introductory: How 'Isis Unveiled' Was Written," in H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. I: *Science*, 1–61 (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1972), 21.

was copied by Olcott in his *Old Diary Leaves* of 1895.[4] It is somewhat more poetic and takes many liberties with the original, but most importantly it adds some lines (highlighted below) that are clearly inspired by doctrinal concerns:

Johnston 1895	Sinnett 1886
… whether you believe me or not, something miraculous is happening to me. You cannot imagine in what a charmed world of pictures and visions I live. I am writing *Isis*; not writing, rather copying out and drawing that which She personally shows to me. Upon my word, sometimes it seems to me that the ancient Goddess of Beauty in person leads me through all the countries of past centuries which I have to describe. I sit with my eyes open and to all appearances see and hear everything real and actual around me, and yet at the same time I see and hear that which I write. I feel short of breath; I am afraid to make the slightest movement for fear the spell might be broken.	You may disbelieve me, but I tell you that in saying this I speak the truth; I am solely occupied, not with writing "Isis," but with *Isis* herself. I live in a kind of permanent enchantment, a life of visions and sights with open eyes, and no trance whatever to deceive my senses! I sit and watch the fair goddess constantly. And as she displays before me the secret meaning of her long-lost *secrets*, and the veil becoming with every hour thinner and more transparent, gradually falls off before my eyes, I hold my breath and can hardly trust to my senses!

It is not so difficult to explain these additions. The first one means that Blavatsky is not to be seen as an ordinary trance medium but as a superior clairvoyant who remains perfectly conscious and in control of her will. This was a crucial point in the doctrinal battles between Theosophists and Spiritualists, and I will return to its significance below. As for the second addition, the original letter made no reference to either the "long lost secrets" or "the veil" (of Isis) mentioned in Sinnett's version.[5] Here it is instructive to compare Blavatsky's

[4] A.P. Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky, Author of "Isis Unveiled," Compiled from Information Supplied by her Relatives and Friends* (New York: J.W. Bouton, 1886), 207–08; Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1875–78: The True Story of the Theosophical Society* (1895; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 214–15.

[5] Note that the title of Blavatsky's first book, *Isis Unveiled*, was decided upon only after May 8, 1877, when Blavatsky's publisher J.W. Bouton pointed out to her that a book titled *The Veil of Isis* was already on the market (letter by Bouton printed in De Zirkov, "Introductory," 43; cf. Alexander Wilder, "How 'Isis Unveiled' Was Written," *The Word* 7 (1908): 82, about

own description of how she wrote *Isis Unveiled* with the reports we have from other witnesses. In a famous passage, Henry Steel Olcott tells us that often, in the midst of her rapid writing, Blavatsky "would suddenly stop, look out into space with the vacant eye of the clairvoyant seer, shorten her vision as though to look at something held invisibly in the air before her, and begin copying on her paper what she saw."[6] He explained that

> while writing she was always half on this plane of consciousness, half on the other; and that she read her quotations clairvoyantly in the *Astral Light* and used them as they came à propos….[I]f ever anyone lived in two worlds habitually, it was she. Often – as above stated – I have seen her in the very act of copying extracts out of phantom books, invisible to my senses, yet most undeniably visible to her.[7]

Olcott's memories closely match those of Professor Hiram Corson, in whose house Blavatsky wrote parts of *Isis*. Discussing her numerous quotations from other books, he commented:

> She herself told me that she wrote them down as they appeared in her eyes on another plane of objective existence, that she clearly saw the page of the book, and the quotation she needed, and simply translated what she saw into English.… The hundreds of books she quoted were certainly not in my library, many of them not in America, some of them very rare and difficult to get in Europe, and if her quotations were from memory, then it was an even more startling feat than writing them from the ether.[8]

It is obvious that such reports had the effect of bestowing great authority on Blavatsky, and no less obvious that she knew what to do to impress those around her. As noted by the journalist Hannah Wolff (who had met her a year earlier, in 1874, before she was famous, and seems to have gotten to know her rather well), Blavatsky "delighted in gaining any kind of intellectual ascendency over those about her, and particularly in dominating men of known strong

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the inappropriateness of the "Isis" reference). In her letter to Vera, Blavatsky writes "I am writing *Isis*," which could refer to either of those two variants and shows that by this time she had abandoned the strange original title "A Skeleton Key to Mysterious Gates" (see Vsevolod Sergyeevich Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (London: Longmans, Green, 1895), 257).

6 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1875–1878*, 208–09.

7 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1875–1878*, 226.

8 Charles Lazenby, "'Isis Unveiled': Anecdotes about H.P. Blavatsky," *The Path* 1, no. 1 (July 1910): 4, here quoted according to Michael Gomes, *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), 114–15 (see also ibid., 112–13).

mental calibre. She would go any length to dupe them and scorn and mentally deride them when duped."[9]

Corson's wife seems to have been less credulous than her husband and those other "men of strong mental calibre." She certainly found Blavatsky very impressive: "That she writes as she does is a perfect mystery. The amount of work she accomplishes is perfectly marvelous. She never tires, and says that we two are awfully lazy."[10] However, Mrs Corson did not take Blavatsky's claims of clairvoyance at face value: "Her active imagination is at work at all times, and breaks into the most serious occupations. She will stop to listen to its illusions and believes them to be facts."[11]

In sum, Olcott and Corson saw Blavatsky as a powerful clairvoyant who could read "phantom books" invisible to others, while Corson's wife saw those feats as mere figments of her imagination. Still, had they been confronted with such scepticism, Olcott and Corson would no doubt have responded, "But what then about all those books she was quoting, even though she did not have access to them?" To clear the way for further discussion of Blavatsky's use of the imagination, this objection must be dealt with first.

2. Blavatsky's Sources

Isis Unveiled contains references to ca. 1400 titles, so Blavatsky's erudition might seem impressive at first sight. However, we know that the book relied to a very great extent on largely unacknowledged borrowings and quotations that can be traced to just about one hundred nineteenth-century books and articles about religion and the occult. This fact was demonstrated conclusively by the researches of William Emmette Coleman, who notoriously accused Blavatsky of plagiarism in his much-noted article "The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings," published in 1895 as an appendix to Vsevolod

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[9] Hannah M. Wolff, "Madame Blavatsky," *The Better Way* 9, no. 19 (7 November 1891): 2; and idem, *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, New Series, 2, no. 32 (2 January 1892): 501–02. See also the substantially abbreviated version published one month after the original version: Wolff, "Madame Blavatsky," *The Two Worlds* 4, no. 213 (11 December 1891): 671–72. Finally, see Sara E. Hervey, "Madame Blavatsky," *The Better Way* 9, no. 25 (19 December 1891): 6 ("I knew her at the same time as did Mrs. Wolff, and all she has said about her is strictly true"), and John Patrick Deveney, "Ozymandias," in *Keeping the Link Unbroken: Theosophical Studies Presented to Ted G. Davy on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Gomes, 1–21 (n.p.: TRM, 2004), 14–15n3.

[10] Letter of Mrs. C. Corson to her son Eugene, 20 September 1875 (Corson Papers, Dept. of MSS, Cornell University Library; as quoted in Gomes, *Dawning*, 113).

[11] Letter of Corson to Eugene, 20 September 1875.

Sergyeevich Solovyoff's *A Modern Priestess of Isis*.[12] While this appendix is well known, scholars of Theosophy seem to have neglected the meticulous analyses on which the article was founded. These can be found in a series of articles by Coleman titled "The Unveiling of 'Isis Unveiled': A Literary Revelation," published in an obscure spiritualist journal titled *The Golden Way* in 1891.[13]

There is no doubt that Coleman was a far from impartial researcher.[14] He was a convinced Spiritualist who hoped to destroy the credibility of the occultist competition at a time when the Theosophical Society was on the ascendant while Spiritualism was in decline, and he was a member of the Society for Psychical Research, which had already denounced Blavatsky as a fraud in its so-called *Hodgson Report* ten years before, in 1885. However, while Coleman's polemical intentions are obvious, there can be no doubt that his analysis was essentially correct. As recently demonstrated by Jake Winchester, his analyses were meticulous and his evidence was conclusive. One therefore misses the true significance of Coleman's achievement if one sees nothing else in it than an exercise in debunking Blavatsky as a plagiarizer. From a scholarly point of view, much more important than such moral condemnations is the fact that he created the groundwork for a scholarly project that should have been very high on the agenda of modern scholars of Theosophy but still has not seen the light of day, that is to say, a professionally annotated critical edition of *Isis Unveiled* (as well as, perhaps even more importantly, of *The Secret Doctrine*). Such an edition should not limit itself to merely listing all those ca. 1400 sources that happen to be mentioned by Blavatsky.[15] Rather, it should take the next step of distinguishing critically between first-hand and second-hand (or, for that matter, third- or fourth-hand) quotations so as to trace the actual processes of borrowing, attribution and interpretation. Of course, from an orthodox Theosophical perspective such work is irrelevant and misguided because no such

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[12] William Emmette Coleman, "Appendix C: The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings," in Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, 353–66.

[13] Ibid., "The Unveiling of 'Isis Unveiled': A Literary Revelation," *The Golden Way* 1, no. 2 (April 1891): 65–75; 1, no. 3 (May 1891): 151–63; 1, no. 4 (June 1891): 207–21; 1, no. 5 (July 1891): 273–78; 1, no. 6 (August 1891): 335–41; 1, no. 7 (September 1891): 410–16; 1, no. 8 (October 1891): 470–79. For Coleman's summary conclusions, see the part in *Golden Way* 1, no. 8 (1891): 470.

[14] On Coleman and his critique of Blavatsky, see the detailed analysis in Jake B. Winchester's unpublished M.A. thesis "Roots of the Oriental Gnosis: W.E. Coleman, H.P. Blavatsky, S.F. Dunlap," (University of Amsterdam, 2015), 3–30.

[15] Such an overview has been provided by Tim Rudbøg in his unpublished PhD dissertation "H.P. Blavatsky's Theosophy in Context: The Construction of Meaning in Modern Western Esotericism" (University of Exeter, 2013).

mundane editorial processes are supposed to have taken place at all. However, in sharp contrast with Corson's statement quoted above, in fact we know how easy it was for Blavatsky to access her sources directly or indirectly. Alexander Wilder has described the working space in her study, which was referred to as her "den": it was "a spot fenced off on three sides by temporary partitions, writing desk and shelves for books. She had it as convenient as it was unique. She had but to reach out an arm to get a book, paper or other article that she might desire, that was within the enclosure."[16]

If one follows in Coleman's tracks and takes the first steps towards an analysis of *Isis Unveiled* based upon standard methods of textual criticism, the true backgrounds to Blavatsky's work begin opening up. Based on his researches published in 1891, Coleman compiled a short list of titles that were used most frequently as a source of indirect references and quotations. He did not present them in a strictly logical order, so I will here present the same list ordered hierarchically according to the number of passages quoted:

Dunlap's *Sod: the Son of the Man*,	134
Ennemoser's *History of Magic*, English translation,	107
Demonologia,	85
Dunlap's *Spirit History of Man*,	77
Salverte's *Philosophy of Magic*, English translation,	68
Dunlap's *Sod: the Mysteries of the Adoni*,	65
Des Mousseaux's *Magie au Dix-neuvième Siècle*,	63
Des Mousseaux's *Hauts Phénomènes de la Magie*,	45
King's *Gnostics*, 1st edition,	42
Supernatural Religion,	40
Mackenzie's *Masonic Cyclopaedia*,	36
Hone's *Apocryphal New Testament*,	27
Jacolliot's *Christna et le Christ*,	23
Cory's *Ancient Fragments*,	20
Howitt's *History of the Supernatural*,	20
Jacolliot's *Le Spiritisme dans le Monde*,	19
Jacolliot's *Bible in India*, English translation	17
Des Mousseaux's *Moeurs et Pratiques des Demons*,	16

At the very top of this list we find a completely forgotten book by a certain Samuel Fales Dunlap, on whom more below: *Sod: The Son of Man* (published in 1861). Second comes William Ennemoser's *History of Magic* (first published

[16] Wilder, "How 'Isis Unveiled' was Written," 80.

in German in 1844, translated by William Howitt in 1854).[17] Third comes a popular *Demonologia* published by one "J.S.F." in 1827. We then get two more titles by Dunlap and a well-known popular volume by the French author Eusèbe Salverte. Noticeable too are no less than three publications by Roger Gougenot des Mousseaux, a conservative Roman Catholic author nowadays remembered mostly for his virulent antisemitism, but whose demonological writings deserve more serious attention by scholars of nineteenth-century esotericism than they have received so far.[18]

It is frankly amazing that over a period of no less than 125 years, no scholar of Theosophy has taken Coleman's list seriously enough to take a closer look at these authors and their relation to Blavatsky's work. It is only in 2015 that a Masters student at the University of Amsterdam, Jake Winchester, corrected this omission, at least in the fascinating case of Samuel Fales Dunlap (1825–1905).[19] We learn from him that Dunlap was a wealthy Harvard-educated New York lawyer who had spent a period in Berlin where he studied ancient philology and delved into German Orientalist scholarship. His confused and unsystematic writings on ancient religion and mythology are largely grounded in German Orientalist scholarship, most of which was never translated into English. As already noted by Coleman, Dunlap's books "consist almost wholly of quotations from and summaries of the writings of other authors, strung together by connecting remarks,"[20] and Dunlap himself admitted that his works were "written by quotations."[21] This made them into ideal reference works for Blavatsky. Sitting there in her "den," she did indeed plunder Dunlap, not only for many quotations

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[17] On Ennemoser, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 266–73.

[18] See Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London: Serif, 2005), 46–50. Cf. Pagès, "Le chevalier Gougenot des Mousseaux," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 82 (1830): 304–24; Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 92–97. For an excellent analysis of Gougenot des Mousseaux as the originator of the "Judaeo-Masonic Conspiracy" myth, see Emmanuel Kreis, *Quis ut Deus? Antijudéo-maçonnisme et occultisme en France sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2017), chapter 2.

[19] Winchester, "Roots of the Oriental Gnosis." A year later, in 2016, Julie Chajes discussed Blavatsky's use of sources in "Construction Through Appropriation: Kabbalah in Blavatsky's Early Works," in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah and the Transformation of Traditions*, eds. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss, (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016), and "Blavatsky and Monotheism: Towards the Historicisation of a Critical Category," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016).

[20] Coleman, "Unveiling" (1, no. 6), 335. Cf. Winchester, "Roots of the Oriental Gnosis," 39.

[21] Samuel Fales Dunlap, *Sod: The Mysteries of Adoni* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), vi.

but also for documentary confirmation of some of her most basic assumptions, notably the distinction between popular exoteric teachings and higher esoteric mysteries derived from the Hindus, Chaldaeans, Egyptians, and Persians, and transmitted through secret Pythagorean, Sabian, and Essenian sects.

Still, this was not all. In addition to the working library available in her "den," Blavatsky could of course rely on her memory, which seems to have been excellent. She had been a voracious reader of books on religion and the occult ever since her early days in Russia, around the age of fifteen, when she encountered the Masonic/Rosicrucian myth of the "unknown superiors" while reading widely in the rich occult library of her maternal great-grandfather, Prince Pavel Dolgorukov.[22] *Isis Unveiled* can therefore be seen as the culmination of a decades-long process of digesting tons of scholarly and non-scholarly literature congenial to her developing beliefs and intuitions. As rightly noted by Winchester, Blavatsky's genius lies in her remarkable ability to bring all these materials together and integrate them creatively in a larger synthesis all her own.

3. Blavatsky's Imagination

One has to conclude that given the sources of information available to her Blavatsky needed no supra-natural assistance to write *Isis Unveiled*, just a sharp mind, a good memory, a lively imagination, and – as will be seen – a little help from her friends. That she was a very clever woman is clear from her biography, but her imaginative powers may not have received the attention they deserve. One should remember that Blavatsky's maternal grandmother, Helena Pawlowna Dolgorukowa (1788–1860), was a natural scientist of international renown, spoke five languages, and was a talented painter and musician as well.[23] Her daughter Helena Andrejewna (1814–1842), H.P.B.'s mother, became a successful novelist during the last years of her short life.[24] The third Helena, the founder of Theosophy, clearly inherited these intellectual and imaginative talents from the maternal family line.

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[22] K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 19–22.

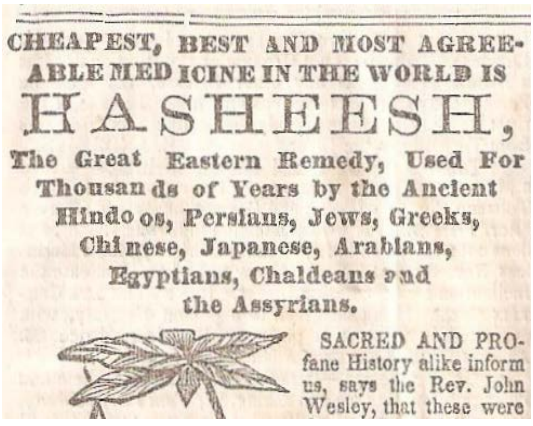
[23] Ursula Keller and Natalja Sharandak, *Madame Blavatsky: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Insel, 2013), 22–24; cf. Charles Johnston, "Madame Blavatsky's Forbears" (orig. published in *Theosophical Quarterly*, July 1932), repr. in *Hidden Wisdom: Collected Writings of Charles Johnston*, John W. Fergus ed., vol. 4, 35–41 (n.p.: Kshetra Books, 2014).

[24] Keller and Sharandak, *Madame Blavatsky*, 25–32; cf. Johnston, "Madame Blavatsky's Forbears" (according to Johnston, the powerful critic V.G. Belinski even called her "the George Sand of Russia").

Blavatsky herself did not hesitate to describe her work as creative: "I'll show them up, your European and American men of science, Papists, Jesuits, and that race of the half-learned, *les châtres de la science*, who destroy everything without creating anything and are incapable of creating."[25] Nevertheless, Blavatsky's imaginative abilities have been rather neglected and played down by herself and many of her followers, for reasons that are easy to understand: quite obviously, too much emphasis on her personal creative and intellectual talents would undermine her claims of superior knowledge based upon clairvoyant perception and telepathic contact with her Masters. In other words, she should not be perceived as just another smart and erudite woman who could very well have reached her convictions just from reading books, or, even worse, as a creative writer who relied on her fertile imagination. On the contrary, she should be seen as an inspired seeress who revealed true *knowledge*; and in order to qualify as "knowledge" at all, it had to be grounded not in her personal imagination but in her powers of clairvoyance. Of course, clairvoyance means literally the ability to "see clearly;" however, it was not supposed to consist of the power of clearly seeing vivid images in one's mind, but of perceiving the true nature of reality "beyond the veil" and communicating with invisible entities whose knowledge was superior to anything science or theology could offer. Against common assumptions, I will be arguing that such an understanding of clairvoyance was more at home in the context of Mesmeric somnambulism and Spiritualism than in Theosophy. In sharp contrast with Mesmeric/Spiritualist understandings, Theosophical clairvoyance was so closely linked to the faculty of imagination as to make it questionable whether the two can be distinguished at all.

If we look again at Blavatsky's letter to her sister Vera, the picture seems quite clear. Those waking reveries of enchanted panoramas gliding by before her inner gaze, those silent pictures and dreamlike images of past events and the great transformations of history are clearly described by Blavatsky herself as vivid products of the imagination. I see no reason to doubt that this recollection of how she watched the display by "the ancient Goddess of Beauty" is quite authentic, and it becomes even more convincing if we add one further element. Hannah Wolff (already quoted above) reports a detail that may be surprising and even somewhat shocking to admirers of Blavatsky, but is perfectly understandable if seen in its proper historical context. Like other occultists at the time – with Alphonse-Louis Cahagnet and Paschal Beverly Randolph as

[25] Blavatsky to N.A. Aksakov, 20 September 1875, as quoted in Zirkov, "Introductory," 6 (see also the slightly different formulation in Solovyov, *Modern Priestess of Isis*, 257).


CHEAPEST, BEST AND MOST AGREEABLE MEDICINE IN THE WORLD IS

HASHEESH,

The Great Eastern Remedy, Used For Thousands of Years by the Ancient Hindoos, Persians, Jews, Greeks, Chinese, Japanese, Arabians, Egyptians, Chaldeans and the Assyrians.

SACRED AND PROfane History alike inform us, says the Rev. John Wesley, that these were

crucial pioneers[26] – Blavatsky was an enthusiastic user of hashish. At the time, this was a perfectly legal substance that could be bought at pharmacies and was often advertised (as one can see from this newspaper clipping) as an "Eastern remedy, Used for Thousands of Years by the Ancient Hindoos, Persians, Jews, Greeks, Chinese, Japanese, Arabians, Egyptians, Chaldeans and the Assyrians." Given such impressive Oriental origins, and given Blavatsky's basic interests, how indeed could she *not* have been interested in hashish? In Hannah Wolff's words,

> [Blavatsky] was addicted to the use of haschish. She several times endeavoured to persuade me to try the effect upon myself. She said she had smoked opium, seen its visions and dreamed its dreams, but that the beatitudes enjoyed by the use of haschisch were as heaven to its hell. She said she found nothing to compare with its effect in arousing and stimulating the imagination.[27]

Even normal tobacco seems to have been a powerful stimulant for Blavatsky, as reported by Albert Rawson, her companion in Cairo. "My most precious thoughts come to me in my smoking hours," she told him, "My mind is then tranquil, and I feel lifted from the earth, and I close my eyes and float on and on, anywhere or wherever I wish."[28] Of course this sounds like a very close analogy

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[26] See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The First Psychonaut? Alphonse-Louis Cahagnet's Experiments with Narcotics," *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 7, no. 2 (Special Issue: "Drugs and Religious Experience"): 105–23.

[27] Wolff, "Madame Blavatsky," *The Two Worlds* 4, 672; idem *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, New Series 2, 502. See the interesting footnote in John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 539n71.

[28] A.L. Rawson, "Mme. Blavatsky: A Theosophical Occult Apology," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* (February 1892): 202.

to what she describes in the letter to her sister Vera about traveling through history on the wings of her imagination. As for hashish more specifically, Rawson reported a conversation with her that seems of great importance:

> [Blavatsky:] "Hasheesh multiplies one's life a thousandfold. My experiences are as real as if they were ordinary events of actual life. Ah! I have the explanation. It is a recollection of my former existences, my previous incarnations. It is a wonderful drug, and it clears up a profound mystery."
>
> [Rawson responded:] "What a crowded memory we should have if the incidents of a few thousand previous incarnations should return at once!"
>
> [Blavatsky:] "Idiot!…Only one series can by any possibility be in the mind at a given time. But suppose – ah! only think, if some of those incarnations had been in a brute or a reptile. Then what would the sensations be?"[29]

The relevance of these quotations to our topic should be clear. Not a word is being said about clairvoyance in these passages, but one sees clearly how Blavatsky was in the habit of giving free rein to her imagination, blissfully daydreaming about previous incarnations, past epochs, and glorious ancient civilizations, while under the influence of tobacco or hashish. It seems that her natural tendency was to dream about other times and other places, and of course that fits perfectly with what we know of her life. All her travels were inspired by a deep longing to explore the mysterious countries and cultures beyond the horizon, and her writings testify to an equally deep longing to move beyond the horizon of time and explore the momentous events of past epochs and cultures as well. Of course, our imagination always works with materials already present in our minds, and in dreaming about things far away and long ago, it would be natural for Blavatsky to depend heavily on the Orientalist scholarship and occultist literature that she had been reading all her life.

4. Blavatsky's Ghostwriters

That Blavatsky wrote *Isis* "with a little help from her friends," as suggested above, is in fact an understatement. It is clear that without the labors of her long-suffering collaborator Henry Steel Olcott and Bouton's editor, the classical scholar Alexander Wilder – in addition to various other people who were involved in the process at some point and to some extent – the book would never have seen the light

[29] Rawson, "Mme. Blavatsky," 202.

of day.[30] The manuscript went through an enormously complicated and chaotic process of writing, re-writing, correcting, cutting and pasting, editing, re-editing, and revising; but even so, with characteristic candor Blavatsky herself would later admit that the published version still had "no system in it" and looked "as if a mass of independent paragraphs having no connection with each other, had been well shaken up in a waste-basket, and then taken out at random and – published."[31]

When Blavatsky first showed her writings to Olcott, she was not surprised to hear from him that everything would have to be rewritten.[32] They then set out to work on the manuscript evening after evening, with Olcott not just "englishing" its formulations, according to Blavatsky, but editing what seems to have been one uninterrupted string of words as separate chapters. The subdivision into two volumes ("Science" and "Religion") came from Olcott as well.[33] Furthermore, Olcott himself and several friends and visitors, such as J.L. O'Sullivan and A.L. Rawson, were invited to help out with *Isis* by contributing pieces of text of their own. Nevertheless, when an 870–page manuscript had finally emerged from this process, Blavatsky was so dissatisfied that she insisted on starting all over again[34] – but hardly with less chaotic results. Presumably it was the result of all these labours that Olcott finally presented to Alexander Wilder, who described it as "truly a ponderous document" that was clearly "too long for remunerative publishing."[35] Hence he was eventually ordered by Bouton (who had procured the copyright in his own name and could therefore do with it whatever he wanted!) to abridge the work. In his own words, "enough was taken out to fill a volume of respectable dimension,"[36] and interestingly, Blavatsky seems to have had no problem with these radical cuts: "What had been taken out was 'flapdoodle,' she declared."[37] Then, when the galley proofs came in, Blavatsky by her own words "made a mess of it

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[30] Crucial information for reconstructing the process of writing *Isis Unveiled* can be found in Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1875–78*, 202–54; H.P. Blavatsky, "My Books," *Lucifer* 8, no. 45 (15 May 1891): 241–47; Wilder, "How 'Isis Unveiled Was Written'."

[31] Blavatsky, "My Books," 241. Cf. Olcott: "Her own manuscript was often a sight to behold; cut and patched, re-cut and re-pasted…a great smudge of interlineations, erasures, orthographic corrections and substitutions" (*Old Diary Leaves 1875–78*, 243). Unfortunately, these manuscripts did not survive, presumably because Wilder's housemaid accidentally threw them away!

[32] Blavatsky, "My Books," 244. That is to say: everything she claimed to have written herself rather than having received as dictations from her Masters.

[33] Blavatsky, "My Books," 244.

[34] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1875–78*, 217.

[35] Wilder, "How 'Isis Unveiled' Was Written," 78.

[36] Wilder, "How 'Isis Unveiled' Was Written," 79.

[37] Wilder, "How 'Isis Unveiled' Was Written," 82.

from the beginning."[38] Her many "corrections and alterations" resulted in such a huge bill from the publisher that she finally "had to give up the proof-reading."[39] The real problem, as pointed out by Wilder, was that she never stopped adding new materials: in fact, those "alterations" grew to "a full third, or even more, of what was published."[40] The truth is that Blavatsky never finished *Isis* at all: the book simply came to an end because the publisher told her she had to stop. Apart from all these troubles, the proofs went "through a number of willing but not very careful hands" and finally to "the tender mercies of the publisher's proof-reader."[41]

Blavatsky herself later described *Isis* as a textual disaster: "The full consciousness of this sad truth dawned on me when, for the first time after its publication in 1877, I read the work through from the first to the last page, in India in 1881."[42] She now realized that the book was confused, full of misprints and misquotations, useless repetitions and irritating digressions, superfluous materials and internal contradictions. So bad did she find it, that when she started to write a new book in the 1880s, she thought of it for a long time as a "new version of Isis Unveiled" that should replace its first incarnation. Nevertheless, the genesis of *The Secret Doctrine* was hardly less chaotic, for once again Blavatsky made a big mess of it. This time, much of the credit must go to the labours of Archibald Keightley (1859–1930) and his uncle Bertram Keightley (1860–1944), two Theosophists with a Cambridge education who were much better qualified to edit a large and complicated book. Their opinion of the original manuscript was identical to Olcott's opinion in the case of *Isis*:

> But we both read the whole mass of MSS. – a pile over three feet high – most carefully through, correcting the English and punctuation where absolutely indispensable, and then, after prolonged consultation, faced the author in her den – in my case with sore trembling, I remember – with the solemn opinion that the whole of the matter must be re-arranged on some definite plan, since as it stood the book was another *Isis Unveiled*, only far worse, so far as absence of plan and consecutiveness were concerned.
>
> After some talk, H.P.B. told us to go to Tophet [that is: to Hell] and do what we liked. She had had more than enough of the blessed thing, had given it over to us, washed her hands thereof entirely, and we might get out of it as best we could.[43]

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38 Blavatsky, "My Books," 244.
39 Blavatsky, "My Books," 245.
40 Wilder, "How 'Isis Unveiled' Was Written," 86.
41 Blavatsky, "My Books," 245.
42 Blavatsky, "My Books," 241.
43 Constance Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences of H.P. Blavatsky and 'The Secret Doctrine'"* (London:

So that is what they did. In an almost exact repetition of Olcott's editorial work on *Isis*, the entire division into "Cosmogenesis" and "Anthropogenesis," as well as the chapter arrangement of *The Secret Doctrine*, comes not from Blavatsky but from the Keightleys. It is impossible to say with any degree of certainty how much they contributed to the final incarnation of the book, but it is safe to say that Blavatsky was not the only writer. As for Blavatsky's own creative process while writing her chaotic manuscripts for *The Secret Doctrine*, it seems to have remained very much the same as with *Isis*, as she explained in a letter to Sinnett – "only far clearer and better.…Such pictures, panoramas, scenes, antediluvian dramas, with all that! Never saw or heard better."[44]

5. The Key to Theosophy: Buchanan's Psychometry

The question now arises: how is it that the human faculty of *imagination* could come to be interpreted as a faculty of *clairvoyance*, i.e. as a means of gaining objective *knowledge* superior to conventional science? The French word *clairvoyance* emerged during the 1780s and originally meant nothing more than "sagacity" or "penetration." Clairvoyance seems to have attained its present meaning of supra-normal vision, both in French and English, as a literal translation from the German word *Hellsehen* that began to be used by German Mesmerists during the 1790s to refer to the visionary capacities that were observed in patients under magnetic trance.[45] This is how the term clairvoyance continued to be understood when Mesmerism developed into Spiritualism after the mid-nineteenth century. As is well known, the occultist movement emerged as a reaction against popular Spiritualism, and emphasized the importance of the active will (gendered masculine) as opposed to a state of passive trance (gendered feminine) that was required for mediumistic communications. This is why Theosophists such as Sinnett and Olcott found it so important (in the case of Blavatsky's letter to Vera discussed at the beginning of this article) to stress that she received her "visions and sights with open eyes and no trance whatever to deceive [her] senses." In short, occultist clairvoyance had to be different from Spiritualist clairvoyance.

Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893), 91.

44 Sinnett, *Incidents*, 303.

45 Source: Google Ngram viewer for "clairvoyance" (French, English) and "Hellsehen." Note that researching the origins and frequency of the term is complicated by Google Ngram's imperfections in reading German gothic script: as a result, terms such as *hälschen*, *herzschen* or *herrschen* are all misinterpreted as *Hellsehen*.

Josef Rodes Buchanan (1814–1899)

The foundations for this new occultist and eventually Theosophical understanding of clairvoyance appear to have been created by a largely forgotten medical innovator named Joseph Rodes Buchanan.[46] In a long article published in his periodical *Buchanan's Journal of Man* in 1849, Buchanan described how seven years earlier, in the autumn of 1842, he had discovered

> the existence of a wonderful power in the constitution of man, the discovery and use of which at once opens before us a wide realm of knowledge. In that single discovery, lay the germ of a science of lofty pretensions, and so wonderful in its facts as to be difficult of belief, if not utterly incredible, to the greater portion of our scientific men. Yet, high as its pretensions are, they are demonstrable in the most rigid manner, and, incredulous as the public may be, it cannot be long ere the truth of my assertions shall be familiarly known in Europe and America.[47]

Buchanan called his new science "psychometry," and his announcement seems to have had a considerable impact on his contemporaries. Just eight years after its discovery, in 1850, the then well-known poet and Unitarian minister John Pierpoint delivered a poem at the anniversary of Yale College, which demonstrates that psychometry was seen as the spiritual parallel to the physical process of photography, or daguerrotype. The poem was titled "Progress," and contained the following lines extolling Buchanan over Daguerre:

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[46] For this discovery I am indebted to the M.A. thesis of my former student Greg Hester, "Into the Celestial Spheres of Divine Wisdom: Joseph Rodes Buchanan and Nineteenth-Century Esotericism" (University of Amsterdam, 2015).

[47] Joseph Rodes Buchanan, "Art. I. – Psychometry," *Buchanan's Journal of Man* 1, no. 2 (February 1849): 49–62; 1, no. 3 (March 1849): 97–113; 1, no. 4 (April 1849): 146–56, here 49.

