Dark Enlightenment
The Historical, Sociological, and Discursive Contexts
of Contemporary Esoteric Magic

Kennet Granholm

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By

Kennet Granholm

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Acknowledgements

This book has been a long time in the making. Originally intended as a revised version of my PhD-thesis from 2005, it was supposed to be finished by late 2007. Other responsibilities kept coming in the way, and every time I picked up the manuscript to continue working on it I had learnt something new that forced me to make revisions. It was frustrating, but has no doubt resulted in the finished product being better. This book is no longer simply a revised version of my thesis. It is much more ambitious in its aim to explore theory and method and novel approaches and perspectives in the study of contemporary esotericism more generally, by looking at a particular case study – the magic order Dragon Rouge. This book in many ways documents my academic journey in the eight years since I wrote my PhD thesis. Understandably, a great number of people have helped me along the way, so many in fact that I can in no way pay tribute to all who deserve it. My sincere apologies to all who feel left out.

First, this book would not have been possible without the funding granted to me by the Donner Institute for Research on Religious and Cultural History and Stiftelsen för Åbo Akademis forskningsinstitut. I also wish to thank the Academy of Finland for making it possible for me to spend the lecture year 2007–2008 at the University of Amsterdam.

This book started as my PhD thesis in Comparative Religion at Åbo Akademi University, and although it does not resemble the original thesis much my original supervisor deserves a great deal of credit. Thank you Emeritus Professor Nils G. Holm for invaluable support and advice, for providing a great atmosphere for work and study, and in general for helping me along the way. Also, the thesis – and indeed my academic career – would not have been possible without the many enlightening and rewarding discussions I had with Dr Jan Svanberg. I have remained active, in one way or another, in the Department. Most recently, I have participated in the centre of excellence project ‘Post-Secular Culture and Religious Change in Finland’ (PCCR) since its start in 2010. While I have not had the chance to participate in the project seminars as much as I would have liked to, I have appreciated the discussions I have had the opportunity to partake in and have learnt much from the different perspectives presented and sub-projects involved. I wish to thank all the scholars involved in PCCR, particularly the project leader Professor Peter Nynäs.

Both within and beyond the project I have collaborated closely with Dr Marcus Moberg. Our focus in PPCR, and in other joint scholarly ventures, revolves around media, popular culture, and religious change, and the numerous lengthy discussions Marcus and I have had have been indispensable for my
current research on esotericism and popular culture. I have been able to turn to Marcus for information and clarifications on the latest research in the field of media, popular culture, and religion, and the projects we have collaborated on have greatly expanded my perspectives on contemporary religion and sociological theory.

In 2007 I was awarded funding by the Academy of Finland to spend the lecture year 2007–2008 as a visiting research fellow at the Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam (HHP). My time at HHP has easily been the most academically and intellectually stimulating in my career thus far. I enjoyed it so much, in fact, that I stayed in Amsterdam until early 2010. The centre is, of course, the leading research and teaching environment for the study of esotericism, and the faculty involves some of the greatest scholars in the field. During my time in Amsterdam I got to know Professor Wouter Hanegraaff, Kocku von Stuckrad (now professor at Groningen University), and Dr Marco Pasi. I am truly grateful to have had the opportunity to befriend and learn from the masters, and I hope that we will continue to engage in stimulating discussions. With no disrespect to the masters, one of the most rewarding aspects of my stay in Amsterdam was that I got to know, and later collaborate, with a great number of brilliant young MA-students – many of whom are today PhD-candidates at various universities in Europe and North America, and some of whom have by this time been awarded their doctorates. I wish to in particular pay tribute to Colin Duggan (PhD-candidate at University College Cork), Christian Greer (PhD-candidate at HHP), Dylan Burns (PhD at Yale, now working at the University of Leipzig), Joyce Pijnenburg (PhD-candidate at HHP), Justine Bakker (PhD-candidate at Rice University), Jacob Senholt (PhD-candidate at Aarhus University), John Crow (PhD-candidate at Florida State University), Aren Roukema, Karen Meier, and Daniel Kline. Many, many more of you deserve mention, but I need to stop somewhere.

Of all the scholars I have worked with, my collaboration with Dr Egil Asprem has been the most rewarding. I met Egil while working at HHP and we soon became friends, engaged in incredibly inspiring (and sometimes equally weird) conversations...and drew up plans for world domination. Working with Egil has been not only rewarding, but also extremely easy. Together we have edited the collected volume Contemporary Esotericism (2013), founded the Contemporary Esotericism Research Network (ContERN, operating under the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism – esswe), and organized the very successful (if I may say so) 1st International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism at Stockholm University in 2012. While I must admit to being intimidated by Egil’s keen intellect and extreme productivity, I hope that our collaboration will continue for a long time.
Since 2010 I have been employed in History of Religions at Stockholm University. I wish to thank all my colleagues, but in particular Per Faxneld (who will have been awarded his well-earned doctorate by the time this book is published, PhD-candidate Tommy Kuusela, Dr Niklas Foxeus, Dr Peter Åkerbäck, Dr Mats Bertell, and Erik Östling. Per in particular deserves much credit. Together we organized a conference on contemporary Satanism in 2011, and I have benefited much from the discussions we have had. History of Religions constitutes a joint department with Gender Studies and Ethnology, and this combination of disciplines provides great opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration. In 2011–2012 I was involved in a jointly planned and realized study programme in Cultural Analysis, and had the good fortune to collaborate closely with Dr Mattias Frihammar (Ethnology) and Dr Annika Olsson (Gender Studies). I also wish to thank Annika and Professor Hillevi Ganetz (Gender Studies) for interesting discussions relating to, among other things, Gender and Feminist theory.

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Most of all, I am grateful for the members of Dragon Rouge who ultimately have made this book possible, many of whom have become close personal friends. Thank you Andreas, Anne, Camilla, Christiane, Christofer, Göran, Holger, J.K, Johan, Timo (thank you also for allowing me to use your artwork in this book), Kosta, Malin, Mattias, Mika, Saïbot, Stefan, Thomas, Tina, Tobbe L, Tommie, Tuomas, Åsa, and many, many more whom I have met and learnt from in my adventures in the order. This book is dedicated to you.

Stockholm, December 2013
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Introduction

This book is a study of a particular expression of contemporary esoteric magic; the Sweden-originated Left-Hand Path magic order Dragon Rouge. But it is also more than that; it is an attempt to shed light on contemporary esoteric magic more broadly by situating a case study in the context of both Western esotericism and late modern societal, cultural, and religious change. Dragon Rouge is a relatively small group and no conclusive generalizations can be made from such a small sample, but the historical, sociological, and discursive contextualization of the order nonetheless provides a look into the inner workings of contemporary esotericism in general and contemporary esoteric magic in particular. In aiming at providing a broader visage at the field of contemporary esotericism this study will hopefully be relevant for scholars of both Western esotericism and new religiosity who are not interested in Dragon Rouge or the Left-Hand Path in particular. It is also my hope that this study will provide useful perspectives to the study of esoteric phenomena beyond the ones explored here.

In addition to being the first published monograph on Dragon Rouge, this book is also the first study to provide a detailed examination of the ‘Left-Hand Path’. Being a rather recent development in the esoteric milieu, originating in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it is understandable that this esoteric current has not received much attention in academia. The Left-Hand Path is an esoteric current, primarily manifested in magic orders, operating with three primary discursive components: An ideology of individualism that posits the individual as the absolute centre of his/her existential universe; a goal of self-deification where the individual aims to gain absolute control over his/her own existential universe; and an antinomian ethos where collectivistic ethics and personal taboos are transgressed in the pursuit of absolute autonomy. Significant groups besides Dragon Rouge are, for example, the Church of Satan, the Temple of Set, and – although being strongly informed by other esoteric currents as well – the Rune-Gild. As can be seen from this short list, many

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1 Some discussion can be found in Sutcliffe, ‘Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick’; Harvey, Speaking Earth, Listening People, 97–99; Evans, The History of British Magick after Crowley. With the exception of my more recent work (see e.g. Granholm, ‘Embracing Others Than Satan’; idem, ‘The Rune-Gild’; idem, ‘The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism’; idem, ‘Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes’), however, no attempts have been made to delineate the current beyond reference to emic self-perceptions.

2 See Granholm, ‘The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism’.

3 See idem, ‘The Rune-Gild’.
Left-Hand Path groups can be identified as Satanic in one way or another. However, as a category ‘the Left-Hand Path’ is both more inclusive and exclusive than the category ‘Satanism’. Self-identified Satanist groups and philosophies that do not operate with the discursive components presented above are excluded, while groups that do operate with the discourses but would not conventionally be described as Satanic are included. In this book Dragon Rouge is employed as a case study that shines some light on the broader Left-Hand Path current that it belongs to.

This book also combines theoretical and methodological insights from both the historiographic study of Western esotericism and the sociological study of contemporary religious change, and it therefore provides an example of how contemporary esotericism can be researched more comprehensively. The source material used in this study is both vast and diverse, consisting of extensive field observations, interviews, questionnaire answers, unpublished documents, publications by members of Dragon Rouge, as well as mass media material and outsider, non-academic and often polemical, accounts of the group. All in all, my research on Dragon Rouge spans more than ten years, from 2000 to 2012 – over half of the order’s existence. Ethnographic data, with the principal fieldwork and interviews conducted between 2001 and 2004, constitutes a major part of the source material. In drawing on empirical ethnographic primary material this study explores esoteric magic in lived contexts and provides a more vivid and diverse picture than is possible by the reliance on textual material alone. The inclusion of ethnographic data distinguishes this study from the text-based studies that are common in the field of Western esotericism, and the historical contextualization distinguishes it from many sociologically focused studies of contemporary (esoteric) religiosity. In its synthesizing approach, with a combination of historical, ethnographic, and sociological perspectives, this study points to new avenues that can be explored in the study of contemporary esotericism. This book is also one of the few studies of religion that employ discourse analysis as its primary method, and in presenting a discourse analytical method for analysing esoteric currents in general it provides a framework for the study of contemporary esotericism in general.

The study of Western esotericism has been predominantly historiographical in character, marked by a preoccupation with Renaissance and early modern

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4 Previous studies employing discourse analysis within religious studies are the original doctoral thesis that this book is based on (Granholm, Embracing the Dark), Marcus Moberg’s doctoral thesis Faster for the Master!, Titus Hjelm’s doctoral thesis Saatananpalvonta, media ja suomalainen yhteiskunta, and a recent special issue of the journal Religion (Wijsen, ’Special Issue: Discourse Analysis in Religious Studies’).
Introduction

phenomena. While some studies have stretched as far as to the late nineteenth and even early twentieth centuries, more recent developments have for the most part been disregarded. At the same time, contemporary phenomena that might fit under the rubric of esotericism have been explored in fields such as the study of new religions and neopaganism, but rarely with any reference to the field of Western esotericism and the approaches, perspectives, and theories developed therein. This division along disciplinary lines is disturbing, and stands in the way of the study of esotericism reaching its full potential. Historians of Western esotericism could learn from sociologists of new religions, just like sociologists of new religions could learn from historians of Western esotericism – and scholars in both fields could greatly benefit from joining forces. The historical diligence found in the field of Western esotericism could curb some of the exaggerations in depictions of the rise of a ‘new spirituality’. Many of the ‘news’ in new (esoteric) religiosity are actually contemporary reinterpretations of far older esoteric teachings and practices. Inadequate familiarity with the history of the phenomena under scrutiny can easily led to situations where the scholar misunderstands and misrepresents the groups, individuals, worldviews, and practices that are studied, or alternatively relies too heavily on biased and ahistorical insider perspectives. Thus, paying attention to scholarship in the field of Western esotericism could introduce valuable longitudinal and broad-ranged cultural field-perspectives to the study of contemporary (esoteric) religiosity. Scholars of contemporary religion are often well-versed in the intricasities of sociological theory concerning late modern societal, cultural, and religious change and aim to present analyses that situate individual case studies in the context of such broader processes. Approaches and perspectives from the study of new religiosity could help alleviate the problem of many studies in the field of Western esotericism being concerned with specialized subjects that are of little interest to non-specialists, and thus bring much needed broader relevance and applicability to the field. Social scientific research, and particularly methods such as ethnography and qualitative interviews, also brings a new and important dimension to the study of historical esotericism – a look at esotericism in actual practice.

The study of contemporary esotericism could perhaps be regarded as a scholarly field in its own right, one that is not only concerned with updating the study of Western esotericism to include present day phenomena, nor only with introducing historical perspectives into the study of contemporary (esoteric) new religiosity, but a field that aims to combine the best of both worlds. The apparent incongruities of the above fields necessitates some ‘translating’ when one wants to do comprehensive research on contemporary esotericism that connects both to the historiography of Western esotericism and the study
of late modern societal change. The study of contemporary esotericism presents many challenges, but also many possibilities. One of the major possibilities is the potential to introduce new perspectives on contemporary cultural and religious change. Esotericism plays a significant role in the contemporary Western (and global, one could argue) religious milieu, and it should receive more scholarly attention. In order for the potential to be realized, however, and for the study of Western esotericism to achieve a broader relevance for religious studies (and other disciplines) a bridging of disciplinary gaps needs to happen. It is my hope that this book will work a bridge, of sorts, that can help make such translations a bit easier.