> But much, Daguerre, as has thy genius done
> In educating thus Latona's son,
> In thus educing, in the god of light
> The power to paint so, at a single sight,
> Buchanan has transcended thee, as far
> As the sun's face outshines the polar star.
> Thine *art* can catch and keep what meets the eye –
> His *science*, subjects that far deeper lie.
> Thy skill shows up the face, the outward whole –
> His science measures and reveals the soul.[48]

What was this superior science all about? Much later, in his *Manual of Psychometry*, first published in 1885, Buchanan would describe psychometry – literally "soul-measuring" – as nothing less than "*the development and exercise of the divine faculties in man*, a demonstration of the old conception of poetry and mystic philosophy as to the Divine interior of the human soul, and the marvelous approximation of man toward omniscience."[49] However, psychometry seems to have begun rather modestly with Buchanan's discovery that many people appeared to be able to blindly "feel" the exact nature of a metal or another natural substance simply by means of physical contact.[50] Since he knew that magnetic somnambules had been making such claims for decades,[51] he was at pains to emphasize that no Mesmeric trance was required.[52] In contrast to the latter, psychometry could be practiced in a perfectly normal state of consciousness, due to a natural sensitivity that (as Buchanan would come to emphasize later) turned out to be surprisingly widespread, especially among women.[53] While distancing himself from Mesmerist somnambulism, Buchanan claimed to have discovered the key to what Theosophists would later call the "hidden mysteries of nature and the powers latent in man":

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[48] Joseph Rodes Buchanan, *Manual of Psychometry: The Dawn of a New Civilization* (Boston: Holman Brothers, Press of the Roxbury Advocate, 1885) Pt. 1, 1–2.

[49] Buchanan, *Manual of Psychometry*, Pt. 1, 9–10.

[50] Buchanan, "Art I. – Psychometry," 51.

[51] For a classic example, see the many experiments with physical substances described in meticulous detail by Justinus Kerner, *Die Seherin von Prevorst: Eröffnungen über das innere Leben des Menschen und über das Hereinragen einer Geisterwelt in die unsere* (Leipzig: Reclam, n.d. (orig. 1829)), 81–134 (summarized in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Versuch über Friederike Hauffe: Zum Verhältnis zwischen Lebensgeschichte und Mythos der 'Seherin von Prevorst'," Pt. 1, *Suevica: Beiträge zur schwäbische Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte* 8 (1999/2000): 24–25).

[52] Buchanan, "Art I. – Psychometry," 52.

[53] Buchanan, *Manual of Psychometry*, Pt. 1, 163; Pt. 2, 20.

> The dark underworld of intellect in which we find the responses of oracles, the revelations of magnetic somnambules, the prophecies of the saints, the forecasts of the fortune teller, the mysterious presentiments and sudden impressions by which many are guided, the warnings of death, calamity or accident, and the mysterious influences attached to places, apartments, amulets and souvenirs, is illuminated by the light of psychometric science, and its phenomena made entirely intelligible.…In studying Psychometry, mystery disappears, and the most cautious inquirer in vital science will feel that he is treading on safe and solid ground.[54]

Buchanan soon began to broaden his explorations and found that psychometrically gifted individuals could divine the nature of substances even *without* physical contact.[55] Next he discovered that if an autograph letter in a sealed envelope was placed on a psychometrist's forehead, he or she could give elaborate and correct descriptions of the person who had written the letter.[56] Eventually, however, he found that *any* object whatsoever could trigger such feats of clairvoyant perception of the person to whom it belonged or with whom it had been in close contact.[57] Finally, Buchanan went all the way towards concluding that not even contact with an object was required.[58] The more experiments he performed, the broader became his concept of psychometry, until it finally amounted to little more than the very simple and general claim that many of us have a natural ability to gain direct and wholly accurate knowledge about anything whatsoever.

This claim was a direct reflection of contemporary fascination with photography (daguerrotype). It was based upon the radical assumption (which psychometrists believed they could demonstrate empirically) that absolutely *everything* that had ever happened anywhere in the universe was leaving a kind of photographic imprint or reflection that was normally invisible but could be retrieved by a sufficiently sensitive person. As already mentioned, it is crucial that psychometry required no trance, nor any other unusual state of consciousness: all one needed to do was concentrate one's attention on whatever one wanted to know, and that knowledge would appear in the mind.

Buchanan's approach was purely empirical. He provided countless case descriptions but showed little interest in theoretical explanations for the powers of psychometry. He was content to speak vaguely about some kind of "continual or continuous sympathy," "some imponderable agent" or "subtil [sic] influences

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54 Buchanan, *Manual of Psychometry*, Pt. 1, 10–11.
55 Buchanan, "Art I. – Psychometry," 53.
56 Buchanan, "Art I. – Psychometry," 57ff.
57 Buchanan, "Art I. – Psychometry," 107ff.
58 Buchanan, "Art I. – Psychometry," 153.

which emanate from adjacent objects" which must be somehow connected to the nervous system and its susceptibility to invisible magnetic or electrical forces.[59] At other times, he used a more psychological language, very much in the tradition of German Romantic speculations about the nightside of nature:

> It appears that there are deep currents of feeling, which flow beneath the surface, without entering into the *daylight of consciousness*. In these subterranean streams of emotion (to borrow the language of poets) heart speaks to heart; and the magic ties which bind us together in love, are formed in the darker chambers of the soul, where reason, reflection and observation have no place.[60]

As Buchanan's thinking about psychometry developed from his original articles of 1849 to his *Manual of Psychometry* published in 1885, he finally dispensed with any technical explanation whatsoever. It ultimately did not matter that much to him whether the psychometric power should be explained in physical, occult, or mental terms – or all of them at the same time. The important point was *that it worked*.

Buchanan was a progressive thinker, and extremely optimistic about the unlimited applications of psychometry, for instance in solving crimes and radically improving the general state of society. But most relevant for us is his vision of psychometric *historiography*.[61] As early as 1849, he wrote:

> If then, man, in every act, leaves the impression, or daguerrotype of his mental being upon the scenes of his life and subjects of his action, we are by this law furnished with a new clue to the history of our race; and I think it highly probable, that, by the application of this principle, the chasms of history may be supplied, and a glimpse may be obtained of unrecorded ages and nations, whose early history is lost in darkness.[62]

In his manual of 1885, finally, psychometry had become not just an ability to see things that had happened in the past, but one that allowed the human mind to grasp the very essence of things:

> That interior faculty grasps the idea in its essence…and then grasps the object in its wide-reaching consciousness. Whether it be a city in China or Africa, a saint or leader whose name has almost disappeared in the twilight of history, a pre-historic race on earth, or a body in our planetary system, it is conceived, understood and

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59 Buchanan, "Art. I. – Psychometry," 53–55.

60 Buchanan, "Art. I. – Psychometry," 153 (emphasis in original).

61 E.g. Buchanan, *Manual of Psychometry*, 16, 57.

62 Buchanan, "Art. I. – Psychometry," 147.

> reported. The divine realm of universal consciousness or intellectual omniscience seems to become occupied by man and either he comes into *rapport* with that limitless sphere of intelligence, or that intelligence is dormant within himself, and is roused by an effort to assert its powers.[63]

6. The Soul of Things: William and Elizabeth Denton

Inspired by Buchanan's original exposition, in 1863 the naturalist, explorer, geologist and butterfly collector Professor William Denton (1823–1883) and his wife Elizabeth M. Foote Denton (dates unknown) published a book together, titled *The Soul of Things: Psychometric Researches and Discoveries*.[64] Unlike Buchanan, they did not begin with an account of empirical experiments and scientific observations but, significantly, with a chapter about the phenomenon of *mental imagery*. Next to various other authorities such as Newton in his work on optics, the authors quoted the well-known autobiography of the Scottish geologist and folklorist Hugh Miller (1802–1856), who had given a vivid description of his delirious visions during a state of fever and had concluded that they were based upon forgotten memories. This had made him wonder about "that accessible storehouse, in which the memories of past events lie arranged and taped up" as in "a mysterious cabinet of daguerrotype pictures."[65]

Miller was thinking only of the images stored in his *personal* memory, but the Dentons went one step further in a direction that would finally lead to Blavatsky's concept of a *universal* memory, the famous akashic records. The original germ of the idea may perhaps be traced to Pierre-Simon Laplace's famous thought experiment known as "Laplace's demon." The English polymath Charles Babbage had waxed quite lyrical about its implications in a book published in 1837 from which the Dentons took one of their two opening quotes: "The air is one vast library, on whose pages are forever written all that man has ever said, or woman whispered."[66] Following a logic that is common in radical "holistic"

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[63] Buchanan, *Manual of Psychometry*, 159.

[64] William Denton and Elizabeth M.F. Denton, *The Soul of Things; or, Psychometric Researches and Discoveries* (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1863). For an extremely useful source of information on the Dentons see Benjamin Laird's website https://thecodeofthings.com; and see Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 109–10, 225–27 (thanks to Jeremy Stolow for the reference).

[65] Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 19; reference to Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters; or, the Story of My Education* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1855), 332.

[66] Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 10. Original passage in Charles Babbage, *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment* (London: John Murray, 1837), 113 (with reference to an extract from Laplace, quoted in his Appendix Note C, o.c. 173–74).

thinking,[67] the strict materialist determinism basic to Laplace's argument was de-emphasized while the exciting prospect of "psychometric" omniscience was highlighted. In a similar rephrasing of positivist materialism, the Dentons made their essential point through a heavily manipulated quotation attributed to the well-known contemporary specialist of optics Sir David Brewster. Here I give the original passage while showing how it was "edited" by the Dentons:

> ~~That a~~All bodies throw off emanations in ~~greater or less abundance, in particles of~~ greater or less size and with greater or less velocities;~~ – that~~ these particles enter more or less into the pores of solid and fluid bodies, sometimes resting ~~near~~ upon their surface, ~~sometimes effecting a deeper entrance,~~ and *sometimes permeating them altogether* [italics added by the Dentons] ~~– that the projection of these emanations is aided by differences of temperature – by great heat – by vibratory action – by friction – by electricity, - in short, by every cause which affects the forces of aggregation, by which the particles of bodies are held together; and that t~~These emanations, when feeble, show themselves in ~~the~~ images ~~of Fusinieri, Draper, Hunt, Moser, Fizeau, Knorr, Karsten, and Zantedeschi –~~; when stronger, in ~~certain~~ chemical changes ~~which they produce~~ – when stronger still, in their action on the olfactory nerves, ~~causing smell,~~; and when thrown off most copiously and rapidly, in heat~~,~~ affecting the nerves of touch – ; in photogenic action, dissevering and recombining the elements of ~~matter~~ nature; and in phosphorescent and luminous emanations, exciting the retina and producing vision.[68]

As one can see, Brewster had written in corpuscularian terms about minute particles of matter; but by throwing out more than half of his words and replacing "matter" by "nature," the Dentons made it all sound more like the 9th century Muslim philosopher al-Kindi and his doctrine that everything in the universe transmits invisible occult "rays."[69] From the "indisputable facts" thus established, the Dentons then drew a happy conclusion:

> In the world around us radiant forces are passing from all objects to all objects in their vicinity, and during every moment of the day and night are daguerrotyping the appearances of each upon the other; the images thus made, not merely resting upon the surface, but sinking into the interior of them; there held with astonishing

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[67] See the illustrative parallel case of Fritjof Capra's "bootstrap philosophy" in his 1975 best-seller *The Tao of Physics*, based on Geoffrey Chew's quantum physics monadology (discussion in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996/Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 130–31).

[68] Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 28. The original quotation attributed to Brewster seems to be taken from a long review article about recent publications about photography in *The North British Review* of 1847: Anonymous, "Art. VIII: Photography," *The North British Review* 7 (May-August 1847): 500–01.

[69] See e.g. Pinella Travaglia, *Magic, Causality and Intentionality: The Doctrine of Rays in al-Kindī* (Florence: Sismel-Editioni del Galluzzo, 1999).

> tenacity, and only waiting for a suitable application to reveal themselves to the inquiring gaze. You cannot, then, enter a room by night or day, but you leave on going out your portrait behind you. You cannot lift your hand, or wink your eye, or the wind stir a hair of your head, but each movement is infallibly registered for coming ages.…Not a leaf waves, not an insect crawls, not a ripple moves, but each motion is recorded by a thousand faithful scribes in infallible and indelible scripture.
>
> This is just as true of all past time. From the first dawn of light upon this infant globe, when round its cradle the steamy curtains hung, to this moment, Nature has been busy photographing every moment. What a picture-gallery is hers![70]

Discussing psychometry in *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky quoted these very same lines to argue that historical events can be explored through occult procedures.[71] While the direct line of influence would thus seem to have gone from the Dentons to Blavatsky, the general idea had been in the air for a while already. For instance, we find very similar statements as early as 1857 in the work of another well-known geologist, Edward Hitchcock.[72] He, too, suggested that a "photographic influence pervades all nature" that may well "fill nature with daguerreotype impressions of all our actions that are performed in daylight." If so, he wrote, this "great picture gallery of eternity" might perhaps be perceptible to "acuter senses than ours."[73] It remained for the occultists to kick the ball into this wide-open goal.

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[70] Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 30–31.

[71] Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: J.W. Bouton, 1877), 183.

[72] The Dentons seem to have been acquainted with Hitchcock's son Charles, whom they quote in *Soul of Things*, 264.

[73] Edward Hitchcock, *The Religion of Geology and its Connected Sciences* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1857), 426, quoted by Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things,* 263–264. Blavatsky quoted the same passage, probably through Denton: see *Isis*, vol. I, 184–85 (italicizing *acuter*). Interestingly, the quotation was preceded by another visionary account by Hitchcock, which the Dentons had taken from E.P. Hood (*Dream Land and Ghost Land: Visits and Wanderings There in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1852), 98), who in his turn had taken it from a fascinating correspondence between Hitchcock and Nathan Welby Fiske, published in *The New Englander and Yale Review* of 1845 ("Case of Optical Illusion in Sickness, with an Attempt to Explain Its Psychology"); cf. Hitchcock's description of an earlier and similar series of visions in *A Wreath for the Tomb: or Extracts from Eminent Writers on Death and Eternity* (Amherst: J.S. & C. Adams, 1842), 91–93. It is notable that in these earlier instances (induced not just by fever but certainly also by morphine, opium, and diethyl ether ([Hitchcock & Fiske], "Case," 193, 199)) the idea of a universal "photographic influence" or "picture gallery of eternity" had not yet occurred to Hitchcock. Fiske interpreted Hitchcock's visions in terms of solid cognitive science, and I find his analysis remarkably relevant to understanding the visionary imagination of authors such as Blavatsky, Leadbeater, or Steiner.

William Denton (1823–1883)

William Denton devoted a chapter of enormous length to descriptions of experiments with fossil remains psychometrically examined by his wife and his sister. At merely touching a piece of quartz, a fragment of lava, a fossil fish-bone, and so on, it seems that both ladies immediately launched into detailed descriptions of prehistoric scenes, landscapes, animals, plants, and so on that they seemed to be observing at first hand as if they were there. More than this, they eventually started hearing sounds as well. Denton explained that since "nothing we see is ever effaced, so nothing we hear ever dies out," it only made sense that the images of past events would be accompanied by what he called "phonotypes."[74] So now we had not just interior photographs, but interior movies accompanied by sound![75] Moreover, Denton went on to speculate that

> all fossil remains of animals are imbued with the feelings of the animals of which they formed a part, and, under their influence, the psychometer, for the time being, feels all that was felt by them; and thus the characteristic actions of monsters that have been extinct for millions of years can be accurately realized and described. This branch of psychometry may be termed psychopathy.[76]

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[74] Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 48–49, cf. 262.

[75] It must be noted that psychometric images were usually not static "snapshots" but had a dynamic quality: subjects typically described images or "scenes" as "floating" or "passing by" the inner gaze. The technique for motion pictures had not yet been discovered when *The Soul of Things* was published, but "spectral illusions" that seemed to be moving were known already by the end of the eighteenth century (see e.g. Stefan Andriopoulos, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media* (New York: Zone Books, 2013)).

[76] Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 50–51. See the possible relevance to Blavatsky's remarks

After more than two hundred pages devoted to one hundred and eleven different geological experiments, the Dentons moved on to other applications of psychometry, including historical research. Taking up Buchanan's suggestion mentioned above, they sketched the outlines of a program that Theosophists such as Blavatsky, Leadbeater and Steiner would soon put into practice: "we shall wander along the shore of time, and watch the empires as they rise and fall before us, as rise and fall the waves of a swelling tide.…The clouds that now rest over the histories of all nations shall melt away in the beams of the rising sun."[77]

7. From the Latent Light to the Astral Light

Part II of *The Soul of Things* was written by Elizabeth M.F. Denton alone, and in this fascinating text she answers questions about the practice of psychometry.[78] We learn that as a child she used to amuse herself at night by watching "the scenes which came sweeping past, not my fancy, *but my vision* [emphasis in the original], as clear and as distinct as were any that greeted my sight by day."[79] This faculty never seems to have left her;[80] but once grown up she learned to dismiss and neglect this imaginative faculty as unimportant and deceptive, and thus "allowed myself only an occasional visit to this ethereal land of ethereal forms."[81] This changed when she read Buchanan's 1849 article on psychometry, which gave her scientific permission to start taking her visions seriously again. Now, in discussing the mechanics of psychometry in clearly photographic terms, Mrs. Denton referred to

> peculiar conditions of the atmosphere which render it, like the polished plate of the skilful artist, capable of receiving and of reflecting the images of objects occupying positions favorable for such reflection of their images.…That there may be conditions of the atmosphere fitting it not only to receive and reflect, but also to retain these images, after the objects have been themselves removed, appears to be a conclusion not altogether unwarranted by the facts.[82]

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to Rawson (quoted above) about the "sensations" of being incarnated in a "brute or a reptile."

77 Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 276–77.

78 Elizabeth M.F. Denton, "Questions, Considerations, and Suggestions," in Denton and Denton, *Soul of Things*, 309–66.

79 Denton, "Questions," 314.

80 Denton, "Questions," 311: "I cannot remember the time when I did not behold objects or their representatives, by night as well as by day, in darkness as well as in light, with closed as well as with open eyes."

81 Denton, "Questions," 315.

82 Denton, "Questions," 324.

In discussing these "peculiar conditions," initially she spoke in Mesmerist terms about an "ethereal fluid which stamps upon it these images."[83] But later on in her discussion, the fluid had become a light: more precisely, she now distinguished between the ordinary light by which we see physical objects, and the "Latent Light" by which the psychometrist perceives his or her visions.[84]

What to make of that reference? First of all, again it is perfectly clear how much this entire line of reasoning owes to the invention of photography. Daguerrotypes resulted from the material transmission and refraction of ordinary light, and the assumption was that a parallel process must be at work on the non-material level of the soul. More specifically, although nothing indicates that the Denton couple had ever heard of the founder of French occultism Éliphas Lévi, it is impossible not to be reminded of Lévi's discussions in *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, published just seven years earlier, in 1856. In his characteristic exalted style, Lévi explicitly highlighted the imagination as "nothing but our soul's inherent property of assimilating the images and reflections contained in the living light, which is the great magnetic agent."[85] This living, primordial, or astral light he described as

> saturated with images or reflections of all sorts that our soul is able to evoke and submit to its *diaphane* [Lévi's term for the imaginative faculty of the personal soul], as the kabbalists say. These images are always present to us and are wiped out only by the stronger imprints of reality during waking life, or by the preoccupations of our thought, which cause our imagination to be inattentive to the moving panorama of the astral light.[86]

The entire line of reasoning is very much a reflection of German Romantic Mesmerism and its preoccupation with the "nocturnal side of nature": opposed to the material light of normal daytime consciousness (the province of rationalist science) stands the inner light of the soul (the province of occult science) that becomes dominant in altered states of consciousness such as sleep, dreaming and visionary trance.[87] There is no such thing as the supernatural: in *both* states of consciousness one can observe empirical facts (*Thatsachen*) that belong to the domain of nature.[88]

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[83] Denton, "Questions," 324–25.

[84] Denton, "Questions," 342ff.

[85] Éliphas Lévi, *Secrets de la magie: Dogme et rituel de la haute magie, Histoire de la magie, La clef des grands mystères*, edited by Francis Lacassin (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000), 78.

[86] Lévi, *Secrets*, 80.

[87] Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 262–66.

[88] Hanegraaff, "A Woman Alone: The Beatification of Friederike Hauffe née Wanner (1801–1829)," in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Anne-Marie

This distinction between two "lights" was soon picked up by Anglophone occultists – whether directly from Lévi, Denton, or both. For instance, in Emma Hardinge Britten's *Art Magic* (published one year before *Isis Unveiled*, and its chief competitor at the time), we read that "Material Light and Astral light are as antagonistic to each other as the north poles of separate magnets. They mutually repel each other."[89] Britten seems to have been very much aware of how closely Lévi associated the astral light with the imagination. In an interesting exchange published as early as 1868, we read how a member in the audience during one of her appearances as a trance speaker had asked her a loaded question: "Is all imagination simply in sight, or is it possible to imagine things which do not really exist?"[90] The subtext is clear: could it be that you are simply *imagining* all those spirits? Britten handled it rather well, but at a heavy price, especially for a woman with strong artistic abilities like herself. To legitimate the imagination as an instrument of knowledge, she was forced to *deny* the very existence of human creativity or originality!

> Analyze your imagination. Can you point to any idea that is not a reflection of the past, a refraction of the present, or a prophecy of the future? No, there is not in the whole realm of nature one single original idea in the mind of man. When I say "original," I mean that there is no creative power in the mind of man – nothing but a reproductive one, and therefore as all that you can conceive of, imagine, dream, hope, or believe in, must have some shadow of past, or future, or present, so I say that imagination, however wild, is either the intuitional perception of truth, the prophecy of the future, or the broken or refracted light of the present.[91]

If we interpret this statement against the background of psychometry, it seems clear what is going on in this exchange. Hardinge Britten was concerned to play down or wholly deny the active, subjective and creative aspects of the imagination in order to interpret it as a perfectly *passive* medium (Denton's "latent light," Lévi's "astral light") that receives and transmits purely objective information. Formulated differently, occult clairvoyance should not be seen as an art but as a science. The mental faculty of imagination was presented quite literally as the psychic parallel to a photographic plate: real events leave

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Korte, 211–47 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 236 (with reference to Heinrich Straumann, *Justinus Kerner und der Okkultismus in der Deutschen Romantik* (Zurich/Leipzig: Horgen, 1928), 84)).

89 Anonymous [Emma Hardinge Britten], *Art Magic* (New York: Published by the Author, 1876), 168.

90 Hardinge, "Questions and Impromptu Answers," *The Spiritual Magazine* 3, no. 9 (September 1868): 385.

91 Hardinge, "Questions and Impromptu Answers," 385.

objective imprints in the astral light, and this information can be retrieved because the human mind is capable of receiving and perceiving such images in the mirror of the imagination. Against this background, it is clear how we should read the final line from Blavatsky's letter to Vera: "Every event which is at all remarkable, every newly-turned page of this many-colored book of life, impresses itself on my brain with photographic exactitude."

8. From the Astral Light to the Akashic Records

We have seen that during the 1860s and 1870s, occultists came to believe that absolutely everything that had ever happened was imprinted on an invisible medium that functioned like a photographic plate on the level of the world soul. This was the famous "astral light." Scientific clairvoyance was based upon the ability, inherent in the *individual* human soul, of receiving and perceiving these images in what Éliphas Lévi called the *diaphane*: the personal imagination. But whereas Lévi was a full-blooded Romantic with few reservations about emphasizing the role of the imagination, such an emphasis would have been more or less suicidal for English-speaking occultists operating in a climate dominated by scientific positivism. It was already easy enough for critics to dismiss so-called clairvoyant observations as mere imaginative fantasies, so it would hardly be helpful for occultists to confirm that clairvoyance did indeed work through the imagination. As a result, although Blavatsky was explicit about using Lévi's astral light as a theoretical explanation for psychometry (while quoting both Buchanan and the Dentons), she steered away from any reference to the imagination.[92] In short, the imagination was the "elephant in the room" for the emerging occultist movement: it was clearly central to both the practice and the theory of clairvoyance, and yet it could not be named for what it was.

While taking up the basic theory of psychometric clairvoyance, Theosophists quickly began developing it in new and increasingly complex ways. A first important point is that already Blavatsky began expanding its scope by stating that it not only could retrieve information from the past, but could look into the future as well:

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[92] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, 182–85. Instead of the imagination, Blavatsky emphasized training and will-power: "scene after scene crowding upon each other so rapidly, that it is only by the supreme exercise of the will that [the psychometer] is able to hold any one in the field of vision long enough to describe it," and "[u]nless his will-power is very strong, unless he has thoroughly trained himself to that particular phenomenon, and his knowledge of the capabilities of his sight are profound, his perceptions of places, persons, and events, must necessarily be very confused" (ibid., 184).

> According to the kabalistic doctrine, the future exists in the astral light in embryo, as the present existed in embryo in the past. While man is free to act as he pleases, the manner in which he *will* act was foreknown from all time; not on the ground of fatalism or destiny, but simply on the principle of universal, unchangeable harmony;…Besides, eternity can have neither past nor future, but only the present.…*The human spirit, being of the Divine, immortal Spirit, appreciates neither past nor future, but sees all things as in the present.* These daguerrotypes…are imprinted upon the astral light, where…is kept the record of all that was, is, or ever will be.[93]

The term *akâsa* did not yet appear in this connection. However, in *Art Magic*, published one year before *Isis Unveiled*, Emma Hardinge Britten already mentioned it frequently. She described it as an equivalent of "the Rosicrucian's *Astral fluid*, the Hebrew's *Life*, the modern magnetizer's *Magnetism*,"[94] in short, of the "life force" or "life fluid"; but she discussed it mostly with reference to the miraculous powers of Indian fakirs, and never in relation to clairvoyance or psychometry. Likewise, in the introduction to *Isis Unveiled*, "Before the Veil" (probably written by Alexander Wilder), *akâsa* was described as analogous to or synonymous with "the occult electricity; the alkahest of the alchemists in one sense, or the universal solvent, the same *anima mundi* as the astral light."[95] But again, this universal "life-principle" was not seen as relevant to clairvoyance or psychometry.[96]

The connection between clairvoyance and *akâsa* was established at some moment during the years after Blavatsky and Olcott's move to India, as can be seen from several anonymous articles (written by Blavatsky?) published in *The Theosophist*. In "A Case of Obsession" (1880), we find a general connection drawn between "the Aryan *Akâsa*" and the Universal Ether suggested by Buchanan's discovery.[97] Then, in "The Soul of Things," (1883) we read that if the Dentons would touch an object, "they would at once come into sympathy with the *Akâsa*, or soul, of the person or thing with whom or which the object had been in relations."[98] Thus, the article goes on to argue, they established "the truth of the old Aryan dogma that the Akasa (Ether) is the cradle and grave of objective nature, and that it holds imperishably the records of everything that ever existed, every phenomenon that

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[93] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, 184–85 (emphasis in original). In attempting to combine "Laplacian" determinism with free will, Blavatsky was opening up a notorious can of worms: if it is possible to have foreknowledge of the free choices we will make, then are those choices still free?

[94] Anonymous [Hardinge Britten], *Art Magic*, 188 (italics in original).

[95] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, xxvii.

[96] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, 113, 125, 139–40, 144, 378, 395.

[97] Anonymous, "A Case of Obsession," *The Theosophist* 1, no. 8 (May 1880): 208.

[98] Anonymous, "The Soul of Things," *The Theosophist* 4, no. 10 (July 1883): no. 46, 239.

ever occurred in the outer world."[99] The author grasped the opportunity to point out how the science of psychometry, first discovered by Buchanan, differed from Spiritualist or Mesmeric clairvoyance: "Its researches may be carried on without risk to the 'patient,' and without throwing him or her into the state of Mesmeric unconsciousness."[100] At this time, it appears that Theosophists were very active publicizing Denton's work beyond the Western world: not only did they put "more than seventy copies of *The Soul of Things* in India and hope to put seven hundred more," but they also arranged for Professor Denton to continue a lecture tour through Australia by coming to India as well.[101] The article ended with a long summary of Denton's lecture in Sydney. Finally, an article "Psychometry" (1884) announced the imminent publication of Buchanan's *Manual*. Psychometry was now presented simply as an alternative to "Clairvoyance" (apparently, the latter term now served as shorthand for the competing approach based on somnambulist trance):

> While the latter faculty is most rare, and more rarely still to be found, unless accompanied by a tendency in the clairvoyant to self-deception and the misleading of others, by reason of imperfect control over the Imagination, the psychometer sees the secrets of the *Akasa* by the "Eye of Siva," while corporeally awake and in full possession of his bodily senses.[102]

In *The Secret Doctrine*, published a few years later, Blavatsky introduced a new distinction: she was now differentiating between the higher realm of *akâsa*, on the one hand, and the lower realm of the Astral Light or the Ether, on the other.[103] The function of the latter was to mediate between the merely human mental faculties and the superior, pure, abstract and noumenal *akâsa*. In response to questions by students in the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society, in 1889, Blavatsky described the actual "Akâsa, or primordial Light" as "the universal and divine mind," and defined it more specifically as "the undifferentiated noumenal and abstract Space which will be occupied by *Chidakasam*, the field of primordial consciousness."[104] It was now differentiated sharply from the lower level known as the Astral Light, which merely

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[99] Anonymous, "The Soul of Things," 239.

[100] Anonymous, "The Soul of Things," 239.

[101] Anonymous, "The Soul of Things," 240.

[102] Anonymous, "Psychometry," *The Theosophist* 5, no. 6 (March 1884): no. 54, 148.

[103] Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, vol. 1 (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), 257.

[104] Anonymous, *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society: Discussions on the Stanzas of the First Volume of The Secret Doctrine*, Part II: Stanzas 2 to 4 (Slokas 1 to 5), February and March 1889 (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society/W.Q. Judge, 1891), 10–11.

mirrored ("reflected and reversed") the "prototypes or ideas of things" existing on this superior, unconditioned and infinite plane of "Divine eternal consciousness." Since the Astral light was finite and conditioned, it could in fact be called "illusion," and as a consequence, "unless the Clairvoyant or Seer can get beyond this plane of illusion, he can never see the Truth, but will be drowned in an ocean of self-deception and hallucinations."[105]

9. The Clairvoyant Virtuoso: Charles Webster Leadbeater

Such a distinction was bound to have far-reaching consequences for the distribution of power within the Theosophical hierarchy, for it meant that higher-ranking Theosophists would always have the option of dismissing any competing or otherwise unwelcome claims of clairvoyant observation as "merely astral" and hence deceptive and unreliable. The simplicity and egalitarianism of the original conception of Buchanan and the Dentons, where countless people could make reliable observations by using their natural psychometric abilities, was hence replaced by a far more complex differentiation along a vertical scale, with mere hallucinations below and pure metaphysical vision up above. As second-generation Theosophists inherited the increasing sophistication of Blavatsky's metaphysics, this resulted notably in a distinction between the lower "Astral plane" and the higher "Devachanic Plane."[106]

These permutations of Theosophical metaphysics are fascinating to trace, but would lead beyond the confines of this article, which purports to demonstrate the centrality of the imagination to what is usually understood as Theosophical clairvoyance. However, it makes sense to conclude with a few words about Theosophy's most famous virtuoso clairvoyant, Charles Webster Leadbeater. Having abandoned his parish in England to follow Blavatsky to India, young Leadbeater (then only thirty years of age) arrived in Adyar at the end of 1884.[107] Throughout the following year, he lived there as the only European on the property except for Mr. A.J. Cooper-Oakley, whom he disliked and tried to avoid.[108] It must have been a difficult time for him.

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[105] Anonymous, *Transactions*, 11.

[106] See Charles Webster Leadbeater, *The Astral Plane: Its Scenery, Inhabitants and Phenomena*, Theosophical Manuals 5 (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1895); idem, *The Devachanic Plane: Its Characteristics and Inhabitants*, Theosophical Manuals 6 (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896).

[107] Gregory Tillett, *The Elder Brother: A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 33–40.

[108] Tillett, *Elder Brother*, 45–46.

If one just looks at this photo of the 1885 Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society (with a rather distraught-looking Leadbeater in the middle towards the right) it is not so hard to understand that a newly arrived European might feel quite overwhelmed among all those Indian Theosophists comfortably at home in their own country, and undoubtedly conversing among themselves in their own language. It is during this period of loneliness and isolation that Leadbeater is supposed to have received visits from the Masters, who taught him to develop his psychic powers through the practice of kundalini yoga. But the evident problem with this story is that its exclusive source is Leadbeater's autobiographical reminiscences *How Theosophy Came To Me* (1930), published no less than forty-five years later. As pointed out by Gregory Tillett, it is hard to reconcile this account with what we find in Leadbeater's letters to Olcott and Sinnett during the mid-1880s, which are full of complaints about his miserable life, make no references to any of those occult experiences, and mostly just show how badly he longed to return to England.[109]

Regardless of how one wishes to evaluate Leadbeater's stories about meeting the Masters, I see no evidence that his claims of clairvoyance had much to do with kundalini yoga; rather, again, everything suggests that we are dealing with psychometry. For instance, in May 1894, Leadbeater began investigating the past lives of a prominent Theosophist, the landscape painter John Varley, simply by "tuning in" to the mind of the Logos or Soul of the world, as he explained. No trance was required: the "investigations" were carried out in a state of full consciousness.[110] This would remain the pattern through the

[109] Tillett, *Elder Brother*, 48.

[110] Tillett, *Elder Brother*, 58–61. After Leadbeater's death, Jinarâjadâsa published the accounts

following decades, in Leadbeater's never-ending explorations of the lives of Alcyone (Jiddu Krishnamurti) and many other Theosophists.[111] Jinarâjadâsa, a frequent first-hand observer, points out that Leadbeater did not rely just on his clairvoyant observations alone, but was consulting reference books and encyclopaedias as well:

> After examining various scenes, what Bishop Leadbeater then does is to consult some Encyclopaedia or book dealing with that time in history, in order to get a general idea of what ordinary historians have to say. Having got then, as it were, a framework of history, at least so far as historians can build it, he then refers to the true record and corrects, if necessary, the so-called history in books by the real Akashic record.[112]

Indeed, a photo of Leadbeater "researching the lives" shows him sitting at a table (together with Dick Balfour Clarke, Irving Cooper, and Fabrizio Ruspoli) with what looks like a well-stocked reference library in the background. Ernest Wood writes that during these sessions, Leadbeater would be dictating for hours on end, "while he walked round and round the room to keep himself awake."[113] Wood was welcome to interrupt him at any moment for questions or suggestions.

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of the lives of Varley (known as "Erato"): Leadbeater, *The Soul's Growth Through Reincarnation: Lives of Erato and Spica*, ed. C. Jinarâjadâsa (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1941).

[111] Tillett, *Elder Brother*, 114–22.

[112] C. Jinarâjadâsa, "The Akashic Records Once More," *The Occult Review* (July 1923): 53–54.

[113] Ernest Wood, *Is This Theosophy?* (London: Occult Book Society, 1936), 135; cf. Tillett, *Elder Brother*, 115.

Clearly, we need no kundalini yoga to explain how it all happened. In fact, it was Leadbeater himself who told aspiring clairvoyants that the first thing they needed to do was precisely to train their imagination! In an extremely revealing account, the same Ernest Wood recalls what happened when a prominent Theosophist complained to Leadbeater that he did not remember any of his initiations on the astral plane:

> Leadbeater's reply was: "But why don't you remember? You ought to be able to remember." "Well, if I let my imagination play on it, I can get a sort of impression about it." "That is just what you ought to do. There is a cause for such imagining. How can you expect your clairvoyant power to develop if you destroy its delicate beginnings?" The member followed this advice and became one of the prominent clairvoyants in the Theosophical Society, though years later he mentioned in conversation, that he never really *saw* anything; only he received an impression so vivid that he felt it must be so, and he was justified in saying with confidence that such-and-such a being was present and saying such-and-such a thing.[114]

10. Concluding Remarks: The Power of the Visionary

That Theosophical clairvoyance is just another word for psychometry – and must therefore be sharply distinguished from the competing type of clairvoyance based upon somnambulist trance – was confirmed with striking honesty by no one else than Olcott in 1896:

> It is not too much to say that if one would have a complete understanding of the revelations given us by Leadbeater, Mr. Scott-Elliott, and some others, and if one would understand the secret of Madame Blavatsky's writing her marvellous books about things quite outside her field of education, one should familiarise himself with the principles and history of psychometry.[115]

The precise formulation "akashic records" may have been coined by Olcott in the same chapter,[116] and again one is struck by how straightforward he was about its limitations: "Of course, it is but fair to say that at the present moment the scientific value of psychometrical research is very far from having been proved."[117] Having questioned the scientific claims of psychometry in this

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[114] Wood, *Is This Theosophy*?, 141–42; cf. Tillett, *Elder Brother*, 267.

[115] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1893–96*, 398–99.

[116] Hester, "Into the Celestial Spheres," 43; see Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1893–96*, 408.

[117] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1893–96*, 405.

manner, Olcott added some lines that can only be read as a sharp critique of Leadbeater, whose past-live investigations had been making big waves among Theosophists for the past two years:

> As regards the tracings back of the births of some of us, in the Society, it is but fair to say that they should not be accepted as absolute truth until our observers have developed their clairvoyant sight much more than it is at present, and until they have become able to divest themselves of all feelings of personal preferences or antagonisms to the subject whose evolutionary career is being observed.[1]

Olcott's remarks reflect the increasing tension between the first and second generation of Theosophical leaders over the ultimate foundations of spiritual authority in their Society. As self-appointed visionaries such as Leadbeater got used to interpreting their own mental imagery as clairvoyant perception, they were moving away from the egalitarian approach that had been typical of Buchanan and the Dentons. These original pioneers, after all, had claimed that anyone with the talent of psychometry could speak with authority about such matters as the history of ancient civilizations or earlier stages of human evolution. Second-generation Theosophists such as Leadbeater in the Anglophone world or Rudolf Steiner in the German-speaking domain,[2] by contrast, were now arguing that the cognitive reliability of clairvoyant vision depended crucially on one's level of spiritual development.

It was inevitable that, in making this claim, they would end up privileging themselves as spiritual authorities whose judgment could not be questioned. By definition, the truth or accuracy of their clairvoyant observations could ultimately not be judged by anyone except those who had attained the requisite level of inner development. The logical corollary was if anyone questioned those observations, this only proved that he or she still fell short of that goal. In other words, Theosophists ended up with classic no-win logic: "if you had reached enlightenment, you would agree – therefore if you do not agree, clearly you have not yet reached enlightenment." From this dilemma there was no escape other than what is known as the *argumentum ad verecundiam*, the argument from authority.

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1 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves 1893–96*, 405.

2 For the case of Steiner, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Vorwort: Rudolf Steiner und die hellseherische Einbildungskraft," in Rudolf Steiner, *Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Christian Clement, vol. 8, no. 1: *Schriften zur Kosmogonie und Anthropogenese*, v-xviii (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 2018), which incorporates a German translation of the analysis of psychometry provided in the present article.

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Correspondentia
A Neologism by Aquinas Attains its Zenith in Swedenborg

James F. Lawrence
E-mail: jlawrence@gtu.edu, jlawrence@psr.edu

Abstract
This article performs a word history on *correspondentia*, a neo-Latin construction by Thomas Aquinas in Scholastic thought attempting to interpret Aristotle on the perception of truth, and then tracks succeeding circles of the neologism's utility. The new term "*correspondentia*" performs a crucial role in shaping correspondence theory in early modern hermetic thought and again in modern neo-Cartesian thought. A thread of shared discourse demonstrates an interconnected journey for the neologism from Aquinas through these contiguous conversations all the way to Swedenborg's sophisticated esoteric "science of correspondences." Typical of figures in Western esoteric and New Religious Movements, Swedenborg makes claims of ahistorical and direct apprehension of theosophical information regarding unseen realms, providing a useful case study for contextual analysis of how cultural transmission and interdiscursivity shape transcendental traditions. Swedenborg claims an ahistorical reception of his "science of correspondences" in his eight-volume masterwork *Arcana Coelestia* (1749–1756), where he lays out his first and most exhaustively demonstrated declarations of correspondences as the key to sacred scripture and to a vast bank of information on unseen realms. Analysis of primary sources and his environment of thought, however, betrays the Swedish polymath as deeply embedded in kabbalist, hermetic, and neo-Cartesian discourse for his impressive development of correspondence theory.

Keywords
Swedenborg; Aquinas; Kabbalah; Agrippa; Leibniz; correspondence theory

Wouter Hanegraaff claims that the general concept behind the technical esoteric term "correspondence"—that there is a spiritual counterpart to everything that is physical and specific channels of energies or powers link the immaterial and material realms, especially soul-body relations—dates to antiquity and can be found in numerous religious traditions, notably in India, China, and Mesoamerica, as well as in the more commonly referenced Greek and Egyptian esoteric traditions.[1] Nevertheless, *correspondentia* (and thus correspondence) as a word proper has a much more recent genesis. The term debuted in late medieval Scholastic theological discourse, framed for epistemological philosophy and originally associated with the Dominican Schoolmen Albertus Magnus (1193/1206–1280) and his pupil Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). *Correspondentia* seems to make its inaugural appearance in discourse via Aquinas's 1256 classic *De veritate*.[2] There Aquinas puts forth an adaptation of Aristotle's theory of truth by defining it as a state in which there is complete agreement between the understanding held in the mind and the thing being apprehended—that when such a state of precise mutuality of agreement exists it is a correspondence. In his attempt to refine the description of ontological substance of the act of complete understanding of what is true, Aquinas needed a word that would convey such a precise mutuality of agreement that a dynamic metaphysical exchange occurs and locks the two together. He thus took the verb *respondere* (to respond) and creatively extended its meaning to obtain a mutuality of responding between two discrete entities.[3] Adding the prefix "with" (*cum* squashed into "co") and assimilating an extra "r," he got *correspondere*: to correspond. A state of correspondence thus describes the dynamic unity of two discrete entities perfectly aligned in an exchange of mutual response.

Thereafter in Christian orthodox philosophy, *correspondentia* became the standard theory of truth and has been known as the classical, or correspondence, theory of truth and often contrasted with the coherence theory of truth, which focuses on how well a truth statement coheres with other statements that can

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1 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Correspondences," *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et. al (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 275–6. See also James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Reference, 1993) 11–47, for a discussion of the "sympathetic magic," the most common framework for operative properties of "correspondence" widely spread in ancient cultures.

2 Thomas Aquinas, *Truth: Questions 1–9*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnerey Company, 1952), 1–7.

3 *The Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary*, eds. Joyce M. Hawkins and Robert Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 326. Correspondentia does not appear in such dictionaries of classical Latin as *A Latin Dictionary*, eds. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

be made about the same matter.[4] The technical philosophical and theological usage that originated in Scholastic thought has continued through to the present day in historical Christian theology and is still in active use, as evinced by such eminent theologians as Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928) at the University of Munich, and Philip Clayton (b. 1955) at Claremont School of Theology.[5]

Of course, most English speaking people are unaware of this technical philosophical origin of a very common English word. After the eighteenth century the word "correspondence" increasingly became a common word in a related but more everyday sense for written communications between or among discrete entities (persons, businesses, governments), and today the word also serves a general utility for describing any basic correlation between two discrete things that share certain properties. But between Aquinas and today's common uses of correspondence lies an important journey of function in three other major historical philosophical conversations germane to Western esotericism—important because the origin of *correspondentia* as a technical metaphysical term reveals something about why the term solidified as a productive conceptual word in subsequent hermetic, kabbalist, and neo-Cartesian discourse.

Aquinas's *De veritate*, written at the University of Paris, created a tremendous controversy and was deemed by traditionalists as yet another Scholastic project that seemed to vaunt Aristotelian philosophy ahead of scripture as a way to do theology. The next two earliest extant usages of *correspondentia* seem to be two late medieval French writers: the poet Jean de Meun (c. 1250 – c. 1305) and the educator Robert of Basevorn (fl. 1322).[6] Inge Jonsson originally concluded that de Meun and Basevorn are the earliest extant authors using the word *correspondentia*, but he was unaware of the term's actual Dominican origins and did not realize the poet and educator were both operating in Aquinas's Parisian context.[7]

From there the term gained legs as early modern Renaissance hermetic writers adopted it for their own purposes, with Cornelius Agrippa probably the first to bring it into play as one of the synonyms that several hermetic writers such as Ficino and Paracelsus were then using to describe the exchange of precisely matching and co-responding powers and energies between such

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4 Jan Wolenski, "History of Epistemology," Handbook of Epistemology, eds. Ilkka Niiniluoto, Matti Sintonen, and Jan Wolenski (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 13.

5 See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1: 52–53; and Philip Clayton, *The Problem of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 31–34, 284–86, 351–53.

6 Lynn Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 19n266.

7 Inge Jonsson, *Swedenborgs Korrespondenslära* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1969).

entities as astral bodies, minerals, the human body, and the divine source. In his 1510 *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* Agrippa utilizes *correspondentia* as a category term for these metaphysical exchanges and relationships, and provides various tables of such correspondences.[8] By the late Renaissance Francis Bacon (1561–1626), when providing a survey of the history of Western science in his 1605 *On the Advancement of Learning,* refers to this same metaphysical concept rife among the early Renaissance hermetic philosophers. Bacon describes it as correspondence theory, which indicates that correspondence had become the standard vocabulary term for hermetic metaphysics.[9]

The second subsequent current in Western philosophy in which correspondence theory played a critical function appeared with both rationalist and empiricist thinkers in the Cartesian dualist metaphysical discourse during the "Long Enlightenment" period. Starting in the generation after Descartes and wrestling with the Cartesian split between *res extensa* (extended or physical things) and *res cogitans* (thinking or mental things), such natural philosophers as Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), John Locke (1632–1704), Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) explored ontological substance theories in their respective worldviews, in which correspondence theory became a strategic term to describe the relationship between the seen and unseen dimensions of the cosmos and of human beings. Descartes's central project of comprehending the nature of relations between natural and spiritual—which he famously deduced as the only two categories of substance—led to attempts to characterize how these two discrete dimensions relate, especially concerning the relations between the activity of the mind and its physical house, the brain or body.

Descartes himself did not propose a philosophy of efficient causality between the two realms, but he is historically significant for framing so crisply the problem of the brain/mind split and of strict ontological dualism proper. Thus, in a new turn in both epistemology and ontology, often identified as a pivotal early foundation for modernism, Descartes started a long conversation in which correspondence theory was applied in different ways for framing how two apparently discrete realms or entities are coordinated, correlated, or dynamically integrated. Importantly, Descartes, who would consequently

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[8] Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. James Freake, ed. Donald Tyson (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1993), 223–27; 339–43.

[9] See Francis Bacon, *On the Advancement of Learning*, ed. Aldis Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869), 45, for his discussion of it in 1605, and also his subsequent expanded discussion in 1623 in book three of *De augmentis scientarium* (Amsterdam: Joannis Ravesteiny, 1662), 379 and 432.

come to be regarded as the philosopher most responsible for shaping a new epistemological methodology in philosophy that supplanted the propositional logical method of Scholasticism, was explicitly in dialog with the correspondence theory of truth first established in Scholastic thought. In a letter to French theologian Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), Descartes indicates that Scholastic correspondence theory did not even need to be dealt with because it was so obvious: "I have never had any doubts about truth, because it seems a notion so transcendentally clear that nobody can be ignorant of it...the word 'truth', in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object."[10]

Furthermore, Western philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were generally aware of the Scholastic correspondence theory of truth, and either implicitly or explicitly responded to it in various ways on both the rationalist and the empiricist sides which developed in modern philosophy up to Swedenborg's moment. Yet, it must be noted that neither Descartes nor his first major interpreter, Spinoza, actually employ the term *correspondentia* for their own ideas, even though in subsequent discourse their thinking is commonly described via the term correspondence. Spinoza, who cites but one philosopher—Descartes—in his 1677 *tour de force* opus, *Ethica*, proffers his renowned monistic solution to Descartes's dualism and clearly presents a correspondence theory for how the body and soul operate.[11] After Spinoza, however, the term correspondence becomes normative in the subsequent Cartesian discourse on how spirit and matter relate.

For example, Malebranche, a French Roman Catholic scholar and priest of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, is best known for attempting to integrate Cartesian philosophy into Christian theology, especially Augustinian thought. In his 1674 masterwork, *Recherche de la vérité*, he employs the term correspondence multiple times to indicate the relationship between the mind and body and generally deploys correspondence theory, which is pivotal for his metaphysics of occasionalism. Malebranche does not posit a dynamically causal relationship between the spiritual and natural but one that is non-causal despite a precise correlation between the two.[12] Locke also demonstrates his familiarity with

[10] Rene Descartes, "Letter to Mersenne: 16 October 1639," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3:138–40.

[11] For Descartes's presentation of a correspondence proposition see especially his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, part 1, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), or the Latin text at http://www.wright.edu/cola/descartes/medl.html; for the same in Spinoza see especially *Ethics*, part 2, scholium 2, trans. G.H.R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) or the Latin text at http://users.telenet.be/rwmeijer/spinoza/works.htm?lang=E.

[12] F.R. Tennant, "Occasionalism," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 17, ed. James Hastings

the correspondence theory of truth in employing the term "correspondence" for how ideas are held in the understanding in his 1689 book-length landmark treatise, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, generally regarded as his most significant philosophical contribution.[13]

Leibniz considered himself in explicit dialog with Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche and Locke. His *New Essays on Human Understanding* was an extended response to Locke's classic tome, though he held it back from publication upon learning of Locke's death; it was not published until 1765, long after Leibniz's own death (and thus after Swedenborg's interpretive work was well underway).[14] In both that volume and numerous other places Leibniz explicitly engaged correspondence theory and in particular attempted to improve Malebranche's occasionalist correspondence concept, producing his well-known solution of pre-established harmony. This, too, is not a correspondential relationship entailing efficient causality, but Leibniz wanted to avoid the implication in Malebranche's theory that would require God to be immanently active moment-to-moment, correlating all things in the two discrete realms. Leibniz's pre-established correspondence (or harmony) is closer to Deistic thought, as it proposes a created order of being set at some primordial beginning point. Leibniz also theorized that there is a specific essence (predicate) and a manifestation (subject) that results in a correspondence for everything that exists. Therefore, as would be true for Swedenborg in his own way, Leibniz expressed correspondence theory both in terms of a larger metaphysical order and of all particularities in creation.[15] But it would be Swedenborg of all the neo-Cartesians who would construct an efficient causality solving apparent Cartesian dualism by linking the material and immaterial planes of being, and he too would draw upon the late medieval neologism *correspondentia* to handle

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and John A. Selbie (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 444. For an excellent analysis of Malebranche's metaphysics, see Andrew Pyle, *Malebranche* (London: Routledge, 2003), especially 96–130; and Jean-Christophe Bardout, "Metaphysics and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, ed. Steven Nadler (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), 139–64.

13 John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: T. Tegg and Son, 1836), 284.

14 Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, "Introduction," *New Essays on Human Understanding*, by Gottfried Leibniz (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1982), xi–xiii.

15 For Leibniz's correspondence theory in his general metaphysics, see Ian Hacking, "A Leibnizian Theory of Truth," in *Leibniz: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Michael Hooker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 185–95. For Leibniz's correspondence theory regarding particularities, see Michael Losonsky, "Leibniz's Adamic Language of Thought," in *Leibniz*, ed. Catherine Wilson (Burlington: Ashgate/Dartmouth, 2001), 437–56; Robert Merrihew Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 68–72.

the conceptual job of a fully integrated ontology. Therefore, any reconstruction of the interdiscursive development of correspondence theory must take into account Swedenborg's relationship to these three preceding philosophical conversations: Scholasticism and the hermetic and neo-Cartesian authors who were themselves aware of the Scholastic correspondence theory of truth.

Swedenborg's Science of Sciences

Esoteric correspondence theory reaches a certain zenith in Emanuel Swedenborg's modern "science of correspondences," his signature input to Western esotericism and his most commonly cited contribution to the history of ideas, even if his voluminous amount of spiritualist information about the afterlife proved the most significant arena of his cultural reception. This article investigates the Swedish sage's claims in the opening paragraphs of *Arcana Coelestia* (1749) of an ahistorical biblical hermeneutic obtained entirely from heaven, a contention commonly repeated by the church organizations that use his works as foundational for their institutional lives. Indeed, he declares that he received the "science of correspondences" (*scientia correspondentiarum*) directly from God as *the* key for unlocking the bottomless treasure of deeper meanings hidden in the biblical text. His correspondence theory, however, also plays a pivotal role in his thought as a neo-Cartesian natural philosopher by producing his innovative and panentheistic integrative solution to the apparent chasm between spirit and nature, as well as the mind-body split. Correspondence theory became his Enlightenment-era Higgs boson in the long hermetic and kabbalist quest to frame exactly how the infinite finites itself and causally indwells materiality.

In considering the relationship between Swedenborg's natural science writings and his religious writings, it is worth noting the historical rarity of an intellectual biography that entails contributions of celebrated distinction to both fields of endeavor. Though many authors from the early modern period up to the present day have exhibited robust interest and aptitude in both science and religion, Swedenborg abides among a select group who have unmistakably influenced historical formation in both realms of endeavor and are recognized as historically noteworthy in each.[16] Swedenborg's contributions to astronomy, mineralogy, and anatomy have been assessed as major by many historians of science. Historian of Swedish science Paivi Maria Pihlaja selects Swedenborg

[16] Paracelsus, Jean-Baptiste Van Helmont, Isaac Newton, Gottfried Leibniz, Swedenborg, Joseph Priestley, and Teilhard de Chardin nearly exhaust the category, if the standard for science is not mere professional competence but historical significance in one or more natural science fields.

for a short list of Swedish figures on an "official 'chain' of pathfinders whose ideas proved to be of lasting value in the unveiling of scientific ideas."[17] The Swedish Nobel laureate Svante Arrhenius has detailed Swedenborg's importance in the history of astronomy, and Princeton University historian of cognitive science, Charles Gross, has persuasively presented Swedenborg as a potent figure in the history of anatomical research.[18] Overall, Swedenborg produced approximately 150 small and large works in at least a dozen science disciplines, and the sheer quantity and breadth of his decades in natural science analysis itself is of historical note.[19] His contribution to the history of religion is not in any doubt, as he is a prominent figure of study in Western esoteric traditions and Western literature, and there is a world-wide church movement devoted to his presentation of Christianity. Such leading historians of religion as Sydney Ahlstrom, Eric Leigh Schmidt, Catherine Albanese, and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke have all noted Swedenborg's important role in shaping Western religious thought, especially in nineteenth-century England and the United States.[20]

Even though Swedenborg was at times strikingly original in terms of re-shaping current paradigms into new ones, a historical analysis of his intellectual biography also exposes a considerable breadth of engagement with dozens of authors across numerous subjects in both science and religion. The state of scholarship on the question of sources for his science of correspondences in particular has virtually all of the confessional Swedenborgian church authors concluding that no earthly source was important, that all his insight came as revelation from beyond this world. Of the six secular scholars who have published on this specific topic, four think he did have important

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17 Paivi Maria Pihlaja, "Sweden and *L'Academie des Sciences*," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 30, no. 3–4 (September 2005): 271. For a concurring view, see Sten Lindroth, "Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772)," in *Swedish Men of Science*, ed. Sten Lindroth (Stockholm: The Swedish Institute, 1952), 50–58.

18 See Svante Arrhenius, *Swedenborg as a Cosmologist* (Stockholm: Aftonbladets Tryckeri, 1908), and Charles G. Gross, *Brain, Vision, Memory: Tales from the History of Neuroscience* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1998): 119–36. See also Sten Lindroth, *Swedish Men of Science, 1650–1950* (Stockholm: The Swedish Institute, 1952): 50–58, for an excellent summary of Swedenborg's science contributions.

19 For thorough presentations of Swedenborg's scientific output, see Cyriel O. Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952): 31–164; Alfred Acton, *The Life of Emanuel Swedenborg* (unpublished manuscript located at Swedenborgian Library, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, 1958).

20 See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 483–85, 600–04, 1019–24; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 199–246; Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 136–44, 170–71, 303–11; and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 155–72.

earthly sources, but no two of them agree closely on the shape of his sources. Ethan Allen Hitchcock believed he raided early modern and modern hermetic authors.[21] Martin Lamm leans heavily on the Plotinian pseudo-Aristotle and on the Philonic tradition.[22] Inge Jonsson emphasizes the neo-Cartesians, Nicholas Malebranche and Christian Wolffe,[23] and Marsha Keith Schuchard mounts a case for primarily kabbalist sources.[24] Regarding the other two scholars who are not confessional Swedenborgians, Ernst Benz sees Swedenborg as an inner-driven psychic not closely incorporating others,[25] and Wouter Hanegraaff postulates that the Swede's Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* kept him away from reliance on other texts (and thus authors) for his science of correspondences.[26] My recent study on the subject reconstructs the web of discourse (what Kristeva calls "interdiscursivity"[27]) that was shaped around correspondence theory, beginning in the late medieval period and continuing into Swedenborg's milieu of natural philosophy. I will presently demonstrate that the Scandinavian theosopher was fully acquainted with multiple conversations around correspondence theory before he unveiled his own science of correspondences.[28]

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[21] Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Swedenborg, A Hermetic Philosopher* (New York: D. Appleton, 1858), especially 181–204.

[22] See Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Development of His Thought*, trans. Tomas Speirs and Anders Hallengren (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), 95–112 for assessment of the *Theology of Aristotle* and 224–37 for Philo.

[23] See Inge Jonsson, *The Drama of Creation*, *Sources and Influences in Swedenborg's* "*Worship and Love of God*," trans. Matilda McCarthy (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2004), 31–47; *Visionary Scientist: The Effects of Science and Philosophy in Swedenborg's Cosmology,* trans. Catherine Djurklou (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 1999), 93–122.

[24] See Marsha Keith Schuchard, "Emanuel Swedenborg: Deciphering the Codes of Celestial and Terrestrial Intelligence," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), 177–208.

[25] See Benz, Ernst. *Emanuel Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), especially 151–61 and 351–62.

[26] Wouter Hanegraaff, "Swedenborg's Magnum Opus," in Emanuel Swedenborg's *Secrets of Heaven*, vol. 1, trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2008), 63–129. This is a new title translation of *Arcana Coelestia*.

[27] See Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Context* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 40–44, for an excellent discussion of Kristeva's conception of interdiscursivity.

[28] See James F. Lawrence, *And Speaking of Something Else: Biblical Allegoresis, Swedenborg, and Tradition* (PhD Diss. Berkeley, Graduate Theological Union, 2012), 59–102.

Swedenborg's Appropriation of and Contributions to Correspondence Theory

The year 1745 is when Swedenborg claimed he became a seer, a daily adventurer in the spiritual worlds, and a recipient of the divine commission to reveal the inner sense of scripture via correspondences; 1749 is when he issued volume 1 of *Arcana Coelestia* with the first fruits of the science provided directly from heaven. A close reading of ten mostly posthumously published texts dating to more than a decade before beginning the *Arcana* show him to be in various ways engaged with earthly texts and authors in his emerging correspondence theory. These begin with his commencement of *Oeconomia regni animalis*[29] in August 1736 (completed December 1739 and published 1740) and extend to the enormous work *Explicatio in verbum historicum Veteris Testamenti*[30] that occupied him until February 1747.

The earliest appearance of the term *correspondentia* on a Swedenborg manuscript page is in the third part of the *Oeconomia,* which presents theory and analysis from his prodigious multi-year pursuit in anatomical studies to locate empirically the seat of the soul in the human body—a relation that he calls correspondential.[31] He also titles a chapter rubric "The Influx and Correspondence of the Sickness of the Body, Animus, and Mind," in which he produces a neo-Cartesian explanation of how the immaterial bridges the seeming divide into materiality via the metaphysical terms he will often use in tandem—correspondence and influx—to frame the flow of power across discrete levels.

In 1741 he filled 79 pages in a notebook posthumously published in English in the mid-nineteenth century as *A Hieroglyphic Key to Natural and Spiritual Mysteries by Way of Representations and Correspondences*.[32] Primarily notes of metaphysical speculation upon spiritual forces as causes of their manifestations in natural phenomena, from its opening lines Swedenborg analyzes how energies and forces—the dynamism of life itself—are all in correspondence with each other: motion, action, operation, conatus, will, providence, nature, the human

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[29] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Oeconmia regni animalis,* 3 vols. (London: Francois Changuion, 1740–41). See also the English translation by Augustus Clissold, *Economy of the Animal Kingdom* (New York: New Church Press, 1955).

[30] Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Word of the Old Testament Explained*, 8 vols, trans. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn: Academy of the New Church, 1928–51). Original manuscript, located at the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, carries the simple title *Adversaria* but is often referred to as *Explicatio in verbum historicum Veteris Testamenti.*

[31] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, 287.

[32] Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Hieroglyphic Key to Natural and Spiritual Mysteries by Way of Representations and Correspondences*, trans. J.J.G. Wilkinson (London: William Newberry, 1847).

mind, the divine mind of God are all channels of correspondence.[33] This now classic hermetic notebook represents the clear beginning of Swedenborg's fundamental preference for the term *correspondentia* over harmony, concordance or analogy, and it becomes the key to relating the energetic power exchanges between the spiritual and natural worlds. *A Hieroglyphic Key* also contains his first extant hermetic engagement with ancient Egyptians, whose culture, he declares, revealed a remnant primordial knowledge about correspondences. Their glyphs, moreover, could be decoded through correspondence knowledge.

Swedenborg makes his crucial move from natural and spiritual philosophy toward sacred philology as a promising route for resolving Cartesian dualism in a second revealing unpublished notebook from the same period. Posthumously published, this lengthy engagement with Christian Wolff's thoughts on esoteric writing systems, such as Egyptian hieroglyphs, Chinese *figura*, and Hebrew, explores the manner in which sacred languages can express higher realities via correspondences.[34] Wolff, a disciple of Leibniz, was at that time the most celebrated living philosopher in Germany.

A third unpublished notebook (or series of notebooks) is the most helpful. These notebooks were posthumously published as *A Philosopher's Notebook,* which runs to nearly 600 pages of small script.[35] These pages represent his reading and study notes from the late 1730s through about early 1742 and are the mother lode of information about his sources in his transitional period. For neo-Cartesian correspondence theory, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz, and Bilfinger are all extensively represented, but overt hermetic and kabbalist discourse is quite muted. Only four such references appear out of hundreds of citations, but they deal with substantial issues and his handling of them indicates familiarity with the terrain.

A fourth unpublished manuscript employing the term correspondence also comes from 1742: an extended reflection on the psychological ontology of the human mind and emotions. Clearly intended to comprise a major part of a new projected work on the interactions between anatomy and the soul, for reasons not entirely clear he elected not to publish it, though it was published posthumously.[36] In it the philosopher employs the term correspondence in a

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[33] Swedenborg, *A Hieroglyphic Key*, 1–2.

[34] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Psychologica: Notes and Observations on Christian Wolff's "Psychologia empirica,"* trans. Alfred Acton (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1923).

[35] Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Philosopher's Notebook: Excerpts from Writers with Reflections and Notes*, trans. and ed. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1976).

[36] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Rational Psychology*, ed. Alfred Acton and trans. Norbert H. Rogers and Alfred Acton (Philadelphia: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1950).

dozen places to characterize various dynamic psychological relations (between sight and imagination, thought and pure intellect, intentions and the soul). He also distinguishes between "natural" and "acquired" correspondence in multiple instances. Importantly for this study, he directly engages Locke regarding "the science of sciences" (i.e., correspondences).[37]

A fifth relevant work to Swedenborg's pre-theosophical development of correspondence theory is his 1745 *The Worship and Love of God*.[38] This work is significant not only for its several deployments of the terms correspondence and correspondences (his first published usage), but as his first foray into published biblical commentary, in which correspondence theory is used to discuss meanings of biblical texts (in this case the creation stories of Genesis). Though Swedenborg is still a far cry from the highly detailed and systematic use of correspondences for biblical exegesis that will appear in the *Arcana*, his first attempt to apply correspondence theory to sacred writ is found in *The Worship and Love of God*.

A final primary source of some interest is the catalogue of Swedenborg's personal library that was put together when his estate was sold soon after his death.[39] The prodigious Swedenborgian researcher Alfred Stroh published an account of his discovery of the original catalogue of Swedenborg's library more than 130 years after the sale occurred, and he issued his findings with considerable excitement in 1906.[40] The appendices in the catalogue contain at least a dozen reprints of well-known hermetic works and authors, including the collected works of Geber (721–815), Peter Kertzenmacher's 1570 *Alchimia*, Borri's 1666 *The Key to the Cabinet*, Helvetius's 1677 *Vitulus aureus*, and Robert Boyle's 1680 *Opera varia*. The General Church of the New Jerusalem (the most conservative Swedenborgian denomination) and the General Conference of the New Jerusalem in England (the oldest Swedenborgian denomination) have published items only in the front section as the contents of Swedenborg's library.[41] The catalogue's title page, however, describes the appendices as books of exceptional beauty and rare quality, and there is every reason to conclude

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37 Swedenborg, *Rational Psychology*, 308–11.

38 Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Worship and Love of God*, trans. Alfred Acton and Frank Sewell (Boston: Massachusetts New Church Union, 1925).