The Structure of the Book

Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical and methodological foundation of the book. As this study deals with contemporary esoteric magic, the term ‘magic’ is the first to be explored. It is a term that has been used in many different ways, and has collected quite a lot of unnecessary baggage in more than a hundred years of problematic social scientific use. It is a term of self-definition in the contemporary esoteric milieu and can therefore not be discarded, yet it evokes associations to ‘primitive religion’ and ‘flawed science’ that are a hindrance for properly understanding magic in the modern world. Establishing any sort of unequivocal definition of magic is impossible, but it is essential to clarify the intended meaning in a scholarly text; is it an anthropological category, is it an emic term without any particular analytical meaning, or is it something else? Having dealt with ‘magic’, I go on to overview both historiographical and sociological approaches to the study of esotericism. As noted above, these two approaches have remained essentially separate and are rarely even mentioned in the same contexts. Thus, as this is a study that is primarily social scientific in character but has its foundation in the historiography of Western esotericism, it is essential to deal with both fields. I end with a brief treatment of an emerging ‘new paradigm’ in more recent scholarship, particularly approaches developed by Wouter Hanegraaff, Christopher Partridge, and Kocku von Stuckrad. Finally, I present the discourse analytical grounding that the book relies on, providing a treatment of the epistemological basis of social constructionism and discourse analysis, a look at some central schools of discourse analytical research, and my own discourse analytical approach to the study of contemporary esotericism. I end the chapter by presenting a framework for studying

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5 See Asprem & Granholm, ‘Contemporary Esotericism’.
esoteric currents as discursive complexes that I have developed – an approach which, I suggest, could introduce more structure in otherwise disparate discussions.

Chapter 2 briefly examines important post-Enlightenment esoteric developments that form the historical and idea-historical background of Dragon Rouge, the Left-Hand Path, and other forms of late modern esotericism. The developments discussed are: the Theosophical Society; the ‘occult revival’ of the nineteenth century, particularly focusing on Éliphas Lévi in France and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in England; Aleister Crowley; neopaganism in its various forms; Satanism and the broader Left-Hand Path milieu; and the popularization of esotericism in late modernity, along with a critical examination of the problematic category ‘New Age’. As said, the focus is on Dragon Rouge, and rather than providing a comprehensive and independent examination of the currents and movements themselves issues of particular relevance for Dragon Rouge are instead treated. This is a chapter where scholarship operating on very different premises needed to be combined. Late nineteenth and twentieth-century phenomena such as the Theosophical Society and ‘the occult revival’ have received (some) attention in the field of Western esotericism. Later developments, such as Satanism and neopaganism, have been studied almost exclusively by sociologists of new religions and hardly at all by historians of Western esotericism. In these cases important historical insights are often lost due to historians of Western esotericism not lending a helping hand. Such studies also tend to examine specific groups and rarely connect to contemporary magic in a broader sense. Furthermore, some very important individuals, such as Aleister Crowley – arguably the most influential (not to mention the most famous/infamous) magician and occultist in modernity – have received almost no attention by either sociologists or historians. This also applies to phenomena such as ritual magic, where developments after the Second World War remain more or less unexplored. For example, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke ends a chapter on ‘ritual magic from 1850 to the present’ well

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6 See e.g. Luhrman, *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft*; Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*; Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld*; idem, *The Nature of Magic*. There are studies that have a more historical approach, such as Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*. However, Hutton’s book does not link neopaganism to the broader esoteric milieu. Dave Evans’ *The History of British Magick After Crowley* does deal with the present day, but is lacking in substantial analysis.

7 This is, however, starting to be amended with two recent works, Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr’s edited volume *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, and Marco Pasi’s *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* (2014). Pasi’s book has previously been published in Italian (1999) and German (2006).
before the 1950s, giving the appearance that ritual magic does not exist in the late modern world. Luckily, the situation is starting to change and a growing number of young scholars are paying attention to contemporary esoteric developments.

By Chapters 3 and 4 it is time to move on to examine Dragon Rouge itself. In Chapter 3 I discuss the history of the order, starting with its founder Thomas Karlsson and proceeding to a discussion of the order from its founding in 1990 all the way to present-day developments. I also look at the basic philosophical tenets of Dragon Rouge, focusing on the dialectic of Chaos and Cosmos in the order, where the former is awarded primacy; the conception of dark magic, the primary form of practice within the order; and the four pillars that the order itself proclaims as its foundation: Goetic Kabbalah, Odinic Runosophy, Vāmācāra Tantra, and Typhonian Alchemy. Finally, I provide an examination of the orders organizational, administrational, and initiatory structures. The aim of the chapter is to provide a basic but detailed overview, which can then be used as a basis for a more focused examination of the orders discursive and social contexts. The source material used in Chapter 3 involves both textual material and interviews, and provides a look at the philosophical and doctrinal constitution of Dragon Rouge. Chapter 4 is where this book diverges from studies within the field of Western esotericism in general. The chapter provides a vivid look at lived esotericism by way of a series of first-hand ethnographical accounts of Dragon Rouge practice. As examples from my extensive fieldwork I present a course on ceremonial magic from 2001, the ceremonial opening of a Dragon Rouge lodge, also in 2001, and my own initiation into the order’s second initiatory degree in 2004. The ethnographies are first analyzed and discussed individually, and then collectively in an attempt to highlight key aspects and central overarching themes in Dragon Rouge practice. Together these chapters knit together a comprehensive picture of how Dragon Rouge looks in both theory and practice.

Chapter 5 and 6 make use of the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1 and provide discourse analytical treatments of Dragon Rouge. In Chapter 5 I take a close look at the order itself, in the context of itself. I examine the key Left-Hand Path discursive elements of the ideology of individualism, self-deification, and antinomianism in their actualization in the context of Dragon Rouge philosophy, worldviews, practices, and relations. The chapter ends with an examination of how these three discourses interact and influence

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9 See e.g. the second half of Aspem, *Arguing with Angels*, and particularly the chapters contained in Aspem & Granholm, eds., *Contemporary Esotericism*. 
Introduction

...each other, and thus how they constitute a coherent esoteric current. While the three discourses are fundamental in all groups and individual actors in the Left-Hand Path milieu they manifest differently in different groups. No real-world esoteric group or philosophy is influenced by discourses belonging to only a single current. Rather, the group will be additionally shaped by a number of discourses belonging to other esoteric currents as well as by ‘ancillary’ discourses, i.e. discourses that are not constituting elements of any particular esoteric current but that are prevalent in a broader social and cultural context. Chapter 6 examines such ‘external’ influences. Dragon Rouge is strongly informed by neopagan discourses, and is in this distinguished from Left-Hand Path groups such as the Temple of Set. I look at the neopagan discourse on the primacy of nature and the orientation towards the feminine divine as they manifest in Dragon Rouge. These neopaganism-derived discourses are intimately woven into the core Left-Hand Path discourses in Dragon Rouge, all influencing each other and assuming unique forms in the context of the order. In the second part of Chapter 6 I examine the real-world implications of the discourses that inform Dragon Rouge, particularly in their interaction with ‘ancillary discourses’ derived from the broader cultural context that the order exists in. In particular, I look at power problematic that arises when a focus on individuality is combined with initiatory structures that necessarily suggest hierarchical implications; environmentalist and animal rights activities and sentiments that arise from the focus on nature, but also from the other key discourses informing Dragon Rouge; and the potential and realized feminist implications of the focus on the feminine divine in conjunction with discourses of individualism and self-deification.

In Chapter 7, the final chapter of the book, I broaden the scope to discuss modern and late modern societal, cultural, and religious change in relation to esotericism. The chapter diverges from the previous ones in that it is no longer primarily focused on Dragon Rouge itself. Instead, the order, along with other (late) modern esoteric phenomena, is used as a case study to illustrate some of the transformatory effects that late modern social change has on esotericism. Dragon Rouge is, of course, a far too small group to be used as a source for generalizing late modern transformations of esotericism as a whole, and much of the discussion is speculative. However, the order is in many ways symptomatic of the societal and cultural transformations of late modernity, and thus a good case study to use as an example. The order demonstrates a degree of eclecticism that far exceeds that of earlier occultist groups, as a reaction to the fragmentation of world views and loss of institutional authority under the impact of detraditionalization and an accentuated pluralism. It operates in a transnational network with the relatively few members of the order spread over large...
parts of the Western world, and displays translocalizing tendencies in catering for different localities, regionalities, and language groups. The order also makes extensive use of modern communication technologies in the form of the Internet, and both affects and is affected by popular culture. Dragon Rouge demonstrates further fragmentation in an ambivalent combination of religious and secular rhetoric, indicative of the influence of post-secular discourses that are critical of the hegemony of secularism. These developments are, however, not limited to Dragon Rouge, but instead visible in much of the contemporary esoteric milieu, albeit in many different and varying forms. If there is ever to be a competent and comprehensive 'sociology of esotericism' some first steps need to be taken, and such steps are by their very nature speculative. I take these first steps by looking at the general and through that interpreting the particular. We can have a multitude of studies of particular expressions of contemporary esotericism, but if these studies do not connect to broader social scientific discussions they will have little general relevance. So, while my discussion in chapter 7 is short and speculative, it draws a rough sketch of how contemporary esotericism, at least partly, might appear when examined through the lense of sociological theory. In doing so I hope that this book will both provide some new insights and inspire future research on particular esoteric expressions, as well as stimulate more comprehensive research on esotericism in general, taking into account its historical, sociological, and discursive contexts.
CHAPTER 1

The Study of Contemporary Magic

What is Magic?

Many attempts have been made to define magic and distinguish it from religion. Although old, James Frazer’s understanding of magic as attempts to control supernatural forces and one’s environment (and thus a form of ‘primitive, but misdirected, science’), distinguished from the submission to the same forces in religion, has shown itself to be very enduring. Emile Durkheim demonstrates similar views, positing that while magic and religion both operate with the same general premises, such as belief systems, rites, myths, and dogmas, the former does not unite its practitioners in churches whereas the latter does. For Mircea Eliade religion deals in kratophanies (manifestations of power), hierophanies (manifestations of the sacred), and theophanies (manifestations of the divine). Kratophanies are the most elementary of the three, manifestations which have yet to be proven to be sacred. While no absolute distinction between magic and religion is made, the former is closely related to kratophanies due to revolving around notions of power. Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge regard both religion and magic as offering compensation for experiences of deprivation, with magic offering more specific compensation to the more general compensation offered by religion. Even though many scholars stress the scholarly artificiality categorically distinguishing between religion and magic the need to maintain such distinctions appears to live strong. This can probably be traced to (Christian) theological influences where ‘proper religion’ is supposed to be devoid of ‘magical’ elements. It is indeed very hard to absolutely separate magic and religion, and Clayton Crockett’s observation on religion as an object of study are equally valid for magic:

1 For a thorough discussion of various ways in which magic has been construed, see Otto & Stausberg, Defining Magic.
3 Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 41–42.
4 Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, 13.
5 Bainbridge & Stark, A Theory of Religion, 36–42.
The fact that reality is not given to human understanding implies that any data which is described as religion or religious can claim only phenomenal status. This means not only that religion cannot be known immediately as a thing in itself, but also that it is at least partially constructed as an object by the observer, interpreter, or scholar.7

The problem is that while religion has been the focus of much theoretical and methodological debate,8 magic has largely remained a subordinate category. This has resulted in a situation where magic is often, although certainly not always, considered a static and more or less transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon. In European cultural history the practices, motivations, philosophical underpinnings, and social contexts (among other variables) of ‘magic’ in different periods vary so greatly that ‘it is questionable if it is even meaningful to treat the term as an expression of a coherent phenomenon’.9 This is certainly no less true in regard to cross-cultural comparisons. ‘Magic’ is not the same in all cultures and in all times, and it is extremely naïve to think so. Furthermore, in its pre-Enlightenment use it referred primarily to a cultural category at home in European intellectual contexts,10 and it is problematic to transpose the term more or less intact to non-European cultures. As the term has come to be primarily interpreted through research conducted on non-European ‘primitive religion’ considerable obstacles to properly understanding European magic have been introduced. Gini Graham Scott's study of the Temple of Set is an illuminating example.11 In basing her understanding of

8 For a discussion of how the study of religion has been challenged and consequently transformed during recent years, even to the extent that the term religion itself is being viewed as an ‘arbitrary and Eurocentric construction’ and largely a false category in itself, see von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Study of Religion, 256; cf. King, ‘Orientalism and the Study of Religion’, 283–284.
9 Gregorius, Modern Asatro, 25, my translation.
10 Lehrich, The Language of Demons and Angels, 10. The origin of the modern English word ‘magic’ lies in the Greek mageía, which was borrowed from the Persians (where the Zoroastrian priesthood were termed magi, in Greek magoi – see Chosky, ‘Zoroastrianism’, 9990). In Latin the term was adopted as magia (Pasi, ‘Magic’, 1134). From Latin it was transformed into the Old French magique to likely be adopted into the English language in the late fourteenth century (Online Etymology Dictionary, ‘Magic’). Systematic philosophies concerning magic were developed primarily from the Renaissance onwards, by authors such as Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535). The Greek appropriation of this word with a Zoroastrian religious origin is itself an example of a form of positive orientalism in Antiquity, see pages 181–182.
11 Scott, The Magicians.
magic on outdated anthropological studies and equating ‘Magic A’ (generalized non-European nature-oriented indigenous cultural contexts) with ‘Magic B’ (a modern North American context, inspired by several European philosophical traditions), she cannot interpret the existence of magic in the modern context she is concerned with as anything other than powerless individuals’ feeble attempts to gain social power.\textsuperscript{12} Furthermore, in borrowing from Frazer and defining magic as ‘erroneous science based on false premises’ Scott more or less brands the people she studies as idiots.