39 Alfred H. Stroh, *Catalogus Bibliothecae: Emanuelis Swedenborgii* (Holmiae: Ex Officina Aftonbladet, 1907).

40 Alfred H. Stroh, "Research Work on Swedenborgiana at Stockholm and Uppsala," *New Church Life* (June 1907): 346–7.

41 See "Swedenborg's Library: An Alphabetical List," *The New Philosophy* 72, no. 1 (Jan–Mar 1969): 115–26; and Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret, A Biography*, trans. Norman Ryder (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004), appendix.

that the appendices were created as featured books from the estate—those that might be of greatest interest to collectors of fine books. No internal evidence whatsoever suggests any titles to be from any source other than Swedenborg's library estate. Possessing such valuable books does not *ipso facto* reveal what Swedenborg thought regarding their contents, but it does attest to a certain level of interest in and familiarity with hermetic thought.

In sum, though ample evidence of much more than a passing acquaintance with hermetic and kabbalist thought exists in Swedenborg's intellectual pursuits, from his student years up through his transition period from natural philosopher to spiritual theosopher, the roster of neo-Cartesian interlocutors is much more abundant in the final eleven-year period before the first volume of the *Arcana*. A close reading of notebooks in this period reveals a long process of philosophical engagement with neo-Cartesian dualism, in which he began using the term correspondence first in his philosophy of science to explain how the infinite finites into materiality. He next applied it in anatomical studies as a way to connect body and soul. Finally, and most prolifically, he pursued sacred philology as a metaphysical conduit through which the divine uniquely comes into higher human understanding via a correspondence of the Word.

Swedenborg's Published Claims of Originality for Correspondences in the Bible

In 1750, as a preface to the second volume of the *Arcana* (written in Latin and published in London), either Swedenborg or his printer John Lewis commissioned John Merchant to translate a preface for the English-speaking public, which includes this testimony by Swedenborg:

> In the First Part of this work fifteen chapters of Genesis have been explained, and the things contained in the internal sense have been stated…I know that few will believe that any one can see things that exist in the other life, and bring therefrom any report respecting the state of souls after death, for few believe in the resurrection, and fewer of the learned do so than of the simple….For some years I have been permitted to speak with spirits and angels every day, and to see amazing things there, which have never come into any one's idea, and this without any fallacious appearance.[42]

[42] Swedenborg, "Preface," *Arcana Coelestia* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1975), 2:419–20.

Swedenborg's dramatic theosophical presentation of a hidden, multiplex inner sense to scripture, first articulated in the *Arcana,* is detailed through copious examples in Swedenborg's theosophical works. *Correspondentia* and forms of *correspondere* occur 3,644 times in Swedenborg's theosophical works, with the greatest usage in the *Arcana*. These are the technical terms the Swedish mystic uses to refer to two related relationships: that between the natural and spiritual worlds and that between the literal and spiritual meanings of scripture. Generally, his theosophy of correspondences can be grasped through nine specific claims, though not all are fully presented in the first chapter and some are much more greatly elaborated in subsequent works, most notably *De equo albo de quo in Apocalypsi, Cap. XIX* (1758), *Doctrina novae Hierosolymae de scriptura sacra* (1763), and *Vera Christiana religio* (1771).[43] The nine interrelated core claims are: 1) God maintains a special channel of revelation for the human race via the Word, whose correspondences create an inner sense to sacred scripture which is also an ontological metaphysical nexus between angelic consciousness and human consciousness; 2) only certain books of the Christian canon(s) are written in correspondences and form the Word;[44] 3) there is a primordial history of human knowledge and understanding of correspondences, as well as an ancient Word that preceded the current Jewish and Christian canons, but that text has passed away, and the earlier primordial human understanding of correspondences was gradually lost;[45] 4) a succeeding Word comprised of some of the books in the Judeo-Christian canon, also written in correspondences, was established by God to maintain the nexus between heaven and earth, but knowledge of the correspondential base of this historical Word has never been

[43] In addition to *Arcana Coelestia* (London: John Lewis, 1749), 1–4, see also *De equo albo de quo Apocalypsi* (London, 1758), *Doctrina novae Hierosolymae de scriptura sacra* (Amsterdam, 1763), n. 1–4, and *Vera Christiana religio* (Amsterdam, 1771), n. 189–95, 206–7. Swedenborg numbered his paragraphs, including frequent enumerated subsets of a paragraph, which makes references to Swedenborg's works uniform regardless of pagination in any translation, edition, or printing. Swedenborg's enumeration system will be used for all references to his works.

[44] Swedenborg taught a theology of "the Word" comprised of thirty-four biblical works (twenty-nine in the Old Testament and five in the New Testament), which he lists in *Arcana Coelestia* 10,325 (and also in *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 266 and *The White Horse* 16). The rest of the Judeo-Christian canon does not contain an internal sense and is not part of "the Word," though in varying degrees Swedenborg claims that the non-correspondential biblical material, especially parts of the New Testament epistles, contains pastoral value.

[45] Swedenborg refers in many places to the primordial "Most Ancient Church," in which people commonly understood correspondences, but he nowhere devotes a full discussion to it, though in his final unfinished work, *Coronis*, he appeared to begin such a succinct overview. See *Arcana Coelestia*, 597, 895, 920, 2896, 3419, and 4454 for various descriptions of it.

known or revealed since before the production of any extant historical commentaries on scripture;[46] 5) with few exceptions, the inner sense of scripture is utterly recondite within the literal text of the Word and impossible to discern without a divine dispensation of revelatory consciousness, entailing open access to spiritual worlds and angelic discourse; 6) before Swedenborg the inner sense could not have been understood because the Jewish church was too carnally-minded, while the succeeding Christian church was too primitive in its early centuries and then too corrupt in later centuries to serve as an able recipient of the heavenly revelation necessary for perceiving it; 7) uniquely in the history of the world, Swedenborg himself has been granted a privileged state of unfettered access to spiritual worlds and angelic discourse for the express task of revealing the inner sense of scripture, which provides crucial reformations of current Christian thought; 8) history prior to Swedenborg, both primordial and recorded history, should be understood as comprising four ages or "churches," and Swedenborg's own interpretive work should be understood as constituting a fifth and final age, the New Church, which issues from this newly unveiled inner sense; 9) the actual unveiling of the inner sense is the second coming of the Lord—thus, not a physical advent as a visible personage but an advent of new spiritual perception (or reception of divine wisdom and guidance) giving rise to a new capacity for regeneration (which is salvation).

Swedenborg's interpretation of the utilitarian role the *Arcana* played for the New Testament *parousia* only arose after the entire work was completed in 1757, which was also the year in which he believed he witnessed the Last Judgment in the spiritual world. In that aftermath he then believed that the greater significance of his disclosure of the inner sense of scripture was the second coming of Christ as a spiritual event in human understanding (not as a physical return of the person of Jesus). Therefore, the second coming, according to Swedenborg, was effected by the deployment of correspondence theory applied to the Word. Understood another way, knowledge of correspondences enabled the Word to be read for the first time in its fullness since it was written in correspondences by the divine, via unsuspecting human agents).

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[46] See Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia,* 4–5; *Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, 112; *True Christianity,* 192–93. The "Word" is Swedenborg's consistent term for the books of the Judeo-Christian canon he claimed are written entirely in "correspondences," which excludes several books of Jewish scripture and all of the New Testament epistles.

Kabbalist Traces in Swedenborg's Mature Theosophy

That Swedenborg was exposed broadly to kabbalah during his university days when he lived for six years in the home of the leading Swedish Christian kabbalist at that time, his brother-in-law Eric Benzelius (1675–1743), is no longer in any doubt.[47] The evidence, however, that he returned to kabbalist literature during the crucial period of 1737–1748 is thin. Swedenborg never mentions the Zohar specifically, nor does evidence exist that he engaged avowed kabbalist authors in this period, beyond any related currents that might be in play in his neo-Cartesian interlocutors. The only references to kabbalah more generally appear in four excerpts in *A Philosopher's Notebook*—twice in excerpts from Leibniz and twice from the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), of whom Leibniz was a seriously appreciative reader.[48] Though their relative weight is minuscule in the full body of extant material from this period of his work, these references do relate to substantial ideas of messianism and the nature of human freedom. Susanna Åkerman-Hjern remarks that the way Swedenborg broaches serious kabbalist thought as a matter-of-course indicates familiarity with the territory.[49] But the overall paucity of extant material on kabbalah and hermetism in this period argues against a high level of interest during Swedenborg's transition to spiritualist writing.

Schuchard claims the scarcity of evidence is due to secrecy on Swedenborg's part, and argues that three other pieces of evidence accrue towards a conclusion that Swedenborg seriously engaged in kabbalah training in midlife in the early 1740s in London.[50] But her speculative alternative scenario, though playfully suggestive, contains no evidence that cannot be explained easily in other ways and does not present a persuasive case. Much more convincing is the fact that Swedenborg saw himself as a thoroughly modern man on the leading edge of Enlightenment thought, yet not perhaps aware of how much hermetic and kabbalist cargo was riding in the hull of his massive theosophic ship. From a new historicist angle, however, a Leibnizian frame captures a sphere of interlocutors that gives something of an integrated picture. Swedenborg worked at

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47 See Lawrence, *And Speaking of Something Else*, 170–90.

48 Swedenborg, *Philosopher's Notebook*, 160, 250, 303, 379.

49 Susanna Åkerman-Hjern, "De sapientia Salomonis: Emanuel Swedenborg and Kabbalah," in *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism*, ed. Peter Forshaw (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 206–19.

50 Marsha Keith Schuchard, "Emanuel Swedenborg: Deciphering the Codes of a Celestial and Terrestial Intelligencer," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), 179–80.

the height of the European Enlightenment and contributed to it, and he was a man of his times in the sense of being far removed from today's postmodern passion for identifying debts and sources—indeed, for understanding context.

A number of ideas in Swedenborg's mature theosophy ring similar to kabbalist constructs—namely, correspondence theory itself; a metaphysics of divine influx; the primordial human as microcosm of the divine macrocosm; Hebrew as a purely divine representational language; three inner and hidden senses to the Hebrew scriptures; and an overarching theme of God's essential nature as gendered and of the creation itself as intrinsically gendered throughout. Of these, though, channels of divine influx and the microcosm-macrocosm paradigm are shared by hermetic constructs, and it has been established that the contents of Swedenborg's library evinced reasonably strong interest in hermetic literature. His claims for the sacred design of Hebrew can also be explained through another channel: the theory of sacred philology then popular among writers whom Swedenborg read. Michael Legaspi has demonstrated that a number of Christian European thinkers in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century sacred philology conflated studies of the Egyptian writing system of hieroglyphics with the kabbalah of Hebrew.[51]

From its earliest developments in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Jewish kabbalah constructed a radical understanding of the mystical properties of the Hebrew language as it is vocalized and with respect to the shape and even essence of the letters of its alphabet.[52] Swedenborg makes identical claims for Hebrew, but he also has just as much material in his mature theosophy on the divine attributes of the ancient language system of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. It was to hieroglyphs that he turned in *An Hieroglyphic Key* when he first began shaping discourse on correspondences as a medium possibly operative with scripture. The idea of a transcendental divinity inherent in the Egyptian hieroglyphs is primarily hermetic (certainly not Christian orthodox or kabbalist), and its presence clarifies the shape of the intertext around sacred philology among such interlocutors of Swedenborg as Leibniz and Wolff. It is worth noting as well that though he does not broach the Chinese *figura* directly, which was also a darling of the sacred philology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Swedish seer in his mature theosophy does claim that before the Hebrew

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[51] Michael C. Legaspi, *Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21–22.

[52] See Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 34–44, for a summary of the mystical aspects in kabbalist thought on the language of Hebrew.

"Word" existed there was an earlier "Word" among peoples in "Great Tartary" (roughly, today's Tibet) that maintained the necessary metaphysical nexus between heaven and earth. So, all except the last in the list of kabbalah-like ideas can be found in broader hermetic and neoplatonic conversations in his milieu. The construct of a thoroughly gendered God and cosmos, however, has remained an intriguing comparative subject. It is difficult to locate the concept with similar details anywhere in world literature other than the Zohar.

Such a metaphysic assigns male and female gender values as constitutive of and intrinsic to both the transcendental and immanent divine, and it designates either male or female gender values to each and every part of the material creation in such a way as to put the energies of masculine/feminine complementarity in play at all times. Since the Zohar and the *Arcana* are each primarily exegetical works purporting to plumb the hidden depths of sacred writ via symbolic (or correspondential) readings of the plain sense of the text, the resulting interpretation always contains some element of gender values. Gershom Scholem maintains that the Zohar's sefirotic tree generated significant innovations in Jewish theology via its motif of sexuality and gender as elemental in the divine emanation,[53] and Eliot Wolfson claims that this sexualized sefirotic lens applies to every biblical verse and leads to a remythologization of the divine realm as male and female, with a union or harmonization of masculine and feminine energies becoming the perceived good.[54] A thoroughly gendered God and creation also underlies Swedenborgian theosophy and metaphysics, in which substance and form are the indivisible constitution of being, which includes not only everything that exists but also the absolute divine itself before its move into phenomenal existence. Substance conveys the will—the affective energy—that is feminine, and form conveys the intellect—the discerning force—that is masculine.[55]

The sefirotic tree is absent in Swedenborg, yet his metaphysics of substance and form performs the same gendered function. Substance is the propensity of force to which he ascribes the heart and the feminine. Form is the specific means of force; it is the structure of intelligence that enables the substance to achieve its purpose, and Swedenborg ascribes to it the mind and the masculine. In both the Zohar and Swedenborg's biblical exegesis, every passage thus has the masculine and feminine in play as a fundamental structure of the inner sense.

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[53] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books), 229.

[54] Elliot Wolfson, *Along the Path* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 2. Idel calls it a "massive remythologization of the Biblical text."

[55] Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, 29–30.

The spiritual theosophy that emerges in the act of interpretation always engages the eternal complementarity of the feminine and masculine. Antecedents besides the Zohar are difficult to locate and may not exist. A Christian kabbalist such as Böhme has a similar metaphysical framework, but there is no doubt his source for it was kabbalah.[56] The androgyne idea in Plato's *Timaeus* does not address the divine side, and in addition there is no concept of *non-human* aspects of creation as gendered. Neo-Aristotelians such as Maimonides and Spinoza parsed Aristotle's fundamental metaphysical categories of form and matter as corresponding respectively to God's intelligence and God's will—a basic construct that Swedenborg adapts, but whereas Swedenborg ascribes gender to them (female for substance and male for form), the others do not, nor did Aristotle. Thus, both Plato and Aristotle fall short of a radically gendered God, cosmos, and creation. Maimonides certainly influenced late medieval Jewish kabbalah, yet what inspired the author(s) of the Zohar to genderize the divine and creation in the Zohar is a matter of speculation.

I'm not aware of any other tradition that so explicitly genderizes all metaphysics as do kabbalah and Swedenborg, in both of which the gendered aspect of spiritual correspondence of the text is basic in biblical interpretation. When exegeting scripture, regardless of whether literal males or females appear in the plain text, every passage (and virtually every word of every passage) have potential feminine and masculine attributes strategically in play. Both Swedenborg and the Zohar are united in positing a metaphysics of the infinite divine, finiting itself through a supernal point that is itself the seat of complementary gender dynamics as creative force. Creation itself is thus a profoundly genderized unfolding of the divine into manifestation such that all things in creation are irreducibly gendered as a fundamental feature of the divine. The most just assessment of the evidence seems to be that though Swedenborg was not an avid or devoted student of kabbalah and did not pay close attention to it in his later transitional period, his acquaintance with kabbalah was at one time significant. The prominent element of gender dynamics in kabbalist thought remained in his storehouse of working constructs, to be reshaped (as he did with numerous other elements of historical discourse) so that it harmonized with his mature theosophy.

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[56] Allison Coudert, *The Impact of Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury Van Helmont* (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 96.

Conclusion

A word history study of correspondentia reveals a strategic journey through the three Western philosophies of Scholasticism, hermeticism, and neo-Cartesianism that culminates in some ways with Swedenborg's science of correspondences. Examination of Swedenborg's sources for his biblical hermeneutics of a science of correspondences, reputedly received only from heaven, reveals him to be profoundly embedded in relevant earthly discourse. He might indeed have been as psychic and objectively immersed in spiritual realms as he claimed to be, but his vast intellectual exposure and experience prior to his mystical experience conditioned how he interpreted his later spiritual states. Swedenborg saw himself as a thoroughly modern man riding on the leading wave of Enlightenment thought, and this disposition led him to look not to the past for answers but to his own age, where all the best answers were flowing forth anew. Importantly for those who study Swedenborg out of interest in his mystical states, it is helpful to remember that as a figure of the European Enlightenment he lacked the postmodern agenda of self-interrogation regarding his social construction. How much of his theosophy in general and of his science of correspondences in particular he gathered from his alleged otherworld travels cannot be investigated, but his debt to neo-Cartesian, hermetic, and kabbalist earthly sources for his vocabulary and conceptual frameworks can be established to a certain definitive extent.

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Reincarnation in H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*[*]

Julie Chajes
E-mail: juliechajes@gmail.com

Abstract
Throughout her career as an occultist, H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), the primary theorist of the nineteenth century's most influential occultist movement, the Theosophical Society, taught two distinct theories of rebirth: metempsychosis and reincarnation. This paper provides a detailed description of the latter, as outlined in Blavatsky's magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), and contemporaneous publications. In so doing, it offers several correctives and refinements to scholarly analyses of Theosophical reincarnationism offered over the last thirty years.

Keywords
H. P. Blavatsky, Theosophical Society, Reincarnation

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Introduction

This paper provides a detailed description of reincarnation as taught by the influential Russian esotericist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) in her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), and contemporaneous publications. Blavatsky made numerous remarks on human rebirth throughout her voluminous writings, which were published over the greater part of two decades, beginning in the early 1870s. Because of the apparently contradictory nature of some of these statements, there has been no little confusion among academics about Blavatsky's views on the matter. This paper clarifies the issue.

From the 1870s until around 1882, Blavatsky taught a doctrine she called "metempsychosis" that was distinct from the reincarnation theory of her later period. In the works of this earlier period (most notably *Isis Unveiled,* published in 1877), she claimed all humans have a soul in addition to a spirit and body. Occultists could achieve immortality during life on Earth by conjoining spirit and soul through practices such as astral projection. If they succeeded, after death, the conjoined soul-spirit entity would begin a journey of metempsychosis through higher spheres, reaching nirvana in the seventh and final sphere. In her earlier teachings, Blavatsky occasionally allowed for something she called "reincarnation," by which she meant the return to life of a spirit with the same soul for a second time. This occurred in such cases as the deaths of foetuses and congenital idiots, so they would have a fair chance at achieving immortality.[1]

In contrast, in *The Secret Doctrine* Blavatsky saw the spirit as intrinsically immortal, and maintained it was normal for it to incarnate repeatedly, each time attaching itself to a different mortal soul and body, thereby living many lives on Earth. Furthermore, she claimed that just as a person lives, dies, and is reborn, so do planets and even the cosmos live, die, and "reincarnate." Blavatsky's contemporaries noted the discrepancies between her earlier and later teachings. In an article of 1882 (and then again in 1886), she responded by trying to harmonise her divergent accounts to claim she had taught the same reincarnation doctrine all along.[2] Although she was being somewhat disingenuous, in a sense, she was

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[1] I explain this doctrine in detail in Julie Chajes, "Metempsychosis and Reincarnation in *Isis Unveiled*," *Theosophical History* 16 (2012). On Blavatsky's earlier doctrine and its kinship with Anglo-American Spiritualist and occultist currents, see Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 358. On Blavatsky's rejection of French Spiritist reincarnation, see 281. See also Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel, and John P. Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1995), 41, 57–60.

[2] H. P. Blavatsky, "'Isis Unveiled' and The 'Theosophist' on Reincarnation," *The Theosophist* 3

telling the truth. She had previously taught a *type* of (occasional) "reincarnation," it just wasn't the same sort of reincarnation she later affirmed.

The present article will explore Blavatsky's later ideas thoroughly, but why is such an exploration necessary? Theosophy has attracted considerable attention from academics in recent decades, largely because of its influence on the development of numerous artistic, literary, religious, and political movements.[3] For example, Theosophy impacted heavily on the development of modern forms of Buddhism in Ceylon (as well as globally), Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) had an interest in Theosophy, and Theosophists played an important role in the establishment of the Indian National Congress.[4] Theosophy has also spawned numerous other movements.[5] Perhaps the best known of these is Anthroposophy, which has a strong presence worldwide in diverse areas, including education.[6] There have been several academic studies of the Theosophical Society and of individual Theosophists, but these have not tended to go into much detail on Theosophical tenets. This study takes a

(August 1882), 288–89 and "Theories about Reincarnation and Spirits," *The Path* 1 (November 1886), 232–45. She wrote the latter in Ostende, Belgium, in October 1886, and it appeared as an appendix in subsequent editions of *Isis Unveiled*.

[3] On Theosophy in Russian literature, see Eugene Kuzmin, "Maximilian Voloshin and the Kabbalah," in *Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah and the Transformation of Traditions,* ed. Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss, (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016). On Theosophy and the visual arts, see Victoria Ferentinou, "Light From Within or Light From Above," and Massimo Introvigne, "Lawren Harris and the Theosophical Appropriation of Canadian Nationalism," both in *Theosophical Appropriations*. See also Tessel Bauduin, "The Occult and the Visual Arts," in *The Occult World,* ed. Christopher Partridge, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

[4] On the impact of Theosophy on Buddhism, see Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). On Gandhi, see Michael Bergunder, "Experiments with Theosophical Truth: Gandhi, Esotericism, and Global Religious History," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82 (2014). On Theosophy and the Indian National Congress, see W. Travis Hanes Jr, "On the Origins of the Indian National Congress: A Case Study of Cross-Cultural Synthesis," *Journal of World History* 4 (1993). See also Shimon Lev, "Gandhi and his Jewish Theosophist Supporters in South Africa," in *Theosophical Appropriations.*

[5] On movements deriving from Theosophy, see Kevin Tingay, "Madame Blavatsky's Children: Theosophy and Its Heirs," in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality,* eds. Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000). See also Robert S. Ellwood, "The American Theosophical Synthesis," in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, eds. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 111.

[6] On the presence and influence of Anthroposophy in Germany, see Helmut Zander, "Transformations of Anthroposophy from the Death of Rudolf Steiner to the Present Day," in *Theosophical Appropriations*. On the connection between Anthroposophy and Theosophy, see Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland: Theosophische Milieus und gesellschaftliche Praxis, 1884 bis 1945*. 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007).

different approach, maintaining that a proper historicisation is only possible once a complete exploration of the ideas themselves has been carried out.

A second justification for paying so much close attention to Blavatsky's reincarnation doctrine has to do with Theosophy's influence on patterns of religiosity today. Theosophy and its numerous offshoots have had a profound influence on the development of modern forms of religion, especially the New Age Movement and related alternative spiritualities that emerged in the wake of the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s.[7] Reincarnation belief is often found in these milieus, and indeed, much more generally, among people in the largely Christian West who have no special identification with Asian religions. A century and a half ago, this was not the case. Theosophy played an important role in bringing about these shifts, and Blavatsky's ideas are fundamental to understanding them.

Thirdly, and finally, a guide to Blavatsky's reincarnation doctrine is needed because it is not possible to simply open one of her books and discover what she taught without considerable effort. Blavatsky has a (somewhat deserved) reputation for confusing, convoluted prose, and this has sometimes led to the dismissal of her works and ideas. This is unfortunate. The present article assists the novice or even somewhat experienced reader of Blavatsky, bringing her teachings on reincarnation into focus by drawing together the short, disconnected expositions she scattered throughout her writings. It reveals a clear "microcosmic" theory of human rebirth that has an important "macrocosmic" context that has not yet been discussed in the scholarly literature. This is offered as a contribution to the growing appreciation, both in the academic world and more widely, of H. P. Blavatsky as an important and influential thinker of the nineteenth century.

Academic Literature on Theosophical Reincarnation

Among the growing body of scholarly literature on Theosophy and related topics, a handful of studies specifically address Theosophical reincarnation.

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[7] On the connection between reincarnation belief in present-day America, the New Age, and Theosophy, see Courtney Bender, "American Reincarnations: What the Many Lives of Past Lives Tell us about Contemporary Spiritual Practice," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 (2007). On the New Age Movement in general, see Paul Heelas's pioneering study, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). On the definition of "New Age," see George D. Chrysiddes, "Defining the New Age," in *Handbook of the New Age*, eds. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2007). See also James R. Lewis, "Science and the New Age," in *Handbook of the New Age*, eds. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

The close reading of Blavatsky's writings that follows reveals their strengths and weaknesses. In "In Search of Utopia: Karma and Rebirth in the Theosophical Movement" (1986), Ronald Neufeldt argues karma and rebirth could be regarded as "the two pillars upon which all of Theosophical teaching rests."[8] A convincing case could certainly be made for this claim. He notes Bruce Campbell's view that reincarnation seems absent from *Isis Unveiled*,[9] but maintains there is evidence Blavatsky's first major work includes notions of karma and rebirth in "substantially the same form as these ideas are found in Blavatsky's later works."

> There is no reason to suggest that [*Isis Unveiled*] should not be read to mean that the eternal monad evolves through a series of human incarnations as well as other incarnations. The difficulty with Blavatsky's works lies not so much in radical shifts in her line of thinking. Rather it lies in an obviously sloppy use of terms or terminology and in the fact that in any given paragraph the discussion proceeds on two or more levels. Whether this was deliberate or not is difficult to say.[10]

Although there are elements of the metempsychosis doctrine of *Isis Unveiled* that re-appear in *The Secret Doctrine*, there is every reason to conclude that *Isis Unveiled* taught a different theory. I explained the doctrines of Blavatsky's earlier period in a previous publication, and the present article reveals a theory that is very different. The reason for confusion among scholars *is* in fact "radical shifts in her line of thinking," and not Blavatsky's supposed "sloppy use of terms or terminology" or multiple intentions, as Neufeldt claims. Blavatsky's choice of words could sometimes be equivocal, but her intentions were usually quite clear. Finally, Neufeldt argues Blavatsky's rebirth teachings were utopian in character:

> The teaching of karma and rebirth in Blavatsky's writings is essentially a charter for the establishment of utopia and utopian hopes.…I would argue that Blavatsky's concern is to establish the beliefs in karma and rebirth because of the benefits and advantages which she feels would result from the acceptance of these beliefs. Her concern is less with the details of the teachings than with spreading the good news about karma and rebirth. Detail that is given is often given only in response to charges of confusion, ambiguity, and contradiction.[11]

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[8] Ronald Neufeldt, "In Search of Utopia: Karma and Rebirth in the Theosophical Movement," in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

[9] Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revisited: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 29.

[10] Neufeldt, "In Search of Utopia," 233–34; H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877).

[11] Neufeldt, "In Search of Utopia," 250.

Blavatsky's inspiration may have been utopian in the sense that Theosophy emphasised universal brotherhood and the reformation of religious and scientific views, but in contradistinction to what Neufeldt says here, she was very much concerned with the details of her teachings, as the present article will demonstrate.

Robert S. Ellwood's "Obligatory Pilgrimage: Reincarnation in the Theosophical Tradition" (1996) deals with reincarnation in two of Blavatsky's later publications, *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Key to Theosophy* (1889).[12] Ellwood notes the diffusion of Theosophical lodges and texts across America during the twentieth century and correctly observes, "Probably no single organization has done more to popularize the concept of reincarnation in the English-speaking world, including the United States, than the Theosophical Society."[13] Ellwood notes that Theosophical reincarnation has been labelled "syncretistic," a term often maligned. This is unjust, he rightly maintains, because all religions are "syncretistic" to some extent. Noting the influence on Blavatsky of diverse global reincarnationist traditions, Ellwood states that the Theosophical synthesis took a specific form that reflected Blavatsky's notion of the "ancient wisdom" tradition:

> It is often assumed that Theosophists simply introduced "Eastern" doctrines to the West. Apart from the dubious assumption that there is any one notion of reincarnation in "the East" to apply, the fact is that Theosophy has drawn as much or more from Western sources in this matter as Eastern. While Eastern terms, largely Sanskrit, have been employed, so that karma and logos juxtapose, the original schema was as Gnostic and Kabbalistic as Buddhist.[14]

Ellwood concludes that in *The Secret Doctrine*, "despite the sometime Sanskrit diction, we are basically in the world of Gnostic or Kabbalistic myth, of the fall of the soul into matter as it ventures out on a great and heroic quest, the search for the Pearl of Wisdom or the Lost Beloved, then makes the return and finally receives the victor's laurels."[15] He also considers Blavatsky's language to resonate with neo-Platonism more than with Buddhism.

As much as Blavatsky's doctrine of reincarnation encompassed her interpretations of neo-Platonism and Buddhism (among other things), Wouter Hanegraaff (1996) demonstrates that her views were also indebted to

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12 Robert S. Ellwood, "Obligatory Pilgrimage: Reincarnation in the Theosophical Tradition," in *Concepts of Transmigration: Perspectives on Reincarnation*, ed. Steven J. Kaplan (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 189–202.

13 Ibid., 190–91.

14 Ibid., 191.

15 Ibid., 193.

European progressivist or evolutionary doctrines of ascendant metempsychosis that had been articulated from the eighteenth century forward.[16] Hanegraaff notes that the similarity between ascendant metempsychosis and reincarnation meant it was unsurprising the two had frequently been confused.[17] Discussing increasing interest in reincarnation since the Enlightenment, he observes that the idea of having lived many previous lives resonated with an emerging historical consciousness.[18] Increasing awareness of Hinduism certainly contributed to the popularity of reincarnation, but there were also many Western sources for the doctrine, such as Platonism, Pythagoreanism, and Kabbalah, and philosophers such as Henry More (1614–1687) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716).[19] Western rebirth theories were typically offered as explanations for spiritual progress or evolution and therefore, Hanegraaff argues, the idea of rebirth as such was secondary to concern with the continual improvement of humanity.

Theosophical reincarnationism and evolutionism, observes Hanegraaff, both had their origins in the eighteenth century "temporalization of the Great Chain of Being," a hierarchical organisation of the cosmos based on Platonic thought.[20] In Theosophy, reincarnation was given as one possible elaboration of the more general idea of progressive ascent through this chain of being.[21] Progressive ascent or evolution — rather than reincarnation itself — was therefore primary.

> For Blavatsky, progressive spiritual evolutionism was far more central than the belief in reincarnation *per se*. She certainly did not adopt evolutionism in order to explain the reincarnation process for a modern western audience; what she did was to assimilate the theory *of karma* within an already-existing western framework of spiritual progress….Karma was adopted in order to provide this evolutionism with a theory of "scientific" causality.[22]

Hanegraaff is correct that Blavatsky assimilated a theory of karma into an existing progressivist framework, that karma provided a form of scientific causality, and that this had a place in Blavatsky's evolutionary theory. However, this does not necessarily mean reincarnation was secondary to karma in Blavatsky's thought. It is clear from Blavatsky's own explicit statements that by the time she wrote

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16 Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden, New York, Köln, 1996), 473.

17 Ibid., 474–75.

18 Ibid., 478.

19 Ibid., 476–77.

20 Ibid., 472.

21 Ibid., 478.

22 Ibid., 471–72.

The Secret Doctrine, she conceived of *karmic reincarnation* as essential for theodicy (the vindication of divine justice). Demonstrating that, despite appearances, the cosmos was fair was a pivotal concern in Blavatsky's discussions of reincarnation, in which she explained that the apparent injustices of life were due to the karmic effects of forgotten deeds performed long ago during previous lifetimes (probably during the Atlantean root race). In such passages, one of which I cite below, reincarnation was not presented as an afterthought in a grand karmic evolutionary scheme, but rather as intrinsic to Blavatsky's justification for the seemingly unjust distribution of wealth and abilities, and this is why Blavatsky insisted karma and reincarnation were "inextricably interwoven."[23]

A second reason that reincarnation is not secondary to karma in Blavatsky is her universal application of reincarnation to all realms of existence, making it a ubiquitous force in the progress of the cosmos. Universes, solar systems, and planets were all said to reincarnate. Reincarnation was therefore a fundamental principle of Theosophy. On the other hand, karma was not. As we will see below, for Blavatsky, karma was not present during all stages of human history. It came into being only once humans had developed egos. Before that (as well as during and after) Blavatsky saw evolution as propelled by other factors, such as the assistance of higher beings and the universe's inherent tendency towards progression.[24]

Helmut Zander (1999) exposes numerous forms of European reincarnation belief and includes a chapter on Theosophy in his history of European reincarnationism. Zander correctly identifies Blavatsky's differentiation of her own doctrine from Spiritualist ones, her knowledge of the term "metempsychosis" and — by implication — Greek reincarnation theories, and her awareness of the supposed reincarnationism of the Egyptians and the Bible. Zander points out some of the basic propositions of *The Secret Doctrine* and notes Blavatsky presented reincarnation in the context of pantheism, although he concludes that a meaningful summary is not simple to achieve. Indeed, Zander argues that a systematic exposition of Theosophical reincarnation is impossible, a claim I disprove in what follows.