The view of magic as having had solely negative connotations in European history is still widespread.\textsuperscript{13} The issue is, however, far more complex. While it is true that the term has been intrinsically linked to polemical discourses it has never been a singular object.\textsuperscript{14} Rather than being straightforwardly ‘illicit religion’, magic has in fact often been divided into several categories – for example natural, demonic, mathematical, and ceremonial magic – some of which have been considered legit and others illicit.\textsuperscript{15} In the Renaissance notions of lawful natural magic, i.e. magic that operated within the confines of the natural world without the mediating help of supernatural beings, were common. However, one should not assume that magic that employed supernatural and even demonic beings in its operations was automatically deemed unlawful. For example, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) considered there to be both licit and illicit forms of demonic magic.\textsuperscript{16}

Due to the problematic nature and often pejorative implications of the term magic some scholars have suggested that it might be best to forgo its use altogether in scholarly contexts.\textsuperscript{17} However, it is used in emic contexts by many contemporary esotericists, and for that reason alone it cannot be discarded.\textsuperscript{18} It is prudent to note the (contextually relevant) native meanings and implications

\textsuperscript{12} And, as Scott should have known, several members of the Temple of Set do in fact have significant societal and social power as e.g. high ranking military officers, successful academics, and affluent businessmen. There is no Satanic conspiracy in play here though, these people do not control the world.

\textsuperscript{13} See e.g. Lloyd, ‘Magic, Dreams and Prophecy in Egyptian Narrative Literature’, where the ancient Egyptian word ‘heka’ is compared to the English word ‘magic’, and an automatically pejorative view of the latter is assumed throughout European history, whereas the former relates to practices fully acceptable in an ancient Egyptian context.

\textsuperscript{14} Lehrich, \textit{The Language of Demons and Angels}, 5; Pasi, ‘Magic’, 1134.

\textsuperscript{15} Lehrich, \textit{The Language of Demons and Angels}, 11.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{17} E.g. Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age Religion and Western Culture}, 80; idem, ‘Magic I’.

\textsuperscript{18} This is a view held by other scholars as well, see e.g. von Stuckrad, \textit{Western Esotericism}, 62–63n2.
of the terms religion and magic, remember that the abstractions ‘religion’ and ‘magic’ are scholarly constructs, and resist the temptation of categorical separations of religion/’religion’ and magic/’magic’. As there exist at least three main ways of using the term, with very different implications – as a transhistorical and -cultural analytical category in the humanities and the social sciences, a native term in certain historical European contexts, and an element of emic terminology that may or may not have different and varying relations to the other two interpretations of the term – it is essential to clarify one’s use and not confuse the different meanings. In the context of this book I refer to magic as the emic term of choice that members of Dragon Rouge use for their practice and philosophy, which is in this case influenced by both early anthropological distinctions of religion and magic and native use of the term in classic and modern esoteric sources.

The Study of Esotericism: Historiographical Approaches

In most historiographic studies the term esotericism denotes a set of historically and culturally specific phenomena and developments rather than an analytical category that can be used in cross-cultural and -historical comparisons. Thus, the qualifier Western is added. Frances Yates’ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964) is commonly regarded as the single-most important work in providing the impetus for a self-sustained field centred on the study of Western esotericism, and Yates’ approach, theories, and methods form the first proper research paradigm.\(^{19}\) She popularized the idea of a ‘Hermetic tradition’ as a distinctive current of thought that informed many of the practices and philosophies that are today researched under the label of esotericism, although, as Kocku von Stuckrad notes, there were scholars prior to Yates who discussed the existence and importance of such a ‘tradition’\(^ {20}\) In Yates’ account, the ‘Hermetic tradition’ had been an important driving force behind scientific revolution, although in itself not being particularly progressive in character. As she writes:

> The procedures with which the Magus attempted to operate have nothing to do with genuine science. The question is, did they stimulate the will towards genuine science and its operations? In an earlier chapter of this book I suggested that they did...\(^ {21}\)

\(^{19}\) See Hanegraaff, ‘Beyond the Yates Paradigm’.


This preoccupation with ‘modernist narratives of secular progress’ is one of the aspects on which Yates’ work has been criticized.\(^{22}\) Another problem is that while she in some ways presents ‘the Hermetic tradition’ as ‘multiple and varied’\(^{23}\) it is nonetheless characterized as a self-contained ‘tradition’. Yates’ account can thus lead one to assume that esotericism, or Hermeticism, is actually a more or less monolithic and singular phenomenon.

The idea of a more or less self-contained ‘esoteric tradition’ is in fact a central element of much esoteric discourse, found already in the Renaissance notions of *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis*.\(^{24}\) It gained currency in post-Enlightenment times, however, with emerging notions of ‘the occult tradition’ as not only a self-contained tradition, but also as something that in its essence was separate and distinct from Christianity and any other identifiable religion. The notion of ‘the occult tradition’ is an area where scholarship and insider perspectives have often met,\(^{25}\) which is not too surprising considering that many pioneers in the field had their scholarly interest sparked by personal esoteric convictions.\(^{26}\) However, when these convictions start to influence and even direct scholarship the situation becomes untenable. The best example of perennialism informing the academic study of religion, and in fact asserting considerable influence, is Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) and his extremely influential depiction of shamanism as a ‘universal and archaic technique of ecstasy’.\(^{27}\) Eliade was deeply influenced by the Traditionalist writings of René Guénon (1886–1951), where the focus lay on a critique of the modern West and the search for ‘authentic tradition’ elsewhere. Eliade’s *Cosmos and History* – better known in English by its original subtitle, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* – has even been compared to Guénon’s *Crisis of the Modern World* (1927) and fellow

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24 Much of the content of the following two paragraphs is derived from discussions I have had with Egil Asprem, and which we have treated in a collaboratory publication. See Asprem & Granholm, ‘Constructing Esotericisms’.
25 A good example of this is Holman, *The Return of the Perennial Philosophy*, which has the subtitle ‘The Supreme Wisdom of Western Esotericism’. The book is intended to be something of a scholarly examination (but fails miserably), and the inclusion of ‘Western Esotericism’ in the subtitle can probably be attributed to intentions of aligning it to the academic field of the same name.
26 See e.g. the importance of Eranos on the early scholarship of Antoine Faivre. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, Chapter 4.
27 Eliade, *Shamanism*. For more on Eliade and the creation of shamanism as a ‘universal tradition’, see Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 165–180. For more discussion on this subject in relation to the esoteric, see Asprem & Granholm, ‘Constructing Esotericisms’.
Traditionalist Julius Evola's (1898–1974) *Revolt Against the Modern World* (1934).28 Eliade, who is ‘almost certainly the most familiar name in the field [of religious studies]’,29 was also an active participant in the annual Eranos meetings in Ascona, Switzerland (arranged since 1933), where he along with other respected and influential scholars and authors such as Carl Gustav Jung, Gershom Scholem, Henry Corbin, and Joseph Campbell subscribed to and developed esoteric-Traditionalist ideas.30

While most current specialists on Western esotericism regard perennialism as an *object of study* rather than a tenable scholarly position,31 the notion of an ‘occult tradition’ is not uncommon among non-specialists.32 Furthermore, perennialism is still a factor in some specialist literature. The most glaring example can be found in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke’s introduction to Western esotericism. While the title of the work refers to esoteric traditions in the plural, the contents reveal a clear religionist position:

> [The] perennial characteristics of the esoteric worldview suggest...that this is an enduring *tradition* which, though subject to some degree of social legitimacy and cultural coloration, actually reflects an autonomous and essential aspect of the relationship between the mind and the cosmos.33

A second paradigm in the study of Western esotericism was formulated by Antoine Faivre in his *L’Ésotérisme* published in 1992,34 and has been adopted by many scholars.35 Faivre regards Western esotericism as ‘an ensemble of spiritual currents in modern and contemporary Western history which share a certain *air de famille*, as well as the form of thought which is its common denominator’.36

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30 On Eranos, particularly with reference to Eliade, Corbin, and Scholem, see Ibid. On the ‘Jung-Eliade school of thought’, see Ibid., 23.
31 See e.g. Hanegraaff, ‘Beyond the Yates Paradigm’.
32 See e.g. Katz, *The Occult Tradition*.
34 For English-language dissemination, see Faivre, ‘Introduction I’; idem, *Access to Western Esotericism*.
35 See e.g. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*; Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*; Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*.
This ‘form of thought’ can be identified by four intrinsic characteristics: The idea that everything in existence is linked through a series of invisible correspondences; the notion of a living nature imbued by divine forces, which can be read for meaning just as other holy scriptures; a focus on the faculty of imagination – perceived as an ‘organ of the soul’ and the agency of intermediary beings in the pursuit of higher knowledge; and the experience of transmutation, where the practitioner actively uses the knowledge gained to perfect his/her essence or soul. In addition, Faivre considers two secondary characteristics as common, but not necessary, components: The practice of concordance, involving attempts to establish a common inner kernel of truth between one or more philosophical or religious ‘traditions’; and a reliance on proper forms and channels of transmission, often through a succession of initiations. Faivre also insists that it is only from the Renaissance onwards that we can talk of Western esotericism in a proper sense, as it is during this period that we ‘see emerging a will to bring together a variety of ancient materials of the kind we are concerned with here, and that it was believed then that these materials could constitute a homogenous whole.

A major problem with neat categorizations such as the one presented by Faivre is that they obscure the inherent complexity of the esoteric. Furthermore, while it was never his intent, Faivre’s approach lends itself to use as a sort of ‘check-list’ that can be employed to determine whether a specific phenomenon is esoteric or not. Faivre’s model has been criticized on at least two major accounts: on the grounds that it seems to be concerned only with ‘Christian esotericism in the early modern period’ and that it is founded on historically limited source materials and therefore does not account for the transformation of esotericism over time. Simply put, Renaissance esotericism will appear, and indeed in light of the typology be, ‘more esoteric’ than later, or earlier, expressions. The point seems to be to strictly (and somewhat arbitrarily) delimit what can properly be studied under the banner of Western esotericism. One finds very little elaboration on how and why the specific currents and notions accepted for inclusion are chosen. The result is that Western
esotericism as a field remains both historically and conceptually narrow and analytical potential is thus restricted.

Even more seriously though, the Faivrean approach easily lends itself to making distinctions between ‘true’ and ‘simulacrum’ esotericism. In an article dealing with esotericism and fiction Faivre approaches the issue by looking at the intentions of authors and receptions by readers.\(^{43}\) If a fictional text includes elements of ‘proper esotericism’ but no ‘esoteric wisdom’ it represents ‘borrowings’ from the realm of esotericism. Similarly, when the text does not include ‘proper esotericism’, but the reader nonetheless appears to find ‘esoteric wisdom’ in it, we are dealing with ‘misinterpretation’. One is led to the conclusion that there can be no proper esotericism in a fictional text. While hermeneutics are important in any reading of a text, the idea that it is meaningful to look for the ‘true meaning’ of a text in the intentions of its author has long since been abandoned in the study of literature.\(^{44}\) This is similar to Henrik Bogdan’s use of the Faivrean approach. Bogdan distinguishes between four categories of sources: ‘Texts belonging to one (or more) esoteric current(s), in which the constituting components of the esoteric “form of thought” are explicitly present’, ‘[t]exts belonging to one (or more) esoteric current(s), in which the constituting components of the esoteric “form of thought” are implicitly present’, ‘[t]exts belonging to one (or more) esoteric current(s), in which the esoteric form of thought is not present’, and ‘[m]igration of esoteric ideas into nonesoteric materials’.\(^{45}\) Thus, texts do not need to contain ‘the esoteric form of thought’ in order to belong to the realm of esotericism, as long as they ‘clearly belong’ to an esoteric current. Problematic predetermined parameters, based on circular argumentation, are in place. Esoteric currents are established, and based on them the esoteric form of thought is derived, which is then used to show that the identified currents are in fact esoteric. The problems are clearly demonstrated by Bogdan’s assertion that ‘even nonesoteric texts can be interpreted as esoteric, depending on the circumstances in which they appear’.\(^{46}\) Conversely, material that demonstrates seemingly obvious esoteric affinities – such as the use of esoteric symbols and references to classic esoteric notions in popular culture – does not belong to the realm of esotericism as it neither contains ‘the form of thought’ nor belongs to a specific, pre-established esoteric current.

Since the mid 1990s, Wouter Hanegraaff has become one of the most influential scholars in the field of Western esotericism. From the outset, he has been

\(^{43}\) Faivre, ‘Borrowings and Misreadings’.
\(^{44}\) See e.g. Lehrich, The Language of Demons and Angels, 19.
\(^{45}\) Bogdan, Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation, 18–20.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 19.
very clear on the fact that esotericism as a category is a scholarly construct, a tool that researchers can use to analyze certain oft-neglected phenomena in Western cultural and religious history.\footnote{See e.g. Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions”’, 11; idem, ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’, 489–490.} Esotericism is ‘not “discovered” but produced’,\footnote{Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions”’, 16.} and the scholar should not make the mistake of searching for ‘the true essence’ of esotericism because such a thing simply does not exist. It is the choices and delineations of the researcher that produce the field, not the other way around.\footnote{Ibid., 13–18; idem, ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’, 489–490.}

Although primarily building on in Fauvet's work, Hanegraaff has already in his early work\footnote{E.g. idem, \emph{New Age Religion and Western Culture}, 518–519.} used an alternative approach based on Gilles Quispel's notion of three distinct modes of knowledge in Western culture; reason, faith, and gnosis.\footnote{Ibid., 138–140.} Hanegraaff points out that these are ideal typical categories that should not be equated with specific ‘traditions’.\footnote{Ibid., 140–141.} In Hanegraaff’s use, the categories are defined by how the knowledge claimed can be confirmed by and communicated to others.\footnote{Ibid., 138.} Reason-based claims, such as scientific ones, can be communicated easily and the validity of them can be checked by anyone with sufficient skills within the field that the claim is made in. Faith-based claims, such ones concerning religious prophecy, can be communicated to others but their validity cannot be confirmed. Gnosis-based claims, however, are a different kind of animal. Knowledge of a gnosis-type is not only unverifiable; it is in its very essence incommunicable as well. In order to access it it needs to be experienced, often by entering ‘altered states of consciousness’.\footnote{Ibid., 138–140.} In contrast to Yates' and Fauvet's approaches the reason-faith-gnosis-model does not deal with ‘traditions’ or self-contained ‘currents’. All three types of knowledge claims can be found in most spheres of human interaction, often mixed together to some degree. For example, conventional Christianity is not solely guided by faith-based knowledge-claims, but does also contain reason-based and gnosis-based claims. This greatly broadens the analytical potential of the study of esotericism.

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\footnote{See e.g. Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions”’, 11; idem, ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’, 489–490.}
\footnote{Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions”’, 16.}
\footnote{Ibid., 13–18; idem, ‘The Study of Western Esotericism’, 489–490.}
\footnote{E.g. idem, \emph{New Age Religion and Western Culture}, 518–519.}
\footnote{Ibid., 138–140.}
\footnote{Ibid., 140–141. On the esoteric and the significance of altered states of consciousness see idem, ‘Entheogenic Esotericism’.}
An overarching problem in the historical study of Western esotericism is that it has tended to focus on elite discourse in the form of the literary output of (mainly Renaissance and early modern) intellectuals such as Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa. While this is somewhat understandable, though not fully acceptable, when it comes to earlier periods such as the Renaissance where ‘lowbrow’ culture may have left fewer traces, this tendency has unfortunately continued in research on esotericism in later periods. As Owen Davies has shown in his excellent work on grimoires, the esoteric was certainly not a domain reserved only for the elites.55 He also shows that the esoteric was often used in far less noble pursuits than the attainment of enlightenment. In fact, a major concern for people using grimoires was the search for actual physical treasure. The focus on elite discourse is particularly problematic when examining contemporary esotericism, where many expressions might easily be disregarded simply for comparing unfavourably with the elites of Renaissance intelligentsia.56

Another problematic issue is the qualifier ‘Western’. While certainly central in the study of Western esotericism, it is a severely undertheorized term.57 Antoine Faivre defines ‘the West’ as ‘the vast Greco-Roman ensemble, both medieval and modern in which the Jewish and Christian religions have cohabited with Islam for several centuries’, but does not include any more discussion on the subject.58 Most other introductory volumes, key texts, and encyclopaedias include even less discussion.59 While it may be fairly unproblematic to use ‘the West’ as a collective term for generally referring to Western Europe and North America, more thorough theoretical and terminological discussion is necessary if the term is to be used as a key qualifier that signifies not only geographical location but also cultural distinctiveness. Vague notions of ‘shared cultural history and values’ through ‘art, literature, and philosophy’ simply do not suffice, and run the risk of homogenizing both ‘the Western’ and the ‘non-Western’ while concealing important local, regional, and even national

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55 Davies, *Grimoires*. Arthur Versluis is one of the few scholars who has discussed folk magic in relation to esotericism. See Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism*.

56 For an example of such a bias, in an otherwise excellent study, see Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 508.

57 For a more thorough discussion, see Granholm, ‘Locating the West’. See also Pasi, ‘Oriental Kabbalah and the Parting of East and West in the Early Theosophical Society’; Asprem, ‘Beyond the West’.


variations. The term is particularly problematic in an increasingly globalized world. Perhaps it would be better to recognize the term ‘Western’ as one that more properly fits insider esoteric discourse and forgo the use of it as a key scholarly signifier, instead relying on more specific delineations when necessary.

The Study of Esotericism: Sociological Approaches

One could also claim that social scientific methods, theories, and perspectives are essential in the study of contemporary esotericism. An atmosphere of general negativity, and even hostility, towards social scientific research on esotericism can be discerned among many historians of Western esotericism, often concerning the perceived reductionism of social scientific approaches. However, a moderate degree of reductionism is not negative, and aiming to provide theoretical insights that extend beyond isolated phenomena is important. Furthermore, while some of the critique of sociological studies, particularly the ‘sociology of esotericism’ in the 1970s, is well-founded, progress has been made since the 1970s. Thus, when a scholar such as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke in 2008 reiterates Hanegraaff’s critique from the late 1990s he is basically making a straw man argument. The interest in esoteric phenomena among sociologists of new religions has been on the rise in the 2000s, and in recent years there have also been several contributions in the field of sociology that treat esotericism in a historically conscious way. It is true, however, that much work still needs to be done.

60 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke demonstrates a textbook example of the accusation of sociological reductionism when discussing Kocku von Stuckrad’s discursive approach to esotericism, which does not take into account that esotericism addresses the ‘essential aspect of the relationship between the mind and the cosmos’ (Goodrick-Clarke, The Western Esoteric Traditions, 13). However, even a scholar such as Wouter Hanegraaff, who otherwise takes a sober approach to the possibility of sociological research on esotericism, falls into the trap and accuses von Stuckrad of reductionism, see Hanegraaff, Esotericism and the Academy, 365.
61 For a critique, see Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions”’, 40–42.
62 Goodrick-Clarke, The Western Esoteric Traditions, 10.
63 See Granholm, ‘Conference Rapport’.
The roots of the sociological study of what can be termed esotericism actually go as far back as to the early days of the discipline of sociology itself. Ernst Troeltsch was a pioneer in this regard, though he used the term mysticism rather than esotericism. Troeltsch idea, formulated most famously in his *Die Sozialelehren der christlichen kirchen und gruppen* from 1911/1912, was that there are in essence three modes of religiosity, expressed in the ideal types of church, sect, and mysticism. He built on Max Weber’s Church-Sect distinction, but in contrast to Weber he dealt with Christianity exclusively rather than with religion in general. Whereas the church and sect types involve specific organizational structures, mysticism is focused on inner religious experiences. It is in its essence individualistic and eschews social organization, although Roland Robertson notes that Troeltsch did consider the possibility of institutionalized mysticism. Robertson also remarks that ‘there is a danger in the Weber-Troeltsch tradition of sliding together mystical experience and the mystical orientation. The latter can be highly collectivist, the former cannot.’ The Weber-Troeltsch typology of religious organization inspired the classic sociological church-sect-denomination-cult model – developed primarily by Howard Becker in 1932 and J. Milton Yinger in 1957 – where the cult stands for loosely organized, inclusive, and doctrinally deviant religiosity. Cults are, in a sense, ‘the organizational response associated with mystical religion.’

Troeltsch’s work is at the foundation of Colin Campbell’s well-known notion of the cultic Milieu. Campbell observed a situation in which non-Christian religiosity propagates, particularly in the form of ‘cultic beliefs like astrology and witchcraft’ that have ‘become a far more visible component of the total cultural system.’ In asserting that cultic religion needs to be examined in different ways from sectarianism due to its different nature, Campbell proposes

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65 While mysticism and esotericism should not be directly equated, a definite distinction is difficult to make. There are also scholars who regard mysticism to be a particular ‘current’ belonging under the rubric of “esotericism”; see Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism*, 3.

66 The book was translated into English as *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* in 1931.


69 Robertson, ‘On the Analysis of Mysticism’, 255.

70 Ibid., 256–257.


72 Campbell, ‘The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization’, 120.

73 Ibid., 119.
that in addition to the often temporary individual cults there exists a cultic milieu that is ‘a constant feature of society’.74 According to Campbell:

The cultic milieu can be regarded as the cultural underground of society. Much broader, deeper and historically based than the contemporary movement known as the underground, it includes all deviant belief-systems and their associated practices. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all comprise elements of such an underground. In addition, it includes the collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs. Substantively it includes the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure. This heterogeneous assortment of cultural items can be regarded despite its apparent diversity, as constituting a single entity – the entity of the cultic milieu.75

While Campbell’s notion of the cultic milieu has much promise, and has been successfully employed,76 it is problematic in asserting the ‘deviance’ of cultic beliefs.77 Proposing that ‘cultic religion’, some of which could be termed esotericism, is deviant or alternative is contrived when considering its immense popularity in contemporary society.78 The ‘deviant alternatives’ have in effect become mainstream.79 Also, as Marion Bowman and Steven Sutcliffe correctly note, ‘any talk of “alternative” spirituality begs the question of normativity in contemporary religion’.80 In essence, presenting something as ‘alternative’ always reifies something else as ‘normal’.

Sociological research on esotericism and occultism, with the use of these specific terms and informed by the Troeltsch-Becker-Yinger understanding of cult-type of religiosities, was conducted in the early 1970s. Edward Tiryakian, defines esoteric knowledge as ‘secret knowledge of the reality of things…to a relatively small number of persons’, and goes on to clarify that ‘[a]t the heart of

74 Ibid., 122.
75 Ibid., 122.
76 See e.g. Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture, 14–18; Partridge, The Re-Enchantment of the West.
77 Campbell, ‘The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization’, 134.
78 Something that Campbell himself acknowledges, see ibid., 119.
79 Partridge, The Re-Enchantment of the West, Vol. 1, 70; idem, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’; Heelas, Spiritualities of Life, 760.
esoteric knowledge, is its concealment from public dissemination, from the
gaze of the profane or uninitiated.\footnote{Tiryakian, ‘Towards a Sociology of Esoteric Culture’, 265–266.} This focus on secrecy goes hand in hand
with positioning ‘esoteric culture’ in contrast to ‘normal’ or ‘exoteric culture’.\footnote{Ibid., 267.} Such an approach is highly problematic as it seeks to highlight the deviant
nature of esotericism and portray it as distinct from ‘mainstream’ culture and
in some way essentially counter-cultural in character,\footnote{Ibid., 260.} and as an effect marginalizes it.\footnote{Tiryakian, ‘Preliminary Considerations’, 1.} Tiryakian also establishes the liminal nature of the esoteric in
describing it as the ‘crucial missing link between the cultural systems of “mod-
ern” and “traditional” Western society’, at the same time being ‘both ultramod-
ern and ultratraditional’.\footnote{Tiryakian, ‘Towards a Sociology of Esoteric Culture’, 265.} Sociology of this period did have predilection to
deal with ‘deviancy’, and was thus posed to see various phenomena in this
light.

An influential feature of Tiryakian’s work is the distinction between esoteri-
cism and occultism. Rather than regarding the latter as a specific development
or current within the former, as is common in current historiographical scholar-
ship, Tiryakian proposes a theory-practice divide. Occultism is seen as

intentional practices, techniques, or procedures which (a) draw upon
hidden or concealed forces in nature or the cosmos that cannot be mea-
sured or recognized by the instruments of modern science, and (b) which
have as their desired or intended consequences empirical results, such as
either obtaining knowledge of the empirical course of events or altering
them from what they would have been without this intervention.\footnote{Tiryakian, ‘Towards a Sociology of Esoteric Culture’, 265.}

Esotericism refers to

those religiophilosophic belief systems which underlie occult techniques
and practices; that is, it refers to the more comprehensive occult tech-
niques of nature and the cosmos, the epistemological and ontological
reflections of ultimate reality, which mappings constitute a stock of
knowledge that provides the ground for occult procedures.\footnote{Tiryakian, ‘Towards a Sociology of Esoteric Culture’, 265–266.}
Thus 'esoteric knowledge is to occult practices as the corpus of theoretical physics is to engineering applications'.\(^{88}\) The two are intrinsically linked, however, and difficult to separate as esoteric knowledge is at its foundation 'of a participatory sort'.\(^{89}\) This alone demonstrates the futility of such a division, as well as its lack of any substantial analytical value.

Marcello Truzzi, another central figure in the sociology of esotericism of the 1970s, also focuses on the secretive aspects of the occult/occultism.\(^{90}\) In describing occultism as a ‘wastebasket, for knowledge claims that are deviant in some way’, comprised of knowledge not accepted in mainstream religion, science, or culture, he emphasises the deviant and countercultural nature of esotericism even more strongly than Tiryakian.\(^{91}\) The major problem with Truzzi’s approach – other than the obvious problem of normative denigration – is that esotericism/occultism becomes a residual and essentially empty category. The occult can be anything, and any specific occult phenomenon ceases to be occult if and when enough people accept it.\(^{92}\) Unfortunately, the use of ‘esotericism’/’occultism’ as a residual ‘wastebasket’ category is still quite common in the sociology study of religion. For example, in Meredith B. McGuire’s much used introduction to sociology of religion occultism is described as ‘a set of claims that contradict established (i.e., official) scientific or religious knowledge’.\(^{93}\) Similar sentiments can be found in Lynn Schofield Clark’s study of popular culture and religiosity among youth, where ‘the occult’ is portrayed as little more than those supernatural beliefs that are difficult to fit into any other category of religion or spirituality.\(^{94}\)

The examination of phenomena that can be labelled esotericism became a major interest for sociologists of religion in the 1990s. Following the pioneering research on new religious movements by the likes of Bryan Wilson, Roy Wallis, James Beckford, Eileen Barker, and J. Gordon Melton, many sociologists of religion focused their studies on neopaganism and the ‘New Age movement’.\(^{95}\) While many of these studies are excellent, they rarely consider the

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88 Ibid., 265.
89 Ibid., 266. See also Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 170.
90 Truzzi, ‘Definition and Dimensions of the Occult’, 244–245.
91 Ibid., 245.
92 Ibid., 245. For a critique, see Hanegraaff, ‘On the Construction of “Esoteric Traditions”’, 40–42.
94 Clark, From Angels to Aliens.
95 For studies of the ‘New Age’, see e.g. Lewis & Melton, eds., Perspectives on the New Age; York, The Emerging Network; Heelas, The New Age Movement; Bowman & Sutcliffe, eds., Beyond the New Age; Ahlin, New Age. For studies of neopaganism, see e.g. Luhrman,
larger historical context of the groups studied. Furthermore, as they operate on different theoretical premises than scholarship on Western esotericism, and as few historians of Western esotericism have bothered to discuss contemporary phenomena, some degree of ‘translation’ is often needed to overcome differences in terminology, perspective, theory, and method if the goal is to use scholarship from both fields.