Zander contends that Blavatsky's adoption of reincarnation in *The Secret Doctrine* reflects Theosophy's later contact with Asian thought. Although

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[23] H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols. (1888. Facsimile of the first edition, London: Theosophical University Press, 2014) 2:303.

[24] This was an idea that resonated with contemporaneous scientific theories of orthogenesis, the idea that evolution is caused by something internal to the evolving organism. This and other influences on Blavatsky's rebirth theories will be discussed in my forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Recycled Lives*, to be published by Oxford University Press in 2018.

Blavatsky was acquainted with European sources for reincarnation, she took them seriously only via the "midwifery" of Asia. Developing this argument, Zander writes that occasionally Blavatsky's debt to Asian sources is unmistakable, such as in her theory of the incarnation of Buddhas and of Krishna, in which she depicts reincarnation as suffering, or when she describes the "nirvanis" as "those who have enjoyed their rest from reincarnations." It is important, however, to differentiate between Blavatsky's different rebirth theories. The theory of the incarnation of divine beings (Buddhas and *avataras*) is distinct from Blavatsky's various doctrines of human rebirth, and must be treated separately.

Zander asserts that the relative presence of European and Asian components in Blavatsky's theory of reincarnation cannot be determined through a reading of *The Secret Doctrine* and that the construction of Blavatsky's theory of reincarnation is highly complex and includes both Asian and European ideas, as well as European conceptions received through the medium of Asia. Blavatsky integrates all these into a European context. Zander concludes that in light of this historical construction, the question of Blavatsky possessing an "Asian" or "European" model of reincarnation is difficult and, to some extent, inappropriate.[25] These observations on the category-defying nature of Blavatsky's thought are astute and anticipate recognition of the cultural "entanglement" of Theosophy found in more recent studies.[26]

Olav Hammer (2001) approaches Theosophical reincarnation from a different perspective, analysing the multiple strategies involved in the legitimisation of the belief. He observes that the reincarnationists of the 1850s to 1880s based themselves on revealed teachings (spirit sources, Mahatmas, or divine revelations). For Blavatsky, this caused problems when contradictions between the reincarnation doctrines of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* were alleged. How could the Masters have changed their minds? Subsequent letters from the Mahatmas attempted to clarify the discrepancies and by 1883, *Esoteric Buddhism,* by the important early Theosophist Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840–1921), had "followed Blavatsky's lead in adopting reincarnation."[27] Importantly, Hammer

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[25] Zander, *Seelenwanderung*, 480–81.

[26] See especially Karl Baier, "Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer: Annotations on the Appropriation of the *Cakras* in Early Theosophy," in *Theosophical Appropriations* and Bergunder, "Experiments with Theosophical Truth."

[27] Although *Esoteric Buddhism* was the first Theosophical work in which the new theory of reincarnation was laid out relatively fully, there was a disagreement between Sinnett and Blavatsky over the nature of the planetary chain within which reincarnation was said to take place. Sinnett claimed that a Mahatma letter had stated that Mars and Mercury were part of the Earth Chain but Blavatsky denied this, claiming instead that Mars and Mercury were each

notes that *The Mahatma Letters* and *Esoteric Buddhism* utilise "discursive strategies of science and tradition."[28] Sanskrit terms were also brought in, testifying to the admired Oriental "other" of the Theosophists. From 1888, with the publication of *The Secret Doctrine* and other more accessible Theosophical works, reincarnation became "one of the core elements" of what was arguably the "most influential esoteric movement of the late nineteenth century." Reincarnation was legitimized through the discursive strategy of the "construction of tradition," whereby an ancient manuscript was posited as the source for Theosophical teachings. Hammer concludes, "Implicitly, reincarnation had passed in six years from being a controversial innovation to becoming a central tenet of all the religious traditions of the world — or at least of the esoteric aspect of each of these traditions."[29] He observes that Blavatsky built on elements deriving from several different sources.[30] Despite this bricolage, her overall conception was novel. Theosophical reincarnation involved a typically nineteenth-century construction involving Orientalism, an evolutionary emphasis, and the division of humanity into races. Hammer describes Blavatsky's theory as a "peak of modern myth-making" as well as an "abstract narrative" that dealt with humanity collectively rather than the individual.[31] His observations add important extra dimensions to our understanding of Blavatsky's reincarnationism.

Blavatsky's Reincarnationary Macrocosm

Blavatsky taught that our universe is one of many in a great "cosmic chain" of universes, each of which arose ("reincarnated") after the demise of the previous one.[32] Over the course of its life, each universe was said to repeatedly manifest and disappear, as though sleeping and waking.[33] The ultimate goal of the cyclic appearances and disappearances of the universes was supposed to be the increasing "self-consciousness" of the Divine. Blavatsky said the Divine would achieve this self-consciousness through the periodic exhibition

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part of their own planetary chain. See "Mars and Mercury" in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett,* ed. A. T. Barker (London: T. F. Unwin, 1923), 489–92.

28 Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 466–67.

29 Ibid., 467.

30 Ibid., 468.

31 Ibid., 469.

32 For example, Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 43.

33 For example, Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 16.

of different aspects of itself to "finite minds," i.e. humans.[34] It would attain this through the evolution of humans from lower forms of life.[35] How was this to take place? According to Blavatsky, universes were living entities constituted of spirit and matter, in fact, two aspects of the same substance. She considered spirit primary because matter arose from it. Spirit carried the ideas that gave rise to matter, and consciousness arose from the union of spirit with matter at a specific point in evolutionary history. Although they would separate during the course of the universe's lifetime, on a deeper level, spirit and matter were inseparable, and continuously and simultaneously repelled and attracted one another. "So do Spirit and Matter stand to each other," Blavatsky wrote, "The two poles of the same homogeneous substance, the root-principle of the universe."[36] Blavatsky claimed spirit and matter were linked by something called Fohat, which functioned like a bridge by which divine ideas were impressed on the material world as "laws of nature." It was an animating principle that brought atoms to life.[37] Describing Fohat in terms of *eros*, or attraction, she characterised it as a kind of "affinity," "intelligence" or even "guide," although she was adamant it was not a personal God.[38]

From a state of cosmic rest, spirit was said to "fall" into matter and be required to find its way back to its original condition. Blavatsky called the change from matter to spirit evolution, and from spirit to matter, involution. During involution, spirit would "involve" into matter and "appear." Thereafter, it would gradually evolve back into spirit again, disappearing. Blavatsky described the periodic appearance and disappearance of the universe as the "outbreathing" and "inbreathing" of the great breath.[39] The time it took for the cosmos to complete one out-breath and one in-breath was known in Sanskrit as a *manvantara*.[40] During the involutionary phase of the cosmos at the beginning of a *manvantara*, the divine source (known in Sanskrit as *parabrahman*) emitted *mulaprakriti* (matter). Subsequent levels were thereafter emanated. Straightforwardly put, emanation is a concept reminiscent of a champagne fountain in which the champagne cascades from the bottle into the glass at the top and thereafter into the glasses beneath. In the religious or philosophical theory, the metaphorical champagne bottle never empties; the Divine continually emanates without diminution into the various levels of the cosmos it

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34 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 487.

35 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 106–07.

36 Ibid., 247.

37 Ibid., 15–16.

38 Ibid., 119, 139.

39 Ibid., 43.

40 It is important to note that Blavatsky used the term *manvantara* to describe different periods. I refer here to a *manvantara* of the universe.

produces. Prominent in neo-Platonic, Gnostic, and Kabbalistic thought, many different variants of this basic idea have been proposed throughout the centuries.

In Blavatsky's version, after the Divine had emitted *mulaprakriti,* a second level emerged. This was known as the "first" or "un-manifested" logos. It was followed by the second logos, known as "the demiurge," which amounted to an aggregate or "army" of sentient beings called *dhyan chohans*, who functioned as the architects of the universe and agents of karma.[41] The next emanation was the Universal Soul, the source of a finite number of monads, or immortal, reincarnating entities.[42] Blavatsky described the Universal Soul as "a compound unity of manifested living Spirits, the parent-source and nursery of all the mundane and terrestrial monads, *plus* their *divine* reflection.[43] In other words, the Universal Soul was not merely a collective of monads but was also independent of and mirrored them.

All monads were said to enter the cycle of incarnation at the beginning of the universe's *manvantara.* With each incarnation, a monad would acquire a new personality. Through the monad's assimilation of successive temporary personalities, it would spiritualise, overcoming what Blavatsky called "the delusions of *maya*."[44] It would thus become increasingly aware of the impermanent and illusory nature of the cosmos and more conscious of its own identity with the Universal Soul. Finally, it would be reabsorbed into the Divine.[45] Blavatsky termed this reabsorption *paranirvana. Paranirvana* was followed by a pause, called a *pralaya*, during which the universe rested before repeating the whole process once more.[46]

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41 See Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 380. Describing the roles of these different emanations, the first logos has the "idea" and the second logos, constituted of the *dhyan chohans*, draws up the "plan" (Ibid., 279–80). Blavatsky considered these beings analogous to angels in Christianity, the "elohim" of Jewish scriptures, and the *Dhyani-Buddhas* of Buddhism (Ibid., 10, 38, 274). There are inferior beings among them, but no "devils" (*Secret Doctrine II,* 487). On *dhyan chohans* as agents of karma, see *Secret Doctrine I*, 122–23.

42 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 16–17, note. The term "monad" can have a wider meaning too, but we will focus here on this meaning. For example, see Ibid., 21.

43 Ibid., 573.

44 "The Universe is called, with everything in it, MAYA, because all is temporary therein, from the ephemeral life of a fire-fly to that of the Sun. Compared to the eternal immutability of the ONE, and the changelessness of that Principle, the Universe, with its evanescent ever-changing forms, must be necessarily, in the mind of a philosopher, no better than a will-o'-the-wisp. Yet, the Universe is real enough to the conscious beings in it, which are as unreal as it is itself." (Ibid., 274)

45 Ibid., 130–31, 268.

46 Again, there are different types of *pralaya,* and I refer here to the cosmic variety. On pralaya, see Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 307. On the re-awakening of monads after *pralaya,* see *Secret Doctrine I*, 21.

Blavatsky conceived all of life as participating in this reincarnationary journey. Those incarnated today as humans were once less evolved life forms such as animals and plants, and those incarnated as *dhyan chohans* were once people.[47] Even the *dhyan chohans* had not finished evolving, and would go on to become still higher beings. Evolution, Blavatsky maintained, was endless, but what compelled it? Blavatsky gave three answers to this question. The first was the universe's inherent tendency to evolve, the second was the assistance of higher beings, and the third was the action of karma. Let's look at each of these in more detail.

The Monad's Planetary Journey

A "life wave" was the name Blavatsky gave to a collection of monads evolving more or less together. The life wave present-day humans were part of had progressed through the earlier stages of cosmic evolution together. Karma only became a factor in their evolutionary journey at a specific point. Before then, they had not experienced karma because they had possessed no egos and no intellectual faculties (*manas*). Nevertheless, they still evolved. This was because the evolutionary process of a life wave was rather like a conveyor belt (my simile, not Blavatsky's). Higher beings had assisted the monads in getting onto this conveyor belt in the first place, and, once on it, everyone evolved no matter what. Once the monads reached a certain stage of human evolution, it was as though the life wave had reached the end of the conveyor belt and the monads would thereafter have to continue through their own effort. In other words, they had to get off the belt and start walking. This was because by this point, humans had evolved egos as well as intellectual and rational faculties, and were now held responsible for their actions.[48] Karma had a decisive role during this stage of evolution, because rational apprehension of its effects could impel a person to think and behave in a more spiritual way.

Blavatsky claimed there were many solar systems and that within them, each planet was merely the visible globe within a system of seven spheres, the other six of which were invisible and existed on different planes of reality.[49] Thus,

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47 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 277.

48 *Manas* (the principle associated with the ego) was "held responsible for all the sins committed through, and in, every new body or personality — the evanescent masks which hide the true individual through the long series of rebirths" (H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (London and New York: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1889), 136).

49 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 166. Describing the six invisible spheres that surrounded

six invisible spheres surrounded the other planets of our solar system, as well as the moon. The Earth with its six invisible planets was known as the Earth Chain. In a diagram Blavatsky provided in *The Secret Doctrine,* she represented the Earth as the lowest globe (Globe D), with six more above it (three on each side) in ascending order of spirituality.[50] On the left of the Earth were Globes A, B, and C, and on the right Globes E, F, and G. Moving down from the top of this diagram, Globes A and G were on the highest level of spirituality, B and F the next down, and C and E followed. Within the Earth Chain, evolution began on Globe A before continuing on Globes B, C, D, and so forth. Humans incarnated on Earth today formerly evolved on Globe C, a sphere slightly more spiritual and less material than the Earth.[51] After they had completed their evolution there, they incarnated on Earth. Once evolution on Earth was complete, life would withdraw and continue its evolution on Globe E, which was as spiritual as Globe C had been. Despite the equivalence in spirituality of Globes C and E, it was not the case that humanity would simply return to the same spiritual condition on Globe E that it experienced on Globe C. Through having lived numerous lives on Earth and assimilating those experiences, the monads would have become more conscious, and moved closer to the divine absorption that was the ultimate goal of their peregrinations.

Blavatsky termed a tour of a life wave around the seven globes a "round." Just as the universe experienced a *manvantara* (active period) followed by a *pralaya* (rest period), so too did the planetary chain. There were seven rounds in each active period of the planetary chain, meaning the monads circled through Globes A-G seven times. Every time a life wave completed a round, there was a period of rest called an "obscuration." Once the life wave had been around seven times, however, the planetary chain itself would begin to die out. This was known as a "planetary dissolution" and the life wave would thereafter transfer to a different planetary chain.[52] According to Blavatsky, the Lunar Chain was where the beings now within the Earth Chain previously evolved.[53] She wrote that occultists termed the transference of life from one planetary chain to another the "rebirth of planetary chains." Just as humans left behind shells (i.e. dead physical bodies), so did planets. Said Blavatsky: "Every such

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planet Earth, Blavatsky explained they "blended with our world — interpenetrating it and interpenetrated by it" (*Secret Doctrine I,* 605).

50 Ibid., 172.

51 Ibid., 158–59.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 172.

chain of worlds is the progeny and creation of another, *lower*, and *dead* chain — *its reincarnation*, so to say."[54]

Those incarnated as humans today were thought to have already completed three and a half rounds within the Earth chain, meaning they had travelled from Globe A to Globe G three times before arriving again at Globe D. From its spiritual state at entry, as it progressed through the first three and a half rounds, the monad gradually became more material, only beginning to re-spiritualise after passing the midpoint of the planetary chain on globe D, the Earth. Entering the chain at the ethereal Globe A, the monad was "shot down by the law of Evolution into the lowest form of matter — the mineral." The precise order in which it would then inhabit the different forms on each globe was never made entirely clear, although there were some indications. Quoting an "extract from the teacher's letter on various topics," Blavatsky wrote: "During the 1st round…(heavenly) man becomes a human being on globe A (rebecomes) a mineral, a plant, an animal, on globe B and C, etc. The process changes entirely from the second round."[55] The idea seems to have been that at least during the first round, on each globe, the monad would pass through what we might call mineral, vegetable, animal and human forms before doing the same on the next globe. Blavatsky clarified that the so-called stones, plants, animals, and humans on other globes were not as we know them, but rather the "germ seeds" of what we would now recognise.[56] This is because on each globe, these forms were appropriate to the overall level of materiality of that particular globe.[57] In other words, a spiritual monad enters globe A at the lowest level of matter for that globe, something that resembles the stones we are familiar with on this globe.

Blavatsky explained that the most developed of the monads entering the Earth Chain "reach the human germ-stage in the first Round; become ter-

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[54] Ibid., 152.

[55] An undated letter from Mahatma Koot Hoomi states: "At each round there are less and less animals — the latter themselves evoluting [sic] into higher forms. During the first Round it is *they* that were the 'kings of *creation*.' During the seventh men will have become *Gods* and animals — intelligent beings. Draw your inferences. Beginning with the second round already evolution proceeds on quite a different plan. Everything is evolved and has but to proceed on its cyclic journey and get perfected. It is only the first Round that man becomes from a human being on Globe B. a mineral, a plant, an animal on Planet C. The method changes entirely from the second Round; but — I have learned prudence with you; and will say *nothing* before the time for saying has come. Letter 23 B in Barker ed., *The Mahatma Letters,* 177–178.

[56] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 186.

[57] Ibid., 180.

restrial, though very ethereal human beings towards the end of the Third Round, remaining on it (the globe) through the 'obscuration' period as the seed for future mankind in the Fourth Round, and thus become the pioneers of Humanity at the beginning of this, the Fourth Round."[58] From the middle turning point of the fourth round no more monads would be allowed to enter the human kingdom; if they hadn't made it to the human stage yet, they would have to wait until the next *manvantara*.[59] Although Blavatsky referred to beings from previous rounds as representing humanity, strictly speaking she claimed that the monad was not a "man" as such until "the Light of the Logos" was awakened in him. Until then, he should not "be referred to as 'MAN,' but has to be regarded as a Monad imprisoned in ever changing forms."[60] For "man" to develop, the monad had to acquire "a spiritual model, or prototype." It needed "an intelligent consciousness to guide its evolution and progress." This is where the *pitris* came in, higher beings who descended to assist in the evolution of humanity by deliberately blending spirit with matter, and this occurred at a specific point in the evolution that took place on Globe D, the Earth.[61]

The Monad's Racial Journey

On Earth, the development of human life wave was divided into seven consecutive stages, known as "root races," each containing seven sub-races.[62] A monad was required to pass through all seven of these root-races during its evolutionary journey.[63] Blavatsky only described in detail the root races of the Earth, stating that "we are not concerned with the other Globes in this work, except incidentally."[64] In her account, previous root races lived on continents that no longer existed and their periods of existence were divided from one other by great convolutions of nature, resulting in a lack of physical evidence for their existence.[65] These convolutions weren't punishments but simply the

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58 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 182.

59 Although all the rocks, plants and animals in the world today would eventually become men, this wouldn't occur in this *manvantara*. Ibid., 182.

60 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 42.

61 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 247.

62 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 434–35. Each sub-race has seven branch or family races.

63 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 160. See also H. P. Blavatsky, "Theosophy and Spiritism," in vol. 5 of *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, ed. Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1950), 45.

64 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 160.

65 "Our globe is subject to seven periodical entire changes which go pari passu with the

natural course of events. Wrote Blavatsky, "Such is the fate of every continent, which — like everything else under our Sun — is born, lives, becomes decrepit, and dies.[66] After the appearance and disappearance of every continent with its root race there was said to be a period of rest before the next race appeared on the next continent. Root races were initially more ethereal, gradually becoming more material, evolving physically and morally and becoming more solid until their physical evolution had reached its fullest extent. This was human incarnation as we know it, the mid-point of the Earth Chain's cycle. After this, the process of spiritualisation could begin again.[67]

Evolution on Earth began when lunar *pitris* (the evolved beings of the Lunar Chain) created the first root race by oozing them out of their own bodies.[68] The first root race was ethereal and Blavatsky called them "the self-born."[69] They multiplied by "budding" and lived on a continent known as "The Imperishable Sacred Land."[70] They were sexless and could not be injured or die. They gradually turned into their more solid descendants, the second root race, known as "the sweat born." This second race was intellectually inactive, and was "constantly plunged in a kind of blank or abstract contemplation, as required by the conditions of the Yoga state."[71] Neither of the first two root races was solid enough to have left any physical remains. The "Hyperborean" continent on which the second race lived stretched southwards and westwards from the North Pole and comprised what is now northern Asia.[72] Like the first root race, they were sexless, but since they were more material, they were affected by the physical conditions of the Earth.

The third root race was the first to develop physical bodies. Blavatsky called it the Lemurian race, because it lived on a continent named Lemuria, which used to occupy the Indian and Pacific Oceans before it sunk because of earthquakes and subterranean fires.[73] The first Lemurians reproduced by exuding drops of

races…. It is a law which acts at its appointed time, and not at all blindly, as science may think, but in strict accordance and harmony with Karmic law" (Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 329).

66 Ibid., 350.

67 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 224–25.

68 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 160, 180 and *II,* 110, 174.

69 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 164.

70 Ibid.*,* 6, 17–18, 132.

71 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 207.

72 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 7, 116.

73 Ibid., 266, 332–33. Sri-Lanka, Madagascar, Australia and Easter Island were its remains, Blavatsky claimed (Ibid. 7).

sweat that became eggs.[74] These eggs initially produced hermaphroditic beings, but very gradually they produced offspring in which one sex predominated over another. Eventually, male or female Lemurians were born.[75] At the close of the third root race, the Lemurians looked like gigantic apes, but they could already think and speak, and were relatively civilized.[76] Nevertheless, some of them were morally irresponsible and mated with lower animals, creating the remote ancestor of today's ape.[77] This, according to Blavatsky, was how occultists explained how apes evolved from "men," and not the other way around, as the Darwinists claimed.[78] During the early Lemurian root race, higher beings had produced those who would eventually become human adepts by a process called *Kriyasakti*. These proto-adepts, known as the "Sons of Will and Yoga," remained entirely apart from the rest of mankind.[79]

At around the mid-point of the Lemurian root race, some Lemurians were endowed by higher beings with *manas*, or reason.[80] From then onwards, *manas* would continue to develop, and would eventually become "entirely divine."[81] Before they had been endowed with *manas,* the Lemurians had been sinless because they were without egos. They had therefore not created any karma.[82] Their death and rebirth process had consequently been a lot less complicated that that of humans today; they would simply "resurrect" out of an old body and into a new one.[83] As soon as they were endowed with *manas*, however, they started creating karma and became subject to death and reincarnation in a recognisable form.[84]

The fourth root race was the Atlantean. Their home was the continent of Atlantis, which rose out of the sea in the eastern Atlantic Ocean and was eventually submerged by a deluge.[85] The Atlanteans were more intellectual than the Lemurians and they perfected language.[86] During the highest point of its civilization, knowledge, and intellectuality, the Atlantean Race divided into those who followed the (good) right-hand path of knowledge, and those who

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74 Ibid., 116.
75 Ibid., 132.
76 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 191 and *II*, 446.
77 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 190.
78 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 180, 263, 635.
79 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 207.
80 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 244–45, 248, 275.
81 Ibid., 161–2.
82 Ibid., 410.
83 Ibid., 610.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 8, 332–34.
86 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 189.

followed the (evil) left-hand path.[87] The evolution of the Atlantean race led it down to the very bottom of materiality in its physical development.[88] They diminished in stature and the length of their lives decreased.[89] During the evolution of the Atlantean race, what had been "the holy mystery of procreation" gradually turned into animal indulgence. As a result, the Atlanteans changed physically and mentally. According to Blavatsky, from having been "the healthy King of animal creation of the Third Race, man became in the Fifth, our race, a helpless, scrofulous being and has now become the wealthiest heir on the globe to constitutional and hereditary diseases, the most consciously and intelligently bestial of all animals!"[90] The "curse of karma" was called down on the Atlanteans, Blavatsky wrote, not for seeking *natural* union, but for "abusing the creative power" and "wasting the life-essence for no purpose except bestial personal gratification."[91]

Present day humanity, the fifth root race, was known as the Aryan, and it could trace its descent through the Atlanteans from those more spiritual races of the Lemurians.[92] The Aryan race arose in Asia and spread south and west. It had been in existence for about one million years.[93] Blavatsky described the development of the Aryan race from the Atlantean as gradual and complex.[94] As with the emergence of all root races, there was some overlap, so that the remnants of the Atlanteans were still present at the dawn of the Aryan root race. Some of these remnants inhabited lands that eventually became islands, where "the undeveloped tribes and families of the Atlantean stock fell gradually into a still more abject and savage condition."[95] After the submersion of the last remnant of the Atlantean race, "an impenetrable veil of secrecy was thrown over the occult and religious mysteries." This secrecy led the Aryans to the establishment of the religious mysteries, "in which ancient truths might be taught to the coming generations under the veil of allegory and symbolism."[96] Blavatsky considered the Aryan root race to be an evolutionary stage of pivotal importance since it was positioned at the exact mid-point of the

87 Ibid., 192.
88 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 446.
89 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 609 and *II,* 331.
90 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 411.
91 Ibid., 410.
92 Ibid., 318, 433, 444.
93 Ibid., 435.
94 Ibid., 433–35.
95 Ibid., 743.
96 Ibid., 124.

involutionary-evolutionary process.[97] Humanity had just "crossed the meridian point of the perfect adjustment of Spirit and Matter," which represented the "equilibrium between brain intellect and Spiritual perception."[98] A practical consequence of the turn towards spiritualisation was that phenomena such as thought transference, clairvoyance, and clairaudience would become more common.[99]

The Aryan root race was to be followed by sixth and seventh root races in the future, and Blavatsky claimed the germs of the sixth were already to be found in America.[100] This sixth race, she claimed, would be "rapidly growing out of its bonds of matter, and even of flesh."[101] Once evolution had been completed through all the rounds and races of the planetary chain, the monad would "find itself as free from matter and all its qualities as it was in the beginning; having gained in addition the experience and wisdom, the fruition of all its personal lives, without their evil and temptations."[102] The monad would then become a *dhyan chohan*.[103] These *dhyan chohans* would be transferred, in the next cycle, to "higher, superior worlds, making room for a new hierarchy, composed of the elect ones of our mankind."[104] Highly evolved *dhyan chohans* would move through solar systems in this way until the time arrived for the cosmic *pralaya,* when the entire cosmos would rest. At that point they would achieve "the highest condition of Nirvana."[105]

The *Saptaparna*

In Blavatsky's later thought, the human microcosm reflected the septenary macrocosm, and each of the seven elements of the human constitution played an indispensable role in the death and rebirth process.[106] Known as the *saptaparna* (seven-leafed plant) these seven principles represented the balance

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97 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 182, 185–86.

98 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 300.

99 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 536–37.

100 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 444–45.

101 Ibid., 446.

102 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 180–81.

103 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 159.

104 Ibid., 221.

105 H. P. Blavatsky, "Nirvana," *The Theosophist* 5 (July 1884): 246.

106 Blavatsky reconciled the earlier tripartite and the later septenary spiritual anthropologies by explaining that the seven could be condensed into three, or the three expanded into seven, with the two lowest principles forming the physical body, the next two forming the soul and the top three the spirit (Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 602–3).

of material and spiritual elements within the human being, or the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical levels on which a person was said to operate throughout their life.[107] The seven principles were given, in ascending order of spirituality, as the body (Sanskrit: *stula sarira*), vitality (*prana* or *jiva*), astral body (*linga sarira*), animal soul (*kama-rupa*), human soul (*manas*), spiritual soul (*buddhi*), and spirit (*atma*).[108] All seven of these principles were considered necessary for life.[109] In Blavatsky's later esoteric instructions she taught that each of these principles was itself sevenfold: there was an *atma* of the *kama-rupa*, a *buddhi* of the *kama-rupa* and so forth.[110]

The physical body (*stula sarira*) was composed of the lowest form of matter present in the human constitution. It was animated by prana, which Blavatsky described as "the breath of life," or the active power producing all vital phenomena.[111] She also depicted the physical body as the vehicle (*upadhi*) of the life force. The third principle, the astral body or "astral double" was an ethereal duplicate of the physical body.[112] The matter of the physical body was formed and moulded over this astral body by the action of *prana*. The fourth principle, the animal soul, was the vehicle of the will and desire. It was associated with feelings and emotional consciousness and Blavatsky described it as "the subjective form created through mental and physical desires and thoughts in connection with things of matter, by all sentient beings."[113] Blavatsky considered the animal soul "the grossest of all our principles." It was the "medium through which the beast in us acts all its life." Hinting perhaps at the temptations of sexuality, she added, "every intellectual theosophist will

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[107] "Do not imagine that because man is called septenary…he is a compound of seven…entities; or, as well expressed by a Theosophical writer, of skins to be peeled off like the skins of an onion. The 'principles,' as already said, save the body, the life, and the astral eidolon [lingha-sharira], all of which disperse at death, are simply aspects or states of consciousness" (Blavatsky, *Key*, 100).

[108] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 153 and *II*, 593, 596.

[109] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 158 and *II*, 241–42.

[110] H. P. Blavatsky, "Esoteric Instruction Number Three" and "Esoteric Instruction Number Five," in vol. 12 of *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, ed. Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1980), 648 and 693.

[111] H. P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (Krotona: Theosophical Publishing House, 1918), 242; Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 593. This idea is, of course, is reminiscent of her claim that the seven root races each had seven sub-races.

[112] Blavatsky, *Theosophical Glossary*, 35; "Esoteric Instruction Number Two," in vol. 12 of *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, ed. Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1980), 547; "Esoteric Instruction Number Five," 704.

[113] Blavatsky, *Theosophical Glossary*, 159.

understand my real meaning."[114] Just as the first principle was the vehicle of the second, the fourth was the vehicle of the fifth. Bestowed on humanity when it was incarnated as the Lemurian root race, the fifth principle, the "human soul" or *manas*, was associated with memory and reason. Blavatsky described it as the mind, intelligence, or consciousness assimilating and reflecting the two principles above it. It was what made a person an intelligent or moral being, distinguishing them from an animal.[115] Blavatsky also described *manas* as the conception of self and associated it with "embodied consciousness" or the "higher ego."[116] Until the third root race, humanity had not possessed an animal soul sufficiently developed to be able to act as the vehicle of *manas.*[117] Even among the Aryans, human *manas* was not fully developed, and only in the future would the full development of *manas* be achieved.[118]

Manas was crucial to Blavatsky's account of reincarnation because the spiritual evolution of a person who had reached the Aryan race was said to depend on the ability of their *manas* to overcome the pull of the lower principles and attach itself to the higher ones.[119] Blavatsky explained the process as follows: *Manas* was constituted of a higher and a lower part. The higher aspect was attracted to the principle above it, *buddhi*, but the lower aspect to the principles below it, the "*animal* soul full of selfish and sensual desires."[120] Although *manas* was drawn down by these desires, if the "*better* man" or higher *manas* escaped that "fatal attraction," then *buddhi* would conquer and carry *manas* with it "to the realm of eternal spirit." This meant the higher *manas* and *buddhi* would join together and go on to the next incarnation in a more evolved state.[121] Blavatsky wrote that the higher *manas* existed on the "plane of *Sutratma*, which is the golden thread on which, like beads, the various personalities of this higher *Ego* are strung."[122]

The two highest principles (*atma* and *buddhi*) formed the monad, the true, immortal essence of a person.[123] *Buddhi* was the "divine soul," or the faculty

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114 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 260.

115 Blavatsky, *Theosophical Glossary*, 188; Key, 92, 135–36.

116 Blavatsky, *Key,* 100, 174*,*

117 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 161–62.

118 Ibid., 300–1.

119 Blavatsky, *Key*, 92.

120 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 495–96. In *The Key to Theosophy,* she explained that the "lower, or personal ego" referred to the "false personality," the combination of the physical body, etheric double, and the lower self, including all the principles up to the lower part of *manas.* This false personality therefore indicated the animal instincts, passions and desires (*Key*, 176).

121 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 244–45.

122 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 79.

123 "Properly speaking, the term "human monad" applies only to the dual soul (*Atma–Buddhi*),

of cognising, the conscience, and the channel through which divine knowledge reached the ego, allowing discernment of good and evil.[124] In other words, through absorbing the higher part of *manas* in each incarnation, the person evolved and their *buddhi* would become increasingly conscious.[125] Blavatsky stated *buddhi* was the vehicle of the seventh principle. *Atma* was the "higher self," a "ray" of the universal spirit inseparable from its divine source.[126] *Atma*, Blavatsky wrote, "Is neither your Spirit nor mine, but like sunlight shines on all. It is the universally diffused '*divine principle*,' and is as inseparable from its one and absolute *Meta-Spirit*, as the sunbeam is inseparable from the sunlight."[127] *Atma* was "the God *above*, more than within, us. Happy the man who succeeds in saturating his *inner Ego* with it!"[128]

According to Blavatsky, it was the separation of the higher principles from the physical body that caused death. At death, the three lower principles (the physical body, the vitality, and the astral body) were cast off. The physical body decomposed, but the astral body could hang around for a while as a ghost and appear during séances. The four higher principles then entered *kama loka*, an astral locality where their experience depended on their level of spiritual achievement. (The more spiritual the person, the shorter their stay in *kama loka*.) At the end of the *kama loka* period, the fifth principle, *manas*, was purified and divided by a struggle between the principles above (*atma* and *buddhi*) and below it (the *kama-rupa* or emotional body). The three highest principles (*atma*, *buddhi*, and the higher part of *manas*) then entered a "spiritual ante-natal state," preparing for the bliss of the realm of *devachan*, which would be entered having left behind the emotional body. *Devachan* closely paralleled Earth life, and within it, individuals were said to experience growth, maturity, and decline. There were an infinite variety of levels of wellbeing within *devachan* to suit different degrees of merit.[129] Blavatsky depicted it as a sort of heaven that provided a rest between lives just as sleep offered rest between days and as *pralayas* occurred between *manvantaras*. Blavatsky remarked on how this teaching reflected the life and death of a human being.