An Emerging ‘New Paradigm’ in the Study of Esotericism

In the last ten years very interesting approaches to the study of the esoteric have been presented by Wouter Hanegraaff, Christopher Partridge, and Kocku von Stuckrad. Egil Asprem and I have termed these three approaches as ‘something of a “new paradigm” in the study of the esoteric in Western culture’. I feel that it is motivated to describe the approaches and their increasing use as representing a paradigm shift in the study of the esoteric for more than one reason. First, they all represent a departure from the Faivrean approach that has dominated the field. Second, all three approaches refrain from providing an outright definition of the esoteric/esotericism, instead going for more fluidic and open-ended perspectives. Third, they all explore novel theoretical and methodological avenues and have already demonstrated great potential in diverse application. All three approaches open up the study of the esoteric and make it more relevant for scholars outside the field of Western esotericism. Furthermore, in avoiding rigid definitions the approaches do not clash. Instead, they complement each other, and could even been used in conjunction. Finally, all three approaches provide good starting points for uniting historical and sociological perspectives, and thus facilitate truly trans- and interdisciplinary research on esotericism in general, and contemporary esotericism in particular.

The Hanegraaff Approach

Wouter Hanegraaff first presented his approach in the article ‘Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research’ in 2005, further developing it in the chapter ‘The Trouble with Images: Anti-Image Polemics and Academic Research’ (2007). At this point Hanegraaff operated with a

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96 Asprem & Granholm, ‘Contemporary Esotericism’
97 See the various chapters in idem, eds., Contemporary Esotericism.
problematic notion of an overarching ‘grand polemical narrative’ ‘by means of which western culture has been construing its own identity over the course of many centuries’, and which has resulted in the phenomena that are today studied under the banner Western esotericism being socially and intellectually marginalized.98 He built on Egyptologist Jan Assmann's idea of mnemohistory as ‘collectively imagined history’, and saw the conflict as one primarily between monotheism – where the divine is far removed from the human sphere – and cosmotheism – where the divine is immanent but hidden. This problematic projection of a more or less independent grand polemical narrative has, however, been abandoned in Hanegraaff’s later work, such as the article ‘The Birth of Esotericism from the Spirit of Protestantism’ (2010) and particularly the monograph *Esotericism and the Academy* (2012). Instead, the focus is on historically specific societal processes of exclusion.

On the surface Hanegraaff’s approach is similar to Truzzi’s wastebasket-approach that has previously been criticized by Hanegraaff as untenable.99 There are major differences though; while both Truzzi and Hanegraaff focus on the esoteric/occult as a form of rejected knowledge, Hanegraaff does not suggest that every form of knowledge that is not accepted in mainstream religion, science, or culture is esoteric/occult. Instead, esotericism as a category of rejected knowledge is formed in very specific historical processes and the phenomena that are rejected are likewise specific. These processes of exclusion are linked to the Reformation – where Protestants and Catholics accused each other heresy due to engagement in practices such as alchemy, astrology, and magic – and the Enlightenment – where practices were split into the ‘properly scientific’ and ‘pseudo-scientific’ in the boundary work of the scientific revolution, creating initially spurious distinctions between e.g. chemistry and alchemy and astronomy and astrology.100 In the first case a phenomenon could be defined as either dangerous or immoral and consequently prohibited, and in the latter a phenomenon could be framed as irrational or simply erroneous and therefore ridiculed.101 The important thing to note here is that the practices and beliefs that were rejected had, in many cases, been central elements of Medieval and Renaissance culture, science, and religion, and were only later marginalized. Equally important to note is that many of these practices and beliefs had very little relation to each other before they were lumped together as rejected knowledge. If this had not been the case the practices could not

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100 Idem, *Esotericism and the Academy*.
later, in the nineteenth century ‘occult revival’, have been appraised as a single independent ‘tradition’ of secret knowledge that had been unduly persecuted throughout history.

Rather than describing the esoteric ‘in itself’ Hanegraaff focuses on the complex and multifaceted social processes whereby certain phenomena, philosophies, practices, and indeed claims to knowledge, in Western culture have been marginalized as ‘rejected knowledge’. In stark contrast to Truzzi, Hanegraaff strives to shine light on marginalized aspects of Western cultural and religious history, rather than to establish them as deviant, also discussing specific rationales and strategies of exclusion. The approach can with great benefit be used to bring in new perspectives to our view of European cultural and religious history, highlighting complexities which often remained hidden in more conventional scholarship.

_The Partridge Approach_

Christopher Partridge first presented his approach in the two-volume _The Re-Enchantment of the West_ in 2004/2005. While there was some overall vagueness to the approach due to a somewhat limited treatment of the core conceptual premises, this was amended in a recent chapter. The approach builds on the work of sociologists such as Weber, Troeltsch, and Campbell, but is set in an explicitly contemporary framework where mass media, popular culture, and consumerism play important roles. The basic premise is that contemporary western societies have been and are undergoing significant religious transformations, which is in line with sociological perspectives on religion in general, but in contrast to the still dominant paradigm that revolves around the notion of secularization Partridge suggests that we are instead witnessing a _re-enchantment_ where new, ‘alternative’, forms of religion are flourishing. Most sociologists of religion are looking at conventional institutional forms of religiosity, which are arguably loosing support, and are therefore witnessing what appears to be secularization. According to Partridge, however, ‘Western culture is not becoming _less_ religious, but rather that it is, for a variety of reasons, becoming _differently_ religious’.104

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102 See Partridge, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’.

103 However, Partridge has recently suggested that occulture can be a part of societies everywhere in every historical period (Partridge, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’ (conference paper)). I consider such a universalizing approach to be problematic, but similarities to the developments that can be witnessed today certainly have historical precedents, for example in the popularization of occultism in late nineteenth-century Europe.

104 Partridge, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’, 116.
The terms ‘mystical’ and ‘mysticism’ are problematic due to being so strongly linked to theological interpretations, and Partridge therefore introduces the term ‘occulture’.\textsuperscript{105} He is here indebted to Campbell’s notion of the cultic milieu, as well as Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge’s conception ‘occult subculture’, but contends that the milieu in question is occultic rather than cultic, as well as something that ‘transcends subcultures’ and instead represents a culture.\textsuperscript{106} Occulture is not a form of religiosity, but ‘the spiritual/mythic/paranormal background knowledge that informs the plausibility structures of Westerners’.\textsuperscript{107} It ‘includes those often hidden, rejected and oppositional beliefs and practices associated with esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism, and a range of other subcultural beliefs and practices...’\textsuperscript{108} Furthermore, this milieu ‘is constantly feeding and being fed by popular culture’, and is thus constantly updated with new material as well as more or less all-obtrusive.\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, as the title of Partridge’s recent publication on the subject states, ‘occulture is ordinary’.

Similarly to Hanegraaff’s approach, the focus is not primarily on the esoteric (whether ‘in itself’ or otherwise) but rather processes of cultural, religious, and social change. However, where Hanegraaff examines the marginalization of specific phenomena, Partridge’s instead looks at how these previously marginalized phenomena and notions (and their more modern offsprings) are popularized and come to function as an amorphous cultural reservoir that is used in the construction of a multitude of specific beliefs, practices, and identities. Partridge’s study is one of the select few that draws both on sociological perspectives on religious change and the study of religion, media, and popular culture, as well as one of the few studies in both of those fields that acknowledges the significance of the esoteric in contemporary culture. Looking at the esoteric, or occulture, as a ‘cultural reservoir’ that is used in many different ways, ranging from entertainment to ‘serious convictions’ – and often as both at the same time, expands the potential and scope of the study of esotericism. In highlighting popular culture the approach also facilitates the abandoning of perspectives which favour the ‘highbrow’ over the popular, something which is long overdue in the study of esotericism.

\textsuperscript{105} Idem, \textit{The Re-Enchantment of the West}, Vol. 1, 67; idem, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’.
\textsuperscript{106} Idem, \textit{The Re-Enchantment of the West}, Vol. 1, 67. The term subculture has also been strongly criticized in recent scholarship, see Bennett & Kahn-Harris, eds., \textit{After Subculture}.
\textsuperscript{107} Partridge, \textit{The Re-Enchantment of the West}, Vol. 1, 187.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{109} Idem, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’.
The von Stuckrad Approach

Kocku von Stuckrad’s approach to the study of the esoteric was first presented in the article ‘Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation’ in 2005, and was further developed in the monograph Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe in 2010. The approach is a discursive one, and as such it deals with communication and interaction. Von Stuckrad argues that instead of discussing esoteric ‘forms of thought’ that detail internal mental processes – which we as scholars really cannot access – we should approach the esoteric as a ‘structural element of Western culture’ composed of specific types of knowledge claims. In line with this, he prefers the term ‘the esoteric’ to esotericism, as we are dealing with an ‘element of cultural processes’ rather than ‘a coherent doctrine or a clearly identified body of tradition’. The basic premise of the approach is fairly simple and straightforward; the esoteric ‘element of discourse’ consists of ‘claims to “real” or absolute knowledge and the means of making this knowledge available’. While the means to access absolute knowledge vary, claims of mediation by ‘higher’ beings and personal experience are common. A valid critique formulated by Hanegraaff is that esoteric discourse commonly deals with the quest for absolute knowledge rather than the possession of it. As in the Hanegraaff- and Partridge-approaches, von Stuckrad does not provide a definition of esotericism per se, but rather uses the concept of the esoteric as a methodological tool to shed light on communicative and interactional processes inherent to the European history of religions. As von Stuckrad puts it: ‘instead of asking what esotericism is and what currents belong to it, it is more fruitful to ask what insights into the dynamics of Western history we might gain by applying the etic concept of esotericism’. Von Stuckrad also reintroduces an aspect that is central to most non-expert understandings of the esoteric but has been downplayed by many scholars of Western esotericism; the notion of secrecy. However, instead of suggesting that the esoteric deals in ‘knowledge hidden from all but a select

110 See also von Stuckrad, Western Esotericism.
111 Note the difference between discursive and discourse analytical approaches, see page 32.
112 Von Stuckrad, ‘Western Esotericism’, 80.
113 Idem, Western Esotericism, 10.
116 Hanegraaff, Esotericism and the Academy, 372.
117 Von Stuckrad, ‘Western Esotericism’, 80.
few’, he emphasizes the ‘dialectic of the hidden and revealed’.118 That is to say, we are dealing with the rhetoric of secrecy – a discursive component – and it could be claimed that the revelation of purported secrets, ‘hidden knowledge’, is much more central than the keeping of them.

Finally, von Stuckrad sets his approach in a framework that acknowledges the inherent pluralism of the European history of religions. Instead of being a modern phenomenon, pluralism is regarded as ‘the standard situation in Europe’, where ‘[e]ven during those times in which Islam was not institutionalised in Western Europe, it existed as an ideological alternative to Christianity or Judaism, as did Judaism to Christianity’.119 To this, the various pre-Christian religions of Europe can be added. Esoteric discourse thus operates in a heterogeneous religious milieu in which identities, relations, affinities etc. are constructed by reference to the ‘others’ that one does not wish to be associated with. The very concept of esoteric discourse becomes an analytical tool that is consciously constructed by the scholar for the purpose of investigating processes of identity formation, and an instrument through which one can shine light on developments that have all too often been neglected in the investigation of seemingly monolithic ‘traditions’.

**Potentials**
The field of Western esotericism has been somewhat isolated, partially due to a certain unwillingness to ‘play in the same sandbox’ with scholars from other fields who might be interested in the same phenomena. All three approaches discussed above explore methodological and theoretical avenues that help open up the study of esotericism for religious studies in general, a development which is long overdue. They also provide perspectives that are relevant for religious studies and a number of other disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. One of the major contributions of the study of esotericism in general, and the ‘new paradigm’-approaches in particular, is to problematize and destabilize outdated perspectives on what religion ‘is’, how it functions, and where it can be located. Research in relatively new fields such as the study of esotericism and the study of religion, media, and popular culture have demonstrated that many of the basic suppositions of conventional history of religions, sociology of religion, and religious studies are too simplistic and

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119 Idem, ‘Western Esotericism’, 86. It should be noted that von Stuckrad defines pluralism as ‘the organization of difference’, rather than as a simple coexistence of different cultural or religious alternatives (i.e. plurality) or an ideology that presents such a coexistence as a virtue (the latter of which is more in line with my use and understanding of the term).
need to be challenged. This is particularly true in the current climate of religious and cultural change. One example of a problematically assumed disparity of the sacred and the secular, the religious and the scientific, and here the utility of the study of esotericism is particular clear. While some esoteric expressions can easily be identified as religious – in a conventional understanding of the word – other expressions appear to be far removed from what is conventionally understood as religion. Whether one looks at esotericism as a form of thought or as a structural element one can find esoteric traits in seemingly non-religious phenomena. For example, in its early history experimental science was as good as indistinguishable from esoteric methodology. Esoteric elements can be found in certain interpretations of contemporary natural science as well. Von Stuckrad examplifies with the human genome project and the search for a grand unified theory in physics, both of which regularly involve fairly esoteric discourse on the prospects of discovering the ‘ultimate language of the cosmos’.

Social Constructionism, Discourse, and Discourse Analysis

This study relies heavily on discourse analysis. The method, as well as the concept discourse itself, builds on social constructionist epistemology, a constructivist perspective that specifically emphasizes the role of language and communication as the means through which social reality, relationships, identities etc. are constructed, transformed, and maintained. Social constructionism operates with four basic tenets:

(1) ‘A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge’. Our understandings of the world, phenomena in it, and even our very selves are by

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120 Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton’s Alchemy*.
123 Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, 60n30. Other constructivist perspectives mentioned by Gergen are radical constructivism, constructivism, social constructivism, and sociological constructionism. Social constructionism and social constructivism are particularly easy to confuse with each other due to linguistic similarities, but should be kept apart as they work on very different basic premises.
necessity informed by preconceived notions that need to be deconstructed. Empirical observation does not yield objectively and universally valid information, and there are a great number of possible explanations of any one phenomenon.