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not to its highest spiritual vivifying Principle, *Atma*, alone. But since the Spiritual Soul, if divorced from the latter (*Atma*) could have no existence, no being, it has thus been called" (Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 178).

124 Ibid., xix.

125 Ibid., 244.

126 Blavatsky, *Key*, 175; "Esoteric Instruction Number Three," 648; "Esoteric Instruction Number Five," 693; *Theosophical Glossary*, 40.

127 Blavatsky, *Key*, 135.

128 Ibid., 175.

129 Blavatsky, "The Various States of *Devachan*," *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, 5:90.

> It thus becomes apparent how perfect is the analogy between the processes of Nature in the Kosmos and the individual man. The latter lives through his life-cycle, and dies. His "higher principles," corresponding in the development of a planetary chain to the cycling Monads, pass into *Devachan*, which corresponds to the "Nirvana" and states of rest intervening between two chains. The Man's lower "principles" are disintegrated in time and are used by Nature again for the formation of new human principles, and the same process takes place in the disintegration and formation of Worlds. Analogy is thus the surest guide to the comprehension of the Occult teachings.[130]

As with *kama loka*, the length of time spent in *devachan* varied from individual to individual, but it was never less than one thousand years. It generally lasted around one thousand five hundred, but could be as long as three thousand years. Since the gap between human rebirths was so large, it was possible those alive in Blavatsky's time were last incarnated as Atlanteans.[131]

After a long period in *devachan,* the monad — now composed of *atma*, *buddhi* and the higher part of *manas* — would feel the attraction of Earth life. Reincarnation was said to occur because of a thirst for life on the part of the monad. The monad then "descended," acquiring a new set of lower principles, and the whole process would begin again. Although the principles themselves were considered new, Blavatsky said they were made of the same "life-atoms" that had formed the lower principles in previous incarnations. These atoms were once again drawn together by the returning individuality under the guidance of karmic law. Adding a scientific angle to this explanation, Blavatsky stated these life-atoms were partially transmitted from father to son by heredity.[132]

Karma

Karma determined the details of the new life.[133] Blavatsky portrayed karma as an impersonal law of the universe, an "eternal and immutable decree," that brought about harmony in the spirit–matter cosmos.[134]

> Karma creates nothing, nor does it design. It is man who plans and creates causes, and Karmic law adjusts the effects; which adjustment is not an act, but universal

130 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 173.
131 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 303.
132 Ibid., 671–72.
133 Ibid., 303.
134 Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I*, 643, and II, 303.

> harmony, tending ever to resume its original position, like a bough, which, bent down too forcibly, rebounds with corresponding vigour. If it happen to dislocate the arm that tried to bend it out of its natural position, shall we say that it is the bough which broke our arm, or that our own folly has brought us to grief? … KARMA is an Absolute and Eternal law in the World of manifestation.[135]

Blavatsky saw karma as playing a role in the perfection of humanity.

> Occultists…recognise in every pain and suffering but the necessary pangs of incessant procreation: a series of stages toward an ever-growing perfectibility, which is visible in the silent influence of never-erring Karma, or *abstract* nature — the Occultists, we say, view the great Mother otherwise. Woe to those who live without suffering. Stagnation and death is the future of all that vegetates without a change. And how can there be any change for the better without proportionate suffering during the preceding stage? Is it not those only who have learnt the deceptive value of earthly hopes and the illusive allurements of external nature who are destined to solve the great problems of life, pain, and death?[136]

However, to reiterate, although it played a role in evolution, karma was not ubiquitous throughout Blavatsky's cosmos. Prior to the late Lemurian period, "humanity" had not experienced karma. Karma was, in fact, only a feature of one of the latest phases in human evolution, and was associated with intellectuality and the human ego.

As I claimed previously, Blavatsky's discussions of karmic reincarnation typically had the intention of vindicating divine justice by demonstrating life's apparent inequalities to be the results of individual or group karma.[137] Had there been no karmic reincarnation, wrote Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*, the origin and cause of suffering could not be accounted for.[138]

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[135] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II*, 304–5.

[136] Ibid., 475.

[137] Blavatsky argued that the "social evils" of the distinction between social classes, or the sexes, and the unequal distribution of capital and labour were due to karma, but that the particular conditions of life were not solely the result of individual action but also the result of group karma. Group karma was the aggregate of individual karma, so that the sum of the karma of everyone within a particular nation became national karma and the aggregate of all national karmas was world karma (*Key,* 203–05). The most important point for Blavatsky here was that the reality of karma didn't mean that people were entitled to ignore the suffering of others. For example, she argued it is every individual's responsibility to give what they can of their money, time, and "ennobling thought" in order to "balance" or improve the national karma (*Key*, 205).

[138] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine I,* 183.

> It is only the knowledge of the constant re-births of one and the same individuality throughout the life-cycle; the assurance that the same MONADS…rewarded or punished by such rebirth for the suffering endured or crimes committed in the former life;…it is only this doctrine, we say, that can explain to us the mysterious problem of Good and Evil, and reconcile man to the terrible and *apparent* injustice of life. Nothing but such certainty can quiet our revolted sense of justice. For, when one unacquainted with the noble doctrine looks around him, and observes the inequalities of birth and fortune, of intellect and capacities; when one sees honour paid fools and profligates, on whom fortune has heaped her favours by mere privilege of birth, and their nearest neighbour, with all his intellect and noble virtues — far more deserving in every way — perishing of want and for lack of sympathy; when one sees all this and has to turn away, helpless to relieve the undeserved suffering, one's ears ringing and heart aching with the cries of pain around him — that blessed knowledge of Karma alone prevents him from cursing life and men, as well as their supposed Creator.[139]

Having looked at Blavatsky's ideas in some detail, we are now in a position to assess the place of reincarnation vis a vis karma. Karma had a role in Blavatsky's account of evolution, but only from around the middle of the Lemurian period onwards and alongside other evolutionary factors such as the assistance of higher beings and the inherent evolutionary impulse of the cosmos. The compound of *karmic reincarnation* was presented as accounting for inequality and human suffering, and was believed to offer an opportunity for self-perfection and hence accelerated evolution through the endurance of suffering. Furthermore, reincarnation in all its forms was depicted as a microcosmic reflection of the universe's macrocosmic cyclicity.

Conclusions

Presumably, Blavatsky found her later doctrine of reincarnation more appealing than the metempsychosis theory she had discarded around 1882. If one had adhered to the doctrines of *Isis Unveiled,* one wouldn't have expected to meet deceased loved ones at séances, since they would either have achieved immortality and transmigrated to the next sphere, or failed to do so and been annihilated. The latter outcome was considered the lot of the majority and it was not particularly comforting. Not so with reincarnation. In Blavatsky's later theory, one would still not expect to converse with the spirits of the dead (as Spiritualists claimed to), but one might be consoled by the idea of them (in

[139] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 303–4. She made the same point in *Key,* 142.

all probability) enjoying their good karma in *devachan* and eventually returning to life on Earth in a more advanced human form. Nevertheless, Blavatsky's reincarnation doctrine still placed a greater distance between the living and the dead than did its main reincarnationist competitor, French Spiritism. Referring to timescales of geological magnitude in contrast to the shorter timescales of Spiritism, according to Blavatsky, reincarnation never occurred during the lifetimes of family members. As explained by Blavatsky's theory of the seven principles, it also always involved the birth of a completely different person from the one who had died. There was therefore no chance the new baby could be the reincarnation of the deceased grandparent, for example. Thus, Blavatsky deemphasized the personal in favour of an impersonal evolutionary trajectory whose ultimate destination was more important than the details of any particular life. To be sure, despite individual differences, all humans were ultimately alike in that their immortal element, *atma*, derived from — and would return to — the same source. All else was temporary and illusory, including earthly attachments. Blavatsky's reincarnation doctrine was, therefore, arguably quite democratic, and could be seen as supporting the notion of universal brotherhood that was promoted in Theosophy.

It could also be seen as pointing towards the inherent power of mankind and the fundamental importance of the present moment. As such, it reflected that fin-de-siècle apprehension — so common in the literature of the period — that a pivotal moment in history had been reached. For Blavatsky, human incarnation in the fifth (Aryan) root race of the fourth round of the Earth Chain was the critical juncture in the progression of the spirit–matter cosmos, the point of exact equilibration, after which the upward turn would once again begin. Sometimes, Blavatsky made it seem as though everything hinged on humanity's contemporary choices, a position consistent with an occultist emphasis on personal agency, power, and will. On the other hand, reincarnating monads could also be made to seem like twigs in a stream in that no matter what one did, humanity — and the cosmos — would inevitably evolve, karma or no karma. Karmic reincarnation played a supporting role in this evolutionary cosmic drama at the same time as it vindicated divine justice by explaining the meaning of suffering. Nirvana, Blavatsky argued, could only be reached through "æons of suffering" and by attaining "the *knowledge* of EVIL as well as of good, as otherwise the latter remains incomprehensible."[140] The tension between the inherent progressive impulse of the cosmos and human agency was present here too, as it wasn't always clear whether Blavatsky was saying that suffering itself compelled evolution, or whether one's response to that suffering was the key to progress. One suspects both to have been the case.

[140] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine II,* 81.

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Sympathy for the Devil
A Review of Recent Publications in the Study of Satanism

Ethan Doyle White

E-mail: ethan-doyle-white@hotmail.co.uk

Dyrendal, Asbjørn, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa. Petersen. *The Invention of Satanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780195181104.

Introvigne, Massimo. *Satanism: A Social History*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. ISBN: 9004288287.

van Luijk, Ruben. *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780190275105.

Within the realms of occultism and alternative religiosity, modern religious Satanism punches well above its weight. For a spiritual milieu that likely holds the allegiance of no more than 100,000 worldwide, it attracts considerable interest and occupies a prominent place in the public imagination. Although academic research into this sector of the cultic milieu has long been somewhat patchy, over the past decade things have begun to change as the subject has attracted the attention of a growing number of scholars and well-established academic publishers. Recently, three new books have appeared, written by some of the foremost figures in this burgeoning field, which help to both advance and take stock of what we know about Satanism.

As recognised by Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, the authors of *The Invention of Satanism*, Satanism is far too diverse to

be regarded as a singular religion or even as a unified movement, and thus is best understood as a broad milieu within which various groups and currents operate.[1] Perhaps best known is the atheistic current of LaVeyan Satanism, developed by the American Anton Szandor LaVey (born Howard Stanton Levey; 1930–1997), the man who founded the Church of Satan in 1966 and published *The Satanic Bible* in 1969. LaVey's carnivalesque creation represents an intriguing blend of right-wing libertarianism, ceremonial magic, and kitsch shock-tactics, presenting Satan not as a real entity but as a personification of humanity's intrinsically animal nature. Other Satanic groups instead regard Satan as a literal deity worthy of veneration. The most prominent movement in this theistic sector of the milieu is the Temple of Set, established by the American Michael Aquino in 1975. Blending elements of religious Satanism with modern Paganism, Aquino's Setians venerate Satan in the form of Set, a deity drawn from the pantheon of ancient Egypt whom they believe has assisted humanity throughout its evolution. A similar crossover between the Pagan and the Satanic can be seen in the Order of Nine Angles, an occult movement originating in Britain which focuses not so much on the figure of Satan himself, but on the antinomian and transgressive status that being a "Satanist" accords. Moreover, not all manifestations of Satanism are explicitly religious; for example, many artists, particularly those active in the fields of literature and rock music, have been content to play with the imagery of Satan in a manner that glorifies or praises him without actively engaging in veneration or worship.

Individual studies of Satanism had appeared sporadically prior to the emergence of the study of Satanism as a distinct field. These included early studies of the Church of Satan, the Process Church of the Final Judgement, and the Temple of Set, and later a historical monograph on the history of Satanism and an encyclopaedia on the subject.[2] Much attention was also given to

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[1] Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa. Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4. This framework has previously been applied in Jesper Aagard Petersen, "Introduction: Embracing Satan," in *Contemporary Religious Satanism*, ed. Jesper Aagard Petersen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 5; Jesper Aagard Petersen and Asbjørn Dyrendal, "Satanism," in *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 216.

[2] Randall H. Alfred, "The Church of Satan," in *The New Religious Consciousness*, eds. Charles Y. Glock and Robert N. Bellah (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 180–202; William S. Bainbridge, *Satan's Power: A Deviant Psychotherapy Cult* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Gini Graham Scott, *The Magicians: A Study of the Use of Power in a Black Magic Group* (New York: Irvington, 1983); Gareth J. Medway, *Lure of the Sinister: The Unnatural History of Satanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); James R. Lewis, ed. *Satanism Today: An Encyclopedia of Religion, Folklore, and Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2001).

the Satanic ritual abuse hysteria which spread across several Western countries during the 1980s and early 1990s.[3] Other studies explored the place of Satanism in folklore and other manifestations of popular culture.[4] Despite these earlier publications, the academic study of Satanism as a distinct field within the wider study of religion only got going in the late 2000s. For instance, the past decade has witnessed the publication of one sourcebook and two academic anthologies devoted to the subject, as well as at least two PhDs turned into monographs.[5] Two conferences on the topic have also been held, one at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim (2009) and the other at Stockholm University (2011). These have been accompanied by special journal issues devoted to the subject,[6] a range of scattered journal articles, and several articles in broader edited volumes. While we are not yet at the stage where a specific scholarly organisation or journal devoted to the subject would be warranted, it is conceivable that we are beginning to move in that direction.

The Invention of Satanism

The first of the three books to be discussed here is *The Invention of Satanism*, published by Oxford University Press. A collaborative effort, this volume is the product of three authors based in Norway: Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis,

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[3] James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley, ed. *The Satanism Scare* (Hawthorne: Aldine de Grutyer, 1991); J. S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993); Gary Clapton, *The Satanic Ritual Abuse Controversy: Social Workers and the Social Work Press* (London: University of North London Press, 1993); Massimo Introvigne, "A Rumor of Devils: The Satanic Ritual Abuse Scare in the Mormon Church," *Syzygy* 6, no. 1 (1997), 77–119; J. S. La Fontaine, *Speak of the Devil: Tales of Satanic Abuse in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[4] Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions and the Media* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Bill Ellis, *Lucifer Ascending: The Occult in Folklore and Popular Culture* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); Christopher Partridge and Eric Christianson, eds., *The Lure of the Dark Side: Satan and Western Demonology in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[5] James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, eds., *The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of Satanism* (Amgerst: Prometheus Books, 2008); Jesper Aagaard Petersen, ed., *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa. Petersen, eds., *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2014); Kennet Granholm, *Dark Enlightenment: The Historical, Sociological, and Discursive Contexts of Contemporary Esoteric Magic* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[6] Titus Hjelm edited the special issue of *Social Compass* 56, no. 4 (2009), while *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 4, no. 2 (2013) was also devoted to Satanism.

and Jesper Aa. Petersen. This trio will be familiar to those already acquainted with the study of Satanism, as each has independently published quite a bit of material on this topic before. Indeed, much of the information that is included in *The Invention of Satanism* has been published previously, in various specialist anthologies and journal articles, but here it is both made more accessible and brought up to date with the information gleaned from Lewis' most recent sociological research.

As the authors state in the opening pages, the book is about "how Satanism was invented as a declared religious or philosophical position, and how it serves as a personal and collective identity."[7] In exploring these questions, it blends two main themes: one concentrates on the early development of LaVeyan Satanism, while the other focuses on a sociological analysis of the Satanic milieu's demographics. Both are worthwhile tasks, although it is a little unusual to see the two juxtaposed in such a manner; perhaps it would have been better to explore these separate themes in greater depth in the form of two separate publications.

While *The Invention of Satanism* is not specifically set up as a textbook and devotes little space to groups like the Temple of Set and the Order of Nine Angles (ONA), it nevertheless tries to cover quite a bit of ground in its exploration of the subject. It opens with a description of the different ways to define Satanism, adopting a tripartite system that divides the milieu into the "reactive, rationalist, and esoteric." The term "reactive" is used as a "catch-all category of popular Satanism, inverted Christianity, and symbolic rebellion," while "rationalist" Satanism is that which is paradigmatically "atheistic, sceptical, materialistic, and epicurean," and "esoteric" Satanism is "more explicitly theistically oriented."[8]

The book then embarks on a brief overview of the wider history of Satan and Satanism in Christian thought and the development of the early self-described Satanic groups. After this it turns more fully to the LaVeyan Satanic current, devoting both the third and fourth chapters to this topic. The former provides a rough historical and biographical overview of (what is known) of LaVey's life and the formation of his Church of Satan, while the latter focuses squarely on his best-known work, *The Satanic Bible*. Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen follow this with a discussion of the Satanic Panic of the 1980s and 1990s – although surprisingly do not cite the important work of Jean La Fontaine – before proceeding to a wider discussion of the demographics of the movement, here evidently relying to a large extent on Lewis' research. They discuss the ways in

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7 Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, *Invention of Satanism*, 2.

8 Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, *Invention of Satanism*, 5–6. This is a framework previously employed, for instance, in Petersen, "Introduction," 6.

which Satanists convert to the movement, drawing useful comparisons with conversion to another sector of the esoteric milieu, contemporary Paganism, which Lewis has studied for several decades. They then look more fully at the statistical evidence produced by surveys conducted by Lewis in 2000/2001, 2009, and 2011. In doing so they confirm the suspicion that modern religious Satanism is a largely youthful phenomenon, with involvement appearing to peak in an individual's early twenties and sharply dropping off in their thirties. At the same time, they demonstrate once again that, in clear contrast to most new religions, it is a largely male phenomenon, while also raising the interesting point that the ONA attracted a larger proportion of women than other forms of Satanism.[9] *The Invention of Satanism* is a fairly short book at only 254 pages, and while its combination of the historical and the statistical can create a bit of a stark contrast, the end result is well worth a read, representing perhaps the best place for students to begin their exploration of this subject.

Satanism: A Social History

Massimo Introvigne, the author of the second volume to be discussed here, is a name that should be familiar to anyone interested in the academic study of new religions. As well as being a prolific author, Introvigne was responsible for the 1988 foundation of the Turin-based CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions). Satanism is one of the many subjects that have attracted his attention, and the volume discussed here is the fourth revision – and the first English-language version – of a work first published in his native Italian in 1994. In keeping with Introvigne's training as a sociologist, he defines his study as "a social history of Satanism, a conversation between history and sociology,"[10] although it is the historical approach that predominates.

For the purposes of his book, Introvigne adopts a fairly narrow working definition of "Satanism" and "Luciferianism," terms which he effectively uses as synonyms. Here, they are defined as "(1) the worship of the character identified with the name of Satan or Lucifer in the Bible, (2) by organized groups with at least a minimal organization and hierarchy, (3) through ritual or liturgical practices."[11] This allows him to rein in his discussion to those groups that would more recognisably be classified as "religious," excluding for instance the so-called "Literary Satanism" of romanticist poets like Byron and Shelley. This more

9 Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, *Invention of Satanism*, 195.
10 Introvigne, *Satanism*, 3.
11 Introvigne, *Satanism*, 3.

restricted approach has both advantages and disadvantages; on the one hand, it permits a more focused and in-depth study of religious Satanism itself, although on the other it cuts religious Satanism off from wider discourses about the Satanic in popular culture. Introvigne further subdivides religious Satanism into two forms, "rationalist" and "occult,"[12] which correspond largely to Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen's categories of "rationalist" and "esoteric" Satanism.

"Part One: Proto-Satanism, 17th and 18th Centuries" is the shortest segment of the book, providing brief examinations of instances in France, Sweden, Italy, England, and Russia in which individuals living in this period may have engaged in the veneration of Satan. None of these cases are clear-cut and it remains difficult to ascertain what was actually going on in each of them. In many respects this is an area that requires fuller attention from specialists in the early modern period and its notorious witch trials. Perhaps the most important contribution here is Introvigne's introduction of the term "folkloric Satanism" in reference to early modern practices where people in rural communities do appear to have engaged in some form of Satanic veneration.[13]

The book moves into "Part Two: Classical Satanism, 1821–1952" with a discussion of anti-Satanic discourses in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, focusing on the paranoid conspiracy theories of writers like Alexis-Vincent-Charles Berbiguier and Joseph Bizouard. These and other individuals, most of whom were right-wing Catholics, regarded Freemasonry, Mesmerism, and Spiritualism as parts of a vast Satanic conspiracy that had been responsible for the French Revolution of 1789 and other attempts to undermine Christendom. Introvigne proceeds to a chapter-length discussion of the Taxil affair, in which two Frenchman who declared themselves to be devout Catholics, Charles Hacks and Léo Taxil, promoted the claim that there was a vast Satanic conspiracy involving the Freemasons. Both Hacks and Taxil later maintained that the entire scenario had been a hoax to expose the gullibility of the Catholic establishment. Introvigne acknowledges that this material "tells us very little about Satanists" but highlights that it "tells us everything on anti-Satanists," a group who are "no less important for our story than Satanists are."[14]

In the following chapter, Introvigne explores what he refers to as the "Satanic Underground" which existed between 1897 and 1952. Here he outlines a variety of Satanic or quasi-Satanic groups and individuals active within the occult scene. These include the Danish Ben Kadosh, the Polish Stanisław

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12 Introvigne, *Satanism*, 9–11.

13 Introvigne, *Satanism*, 44.

14 Introvigne, *Satanism*, 226.

Przybyszewski, and the Paris-based Russian Maria de Naglowska. He also discusses Aleister Crowley, the British occultist who founded the religion of Thelema and who, although not easily labelled a Satanist himself, was a strong influence on the later emergence of explicitly religious Satanism. Introvigne also returns to the place of anti-Satanists, discussing the fantasies of a Satanic conspiracy that appear in the 1929 book *L'Élue du Dragon* or the attacks on the maleficent "counter-initiates" in the work of the Traditionalist René Guénon. He rounds off the chapter with a discussion of two other movements that have some areas of commonality with Satanism but which are generally distinct: Gerald Gardner's Wicca and Jack Parsons' variant of Thelema. There are a few unfortunate omissions here. For instance, when discussing the development of Wicca no mention is made of Robert Cochrane, an occultist who established a coven in England's Thames Valley. Although there is no unequivocal evidence that Cochrane had Luciferian aspects to his theology, he has certainly been understood this way by some of the later groups that have embraced his legacy.[15]

The final part of the book, "Contemporary Satanism, 1952–2016," is also the longest. Introvigne sees LaVey as being, "with few exceptions … at the origins of all contemporary Satanism,"[16] and thus begins his story with an account of the life and times of the self-declared Black Pope. Later in the chapter he delves into a number of other Satanic or quasi-Satanic groups that sprang up during the 1960s and 1970s. He discusses the Process Church of the Final Judgement, a group which incorporated Satan into its Jungian-influenced theology, before providing an overview of Charles Manson who – although not a Satanist – came to be associated with Satanism in the polemics of various anti-Satanic authors. Next is the Temple of Set, which broke from the Church of Satan in a 1975 schism. This is then followed by a discussion of the Order of Nine Angles, a more extreme manifestation of Satanic thought which emerged in Britain, initially combining Satanic ideas with explicitly Neo-Nazi material. The chapter also includes brief mentions of smaller groups such as the Society of the Dark Lily, the Order of the Left Hand Path, and the Joy of Satan.

Introvigne next turns the reader's attention to the great Satanism Scare that spread across various Western nations in the 1980s and early 1990s. He outlines

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[15] Ethan Doyle White, "An Elusive Roebuck: Luciferianism and Paganism in Robert Cochrane's Witchcraft," *Correspondences* 1, no. 1 (2013), 75–101; Fredrik Gregorius, "Luciferian Witchcraft: At the Crossroads between Paganism and Luciferianism," in *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*, eds. Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa. Petersen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 229–49.

[16] Introvigne, *Satanism*, 299.

how the hysteria about ritualised sexual abuse of children being carried out by Satanic groups emerged and spread during these decades and also how it finally declined. Rightly perceiving opposition to Satanism as a core part of the Satanic phenomenon, he also details the actions of the Christian counter-Satanism movement in this period, examining the movement's criticism of rock music and role-playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons*. Although the hysteria about Satanism has long since died down in the United States and United Kingdom, Introvigne raises the pertinent (and often overlooked) point that it survives in other parts of Europe and Latin America. In particular he brings his own expertise regarding the Italian situation to wider attention, detailing the existence of a number of allegations and trials for Satanic ritual abuse that have taken place in that country over the last two decades.

In the penultimate chapter, Introvigne tackles the role of Satanism in black metal, a sub-genre of heavy metal that has proved particularly popular in Norway and other Scandinavian countries since its emergence in the 1980s. While a discussion of Satanic black metal is no doubt vital to fully appreciating the place of Satanism in modern Western culture, the inclusion of an entire chapter on the subject somewhat undermines the definition of religious Satanism that Introvigne has employed: many of the Black Metal groups discussed do not appear to be part of organised Satanic groups engaged in ritualised activities, making them in some sense nearer to the literary Satanists that Introvigne avoids discussing rather than to organised groups like the Church of Satan or Temple of Set. Introvigne also mentions the place of Satan in several earlier, pre-heavy metal rock bands, although it was a little surprising to see no mention of one of the most prominent rock songs of the era: "Sympathy for the Devil" by the Rolling Stones.[17]

Introvigne ends the volume with a chapter detailing the place of religious Satanism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He discusses LaVey's final years and the role of the Church of Satan and its various LaVeyan spin-offs that have formed posthumously. He then offers briefer overviews of a range of Satanic groups that have popped up in recent decades, including Michael Ford's Greater Church of Lucifer, Michael Bertiaux's Neo-Luciferian Church, and the Satanic Temple, a US-based group which has attracted much publicity in the past few years for its public stunts testing the boundaries of religious freedom. Although Introvigne has helped to dismiss many of the erroneous and hyperbolic charges made against Satanists (and alleged Satanists) over the last quarter of a century, in this chapter he does highlight the existence

[17] After initial publication, it was brought to my attention that, contrary to my statement, the song is mentioned on page 462. *Mea culpa*.

of certain small groups, such as Sweden's Temple of the Black Light and Italy's Beast of Satan, whose practices have culminated in murder.

Introvigne's *magnum opus* is a product of many decades of research, and accordingly reaches a total of 665 numbered-pages in length,[18] making it the longest of the three books under review here. A number of prose errors notwithstanding, Introvigne's work is generally well written, and it is a shame that Brill's copy-editing did not match the standard of the book itself. Moreover, given the exorbitant cover price of €197.00 (£156.00; $255.00) for a hardback, and no cheaper paperback option available, this is a book that is going to be restricted almost entirely to select university libraries and sadly will never reach the wider readership that it deserves.

Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism

The last of the three books under review here is *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism*. A 613-page, extensively referenced tome, *Children of Lucifer* is based on van Luijk's PhD thesis, conducted at Tilburg University and then Radboud University Nijmegen. As with *The Invention of Satanism*, *Children of Lucifer* has been published by Oxford University Press, and is situated within their Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism series. At £25.99 ($39.95), it is reasonably priced for a work of this nature and thus has the opportunity of reaching a (much deserved) wider audience. There is no questioning that this is a dense work, which has resulted in the adoption of a frustratingly small font size, although the prose is engaging and would pose little problem for those unfamiliar with the shibboleths of academia.

Van Luijk's "working definition" is considerably wider than that adopted by Introvigne: he refers to Satanism as "the intentional, religiously motivated veneration of Satan."[19] This allows him to devote greater attention to artistic expressions of Satanism, in addition to the organised ritualism that served as the focus for Introvigne. While this broadens the amount of material, it also forces van Luijk to severely trim back in other areas. The space given to many of the twentieth and twenty-first century religious Satanist groups is far more limited than it is in Introvigne's work, focusing instead on the poetic and literary expressions of Satanism (and anti-Satanism) produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For this reason, van Luijk's work could

[18] A deliberate nod to the Satanic 666, perhaps?

[19] van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 2.

even be seen primarily as a history of literature.

Van Luijk's working definition allows him to begin his historical narrative at an earlier point than Introvigne, delving into the development of the idea of Satan in ancient and medieval Europe before providing an overview of the witch trials that spread across early modern Christendom. In the ensuing chapter he explores "Romantic" or "Literary" Satanism, discussing the place of Satan in the work of romanticist figures like Shelley, Byron, Victor Hugo, and William Blake. In the next chapter, van Luijk turns his attention to Satanism in nineteenth-century counter-culture, devoting most of his discussion to the changing views of Satan in the work of the highly influential French occultist Éliphas Lévi. Van Luijk's analysis of Lévi is most welcome; however, it comes at the expense of several other groups that would have contributed significantly to his narrative. The place of Lucifer in the Blavatskian Theosophical movement is for instance accorded very little space, while other groups receive no mention at all. Perhaps the most significant omissions are two nineteenth-century British esoteric groups which incorporated Satanic and diabolist elements into their practices: the Society of Horsemen and the Society of Toadmen.[20] Some of these elements – such as the reverence for Cain – were also allegedly present in forms of twentieth-century English folk magic, including that of groups which influenced Andrew Chumbley's Cultus Sabbati in the 1990s,[21] another Luciferian group that (unfortunately) makes no appearance in any of the three books reviewed here.

In a brief intermezzo, van Luijk discusses the work of the French poet Charles Baudelaire, arguing that he can be seen as a transitional figure bridging the gap between the Romantic Satanists and the attitudes that emerged in the fin de siècle. The next chapter delves more fully into the late nineteenth-century French milieu, dealing in particular with Joris-Karl Huysmans' 1891 novel *Là-bas*. Discussing a secretive Satanic organization, the book was officially presented as fiction, but many interpreted it as a thinly veiled autobiography. Unsurprisingly, van Luijk concludes that Huysman's Satanism was "an exclusively

[20] The Society of Horsemen featured Satanic elements in their initiation ceremony, for instance by making a blindfolded initiate shake a goat's hoof and by claiming that the society had been inherited from Cain; see Russell Lyon, *The Quest for the Original Horse Whisperers* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2003), 34–5. The Devil also appears as a feature in the toad-bone rite recorded in East Anglia; see George Ewart Evans, *The Pattern Under the Plow: Aspects of the Folk-Life of East Anglia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971 [1966]), 218–21.

[21] Andrew D. Chumbley, *The Leaper Between: An Historical Study of the Toad-Bone Amulet* (Richmond Vista: Three Hands Press, 2012), 52.

literary creation,"[22] with no basis in fact; however, he also emphasises the wider influence that it had in French culture, particularly in stoking conspiracy theories about a pervasive Satanist movement. Like Introvigne, van Luijk devotes a whole chapter to the Taxil affair and the role that this hoax played in the wider context of anti-Freemasonry in Catholic Europe. The ensuing chapter delves deeper into the context surrounding Taxil's publications, examining such issues as the Roman Catholic Church's attempts to influence the democratic sphere, the adoption of Romantic Satanism within elements of Freemasonry, and the place of Satanism in the wider anti-Masonic and anti-Semitic currents of nineteenth-century Europe. In an additional intermezzo, van Luijk raises the question of whether there really were any religious Satanists in the nineteenth century. He concludes that despite the existence of some isolated individuals like Przybyszewski and Kadosh, there is no good evidence of any substantial movement of religious Satanists in that period.

Moving into more recent times, van Luijk examines LaVey's formation of the Church of Satan before jumping back and forward in time to look at Naglowska's Temple de Satan, the Fraternitas Saturni, the Process Church, and then Crowley. The following chapter kicks off with a discussion of the schism in the Church of Satan that spawned the Temple of Set, before moving on to a discussion of the Satanism scare of the 1980s and 1990s, the Order of Nine Angles, and LaVey's final years. A final intermezzo then briefly covers adolescent Satanism, Satanism in the metal subculture, and the impact of the internet on the Satanic community. This discussion is somewhat unsatisfactory, as it is given only a few pages.