(2) ‘Historical and cultural specificity’.125 Apparent ‘facts’ are not rigid and eternal but instead malleable, fluid, and dependent on context. What is perceived as ‘natural’ varies according to cultural and historical context.

(3) ‘Knowledge is sustained by social processes’,126 or as Kenneth Gergen expresses it, ‘[o]ur modes of description, explanation and/or representation are derived from relationship’.127 This means that our ways of understanding phenomena derive from our interaction and communication with other human beings, and only gain meaning in and through these contexts. All claims to knowledge are dependent on social processes, and an account that no one else adheres to is socially invalid.

(4) ‘Knowledge and social action go hand in hand’.128 Not only are knowledge and communication closely tied to each other, but communication is in itself a very fundamental form of social action. Social institutions and relationships are dependent on the words we use to describe and define them, and are subject to constant retransformation and reproduction. Gergen asserts that ‘[r]eflection on our forms of understanding is vital to our future well-being’,129 stressing that all communicative acts have real-world effects that need to be considered.

The French word discours130 began to take on a more theoretical meaning in the 1960s, primarily in French philosophy,131 and ‘discourse’ has since then become something of a staple term in the social sciences. An unfortunate consequence is that the term is used in many different and sometimes conflicting ways, and often without any clarification as to the specific meaning in a

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126 Ibid., 4.
130 The French word does not correspond exactly to the English word. In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (accessed May 10, 2011), discourse is defined as ‘verbal interchange of ideas’ or ‘formal and orderly and usually extended expression of thought on a subject’. In discourse analytical research the concept is defined somewhat differently but still maintains the focus on ‘speech in use’.
131 Mills, Discourse, 2–3.
particular context. When using the term the first task should thus be to clarify its meaning. Since many authors simply refer to their use as being ‘Foucauldian’, it is logical to first turn to the work of Michel Foucault in the search for a definition. However, we run into problems straight away as Foucault actually used the term at least three distinct ways: as ‘all utterances of texts which have meaning and which have some effects in the real world’, as ‘groups of utterances which seem to be regulated in some way and which seem to have a coherence and a force to them in common’, and in regard not to utterances themselves but to ‘the rules and structures which produce particular utterances and texts’. One can also discern differences of meaning in more general uses of the term, i.e. in discursive approaches, where the focus is often on abstract large-scale social systems, and in more grounded discourse analytical approaches where the focus is commonly on ‘language in use’ and ‘language in context’. An example of the former is Kocku von Stuckrad’s previously discussed work, where discourse implies ‘the social organisation of tradition, meaning and matters of knowledge’, which in turn direct constructions of meaning, specific uses of traditions, and constitutions of social- and power relations.

Most discourse analytical approaches operate with a similar set of basic premises as more general social constructionism, but are more specifically centred on uses of communicative systems. These premises are: Language use constructs social reality, there are several competing systems of meaning, acts of meaning-making are bound to the context they appear in, actors are attached to meaning systems, and language use has consequences. Language is ‘the
key ingredient in the very constitution of knowledge' rather than simply being 'a neutral medium for the transmission and reception of pre-existing knowledge'.\textsuperscript{139} It is important to note that discourse not only operates in written or spoken language, but in all communicative acts, including non-verbal ones.\textsuperscript{140} Furthermore, ‘discourse’ does not simply refer to the use of language as such; rather, it deals with ‘language use relative to social, political and cultural formations’.\textsuperscript{141} Discursive acts do not necessarily take place in direct face-to-face interaction. As all communication is mediated in one way or another, the creation of an advertisement in a newspaper, and the interpretation and retransmission of meaning by a reader, constitutes a discursive event as much as direct interaction.\textsuperscript{142} Furthermore, not all communication, and thus discourse, takes place on a conscious level. A major part of our communicative acts occur on a subconscious level, expressed in the ways we act, move, look, talk, and remain silent. In this study ‘discourse’ refers to ‘a fixed way of talking about and understanding the world (or a section of it)’,\textsuperscript{143} or, expressed in an alternative way, ‘a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events’.\textsuperscript{144}

A distinction should be made between themes and discourses.\textsuperscript{145} Themes, or thematic fields, are specific areas of communication containing several distinct, and often competing, discourses. Discourses, then, are the different viewpoints and ways of framing the subject-matter of the thematic field. For example, ‘Islam in Europe’ can be considered a thematic field, in which discourses such as ‘Islam is dangerous’, ‘Islam can reintroduce morality to a secularized West’, and ‘Islam is no different from other religions’ compete for hegemony. This differs from Kocku von Stuckrad’s use where e.g. ‘salvation’ would be termed a discourse rather than a theme, with different uses and interpretations of ‘salvation’ constituting a ‘field of discourse’.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{140} See Burg, \textit{An Introduction to Social Constructionism}, 50–51; Fairclough, \textit{Discourse and Social Change}, 3–5; idem, \textit{Media Discourse}, 54.
\textsuperscript{141} Coupland & Jaworski, ‘Introduction’, 3.
\textsuperscript{142} See e.g. Fairclough, \textit{Media Discourse}, 125–128; Jokinen et al., \textit{Diskurssianalyysin aakkoset}, 31–32; Suoninen, \textit{Miten tutkia moniäänistä ihmistä?}, 77–78.
\textsuperscript{143} Jørgensen & Phillips, \textit{Diskursanalys som teori och metod}, 7.
\textsuperscript{145} See Suoninen, \textit{Miten tutkia moniäänistä ihmistä?}, 67–68.
\textsuperscript{146} Von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Study of Religion’, 269; idem, \textit{Western Esotericism}, 6–7.
When it comes to discourse analysis there are several different approaches, many of which differ a great deal.¹⁴⁷ My approach is mostly informed by the work of discursive psychologists (e.g. Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell) and critical discourse analysts (e.g. Norman Fairclough), building on elements from both ‘schools’. I will therefore focus on the similarities and differences between these approaches. Discursive psychology was developed within social psychology to counterbalance the dominant statistical and experimental methods and in a critique of the preoccupation with ‘behaviour’, ‘attitude’, and ‘cognition’.¹⁴⁸ The critical notion that ‘internal mental processes’ cannot be accessed directly lies at the foundation of my own work. My epistemological stance can be condensed in the following quote from Judith Butler: ‘there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have’.¹⁴⁹ While the quote might be taken as a denial of materiality, it simply means that ‘phenomena only gain meaning through discourse’.¹⁵⁰ In short, while the ‘prediscursive’ might exist, we can only access it through discourse. As Potter and Wetherell express it: ‘New Zeeland is no less real for being constituted discursively – you still die if your plane crashes into a hill whether you think that the hill is a product of a volcanic eruption or the solidified form of a mythical whale’.¹⁵¹

This connects to the first divergence between discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis, namely different perspectives on the scope of discursive acts. Like many discursive psychologists, I maintain that discourse is ‘not partially constitutive, but thoroughly constitutive’.¹⁵² That is to say, every social action is in itself a discursive act. Conversely, critical discourse analysts normally regard discourse as simply one form of social action among many, both affecting and being affected by other forms.¹⁵³ For example, whereas a critical discourse analyst might regard an act of discrimination as being informed by racist discourse, a discursive psychologist could regard that very act of discrimination as a discursive act in and by itself.

¹⁴⁷ Coupland & Jaworski, ‘Introduction’, 19–35, mention conversation analysis, discursive psychology, the ethnography of communication, interactional sociolinguistics, narrative analysis, and critical discourse analysis.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 22, 25; Jørgensen & Phillips, Diskursanalys som teori och metod, 97–103.
¹⁴⁹ Butler, Gender Trouble, 2002; cf. Idem, Bodies that Matter.
¹⁵¹ Potter & Wetherell, Mapping the Language of Racism, 65.
¹⁵² Ibid., 62.
Second, while most forms of discourse analysis, including discursive psychology, are critical by default in that they question taken-for-granted positions, critical discourse analysis has an explicit focus on the construction and maintenance of ideology and power relations. According to Nikolas Coupland and Adam Jaworski, ‘[c]ritical discourse analysts need to see themselves as politically engaged, working alongside politically disenfranchised social groups’. The term ‘hegemonic discourse’, i.e. a discourse which operates as ‘self-evident fact’ and effectively overshadows all competing alternatives, is central to critical discourse analytical approaches. Hegemony is, however, not regarded as inherently stable, but rather as involving a ‘process of negotiation in which consensus of meaning is created’. A task for the critical discourse analyst is to expose the constructed nature of seemingly self-evident truths, and thus actively work towards the dismantling of hegemony. It should be noted, however, that discursive psychology is in no way devoid of critical aspects. For example, Potter and Wetherell note that ‘discourse and ideological practice are inseparable from other social practices’, and one of their major work deals with exposing racist discourse.

The two approaches also differ in their general fields of interest. Critical discourse analysts often focus on grand-scale, socially transformative discursive practices, whereas discursive psychologists more often examine ‘specific cases of language use in concrete social interaction’. For example, the former may look at general media discourses hegemonically positioning Islam as ‘a religion not suitable for Western societies’, where the latter will look at how the same discourses operate in the interaction and rhetorical negotiations of participants in a particular televised debate. Noting contexts is, however, central to all discourse analytical approaches.

Discourse is also an integral part of processes of identity construction and negotiation. The formation of identity is a continuous process in which the individual constructs meaningful and coherent narratives based on his/her experiences, and which is then revised in relation to other people and new experiences and information. When identity is analysed through the
concept of discourse it tends to be seen as even more flexible and variable. Individuals have many different identities, all constructed and expressed in relational contexts. As James Paul Gee notes, ‘[y]ou project a different identity at a formal dinner party than you do at the family dinner table’.161

**Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes**

The term ‘current’ is a central concept in the study of Western esotericism, used by Antoine Faivre to denote ‘movements, schools, or traditions’, represented by e.g. Hermetism, Christian Kabbalah, and Paracelcism. Currents are distinguished from ‘notions’, ‘spiritual attitudes or practices’ such as Hermeticism and Gnosis, and some phenomena, such as alchemy, astrology, and magic, are both currents and notions.162 While Faivre insists that ‘we should...not confuse “currents” with “notions”’,163 the distinction does not seem to do any significant analytical work and is therefore of little value. With this in mind, I have developed an alternative approach based on social constructionist epistemology and set in the discourse analytical framework discussed earlier. I propose that esoteric currents can be analyzed as ‘discursive complexes’, i.e. collections of distinct discourses in specific combinations.164 This latter aspect is essential, as it spells out that the various individual discourses that constitute a complex – a current – are interdependent and modify each other. Each individual discourse assumes a unique form due to its dependence on the other discourses constituting the complex. It also means that a particular discourse can be a constituting element of more than one distinct complex, but that it will assume different, though mutually recognizable and related, forms, functions, and rationales.

Discourses are, as all human communication, inherently amorphous, and any proposed current can only be an ideal type. Such ‘pure form’ currents are affected by inference from other currents and ‘ancillary’ discourses, i.e. discourses that are not constitutive elements of a particular esoteric current and therefore independent, explaining why real-life manifestations of currents assume unique forms and rarely look exactly like their ideal typical representations. This process helps explain both diversity and transformations in the

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163 Ibid., 3.
164 For more on this, see Granholm, ‘Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes’. 
esoteric field. For example, the neopagan discourse of the primacy of nature can be interpreted, produced, and reproduced in a great number of different ways in different historical and social contexts. This means that the precise implications and repercussions of that discourse will vary, and there may even be conflicts between different interpretations and expressions. Human communication and interaction is more often than not unstructured and confusing, but a discourse analytical approach provides the means to systematize the chaos. Identifying the ideal typical discourses that constitute a current provides a solid framework within which the investigation of esoteric complexity is made easier.

This discourse analytical approach to esoteric currents is compatible with historical ones. It is fully conceivable to trace the occurrences, intermixing, and development of both currents and the individual discourses that constitute them through history. In fact, the discourse analytical approach proposed here actually facilitates historical investigation by providing an analytically coherent framework. Currents cross-pollinate, and do so more easily when two discursive complexes have a specific discursive component in common. Say that an individual or a group operates primarily within current X, but draws close to current Y through the appeal of familiarity offered by the presence of discourse C in both currents. Over time, elements from current Y are incorporated into the group’s particular version of current X and slowly grow in influence. While this is happening, some discourses of current X start to lose their relevance. We then end up with a new complex of discourses derived from both the preceding currents, but which is unique in its new constellation of discursive interdependency. Tracing how these transferences and transformations have occurred is a matter of historical investigation. A discourse analytical approach to esotericism and esoteric currents is thus both historically sound and provides tools for systematizing the investigation of historical transformations, answering to Wouter Hanegraaff’s call for sociologically informed approaches to the study of esotericism that are compatible with historiographic studies. The discourse analytical approach could of course also be used to examine, discuss, and compare strictly typological similarities without consideration for historical relation. While typological similarities should of course not be confused with historical relation, examining one does not preclude interest in the other. It is not inconceivable that typologically very similar phenomena develop with no contact to each other, and when this occurs it should be examined rather than neglected. Furthermore, it is fully conceivable

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165  And transfers, see von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Transfers and Reconfigurations’.
that similar currents that have arisen in different regions and without any historical connection meet at some point and flow into each other, thus forming a single current from two similar but previously unrelated ones. This is increasingly the case in late, or liquid, modernity characterized by cultural and social fragmentation, transnational relations, and nearly instant global dissemination of information through new media.167

The perspective of esoteric currents as discursive complexes also provides a way to focus Kocku von Stuckrad’s discursive approach. Von Stuckrad’s approach benefits from being flexible, which allows for broader application as well as greater relevance for religious studies in general, but it also runs the risk of becoming too inclusive and general to provide sufficient analytical grounding. If the esoteric is, in a general sense, to be regarded as claims to higher knowledge and ways of accessing this knowledge, then looking at esoteric currents as discursive complexes provides a way to examine what knowledge is sought and how it is accessed. The term ‘higher knowledge’ says very little by itself, but by including a more focused perspective on specific esoteric currents it is possible to gain more detailed insights into the social workings of specific esoteric groups. Esoteric currents produce particular worldviews, practices, organizational and social structures, and tropes of communication – all informed by the discourses that constitute the current in question. Discourses are not, however, philosophies and worldviews in themselves; rather, they direct the production and reproduction, and the interpretation and reinterpretation, of philosophies and worldviews.

A third benefit in the approach is its potential in examining esoteric discourses/the esoteric in close relation to other social phenomena and societal transformations, and to do so in a unified methodological and theoretical framework. I am here referring to the impact of ‘ancillary’ discourses on esoteric currents. Examples include, but are in no way limited to, discourses informing the societal role of religion such as secularist and post-secularist ones;168 political ideologies involving e.g. Marxist, democratic, anarchist, totalitarian, and neoliberal discourses, and more specialized politico-social discourses such as sexism, racialism and racism, feminism, and animal rights-philosophy and Deep Ecology.169 In regard to the study of esotericism, the approach discussed here offers a systematic way to examine the historical, social, cultural, economic, political factors, among others, that direct the

168 See idem, ‘The Secular, the Post-Secular, and the Esoteric in the Public Sphere’.
formation, shaping, and development of esoteric currents in particular localized forms. Furthermore, by situating esotericism into broader societal and cultural contexts the approach presented here also provides an effective means to integrate the study of esotericism with more general discussions on religious and cultural change.

Finally, I would like to suggest that instead of looking solely at esoteric discourse, we should broaden our perspective to include the ‘full field of discourse on the esoteric’. In this way we can also examine ‘non-believer’ use of esoteric discourse – as in the form of popular culture – without the need to distinguish between ‘real’ and ‘simulacrum’ esotericism in the way e.g. Faivre has done. The question of whether an actor is ‘truly’ an esotericist or not is simply irrelevant, and indeed something that scholars are not even qualified to assess (as it would be based on value judgement and dubious emic esoteric legitimacy and authority). Popular culture, from the ‘encyclopaedias of the occult’ that have been bestsellers since the eighteenth century\textsuperscript{170} to entertainment media, has undoubtedly plays a major role in the propagation of esoteric discourse in the contemporary world.\textsuperscript{171} One would probably be correct in claiming that TV-series such as Charmed and Heavy Metal band such as Black Sabbath have, while perhaps not being as intellectually complex, been more influential in raising people’s interest in the esoteric than the writings of Marsilio Ficino.

\textsuperscript{170} Hanegraaff, Esotericism and the Academy, 230–239.
\textsuperscript{171} The visual arts, acting as a sort of middle ground between intellectualist philosophies and popular culture, should not be forgotten. For a recent discussion, see the Aries special issue ‘Occulture and Art’, edited by Tessel Bauduin and Nina Kokkinen.
CHAPTER 2

Major Trends in Post-Enlightenment Esotericism

The Enlightenment set into motion major societal changes that affected esotericism just as it did a large number of other areas. In Chapter 7 I will go into more detail regarding sociological research concerning the consequences of these changes, but here a cursory discussion of some of the more specific implications for esotericism in general will suffice. Wouter Hanegraaff has highlighted four principal transformations:1 an adaptation to the ideals of reason and rationality; a growing influence from non-Western cultures and non-Christian religions, much influenced by the emerging study of religions; the adoption of an evolutionary paradigm to spiritual development; and the re-interpretation of esoteric notions in psychological framesets, in what Hanegraaff calls ‘the psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology’.2 All these developments can be directly attributed to emerging hegemony of secularism, through which (conventional) religion was posited as antiquated and belonging to more primitive stages of cultural development. Consequently, esoteric actors attempted to align their teachings, practices, rhetoric, and vocabulary more closely to the ‘new scientific worldview’, and the earlier organic model of correspondences was more or less replaced by mechanistic models focused on instrumental causality.3 However, the Enlightenment ethos was not anti-religious per se. It involved a strong faith in the possibility, and indeed inevitability, of obtaining perfect knowledge about the world through reason, rationality, and recourse to essentially unchanging and absolute natural laws. The critique of religion was primarily directed towards the dominant religious institutions of Western society, i.e. various forms of conventional Christianity. This relative ‘de-Christianization’ of Europe made it both possible and appealing to turn to non-Christian religions for inspiration.4 In this chapter I will look at some of the more important groups, individuals, and approaches that have emerged since the Enlightenment, specifically dealing with their relevance for Dragon Rouge in particular and late modern esotericism in general.

1 Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture, 411–513; idem, ‘How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World’.
2 Idem, New Age Religion and Western Culture, 482.
4 For further discussion on these subjects see Granholm, ‘Locating the West’.
The Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society, founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), and William Quan Judge (1851–1896), is a textbook example of many of the Enlightenment influences on esotericism discussed by Hanegraaff. The Ukraine-born Madame Blavatsky was the lead ideologist of the society and the most central figure in its history and early development. The details of her early life are somewhat vague, but it would seem clear that from age eighteen she travelled the world extensively, eventually founding the short-lived Société Spirite in Egypt in 1871/1872. While Blavatsky appears to have been involved in spiritualism earlier she came to express an impassioned critique of it after the founding of the Theosophical Society. By the 1870s spiritualism had reached a level of mass popularity where it had attracted a lot of opportunistic charlatans, and assuming a polemical attitude towards it was in itself a way to stake out new territory. Blavatsky earlier religious pursuits, including the early Theosophical Society, were largely informed by themes common to the contemporary Western esoteric milieu, in particular the ‘Egyptian hermeticism’ so in vogue during the period. As such, there was nothing particularly unique about the early Theosophical Society or Blavatsky’s first book Isis Unveiled (1877). It was the focus on Eastern spirituality that came with the move to India in 1879 that made the Society novel and generated its immense and lasting popularity and significance in the esoteric milieu and beyond. The adaptation of Indian religious themes is evident in Blavatsky’s second book, The Secret Doctrine (1888), where the principles of reincarnation and karma coexist with concepts more familiar from traditional Western esotericism.

The impact of Enlightenment ideals is apparent in the three core goals stipulated at the foundation of the Theosophical Society: In aiming to ‘form the core of an universal brotherhood of man, independent of Faith, race, gender or social position’ Theosophy demonstrates the Enlightenment ideal of universalism; the aims to ‘encourage the study of all religions, philosophy and science’ and to ‘study the laws of Nature and the psychic and spiritual powers of man’ demonstrate the influence of scientism, as discussed by Olav Hammer, in an

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5 Hammer, Claiming Knowledge, 81–82.
6 Santucci, ‘Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna’.
7 Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 282.
8 Ibid., 321.
9 Ahlbäck, Uppkomsten av Teosofiska samfundet i Finland, 13–19.
10 For the goals, see Ts, ‘Objects’; Faivre, Access to Western Esotericism, 92.
obvious turn away from religious rhetoric in favour of a science-like one. The three goals also demonstrate an alignment with the budding study of religions, which in itself helped broaden the scope of modern perennialism. Even though Blavastky was critical of Darwinism, the society was greatly influenced by the broader evolutionist discourses of the nineteenth century, where the cyclical view of time inherent to Indian religion was adapted in a worldview where humanity evolves, by way of reincarnation and the law of karma, through seven root-races with seven sub-races in each. Classic Western esotericism was, however, not forgotten. This is demonstrated by the Paracelsian notion of the seven bodies of the human being, from the material body to the astral body, remaining a key notion, but with (erroneous) Sanskrit names given to these bodies. A idea held by the Theosophical Society, which in different iterations has become very popular in esoteric circles, was that the eternal philosophy is preserved and guarded by a group of spiritually highly evolved beings – the Mahatmas or the Great White Brotherhood – and passed on to Theosophical leaders who they were in direct contact with.

The Theosophical Society has provided much inspiration for later religiosity, with the Society’s syncretistic blend of ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ having become the general framework of much of the esoteric milieu of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The broader influence of the society is apparent in the popularity of the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) – who was identified as the new ‘world-teacher’ by Theosophical leaders Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854–1934) in 1909/10 and became an influential spiritual teacher in his own right after renouncing his Messiah-role in 1929 – and in the Anthroposophical Waldorf Pedagogy and Biodynamic cultivation devised by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), who was General Secretary of the German section of the Theosophical Society from 1902 until founding the Anthroposophical Society in 1912/1913.

The influence of the Theosophical Society on Dragon Rouge is both general and particular, though not direct. In a general sense, the Theosophical Society was pivotal in popularizing Indian religious themes in the Western esoteric milieu. This includes important concepts such as karma, reincarnation, and chakras – which all have become reinterpreted and introduced as staple ingredients of esotericism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The society

12 Ahlbäck, Uppkomsten av Teosofiska samfundet i Finland, 16–18; Hammer, På spaning efter helheten, 41–42.
13 Ahlbäck, Uppkomsten av Teosofiska samfundet i Finland, 30.
14 Ibid., 20; Hammer, På spaning efter helheten, 69–70.
16 For Leadbeater’s contribution, see Hammer, Claiming Knowledge, 62.
also pioneered an overall perceptual shift towards India as a, if not *the*, primary source of perennial wisdom. In a particular sense, Blavatsky combined the dichotomies of ‘black’ and ‘white’ magic with notions derived from Tantra, and thus sowed the seeds of Left-Hand Path self-identity. This is discussed in more detail further on, in the section on Satanism and the Left-Hand Path. Furthermore, the ‘oriental’ focus of the Society also partly influenced the foundation of explicitly ‘Western-focused’ esoteric societies, many of which were founded in order to compensate for the overly ‘Eastern’ focus of Theosophy. In response, the more ‘Western-focused’ Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society was organized in London in 1888.17

### The Nineteenth Century ‘Occult Revival’

Modern ceremonial magic saw the light of day in the mid nineteenth century, in what is often called ‘the occult revival’. In strictly scholarly terms, speaking of a ‘revival’ of the occult is erroneous. Rather, what we are dealing with is the emergence of a modern esoteric meta-current that can be termed occultism. Going by the discourse analytical approach to esoteric currents introduced in Chapter 1, ‘meta’ implies that while we are dealing with an esoteric development that can be distinguished from earlier expressions, as well as many contemporaneous ones, it can easily be broken down into several distinct currents. This meta-current is particularly interesting in that it represents the emergence of the idea that esotericism constitutes a distinct ‘tradition’ that is self-contained and separate from ‘the Christian tradition’. In contrast, during the Renaissance ‘the ancient wisdom’ was thought to be present in both the pre-Christian and the non-Christian but it nonetheless affirmed and in its essence represented a *Christian* wisdom. Naturally, it is possibly to find plenty of nineteenth- and twentieth-century occultists who self-identify as Christians, but even among them it is rare to find those that regard occultism itself as inherently belonging to Christian tradition.

In a certain sense, however, ‘revival’ is an apt description of what was going on. We are dealing with a situation where esoteric discourse, practices, and philosophies were becoming increasingly popular, in stark contrast to their relegation to the realm of ‘rejected knowledge’ during the Reformation and the Enlightenment.18 Furthermore, the interest in the esoteric (or the occult) was not limited to merely...

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the educated classes; rather, there was a huge popular interest in the esoteric, evident in the fiction of the time. The situation is reminiscent of the popular upswing of the esoteric in the 1960s and onwards, and one could therefore claim that the occultural re-enchantment in late modernity described by Christopher Partridge had a counterpart in the mid to late nineteenth century.19

The ‘occult revival’ started in France, and the major early figure was Alphonse Louis Constant (1810–1875), better known by his pen name Éliphas Lévi.20 Lévi was aligned with Catholicism, working in the Church until 1840/1841 and even being ordained a deacon. His final ordination into the priesthood was, however, suspended due to a love affair.21 He then turned to socialist politics, and esotericism. Although Lévi had practically no experiential knowledge of magic, he was considered a great mage by many of the key figures of British occultism and his books on magic were widely read. His first book on the subject, the two-volume Dogme et ritual de la haute magie (1855/1856), was translated into English as Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual by Arthur Edward Waite in 1896. The same procedure was repeated with subsequent books, such as Histoire de la magie (1860 – translated by A.E. Waite in 1913 and published as The History of Magic) and La clef des grands mystères (1861 – given the English title The Key of the Mysteries, and published by Aleister Crowley in the last issue of his periodical The Equinox in 1913). Lévi’s main influence lies in his penchant for syncretism. He presented such diverse phenomena as Renaissance magic, alchemy, and even the Tarot – which before Lévi had been little more than simple playing cards – as belonging to the same ‘tradition’ of ancient wisdom. Of primary interest for Lévi was, however, the Kabbalah – which for him functioned as an overarching framework through which all other esoteric phenomena were interpreted.22 Another innovation of his, in line with the Enlightenment ideals of reason and rationality and something that has characterized occultism ever since, was the presentation of magic as a technique rather than a religious practice.