Whither goes the study of Satanism? Terminology, categorization, and discipline formation

The three volumes that have been examined here each try to accomplish something a little different. *The Invention of Satanism* is a multi-disciplinary work which juggles its sociological approach with a briefer historical analysis. *Children of Lucifer* and *Satanism: A Social History* are more explicitly historical, even though the latter positions itself as "social history." These latter two works may therefore be seen as competing with each other, although they cover distinct material due to the different working definitions of Satanism that they employ: for van Luijk, all that is required is "the intentional, religious motivated veneration of Satan," while Introvigne also expects a level of organisation and ritualised activity. Both

[22] van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 193.

Introvigne's and van Luijk's works are lengthy tomes weighing in at over 600 pages; by contrast, Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen's work is just over 250 pages. The length and price of *The Invention of Satanism* means that it is most likely to appeal to a wider, non-specialist audience than the other two volumes reviewed here, although the terminology employed throughout many of the chapters may prove challenging to non-scholarly audiences. By contrast, van Luijk's and Introvigne's works are more heavy going but provide a level of historical depth absent from Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen's. *Children of Lucifer* is best at exploring the wider field of Satanic discourse, namely the interplay between literature about Satanism and more explicitly religious manifestations of Satanic practice. Conversely, *Satanism: A Social History* stands out with its discussions of a range of religious Satanic groups, in which it is unparalleled. Thus, *Children of Lucifer* is stronger when dealing with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while *Satanism: A Social History* is the more robust volume when discussing the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The three books further expose the problems of definition and terminology that plague scholars of Satanism. As has been made apparent, different scholars are defining "Satanism" in distinctly different ways. Given that these are all working definitions, we need not be too concerned about these differences, but it unfortunately brings us no closer to the establishment of a common understanding and terminology surrounding Satanism to which all (or at least most) scholars can subscribe. It is nevertheless significant that all three books reviewed here adopt "Satanism" as an umbrella term for a wide range of movements and currents. An alternative might have been to follow the lead of Kennet Granholm, who has suggested that we reserve "Satanism" solely for those groups which expressly call themselves "Satanic" and abandon it when discussing the broader "dark spirituality milieu," which he instead prefers to call the "Left-Hand Path" (a piece of emic terminology repurposed for etic usages).[23] Van Luijk does perceive utility in this approach, and although he discusses the Temple of Set he concurs with Granholm that this group is not easily identified as a form of Satanism; instead, he sees it as a form of modern Paganism.[24]

Another problem lies in categorising the different groups that operate within the Satanic milieu. While the term "rationalist" Satanism appears to have gained

[23] Kennet Granholm, "Embracing Others than Satan: The Multiple Princes of Darkness in the Left-Hand Path Milieu," in *Contemporary Religious Satanism*, ed. Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 83–101; Kennet Granholm, "The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism: The Temple of Set and the Evolution of Satanism," in *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*, eds. Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa. Petersen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 212.

[24] van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer*, 356–57.

widespread usage for those groups, like the Church of Satan, which profess atheism, there is greater disagreement on how to label the groups that regard Satan as an entity with a genuine existence.[25] Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen adopt "esoteric" Satanism, while Introvigne favours "occult" Satanism. I would argue that neither of these terms are particularly appropriate. This is because all forms of modern religious Satanism evidently belong under the category of "(Western) esotericism," including LaVey's Church of Satan, which practices forms of ceremonial magic and continues to inhabit the blurry space between accepted science and traditional Judeo-Christian religion. Moreover, if "occultism" is defined in accordance with Wouter Hanegraaff's conception – that it constitutes forms of esotericism seeking to "come to terms with a disenchanted world" or to "make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanted world"[26] – then the Church of Satan is also most certainly an occultist group. Thus, using the terms "esoteric" or "occult" for only a subset of Satanic groups, when virtually all forms of Satanism could be regarded as forms of esotericism or occultism, is intrinsically misleading. As an alternative, I would proffer "literalist" Satanism as a more apposite term for these groups, for it escapes the problems posed by the "esoteric/occult" terminology while emphasising that these groups believe in the *literal* existence of Satan. Other options might be "realist" Satanism,[27] or perhaps "theistic" Satanism, a term that – as Introvigne highlights[28] – is already in use in the Satanic milieu. While this term also has its advantages, confusion can easily ensue when scholars adopt a piece of emic terminology and try to repurpose it for etic scholarly uses.[29]

Additional problems are posed by the category of "reactive" Satanism, which Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen use in reference to "popular Satanism,

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[25] Manon Hedenborg-White has raised the valid point that the term "rationalist Satanism" can be misleading given that many forms of Satanism other than LaVeyanism also appeal to rationality and science as a source of legitimacy; see Manon Hedenborg-White, review of Asbjørn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, and Jesper Aa. Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism, Aries:* 17:1 (2017), 143.

[26] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998 [1996]), 422.

[27] This would have parallels with the manner in which Egil Asprem used the term "realism" when discussing occultists who believe in the literal existence of spirits; see *Arguing with Angels: Enochian Magic and Modern Occulture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 74.

[28] Introvigne, *Satanism*, 525–27.

[29] This has for instance been the case when scholars of modern Paganism have adopted "Paganism"; see Ethan Doyle White, "Theoretical, Terminological, and Taxonomic Trouble in the Academic Study of Contemporary Paganism: A Case for Reform," *The Pomegranate* 18, no. 1 (2016), 31–59.

inverted Christianity, and symbolic rebellion."[30] "Reactive" Satanism is a primarily sociological definition, encompassing all those individuals and groups who are using Satanic imagery for the transgressive purpose of expressing their opposition to mainstream society. Conversely, terms like "rationalist" and "esoteric/occult/literalist" Satanism categorise groups according to their theology. These are two different types of categorisation and they do not provide for clear-cut demarcation. One who holds "rationalist" or "literalist" views can still be a "reactive" Satanist. Where Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen suggest that the tripartite division could be best understood "as points in a triangle,"[31] perhaps we should instead seek to understand where individuals are positioned within the Satanic milieu on two axes: one sociological and the other theological. For instance, the sociological axis could plot whether an individual is a "reactive" solitary Satanist or whether they are part of an established, organised group. It could also take into account the fact that there are those who sit between both positions; members of the Order of Nine Angles are for instance broadly affiliated with one another as part of the "kollective" but are not members of any structured organisation. They are also "reactive," seeking to play upon society's ideas of evil by drawing on symbolism from the Neo-Nazi and Salafi movements. The theological beliefs of the group can then be understood along an axis between "rationalists" who view Satan as a symbol without any real existence, and the "literalists" who regard Satan as a genuine entity.

It is notable that the study of Satanism remains a largely male-dominated phenomenon; the four authors discussed here are men, as are seventeen of the twenty-one scholars to have contributed to the two edited volumes on Satanism produced in the past decade (81%).[32] This mirrors the male-dominated environment of the Satanic milieu itself.[33] Interestingly, this is a clear difference from the academic study of modern Paganism, where a slight majority of scholars are women.[34] This in turn suggests that there is ample scope for

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[30] Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, *Invention of Satanism*, 5. They have adopted it from Joachim Schmidt, *Satanismus: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Marburg: Diagonal Verlag, 2003 [1992]). It should be noted that this trio fully recognise that these are "fuzzy" categories, with no clear and unproblematic demarcation between them.

[31] Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, *Invention of Satanism*, 5.

[32] In calculating this, I omitted the authors of the entries in the "Primary Documents" of *Contemporary Religious Satanism*.

[33] Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, *Invention of Satanism*, 138.

[34] For instance, an examination of 52 monographs and edited volumes devoted to the academic study of modern Paganism reveals 29 female authors (58%) to 21 male ones (42%) – this takes into account books with multiple authors and authors who have produced more

scholars of gender and religion to delve deeper into this issue: what is it about Satanism, and the study of Satanism, that appeals more to men than to women?

It is also noteworthy that the authors of this material have (almost) all been based in continental Europe and Scandinavia.[35] This is despite the fact that organised religious Satanism has remained a largely, although not exclusively, Anglo-American phenomenon, with the Church of Satan and Temple of Set both being established in the United States and the Order of Nine Angles originating in England. It is also again in contrast to the study of modern Paganism, which has long been dominated by Anglo-American scholars. This is an interesting turn of events, although the precise reasons for why it should be so remain unclear. One explanation may be that the academic environments that have been cultivated in many European nations are more accepting of research into a controversial religious milieu like Satanism than those in Britain or the US.[36] In many parts of the US, certain Christian denominations wield considerable influence on campuses and within religious studies departments; in such an environment, there may be impediments that make it difficult for scholars of religion to conduct research into Satanism.[37] A second, somewhat related explanation, is that Europe provides a better institutional set-up for the study of new religious movements (NRMs). This has been noted by Lewis, who has lamented that the US is experiencing a shortage of young scholars coming through to study NRMs because of a lack of employment opportunities in that field.[38]

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than one book; for edited volumes only the editors were counted. Meanwhile, an examination of the contributors – excluding book reviewers – for *The Pomegranate* volumes 6, no. 1 (2004) to 18, no. 2 (2016) reveals a slight predominance of female scholars, with 62 women (53.4%) to 54 men (46.6%).

35 I previously noted this in Ethan Doyle White, review of Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa. Petersen, eds., *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity, Correspondences* 2, no. 2 (2014), 225–26.

36 This might also explain why continental Western Europe has a better set-up for the study of esotericism than the US, particularly through the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) and the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents department at the University of Amsterdam.

37 I am reminded of the psychologist Nancy Campbell's observation that evangelical Christian groups operating at her United Methodist-affiliated campus actively protested against her research into a Wiccan coven, accusing her of promoting Satanism. See Allen Scarboro, Nancy Campbell, and Shirley Stave, *Living Witchcraft: A Contemporary American Coven* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1994), 196–201. The events described took place in 1991, a quarter of a century ago, but similar social forces remain active in the US.

38 James R. Lewis, "James R. Lewis on Who joins New Religious Movements?," The Religious Studies Project, 10 December 2012, http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/who-joins-new-religious-movements-james-r-lewis-on-the-need-of-new-quantitative-data-on-nrms/.

The absence of American scholarship on Satanism is unfortunate for various reasons. As noted by Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, there may still be important oral history to collect from those who were involved in the early days of the Church of Satan,[39] and the same is true of the Temple of Set. Equally, many of the primary documents from the establishment of these groups are likely still based in that country. These would be particularly useful in the production of a full-length scholarly biography of LaVey or other senior figures in the Satanic milieu. Examining this material is a task that will likely be easier for scholars already based in the US. At the same time, it will also be important for scholars to devote greater attention to the wealth of Satanic and anti-Satanic activities that are taking place in other, non-Anglophone regions. Introvigne has already highlighted the presence of such phenomena in parts of continental Europe and Latin America, and it would be interesting to see scholars of Satanism examine discourses of the Satanic as they exist in the former Soviet bloc and in the Islamic world. There is also room for greater exploration of how forms of Satanism intersect with other religious milieus, such as modern Paganism (as with the Order of Nine Angles and Temple of Set) and UFO religions (like the Joy of Satan). At the same time as scholars deepen and widen the study of this subject, it is also important to ensure that the topic is made accessible to a wider audience; there is certainly scope for a shorter textbook on the subject aimed at undergraduates and lay readers. In the meantime, the three books discussed here all provide a good basis from which further studies into Satanism can be made and each advance scholarly understandings of this fascinating yet much misunderstood phenomenon.

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Editor's note: This final version of this review article has the addition of footnote 17 on page 8 resulting slight differences in pagination from the advance publication. Where possible, citation of this final version is advised.

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Book Reviews

Andrew Colin Gow, Robert B. Desjardins, and François V. Pageau (eds., trans.). *The Arras Witch Treatises*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016. 168 pp. ISBN: 978-0-271-07128-2. $24.95.

This sourcebook edited by Andrew Colin Gow, Robert B. Desjardins and Francois V. Pageau presents annotated translations of two treatises connected to the trials against alleged witch sect members in Arras in northern France in 1460. The first of these treatises is *Recollectio casus, status et conditionis Valdensium ydolatrarum* (*A History of the Case, State, and Condition of the Waldensian Idolaters*). The authorship of this treatise remains uncertain, but the editors follow the widely accepted view that Jacques du Bois, then dean of the cathedral chapter in Arras and a man who played an influential role during the trials themselves, is probably the author of this text. The editors quote two of the most influential recent works about the Arras trials, and about the Sabbath imageries in the second half of the fifteenth century: Franck Mercier's *La Vauderie d'Arras* and Martine Ostorero's *Le diable au sabbat*.[1] Technically, they worked not with a manuscript of the treatise, but with the classic edition by German historian Joseph Hansen.[2] This means they could not include any notes concerning the original text and visual organization of the manuscript. However, Hansen's edition provided them with a solid basis for their translation of the content.

[1] Franck Mercier, *La Vauderie d'Arras. Une chasse aux sorcières à l'Automne du Moyen Âge* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 32; Martine Ostorero, *Le diable au sabbat: Littérature démonologique et sorcellerie (1440–1460)* (Florence: Sismel, 2011), 666.

[2] Joseph Hansen, ed., *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1963 [1901]), 149–83.

The second translated treatise is *Sermo contra sectam Valdensium* (*Sermon against the sect of the Waldensians*), which was written by the renowned theologian John Tinctor in 1460. It must be noted that the translators worked with an early French translation of the text known under the title *Invectives contra la secte de vauderie*, which was compiled shortly after the Latin original, and which also appeared in a very early printed version, probably shortly after 1475. (81) The translators argue that this French version of Tinctor's treatise was more influential at the end of the fifteenth century than the Latin original, and note that they have therefore decided to follow this edition and only consult some passages of the Latin text. (81)

Both translations are supplemented with a brief introduction discussing the context of the Arras trials and the origin of the treatises, and include multiple relevant bibliographical footnotes. The Arras witch trials started in spring 1460, when four women and one man were accused of witchcraft and devil worship and subsequently convicted and burned at the stake. This incident triggered an anti-witchcraft riot in the city, which was interrupted after a few months by Duke Phillip of Burgundy, when some of the local noblemen happened to become targets of the accusations. The trials are an important part of the history of the late medieval European witch-hunt, both from a social perspective, as they took place in an influential Burgundian city, and as indicators of cultural imagination in the period. The trials combined imagery of heresy, devil worship, and harmful magic with demonological speculations about the physical abilities of evil spirits and their capability to affect human bodies. Both treatises represent this synthesis particularly well. Rather than revolutionary innovations in the imagination of late medieval witchcraft, the two treatises should be read as steps in the gradual genesis of both imagistic *and* intellectual speculation about the Witches' Sabbath. The content of the treatises belongs to the tradition of elaborate theological works on the devil and his worshippers, following in the vein of Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* (1430s) and preceding Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger's notorious *Malleus Maleficarum* from the 1480s.[3]

The *Recollectio*, probably written or strongly influenced by Dean Jacques du Bois, contains long thematic chapters dealing with the methods of investigation and interrogation of the suspects. The huge emphasis put on these topics shows just how closely this treatise was connected to the actual witch trials. The author claims to debunk the suspects' usual strategies of defense, most notably the argument that they were not themselves present at the fiendish congregations, but were impersonated by demons. (58–63) His harsh rhetoric is accompanied by quite detailed knowledge of classical works by church authorities like Thomas

[3] The factuality of Sprenger's co-authorship is not universally accepted by scholars.

Aquinas, as well as competence in scholastic ways of argumentation. The legacy of the older heresiology is present in the passage where the author considers different opinions of the diabolical Waldensians about hell, paradise and eternal life. (51) This part is very reminiscent of passages about the Cathars or the Waldensians in the inquisition manuals of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,[4] such as Bernard Gui's *Practica inquistionis hereticae pravitatis*,[5] and can serve as an illustration of how the public imagination of the Witches' Sabbath contained concepts of both harmful magic and heresy. John Tinctor's treatise contains a systematic prologue explaining the fall of Satan and his angels and the original sin of man. (83–90) As a prominent theologian with a broad spectrum of interests, Tinctor deals extensively not only with the demons' engagement in the physical world, but also with topics like the coming of the Antichrist, (105–10) or the methods of discerning wonders performed by good and evil spirits. (144–49)

The translators of the Arras treatises faced several difficulties related to the terminological and conceptual instability of categories like "witchcraft" and "heresy" in the late Middle Ages. Most importantly, a problem has emerged regarding the label "Waldensians" and its relations to medieval concepts of witchcraft. Members of the allegedly devil-worshipping sect are called Waldensians (*Valdenses*, *secta Valdensium*) in both treatises. This term originates in high medieval heresiology and originally labeled followers of an anti-clerical ascetic movement, which appeared in late-twelfth-century France and soon became a target of persecution. Accusations against these Waldensians of luxury, promiscuity, and even devil worship became a *topos* already during the fourteenth century, with the meaning of the term itself gradually getting darker in this period. During the fifteenth century, however, the meanings of the terms Waldensians and Waldensianism started to shift more significantly. These words began to label alleged (probably purely fictional) sects of devil worshippers, accused of dealing with harmful magic and sometimes of being provided with strange skills by the devil, like the ability to fly in order to join diabolical gatherings.

The translators of the Arras treatises decided to translate the term *Valdenses* alternately as heretics and witches. This translation strategy provides a reader not-so-familiar with the late medieval heresiology a basic understanding of what this label generally meant in the treatises, but does result in the loss of some semantic nuances. Perhaps the most evident example of these terminological

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4 See Lucy J. Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century: The Textual Representations* (York: York Medieval Press, 2011), 135–53.

5 See Celestin Douais, ed., *Bernardi Guidonis Practica inquisitionis hereticae pravitatis* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1886).

issues appears on pages 26–27, where the author of the *Recollectio* explains that the contemporary devil worshipping Waldensians are not the same sects as "the Waldensians, or the poor of Lyon," who were active "some 270 years ago." By referring to the original Waldensians as Waldensians and the fifteenth century "Waldensians" as witches, the fact that the author notifies the reader about the difference between the ancient and contemporary sect, but at the same time calls both sects Waldensians, is lost from the translation.[6] It is a pity because this passage in the original shows very well how heresiological knowledge crumbled during the late middle ages, with terms changing or losing their meaning, and how public imagination about witchcraft was influenced by these unstable assumptions.

Another problematic decision is the translation, in some cases, of the words *Ydolatria* and *Ydolatrae* as "heresy" and "heretics" respectively, most obviously in the translation of the title of *Recollectio*. (19–20 and further) The medieval concept of idolatry generated a complex discourse and was closely connected to many other terms, such as infidelity and superstition. Connections between idolatry and heresy existed, but were by no means clear and straightforward. Perhaps the most immediate encounter of the concepts of idolatry and heresy occurred during the trial against the Templar order (1307–1312), when the Templars were accused of worshipping an idol, sometimes called Baphomet.[7] Other connections between the concept of heresy (especially its darker associations with devil worship) and idolatry are known from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,[8] but simple substitution of the terms does not seem justified in this context.

These strategies of translation were probably employed to make the text intelligible to a reader with little or no background knowledge about medieval history, but they also somewhat reduce the value of the translation for historians. Despite these few issues, the sourcebook presents a valuable contribution to the study of witchcraft and devil worship in the late medieval imagination. It is intelligible to lay readers, while scholars may find it useful as a brief overview of the Arras affair, with multiple references to more detailed studies on the topic.

František Novotný
frantisek.novotny@mail.muni.cz

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6 Compare Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen*, 152–53.

7 See the classic work by Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). For sources, see above all Jules Michelet, ed., *Procès des templiers I–II* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1841).

8 See Bernd–Ulrich Hergemöller, ed., *Krötenkuss und Schwarzer Kater: Ketzerei, Götzendienst und Unzucht in der inquisitorischen Phantasie des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Warendorf: Fahlbusch Verlag, 1996).

Lonny Harrison. *Archetypes from Underground. Notes on the Dostoevskian Self*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016. 206 pp. ISBN 978-1-77112-204-7.

When a scholar of esotericism sees a word "archetype" in a title, they often tend to be wary about the content of the publication. Lonny Harrison's *Archetypes from Underground*, however, manages to avoid the most common problems associated with this type of literature. The main aim of the book is to provide an analysis of Dostoevsky as a psychological author whose ideas were in some regards close to the tradition of depth psychology, instead of the usual approaches to the author as a novelist, philosopher, or religious thinker. The depiction of Dostoevsky as a psychologist has a long tradition, stretching right back to his contemporaries. A problem with this approach, however, is that Dostoevsky seemingly rejected the title. "They call me a psychologist," he wrote, "It is not true, I am only a realist in a higher sense, that is, I portray all the depths of the human soul." (Dostoevsky, quoted on pp. 27–28) The passage demonstrates Dostoevsky's ambiguous approach. He definitely opposes modern psychology, yet at the same time he aspires to study and to depict the human soul as realistically as possible in his writings. And what is a psychology if not a science of the soul?

To support the legitimacy of a psychological approach to Dostoevsky's texts, Harrison relies on interpretation provided by esteemed Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, according to whom Dostoevsky's rejection of psychology should be understood as a rejection of a *wrong* modern psychology rather than a rejection of psychology in general. From this point of view, Dostoevsky sought to contrast his own idealistic approach to the human psyche with other psychological approaches of his time. If this is the case, what constituted the core of Dostoevsky's work as a psychological author? Here we come to the central idea of Harrison's book, namely that Dostoevsky attempted to describe a number of psychological "types", as he called them, or typical characters reflecting the nineteenth century psyche. According to Harrison, Dostoevskian "types" have some prominent parallels with the archetypes of Jung's analytic psychology. One could ask, however, on what grounds we can talk about parallels between Jung and Dostoevsky. Harrison obviously understands this problem and dedicates a substantial part of the introduction to answering this question.

First, he claims, Jung and Dostoevsky had a shared understanding of the urgent problems of contemporary society and their causes:

> One of the ruling themes of Dostoevsky's mature works is the chief problem upon which Jung's theories are based: that the loss of a spiritual sense of modern life is a problem not only of individuals but of societies, representing a self-destructive danger to modern civilization. (14)

However, it was not only about a similar feeling of the crisis of modern culture; their backgrounds were similar as well. "Dostoevsky and Jung," claims Harrison, "shared an array of common sources and contexts out of which their thinking on the life of the unconscious mind and archetypal patterning could have arisen." (77) Just like Jung, who was fascinated by alchemy, Gnosticism and other forms of esotericism, Dostoevsky "would have encountered concepts from alchemy, Hermeticism, and Neoplatonism via German Romantic Idealism, which dominated Russian culture in the 1830s." (16) To be more precise, Harrison names several particular figures, namely Goethe, Schelling, and Carus, who may have influenced both the development of analytic psychology and Dostoevsky's work. (12)

The idea of connecting Dostoevsky and Jung through their common roots in German Idealism seems persuasive. On the one hand, the Russian nineteenth-century intelligentsia had many ties with Germany and was prominently influenced by German philosophy. On the other hand, the Romantic approach to science, as well as German Idealism in general, had obviously influenced Jung, who is best understood in the frame of a specific research program of Romantic science. This common background and the similar historical situation they faced may indeed have led Jung and Dostoevsky to similar solutions; at least, it definitely justifies the possibility of comparative research of their works and ideas.

Based on this conception, the author sets out his disposition: the Dostoevskian literary "type" is an analogue of the Jungian archetype, the "underground" of Dostoevsky's novels corresponds with the collective unconscious, while the stories about a character's transformation represent yet another depiction of the process that Jung would call "individuation." To demonstrate this very process is, according to Harrison's interpretation, the central artistic goal of Dostoevsky:

> …his characters almost unanimously experience a sense of inner division, enact roles (archetypal forms) that catalyze change and transformation, and ultimately move toward discovery of authentic self (though that process is rarely completed). (13)

At the core of Dostoevsky's work, according to Harrison, is the story of the divided self of a nineteenth-century person placed into the "underground" of a secularized culture inhabited by figures who are more personifications of psychological types than actual men and women. A hero must encounter them in order to learn lessons that, little by little, lead him to a cathartic transformation. The most important of these figures is probably the hero's double, which represents a shadowy aspect of the hero's psyche. Harrison claims that such a narrative resembles some classical concepts of Western esotericism:

> Traditions of Western esotericism such as Hermeticism and alchemy gave prominence to the tension of opposites and their underlying complementarity. Rediscovery and recovery of the authentic self is the "Great Work" of perennialist tradition, grounded in Neoplatonism. An experience of rebirth and awaking is the noumenal event of seeing and recognizing the apparent self for what it is – a fiction, an illusion… (152)

Here Harrison steps on shaky ground, trying to find the source of Dostoevsky's "psychology" in Platonic tradition, which could in that case be regarded as an initial philosophical source of Dostoevsky's and Jung's approaches. However, as Harrison himself admits, "there is no direct evidence … that Dostoevsky took an explicit interest in Plato," even though interest in Platonism was widespread among Russian philosophers and writers like Tolstoy. A more direct and therefore more reliable source of the doppelganger image can be traced back to Romantic literary tradition, and Harrison earnestly demonstrates how Dostoevsky's works were in many regards a reaction to the Romantic approach.

For scholars of esotericism, Harrison's study may be interesting as another examination of influences and parallels between nineteenth-century esoteric circles, German Idealism, psychology, and literature. One question that, unfortunately, is not addressed sufficiently in the book is the role of Dostoevsky himself in the development of depth psychology. We know that Freud wrote about Dostoevsky in the essay "Dostoevsky and Parricide," published in 1928. Although Freud does not seem to have been influenced by Dostoevsky in any prominent manner, we know that he influenced Freud's student, Alfred Adler. However, can we speak about any direct or indirect influences of Dostoevsky on Jung's conception of archetypes? It seems at least quite possible, and deeper study in this direction may provide new ideas about similarities between Jungian archetypes and Dostoevsky's characters.

Nevertheless, Harrison's analysis of Dostoevsky's writings is filled with fruitful insights and can be considered as a worthy contribution to the study

of this influential, but complex and controversial Russian writer. Placing Dostoevsky in context of the history of Western esotericism is an exciting idea, and Harrison has performed a magnificent job in this regard, analyzing ideas and approaches of both English-speaking and Russian scholars of Dostoevsky. Another thing that makes the book important is the fact that it shows new parallels between Western European and Russian thought of the nineteenth century, demonstrating (even if it was not the author's explicit goal) how classical Russian literature developed in the same context as European thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, responding to the same issues with sometimes very similar solutions. I believe that nowadays, when many would like to oppose Europe and Russia, such reminders of common cultural heritage are very timely.

Stanislav Panin
stanislav_panin@gmx.com

Paul Youngquist. *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016. viii + 346 pp. ISBN 978-0292726369. $27.95.

While some publications on the legendary poet, visionary, and jazz musician Sun Ra have made mention of his interest in things mystical, esoteric, and occult,[1] it was Marques Redd who was the first to devote significant attention to the link between Sun Ra and esotericism. In his strong contribution to *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience: There is a Mystery* (2012), the first book-length study of black esotericisms, Redd takes Ra's poem "Astro-Black Mythology" as the starting point for a "properly hermetic literary theory" that views certain forms of poetry and other works of art not as "objects" to critique and dissect, but as initiatory, imbued as they are with a particular kind of "gnosis."[2] Paul Youngquist's *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism*, which makes a strong case for Ra as a purveyor of esoteric epistemologies, further cements the poet and musician's place in the pantheon of esotericism.

A Pure Solar World is not a biography: for those interested in the biographical account of Sun Ra, born Herman Blount in Alabama in 1914 (although Ra himself would later state that he came from Saturn), Youngquist directs readers to John Szwed's phenomenal *Space is the Place*. Rather, more than any other recent scholarly publication, *A Pure Solar World* seeks to place Sun Ra firmly within his times by combining careful analysis of Ra's music and poetry with elaborate discussions of the cultural, social, and political contexts in which his work emerged and which it helped to shape. According to Youngquist, Ra's seemingly eccentric and out-of-this-world practices, words and sounds were informed by the lived experience of segregation and inspired by the Space Age and various esoteric and occult epistemologies, and should be seen as a committed, cogent and creative response to the oppressive reality of being black in America. In positing this thesis, Youngquist also reclaims Ra's more political side, portraying him as at heart a black activist who, witnessing the violent everyday reality of anti-black white supremacy, practiced "a cultural politics of sound." (2)

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[1] See, in particular: Tobias C. van Veen, "Other Planes of There: The MythSciences, Chronopolitics and Conceptechnics of Afrofuturism" (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2014); John F. Swzed, *Space is the Place: The Life and Times of Sun Ra* (Edinburgh: Payback Press, 1997).

[2] Marques Redd, "Astro-Black Mythology: The Poetry of Sun Ra," in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*, eds. Stephen Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory, and Hugh Page (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 231–32.

Youngquist demonstrates that for Ra, politics and institutional religion (Ra was particularly critical of Christianity) had failed to foster change; instead, his solution was to produce forms of art—most importantly music and poetry—that would create a better world. His music would transport black Americans from segregated inner-city neighborhoods to outer space. Or, as Youngquist succinctly puts it, "[f]rom nothing to infinity." (194) The terms "nothing" and "infinity" are Ra's, and relate to one another: Youngquist argues that Ra, on numerous occasions, likened the plight of African Americans in the United States to a condition or state of nothingness, yet was convinced of (his) music's propensity to bring change, to inaugurate infinity—for black Americans, first and foremost, but perhaps also for the rest of the world. Ra, moreover, linked the condition of nothingness of black America to the "*[n]othing* of heard sounds"—that is, its "fugitive quality"—which for Ra did not translate as an absence but as "active force that transforms the present." (81) While Ra displayed ambivalence regarding the transformative power of language, sound (expressed in and through music and poetry) could, quite literally, create a better world. Or, in the words of Youngquist, Ra was convinced that "music moves. It transports. In transporting, it transforms. Music can transform worlds." (117) In linking the nothingness of black America to the transformative nothingness of sound, Ra reconfigured blackness as the potential for "Black Infinity." (193)

The book consists of a short introduction and conclusion and twenty-one chapters of varying lengths which, although more or less chronological, are organized thematically such that they "can productively be read in any order or disorder." (3) Although this approach does occasionally make the text unnecessarily repetitive, it does not impede on Youngquist's argument, which is sound, easy to follow, and convincing. Moreover, his rationale—"[a] book on Sun Ra and his explosive music should eschew too tidy a linearity" (ibid)—immediately sets the tone of the text. As another reviewer remarked, Youngquist is an "unapologetic convert" who not only subjects Ra's life, music and poetry to scholarly tools of analysis—although Youngquist certainly does this too, and does so very well—but seeks to convince us that Ra's poetry, tone science, and esotericism continue to be relevant, as they open to new worlds, to better worlds, to pure solar worlds.

Occasionally, this approach backfires when Youngquist *imagines* conversations that Ra would have had (see 13–14, 47–53, 260–63). This tactic feels particularly problematic in the last chapter, when Youngquist imagines the words Ra could have shared with loved ones on his deathbed. (260–63) Precisely because Youngquist quotes Ra extensively, allowing his voice to speak for itself, it is unnecessary, and quite problematic, to take the liberty

to imagine—or invent really—what Ra's last words would have been. For the most part, however, Youngquist's ardent conviction of Ra's brilliance and importance allows for an engaging read that takes Ra's music and his poetry—and in particular, taking a cue from Ra himself, the relationship between music and poetry—seriously. Carefully dissecting both, Youngquist reveals, as noted above, a complex but coherent, consistent and inspired response to the plight of black Americans, a truly alternative and original vision for the future. His claim that Ra's experimental poems form an integral, if mostly overlooked, part of this vision is an important and much-needed contribution in this respect. In "Immeasurable Equations," one of the lengthier chapters, Youngquist conveys that Ra's poems—which Ra referred to as "equations"—are, like his music, grounded in Ra's confidence in the "fugitive quality of sound," which explains his fondness for wordplay and his attention to tonality. In his poem "Discernment," for instance, Ra utilizes the sound of the word "justice" to arrive at the devastating conclusion that "justice" can also imply "just is," or "the status quo." (93, 280n.51) Dissecting this particular play of words, Youngquist argues that for Ra an ostensible commitment to social justice issues "conceals a longing for control enforced by language." (93)

Ra's faith in the transformative power of music began early in life. After a relatively short but devastating period in which he was deprived of music as a forced civil servant during World War II, it found force when Ra exchanged Alabama for Chicago's Bronzeville. It was here, in 1951, while working as a musician and composer, that Ra met Alton Abraham. According to Youngquist, the two men were brought together by a shared intellectual interest in occult and esoteric knowledge. Abraham was as concerned with the often-denigrated position of black Americans as Ra and together, building on Egyptology, Theosophy, numerology and other esoteric and occult traditions, the two would "cobble together an intellectual countertradition for the South Side, a forgotten legacy of wisdom to invigorate a people caged without a key." (33) They would distribute leaflets and booklets, and call their semi-secret organization Thmei, probably named after the Egyptian goddess of truth and justice. They practiced what Youngquist calls "political theosophy," "a radicalism combining the spiritual imperative of esoteric wisdom with a social agenda of black advancement." (37) Ra, Abraham, and other members of the group offered a means for creative resistance—not through conventional politics or religion but through culture. And while Ra occasionally spoke of the universal potentiality of his music, Youngquist correctly observes that he was primarily concerned with producing forms of art that would reach, help, and inspire black Americans.

While I wished for a more thorough discussion of the notion of "political theosophy," and, for instance, the ways in which it relates to other theosophical traditions, I understand that this work is perhaps better suited for scholars of esotericism. And, to be sure, Youngquist's chapters on Ra's occult and esoteric interests, made possible through archival research at the recently established "Alton Abraham Collection of Sun Ra" at the University of Chicago, are riveting. Moreover, he attributes to Thmei (and thus esoteric thought) a much larger role regarding the musical and spiritual trajectory of Ra than other scholars have, suggesting that Ra's band, the Sun Ra Arkestra, served to spread and advance Thmei's message or, at the very least, "complemented Thmei's program of cultural activism." (63) For Ra, music was a conduit for esoteric knowledge, and a vehicle for change. The pervasive influence of Thmei is also evidenced in the fact that Ra, when he became a visiting lecturer at UC Berkeley in the Department of Afro-American Studies in 1971, assigned, among other things, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* and the works of Theosophist Helena Blavatsky, alongside contemporary black writers such as Amiri Baraka and Henry Dumas. (206–07)

Indeed, Youngquist demonstrates that Thmei continued to be important for Sun Ra, even as he, inspired by the Space Age, added a more "futuristic dimension" to Thmei's "occult message" by the mid-1950s, as evidenced in such tracks as "Blues in Outer Space" and "Space Aura." (130–31) Even as Ra was influenced by the cultural zeitgeist of his time, his ideas about outer space were very different and more sophisticated: carefully comparing the goals of the government and Sun Ra, Youngquist argues that Ra's alternative space program, El Saturn, was "much bolder" than that of the US or Soviet Union, precisely because it was not informed by "state-sponsored technoscience," nor steeped in the desire for and "politics of domination." (140) Ra offered an alternative future, a "visionary NASA," precisely because he "imagine[d] it," thereby "eschewing the language of politics and propaganda for a poetics of outer space." (ibid) The Arkestra had no need for rockets, he continues, precisely because they *played* "space music," transporting black people from segregated neighborhoods to "outer space," "blasting humans to infinity on a fiery counterthrust of sound." (147) This, Youngquist observes, also distinguishes Ra's music from other musical forms that embraced outer space and a more futuristic dimension, but that lacked the larger political agenda of transforming the plight of black Americans through the liberating power of music.

It is only towards the end of the text that Youngquist provides a rationale for his subtitle, *Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism*, although those familiar with Afrofuturism would already be aware of Ra's foundational influence on this

cultural movement, from his emphasis on the transformative power of myth to his attention to outer space. Youngquist argues convincingly that Ra should be seen as a progenitor of Afrofuturism, a term coined in the year that Ra passed away, 1993, as a rubric for an aesthetic and a set of forms of cultural production that combine technological, science fictional, magical realist and speculative tropes and themes with (West-)African cosmologies and histories to construct alternate identities, re-examine the past, offer a critique of the present, and envision alternatives to destructive whitewashed futures.

Youngquist's discussion on Afrofuturism also opens possibilities for future research in *our* field: while he does not explicitly discuss the relationship between Afrofuturism and esotericism, and while the two strands of thought generally remain separated in the Academy, his analysis does point to various areas of intersection, such as ufology and the transformative qualities of sound. It would be fruitful to explore this relationship further.[3] Youngquist's careful analysis also opens additional possible research paths for future studies in esotericism. One can think here about the mutually constitutive relationship between jazz and esotericism, or, in continuation of the work of Jeff Kripal, esotericism and science fiction.[4] Of course, Youngquist's intricate attention to the Thmei society and its undeniable influence on Ra's poetry, music, and mission provides us with insight into a heretofore largely unknown but highly creative esoteric phenomenon, which will hopefully encourage new scholarship. *A Pure Solar World* also invites further research on the ways in which esoteric currents such as Blavatsky's Theosophy found their way to black communities, where they were interrogated, utilized and altered, such that new currents and variations, of which Ra's "political theosophy" is merely one example, emerged. Moreover, Ra was clearly in conversation—either explicit or implicit—with other black purveyors of esoteric thought, such as Elijah Muhammad, leader

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[3] To my knowledge, this has yet to be done. The edited volume *Esotericism in the African American Religious Experience* is the only publication that has brought the two fields together. Yet, although Stephen Wehmeyer in his contribution does briefly engage the intersections of conjure and Afrofuturist texts, Afrofuturism is more frequently mentioned in passing, and its relationship to esotericism, or Africana Esoteric Studies, is only provided a cursory glance; Stephen C. Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory, and Hugh R. Page, Jr, "Introduction: Africana Esoteric Studies, Mapping a New Endeavor," in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience*, ed. ibid. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1, 9, 11; Stephen Wehmeyer, "Conjurational Contraptions: Techno-Hermeneutics, Mechanical Wizardry, and the Material Culture of African American Folk Magic," in ibid, 259–60.

[4] Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

of the Nation of Islam, and these connections, and the creative thought that emerged in their wake, are worth exploring further.

That said, Youngquist's accessible and vivid prose, careful exegesis of Ra's at-first-sight impenetrable music and poetry, and never-ending commitment to communicate (or transport) Sun Ra's vision to the twenty-first century deserves a much wider audience. I highly recommend this book for scholars and students interested in music, sound, science fiction, the space age, and American and African American history, culture and religion. Ra departed Earth in 1993. Youngquist—like so many musicians, artists, and activists that continue to find inspiration in Ra's oeuvre—revives Ra's "cultural politics of sound" for the twenty-first century, in a persuasive plea that demonstrates the propensity of Ra's music to open up alternative futures, or a pure solar world.

Justine M. Bakker
justine.bakker@rice.edu

Henrik Bogdan and James R. Lewis. *Sexuality and New Religious Movements*. New York: Palgrave, 2014. 240 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-40962-1.

A voluptuous woman, face turned-away from the viewer, lies prone across the back of a many-headed leonine beast. She pulls — in unequivocal phallic visual metaphor — a set of red reins across her upper thighs with her left hand whilst the right supports a cosmic womb, from which dawn breaks (perhaps). This choice of cover image — a reproduction of that created by Frieda Harris under Crowley's instruction for the tarot trump XI 'Lust' ('Strength' in the majority of other decks) — fairly well epitomizes the concerns I have with this volume.

Whether selected by the editors or publishers makes little difference — a representation of a generic, long- and fair-haired naked woman is chosen to illustrate a thematic volume on sexuality in New Religious Movements. Why did the cover image not represent individuals of a range of genders, or a man? Or, indeed, following the volume's focus on dimorphic concepts of gender, a symbol of gender polarity of which many abound? Are we simply meant to read this as a nod to the market-stimulating role in which salacious images of women are so often employed? However, it is the more troubling sexuality=women equation that the conjunction of the volume title and this image creates, unconscious as it may be, but which is unfortunately born out further in some of the discourse within, that I find enduringly troubling. I like conceptual trouble, but not of this kind.

The Introduction, co-authored by the editors, sets out the volume's dual agenda: "First, we wish to challenge many of the misconceptions — propagated by the anticult movement and, by extension, the popular media — about sex, sexuality and gender in NRMs," and also to "give a deeper and more complex understanding of sexuality and religion in late modernity." (3) These aims raise two issues. The first pertains to the proposed audience for the volume, given that the requisite attribute of critical inquiry would make graduate students and academics highly unlikely to take the accounts of "sex, sexuality and gender" disseminated by either anticult organisations or the popular press at face value. Further, one would also assume (I hope not erroneously) that such an audience would have a nuanced if not detailed understanding of such in late modernity. The latter claim also floats adrift from the entire academic field of gender and cultural studies, which receives no reference at all in the Introduction. Thankfully a number of chapters do engage with relevant scholarship from that field. Overall, I was left wondering, who was the intended audience for this volume?

In addition, Bogdan and Lewis do very little to provide a framework for the selection of chapters, not least why some movements are represented and not others. Of course, it is often not possible to provide cohesive representation in edited volumes and the Introduction is exactly the place where acknowledgement of omissions and logic of selection should be detailed; I did not find that these issues were adequately addressed. Indeed, critiques of the elastic nature of the category of New Religious Movements seem valid considering that the final chapter, by Lewis, takes as its focus Catholic Nuns. I struggle to read this inclusion as anything other than opportune. I also struggle to understand how these issues were not raised during a peer review process.

The overall orientation set by the Introduction is of sex, sexuality and gender being examined via normative categories of dimorphic gender and the normal–deviant binary. There is a substantive lack of acknowledgment of nonbinary gender positions. Indeed, gender seems for the most part to be a synonym for 'women' and even within a reductive binary scheme there is no sustained analysis of masculinities chosen for inclusion in the volume, let alone a range of non-binary gender identities. This is evidenced by the four search terms used in Bogdan and Shay's examination of Osho: "sex, sexuality, gender and women," (4) no 'men', let alone 'trans', 'intersex' or 'queer' identities considered (within the limited bounds they set, Bogdan and Shay do provide salient analysis). Similarly, the terms sex and sexuality are presented *prima facie*, without consideration of their discursive and historical construction, especially vis-à-vis alignment with concepts of individual subjectivity. The editors note that they have "deliberately refrained from imposing a particular theoretical approach" regarding sex and gender, (8) rather leaving such to the contributors. Some contributors do a marvellous job of positioning their analysis within contemporary theoretical debates, others (like the Introduction) leave very complex terms to hang undefined and ambiguous. This allows little room for the work of challenging commonplace assumptions.

Despite these substantial reservations, there are of course matters of worth amongst the nine distinct chapters. As with many edited anthologies the standard of scholarship varies, but important issues are tackled. Among the most successful are Clifton on sexuality in contemporary Wicca; Petsche on Gurdjieff; Faxneld and Petersen on contemporary Satanism. While I do not necessarily agree with Fagen and Wright's entire argument, their point regarding the cultural valuation of 'motherwork' is well made, though the references to what is and is not 'natural' for women remain disturbing. Several chapters refer — negatively — to 'feminism' or 'feminist' theory, set up as a

'bogey woman' inhibiting correct analysis or due consideration. However, the term is only ever used generically, and there is no due attention to the wide variety of feminisms or complexity and substantive differences within the field of feminist theory. For many in this volume, feminists/feminism are simply rendered an ill-informed and even priggish 'other' against which their 'unbiased' analysis is pitched. A form of shadow-boxing that does nothing to bolster the credibility of the arguments being made.

I was initially enthusiastic to receive this volume, and imagined it would be greatly useful for my undergraduate class on 'Sex, Desire and the Sacred.' Students may indeed be directed to a few select chapters, but overall the volume fails to deliver on its ambition. Very little analysis moves outside a thoroughly conservative and normative dimorphic understanding of gender, and, despite the diversity of sexual practice reported, the consideration of this content tells a depressing and disturbingly uniform tale that reproduces normative stereotypes and assumptions.

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Jay Johnston
jay.johnston@sydney.edu.au

Eric Kurlander. *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780300189452.

Among the steady stream of publications devoted to the relationship between esotericism and National Socialism, Eric Kurlander's study is one of the rare examples of a serious contribution to an old debate. It offers a most welcome critical perspective that sets it apart from the scholarship of recent decades, most significantly Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1985) and Corinna Treitel's *A Science for the Soul* (2004). In contrast to these studies, which were highly cautious about claiming actual links between esotericism and National Socialism, Kurlander establishes the central argument that "National Socialism, even when critical of occultism, was more preoccupied by and indebted to a wide array of supernatural doctrines and esoteric practices than any mass political movement of the interwar period." (xiv) By covering a vast spectrum of topics and sources, and by taking into consideration an impressive amount of secondary literature, the ambitions of *Hitler's Monsters* are high: In the three chapters of Part One, Kurlander investigates the emergence of National Socialism since the late 1880s and its relationship to what is termed "the supernatural"; Part Two, again consisting of three chapters, discusses the relationship between the National Socialist state and the supernatural; while the last three chapters of Part Three deal with the period of the Second World War until 1945.

Despite a range of important arguments and inspiring thoughts, *Hitler's Monsters* is at times a highly problematic book that leaves an ambivalent impression. Kurlander does address a pressing issue by pointing out lacunae and shortcomings within previous scholarship. It is correct that Goodrick-Clarke's classic study of Ariosophy did not dwell on the Third Reich itself, thus making it an incomplete source for an understanding of the actual relationship between Ariosophy and the NSDAP. Kurlander is also right to point out the sometimes one-dimensional conclusions of what he calls the "revisionist" genre of literature, which is especially represented by Treitel. As Kurlander explains, it "has provided a welcome corrective to the 'special path' (*Sonderweg*) literature typified by earlier accounts," which overemphasized not only the anti-modern and illiberal tendencies inherent within German culture, but also the influence of esotericism on National Socialism (xiii). However, the revisionist reaction to sensationalist and simplifying accounts has sometimes led to opposite over-simplifications that

have downplayed the links between esotericism and National Socialism. This criticism is reasonable and overdue. *Hitler's Monsters* makes an important and overall constructive case for having a closer look at the topic, making it clear that we need to take into account the many contradictions and ambiguities related to it.

Unfortunately, there are problems with respect to Kurlander's approach that might already be suspected after encountering the book's title. These problems regard, most notably, his engagement with scholarship, his approach to primary sources, his methodology, and the style of argumentation essentially resulting from it. To begin with, Kurlander comes close to building a straw man in his criticism of "revisionist" scholarship. Treitel's discussion of the relationship between the National Socialist state and occultists is much more complex than Kurlander wants the reader to believe, and his own counterproposal is ultimately far from offering a more nuanced explanation. One also keeps wondering who the "many revisionist scholars" that Kurlander speaks about are (xiii), since, besides extensively quoting Treitel throughout the book, he only superficially addresses two articles by Marco Pasi and Thomas Laqueur in the introduction (one of them a review of Treitel): When it comes to occultism, Kurlander's thesis arguably represents less a valiant struggle against a revisionist hegemony than an attempt to reinforce perceptions that are predominant among the public at large but were long ago dismissed by specialists. At the same time, he has a habit of affirmatively citing authors who contradict him, for instance when he argues that recent scholarship states that "[e]vidence indicating an important link between Nazism and the supernatural has never been greater" (x) or that scholarship "has begun once again to take seriously the supernatural roots of Nazism." (xiv, followed by a reference providing a long list of his own publications and Peter Staudenmaier's *Between Occultism and Nazism*, which, as will be seen, draws quite different conclusionsA)

Most important, however, is Kurlander's failure to take a nuanced middle position between what he calls "classical" and "revisionist" scholarship. Instead, *Hitler's Monsters* is too often marked by a sweeping treatment of sources and contexts, as well as by a remarkable methodical vagueness. This becomes most evident in Kurlander's central category, "the supernatural," the definition of which is as vague as it could possibly be:

> I argue that no mass political movement drew as consciously or consistently as the Nazis on what I call the 'supernatural imaginary' — occultism and 'border science', pagan, New Age [sic!], and Eastern religions, folklore, mythology, and many other supernatural doctrines — in order to attract a generation of German men and women seeking new forms of spirituality and novel explanations of the

> world that stood somewhere between scientific verifiability and the shopworn truths of traditional religion. (xi)

As Kurlander goes on to explain, he chose "supernatural" instead of "occult" because, firstly,

> 'the occult' tends to connote, by definition, something secret, elitist, and generally obscure. But much of what attracted ordinary Germans and Nazis to the ideas and practices discussed in this book — as the revisionist scholarship has convincingly shown — was eminently public and widely popular. [...]
>
> Second, early twentieth-century occultism, diverse as it is, constitutes only one cluster of beliefs and practices within the broader German supernatural imaginary. To be sure, under the rubric of occultism we might include a broad range of practices (astrology, clairvoyance, divining, parapsychology, etc.), beliefs (witchcraft, demonology), and syncretic doctrines that share elements of both (Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Ariosophy). Nevertheless, studies of occultism still tend to exclude important 'border sciences' such as World Ice Theory, the Nazi search for 'miracle' technologies, folklore and mythology, and aspects of *völkisch* religion. (xiv–xv)

Kurlander states that "there is extensive scholarly literature about Nazi religiosity on the one hand, and folklore and ethnology on the other, that has developed independently of the historiography on the occult." Of course, this is so because previous authors were, thankfully, aware of the significant differences between these aspects and their histories and contexts. It is, in principle, legitimate and potentially reasonable to include such an array of aspects into a study like this — but this would require a solid, precise theoretical and methodological foundation in order to avoid vagueness and randomness. Unfortunately, *Hitler's Monsters* does not offer a corrective to the general tendency to neglect such a foundation.

Quite the contrary, Kurlander makes generous use of his option to include "many other supernatural doctrines" into his discussion, without really explaining what exactly we should understand as such. This is aggravated by the fact that Kurlander frames his study with very general questions about the "longing for myth" or the use of folklore, which are arguably relevant to the identity formations of any community, and certainly every nation. Linking such a broad selection of diverse source material to these questions would require much clearer theoretical and methodological substance, and at least a much more cautious style of argumentation. However, Kurlander is anything but restrained

in his argument for "the supernatural roots, character, and legacies of the Third Reich." (xv) In establishing this thesis, the category of "the supernatural" enables him to include vastly different contexts and examples that are, somehow, linked by their "supernatural" character. Sometimes, this results in strikingly superficial arguments, such as Kurlander's proof of "supernatural thinking" within the NSDAP on the basis that "early Nazi leaders refer[red] frequently to monsters — demons, devils, vampires, mummies, and other supernatural tropes — in articulating their views." (52) His suggestion that this rhetoric set "early Nazi leaders" apart from other political currents is demonstratively false — one only needs to think of the omnipresence of the vampire topos in socialist discourse, especially after it was picked up by Marxists. Generally, Kurlander's implication throughout the book that vampires, monsters, and similar tropes played a unique role in German culture reveals a remarkable ignorance of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European literature and art.

These critical points serve to illustrate some of the methodological issues of the book. Kurlander does discuss methodology in the introduction, but this basically consists of mentioning what sources he used, rather than how he used them. Most problematic is his justification of the extensive use of sensationalist, biased and spurious sources from the years before and after 1945 on the basis that they could contain a kernel of truth or reflect a general atmosphere (xix–xx). These sources include famous examples such as Hermann Rauschning, Konrad Heiden, Lewis Spence or Rudolf von Sebottendorff. While it is understandable that such sources are not simply dismissed, their use is not made transparent, sometimes not even explicit, in the text and in the references — at times, this gives the impression that Kurlander cites from them only because it suits his narrative. Usually, Kurlander does not explain on what basis he has decided whether the information is trustworthy or not, or he provides long, affirmative quotes from a sensationalist source after simply using a word like "ostensibly." Any kind of deeper reflection or problematization is noticeable by its absence. Instead, sensationalist sources are labeled, for instance, as coming from "an important reservoir of evidence for Nazi supernatural thinking" (xx) or as "an example of Germany's frame of mind." (63)

Kurlander relies heavily on such sources in every chapter, for instance when he stresses that Hitler's reading of Ernst Schertel's book on the history of magic from 1923 expressed a genuine belief and engagement with the practice of magic on a political level. We read sentences by Kurlander such as: "Like any shaman or magician, the spoken word was essential to Hitler's magic." Or quotes by contemporary observers, here Heiden: "Hitler's speeches were probably the

greatest example of mass sorcery that the world has heard in modern times." (71) This use of sensationalist sources — particularly the adoption of their interpretations — marks a significant shift away from more nuanced and less "demonical" attempts to deal with the person of Hitler, or National Socialism as a whole. The bottom line is that it is nothing more than circumstantial evidence, supplemented with a range of spurious or at least problematic sources, that leads Kurlander to the very bold statement that Hitler was actively employing the means of a "shaman or magician" to control the masses with occult powers.

Not all of Kurlander's arguments are as colorful at this. There is much in *Hitler's Monster* that is highly instructive. But it is the strong claims that make the book stand out among other serious publications on the topic, since most of the material is not new. Most of the time, Kurlander concisely summarizes recent scholarship and gives it a twist by his own reading. Experts will thus not learn much new about central aspects such as Ariosophy, the Thule Society, Anthroposophy, individuals like Otto Rahn and Karl Maria Wiligut, or bizarre doctrines like the World Ice Theory. Instead, Kurlander's innovation lies in the way that he connects these different aspects. As has been stressed above, their treatment is sometimes very problematic, and it is to be expected that the different topics will find their respective expert critics in other reviews. Here, only some examples representative of fundamental issues within the volume shall be discussed.

Chapter Two, for instance, criticizes previous scholarship on the *völkisch* Thule Society and argues for more substantial and richer connections between the Wilhelmine *völkisch*-esoteric milieu, the Thule Society, and the early DAP (Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, the predecessor of the NSDAP). This chapter is entirely based on secondary literature, with one stunning exception: the accounts of one of the founders of the Thule Society, Rudolf von Sebottendorff, whose depictions are reproduced by Kurlander despite their obvious bias and unreliability. While the Thule and other radical *völkisch* circles were definitely part of the emergence of the DAP and National Socialism, Kurlander uncritically adopts Sebottendorff's narrative of a paramount influence and direct continuation, ignoring broader historical contexts and providing no further evidence except Sebottendorff's own account. Apart from this deeply problematic choice, Kurlander's discussion is marked by the omission of important nuances: for example, Dietrich Eckart and Alfred Rosenberg were not members of the Thule Society but guests, while Rudolf Heß and Hans Frank were only members for a short period. The Thule Society was, as the scholarship cited by Kurlander explicitly states, not an "occult order" but a combat group against Communists, which occasionally included public talks

about topics like dowsing. Kurlander does not engage with the argument of the scholarship he cites that these elements were superficial attempts to veil the political character of the society, and he does not present any evidence to challenge this conclusion. To be clear, the point is not that the Thule Society's historical role has been sufficiently elucidated — it has not. But a new critical inquiry should be based on more than circumstantial evidence from second- or third-hand accounts, a selective focus on or neglect of details, and the allegations of someone like Sebottendorff. This is further aggravated by the fact that, throughout the book, Kurlander refers to the Thule Society as *the* "proto-Nazi" organization that exerted a predominant influence on an ideological and personal level until the end of World War Two.

At this point, it must be stressed that the importance of *völkisch*, including esoteric, influences on National Socialism, especially in its early phase, is well known and not contested by anyone familiar with the historical context. However, Kurlander does exactly what he claims to avoid in the introduction: he overemphasizes the esoteric elements while paying little attention to the fact that the NSDAP's transition from a radical fringe group to a mass movement went hand in hand with a marginalization of such extravagant elements. The problem here is not that Kurlander identifies the necessity to scrutinize these elements with new vigor — it is his exaggerated argument that the party had not only "supernatural" *roots*, but also a predominantly "supernatural" *character*. With these claims, Kurlander widely overshoots the mark in his attempt to question the revisionist neglect of *völkisch*-esoteric influences on the early NSDAP and the period after its ascension to power. This is especially regrettable because Kurlander does offer some interesting thoughts about the political use of *völkisch*-esoteric and other aspects of the emergent mass politics of the early NSDAP, and he does provide a well-informed summary of a large part of the intellectual landscape that served as its breeding ground. He is correct in stating that the Nazis were probably the most sophisticated movement in exploiting emotional and religious aspects to win the people for their political cause, but his analysis is inaccurate due to the shotgun approach of his "supernatural imaginary" and his overstated conclusions.

These problems also become evident in Kurlander's adamant statement that "[t]here was no such relationship between politics and occultism on the left." (88) This is factually wrong, and Kurlander does indeed not provide anything to back up this claim. The very emergence of spiritualism and occultism was inherently intertwined with socialism since the 1840s and flourished in far-left contexts in the period around 1900. The developments in the early 1900s are richly docu-

mented for other national contexts, while they are largely obscure in Germany, especially in the interwar period where radical differences are to be expected for obvious reasons. Here, the point is that Kurlander is neither aware of the history of these contexts, nor of their complexities. Relevant scholarship is absent from his study.[1] This, like much else in *Hitler's Monsters*, suggests a limited familiarity with esotericism and the field of study dedicated to it, which is another major reason for the somewhat simplistic character of Kurlander's narrative.

Despite the many flaws, the book has real merit, which becomes especially evident in Chapter Four, arguably the strongest. It is substantially based on archival material and thus provides the most original and well-founded insights. "The Third Reich's War on the Occult" explores the ambiguous relationship between occultism and the state, focusing on the period between 1933 and 1941 that ended with a crackdown on esoteric societies, individuals, and publications. Kurlander provides an overall convincing corrective to Corinna Treitel's conclusion that the relationship between occultism and the state was one of "escalating hostility." Why, Kurlander asks, was it only after eight years in power that measures against occultism were taken? Why were these measures so modest? Why were officials bothering to make distinctions between commercial and popular occultism on the one hand and "scientific

[1] Ranging from "classics" such as Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits. Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) and Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: Universtiy of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) to more recent works such as Nicole Edelman, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France* (Paris: Michel, 1995) Ulrich Linse, *Geisterseher und Wunderwirker: Heilssuche im Industriezeitalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996) Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1998), Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Lynn L. Sharp, *Secular Spirituality. Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth Century France* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit. A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), or John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France. Ithaca* (Cornell University Press, 2008). Kurlander could have learned about this kind of scholarship from 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, 59–74 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009) which is, as has been mentioned above, only superficially cited. For scholarship published after Kurlander's research, see e.g. Daniel Cyranka, "Religious Revolutionaries and Spiritualism in Germany Around 1848," *Aries* 16, no. 1 (2016): 13–48 and my own work, such as Julian Strube, "Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism: A Genealogical Approach to Socialism and Secularization in 19th-Century France," *Religion* 46, no. 3 (2016): 359–88 or Julian Strube, "Socialism and Esotericism in July Monarchy France," *History of Religions* 57, no. 2 (2017): 197–221.

occultism" on the other? Kurlander argues that these inconsistencies were due to "the fact that the Nazis embraced many elements of occult and border scientific thinking," (100) and provides sufficient evidence to make clear that Nazi officials adopted the services of some occultists, or ideas that could be regarded as occultist, when it suited them for ideological or propagandistic reasons. Kurlander demonstrates how the measures taken against occultism were not determined by wishes to eradicate it, but to control it. He also shows how easily *völkisch*-esoteric groups and individuals were assimilated into the party structure, in contrast to other alternative groups and their members.

Unfortunately, Kurlander once again overstates his case when he stresses the paramount importance of occultism within the party, while not only alleging the marginality of anti-occultists therein but also claiming that they were not really anti-occultists after all. (130) Instead of disentangling what other scholars have termed the blatant contradictions and ambiguities of the state's stance towards occultism, Kurlander claims that there were no contradiction and ambiguities at all. In developing these arguments, he is willing to form far-reaching interpretations of his sources, as, for instance, when he reads the Gestapo's suppression of public shows that were debunking the tricks of stage magicians in recreational *Kraft durch Freude* programs as a kind of state protectionism of "scientific occultism." (110–18; Kurlander refers to these tolerated "occultists" as "Hitler's magicians") One of Kurlander's most convincing criticisms of Treitel is her treatment of "the state" as a monolithic block, but in the end he does not provide a multi-faceted alternative, rather another set of over-generalizations that marks a return to old stereotypes. These issues notwithstanding, Kurlander raises questions and points out ambiguities that make this part of *Hitler's Monsters* a relevant contribution to this old debate.

Regarding future research, a question may be raised here that is not considered by Kurlander: What if the unsteady character of official measures against occultism and the lack of interest in eradicating all occultists simply result from the fact that they were not regarded as particularly important? Is it not simply due to the sensationalist overemphasis on links between occultism and National Socialism, especially since the postwar period, that we direct our attention to these aspects and expect something "extraordinary," something spectacular? There is much that indicates the ordinary and quite unspectacular character of the relationship between state officials and occultism. Perhaps the clearest indicator for this is the "zigzag course," (100) the lack of interest, the moderateness that is documented by Kurlander himself.

Despite containing numerous valuable observations, the following chapters are riddled with significant shortcomings that deserve a more detailed analysis than this review can provide. The treatment of topics like border science and Anthroposophy in Chapter Five, for example, is superficial. Recent research, such as that by Uwe Schellinger, Andreas Anton, Michael Schetsche or Peter Staudenmaier, allows for much more nuanced, detailed and instructive insights that stand in stark contrast to Kurlander's more superficial discussion.[2] In Chapter Six, Kurlander sincerely argues for the prominence of "Luciferianism" in the Nazi party by highlighting the role of individuals such as Otto Rahn ("the Third Reich's 'real Indiana Jones'") and Karl Maria Wiligut, who are regarded by most scholars as ultimately marginal figures. On the one hand, the chapter offers reasonable, if sometimes very selective, observations about Nazi attempts to construct alternative forms of religion. On the other, Kurlander heavily relies on sensationalist accounts such as Lewis Spence's *Occult Causes of the Present War* (e.g. 173), mixing up contemporary sources with post-war sensationalist literature,[3] half-truths, and fictitious accounts. These problems resurface in the chapters of Part Three, for instance when Kurlander cites from the reservoir of post-war conspiracy theories: his jaw dropping discussion of a topic like the alleged super weapon, *die Glocke*, only serves, again, to suggest that the large amount of such tales hints at some obscure kernel of truth. (273)[4] The reading of these chapters can be particularly frustrating, because Kurlander's more constructive and challenging insights are mixed up with a genre of literature that experts of Nazi border science, secret technology, and alternative religions are all too familiar with.

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[2] Uwe Schellinger, Andreas Anton and Michael Schetsche, "Pragmatic Occultism in the Military History of the Third Reich," in *Revisiting the "Nazi Occult": Histories, Realities, Legacies*, eds. Eric Kurlander and Monica Black, 157–80 (Rochester: Camden House, 2015), Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), and Peter Staudenmaier, "Esoteric Alternatives in Imperial Germany: Science, Spirit, and the Modern Occult Revival," in *Revisiting the "Nazi Occult,"* 23–41.

[3] For instance, *Hitler, Buddha, Krishna* by Victor and Victoria Trimondi. In his introduction, Kurlander maintains that, despite the sensationalist character of the book, its authors have done valuable archival research. We do not learn, however, on what basis Kurlander has decided whether the information or argument is trustworthy or not. At no point does he critically engage with this study, from which he only appears to quote when it suits his narrative.

[4] For a brief summary of similar conspiracy theories and their sources, see Julian Strube, Strube, Julian. "Nazism and the Occult," in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge, 336–47 (London: Routledge, 2015) and the more detailed Julian Strube, "Die Erfindung des esoterischen Nationalsozialismus im Zeichen der Schwarzen Sonne," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 20, no. 2 (2012): 223–68.

When we look for historical explanations for the links between esotericism and National Socialism, other recent studies can offer us much more differentiated, informed, and informative insights, perhaps most importantly Peter Staudenmaier's case study of Anthroposophy, *Between Occultism and Nazism* (2014).[5] Among the many nuanced arguments in this book, the most concise might be that the links between "National Socialism and the occult" were "ordinary, not esoteric. They can be explained not through the deviance of occultism but through its familiarity, its participation in and influence by central cultural currents of the era." (327) We find similar remarks throughout Kurlander's volume, sometimes with reference to Staudenmaier, but interwoven with and eclipsed by the problematic aspects discussed above. What Kurlander presents us with is not a nuanced approach that confronts the reader with the "irreducible ambiguities of modernity," (Staudenmaier, 6) but an updated version of the old "irrationality vs. rationality" narrative that has merely been replaced by "the supernatural" and supplemented with some nuances.

Certainly, Kurlander offers a gripping, excellently written narrative that touches upon a range of fascinating cases. He makes a range of valuable arguments, especially in Chapter Four, and I wholeheartedly subscribe to his plea to take seriously the events between the late nineteenth century and 1945 in the light of present-day developments in Europe and the USA. (299) However, it is exactly these strengths that make this study especially ambiguous, as the lines between solid research and the full spectrum of sensationalist, biased, and spurious literature are frequently blurred. These sources may be distinguishable for experts, but not necessarily for others, which makes their appearances at the core of a serious academic study particularly misleading. As has been indicated above, Kurlander's justification for relying on these sources amounts to little more than "if so many people were talking about it, there must be something to it." This comes dangerously close to the kind of reasoning that Kurlander rightfully criticizes throughout the book. An approach to this kind of material should be based on a clear methodology that results in a carefully differentiated investigation and interpretation. It should seek to establish a historical contextualization that reflects the complexities and ambiguities of the period. In short, it should put nuance over narrative. In this regard, for all its merits, *Hitler's Monsters* is a missed chance.

Julian Strube
julian.strube@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de

[5] See my extensive review in *Aries* 17, no. 2.