Occultism may have started as a French phenomenon, but the focus was shifted to England later in the nineteenth century, with groups such as Anna Kingsford (1846–1888) and Edward Maitland’s (1824–1897) Hermetic Society (1884–1887),23 the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (1884–1885),24 the Esoteric

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19 This was pointed out to me by Per Faxneld. For a discussion of occulture, see chapter 1 and Partridge, The Re-Enchantment of the West; idem, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’.
20 Faivre, Access to Western Esotericism, 88.
22 Goodrick-Clarke, The Western Esoteric Traditions, 192–196.
23 See Goodrick-Clarke, ‘Hermeticism and Hermetic Societies’, 552–553.
24 See Chanel et al., The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor; Deveney, Paschal Beverly Randolph, 246; idem, ‘Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor’.
Section of the Theosophical Society (formed in 1888). It is in London that we find the most influential magic order in the history of esotericism; the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. A direct line can be drawn to Lévi, as an important figure in the pre-history of the order, Kenneth Mackenzie (1833–1886), had met with the former in Paris in 1861. Mackenzie co-founded the theoretically focused Masonic Rosicrucian group Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (sria) in 1866/1867, and organized the practice-oriented Society of Eight in 1883. After Mackenzie’s death his fellow sria and Society of Eight member William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925) came into possession of some of the former’s documents written in cipher. He engaged another sria and Society of Eight member, Samuel Liddell ‘MacGregor’ Mathers (1854–1918), to help him translate them. According to Golden Dawn legend, the documents revealed the existence of a German magic order as well as the address of its leader, a Fraulein Sprengel. Westcott promptly contacted this mysterious woman and received the permission to open a British lodge of the order. Westcott and Mathers engaged a third sria member, William Robert Woodman (1828–1891), to complete the required triumvirate and the Isis Urania was opened on March 1, 1888, as the third temple of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

The legend of the origin of the Golden Dawn and Fraulein Sprengler herself were fictive, concocted by Westcott in order to create a proper and legitimate lineage for his order. For this effect he also came up with the story of how he received the original manuscripts from Masonic historian Reverend A.F.A. Woodford on August 8, 1887. The intent of this intricate fictional background

27 The cipher used was probably ‘an alphabetic code published by Trithemus’, and the content was largely Mackenzie’s translations of material by the German Rosicrucian order Gold- und Rosenkreuz that operated in the eighteenth century. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 223, 216, 121. Egil Asprem notes that the manuscript ‘also included material from [John] Dee’s angel conversations’, Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*, 47.
28 The two had been frequent lecturers in Kingsford and Maitland Hermetic Society, see Gilbert, ‘Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn’, 545.
does not appear to have been to derive any direct benefits from would-be members, but the revelation of its true nature set in motion events that led to the downfall of the order only twelve years later. In 1900, Mathers, who was by this time running his Ahathoor Temple No. 7 in Paris, became convinced that Westcott was attempting to outmaneuver him from his leadership position. In reality, however, Mathers was the only founding member who remained active in the order. Mathers was also convinced that he had come into contact with the real Fraulein Sprengel in the form of a Madame Horos. As a response to the imagined power-struggle, Mathers sent a letter to the London headquarters of the Golden Dawn, accusing Westcott of having falsified his correspondence with Fraulein Sprengel. All did not go as Mathers planned, and he ended up ousted from the order he had helped create. More trouble ensued when Madame Horos and her husband Theo turned out to be charlatans and were convicted of the rape of several young women. An attempt was made to deflect all the bad publicity by changing the name of the order to Morgenröthe (the German equivalent of Golden Dawn), but the original Golden Dawn was all but disintegrated by 1903.

Various offshoots of the original order remained, however, such as Mathers and his wife Moina’s (Mina Bergson, 1865–1928) Alpha et Omega with temples in Paris and Edinburgh, and Arthur Edward Waite’s (1857–1942) mysticism-oriented The Independent and Rectified Rite of the Morgen Röthe that was in operation until 1914. It was, however, Robert William Felkin’s (1853–1926) Stella Matutina, with temples in London and Bristol (England), and Havelock, New Zealand, that was the longest running. The Hermes Temple in Bristol closed down in 1972 and the Smaragdum Thalasses Temple in New Zealand some time later. The Golden Dawn has survived to the present day largely due to Israel Regardie’s (1907–1985) publication of the Stella Matutina rituals and lectures in four volumes between 1937 and 1940, the republication of which in the 1980s inspired the formation of several new iterations of the order.

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35 Idem, ‘Stella Matutina’.
39 Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, 127. One iteration that is active in Sweden is David Griffin’s (1935-) Rosicrucian Order of Alpha + Omega, which opened the
The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was influential in providing a ‘conscious syncretistic approach to esotericism as a whole’ that has been followed by many subsequent groups. It was also innovative in being among the first Rosicrucian/Masonic-styled orders to admit women, with females constituting more than one third of the membership by the mid 1890s, several of whom were in leading positions. The biggest impact of the Golden Down, however, lies in its initiatory structure. Derived from the German Gold- und Rozenkreutz by way of the sria, the structure was based on the Kabbalistic tree of life and its ten sephiroth (Image 1):

- Neophyte $0^\circ = 0^\circ$, an introductory initiation admitting a person into the order
- Zelator $1^\circ = 10^\circ$
- Theoreticus $2^\circ = 9^\circ$
- Practicus $3^\circ = 8^\circ$
- Philosophus $4^\circ = 7^\circ$
- Adeptus Minor $5^\circ = 6^\circ$, constituting the first grade of the Second, or Inner, Order, in which practical magical operations were conducted
- Adeptus Major $6^\circ = 5^\circ$
- Adeptus Exemptus $7^\circ = 4^\circ$
- Magister Templi $8^\circ = 3^\circ$, constituting the first grade of the humanly unattainable Third Order, reserved for the ‘secret masters’ of the Golden Dawn
- Magus $9^\circ = 2^\circ$
- Ipsissimus $10^\circ = 1^\circ$

This structure has functioned as a model for a large number of subsequent magic orders, including Dragon Rouge.

**Aleister Crowley and Ordo Templi Orientis**

Aleister Crowley (Edward Alexander Crowley, 1875–1947) was a controversial figure in his time, as well as an accomplished mountaineer and a poet of some
The Kabbalistic Tree of Life

ILLUSTRATION BY T. KETOLA
repute. Most relevant in the present context, however, is that he is one of the most influential magicians and occultists of all time. Born in Lemington Spa, England, Crowley’s youth was shaped by his upbringing in a family belonging to the fundamentalist Christian movement the Plymouth Brethren. After his father’s death in 1887 Crowley rebelled, engaging in all sorts of vice from a young age. The considerable inheritance he received at age twenty was all but spent by the early 1910s.

Crowley’s magical career started when he came across A.E. Waite’s The Book of Black Magic and Pacts in 1898, and in October of the same year he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. He also played a key role in the downfall of the order. Having progressed through the first order grades rapidly, his entry to the second order was refused on the grounds of his dubious moral character. In response he sought out Mathers in Paris, who in January 1900 granted Crowley his first inner order grade and sent him to London as his personal representative in an ill-fated attempt to regain control of the order. Mather’s paranoia and Crowley’s over-dramatic theatrics sealed the fate of the former and got both banned from the Golden Dawn.

Crowley spent the next few years travelling around the world, before entering the second phase of his occult career. While honeymooning in Cairo, Egypt, in early 1904 with his new wife Rose (née Kelly, 1874–1932), he came into contact with the spiritual entity Aiwass (or Aiwaz) and channelled Liber AL vel Legis – the Book of the Law. Although initially apprehensive of the message contained in the text, it came to form the foundation of his later magico-religious pursuits, and indeed his very life. This applies particularly to the notion of Will – construed as the true essence or Higher Self of the magician – as the guiding principle of magic. The notion is exemplified in such key phrases as ‘Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law’ and ‘Love is the law, love under Will’, and was codified by Crowley in his system of Thelema (Greek for will). The Book of the Law also introduced the idea of three ages or paradigms

44 See Urban, Magia Sexualis, 109–139.
45 Kaczynski, Perdurabo, 20–22.
46 Ibid., 30, 156.
48 Kaczynski, Perdurabo, 40–41, 57, 94–96. For an account of how Liber AL vel Legis was conceived see Crowley, ‘The Temple of Solomon the King’, 359–386, and for an early commentary of the book by Crowley see Crowley, ‘Liber Legis’.
49 Crowley, The Law is for All.
50 Kaczynski, Perdurabo, 98–105.
that the world has passed through; the matriarchal Aeon of Isis, the patriarchal Aeon of Osiris – which began approximately around 500 C.E and was primarily characterized by Christianity, and the Aeon of Horus – which began in 1904 with the reception of Liber Al vel Legis and was conceived of as the ‘age of the True Self’. In 1907 Crowley founded A.:A.: as the third order of the Golden Dawn. Between 1909 and 1913 he published the occult journal Equinox as ‘the official organ of the A.:A.:’, in which the Golden Dawn first order rituals as well as the inner order Adeptus Minor ritual were made public for the first time.

The third important chapter in Crowley’s life started in 1912 when he published Book of Lies and was visited by Theodor Reuss (1855–1923). Reuss was something of an occult entrepreneur, at the centre of a large fringe-masonic network with hundreds of members, and he claimed that Crowley had revealed the innermost secrets of one of these, the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). As a result of the discussion, Crowley – who was unaware of the order and its supposed secrets – was awarded the ninth (second highest) degree of the OTO and chartered to open a British section of it. Crowley’s unfamiliarity with the order is very understandable. Even though the legend of the OTO states that it was founded by Reuss, Franz Hartman (1838–1912), and Karl Kellner (1851–1905) in 1904, and while the idea of the order might have existed earlier, research has shown it to be unlikely that OTO existed as an actual organization before Crowley’s involvement. Crowley wrote the rituals used by the order, developed the sexual magic at its centre, and aligned the order to his philosophy of Thelema. Crowley took over as international leader – or Outer Head of the

52 Kaczynski, Perdurabo, 138–139. A.: A.: is often said to stand for Argentum Astrum or Astrum Argentinium, i.e. the Silver Star, but Crowley never revealed what it stood for.
54 Kaczynski, Perdurabo, 202–203.
55 OTO, ‘History’.
57 Crowley and the OTO are often regarded as the magician and the order that introduced sexual techniques into occultism. However, Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875) had operated with and published material on sexual occult techniques far earlier, and it is probable that Reuss and Crowley were familiar with his writings. Randolph’s sex magic was, however, very different from that of OTOs, as it stipulated that the practices were only for heterosexual married couples. For information on Randolph see Deveney, Paschal Beverly Randolph, and for a history of Western sex magic see Urban, Magia Sexualis.
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Order (OHO) – when Reuss died in 1923, even though some sources indicate that the latter had most likely expelled Crowley in 1921. After Crowley’s death in 1947 the OTO was headed by Karl Germer (1885–1962), who was very passive in his leadership. The order led a dwindling existence and was almost extinct when Grady Louis McMurtys (1918–1985) claimed leadership around the late 1960s and early 1970s. McMurtys’ branch of the OTO, which with its 3056 members (in 2005) is by far the largest one, is commonly identified as the ‘Caliphate’ and its leaders as Caliphs. The OTO is an initiatory order with nine effective degrees identified by roman numerals, and a tenth administrational degree reserved for national heads of the order. Sex-magical techniques are mainly taught in degrees XIII and IX. Crowley later added a XI degree centred on anal intercourse.

Crowley’s influence on esoteric currents such as neopaganism and the Left-Hand Path is immense. The concept of the Will, as it is understood by contemporary magicians and neopagans, can largely be attributed to Crowley, as can the significance of sex magic. Crowley’s definition of ‘magick’ as ‘the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will,’ as well as his mechanistic view on how and why magic works, is commonly used by contemporary magicians. In a broader context, the Thoth Tarot deck created by Crowley and Frieda Harris (1877–1962) in the 1940s is one of the more popular Tarot decks today. While on his travels in the early 1900s Crowley experimented with solitary magical practice and developed a system of self-initiation, something which has become central to many contemporary magic orders and neopagan groups. Finally, the Abbey of Thelema – operated by Crowley and Leah Hirshig (1883–1975) on Cefalú, Sicily, between 1920 and 1927 – can in many ways be regarded as a forerunner to the ‘free love’ and esoteric communes of the 1960s and 1970s.

In Sweden, a branch of the Caliphate OTO was founded in 1990 in Stockholm. In addition, groups exist in Gothenburg, Stockholm, Lund, and Växjö. Aleister

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60 See Hedenborg White, To Him the Winged Secret Flame, 18.
63 Crowley, Magick, 131. The same applies to Crowley’s spelling of ‘magick’ with a ‘ck’, introduced in Book Four. By using this spelling Crowley wished to differentiate himself from stage magicians (idem, 45n) as well as convey an esoteric meaning, as the ‘k’ referred to the female sex organ.
64 Kaczynski, Perdurabo, 411; Gudmundsson, Tarot, 46–47.
Crowley’s *Book of the Law* was translated into Swedish in 1992.\(^{66}\) When at its largest, the order had around 150 members in Sweden.\(^{67}\)

**Neopaganism**

Neopaganism is one of the most vital religious innovations of the post-Enlightenment era, and it has steadily grown in popularity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While diverse and expressed in a myriad of different manifestations such as Wicca, heathenism, druidry, and neoshamanism, it is fairly easy to establish the current’s core discursive components.\(^{68}\) Neopaganism can be distinguished by its reliance on two key discourses: the primacy of nature and the desire to revive (primarily) European pre-modern and pre-Christian religion. While various ‘sub-currents’ of neopaganism place different emphasis on the two discourses, they are both connected in their perception of contemporary society and conventional Christianity. For example; adherents of Asatrú tend to focus on the revival aspect, but often describe pre-Christian religiosity as more nature-oriented, while Wiccans may focus on nature and have largely abandoned the idea of representing ‘the Old Religion’ but nonetheless operate with ideas of their religion expressing the basic ethos of pre-Christianity.

Even though scholarly consensus exists on the general characteristics of neopaganism, there is debate on the specific terminology to use when discussing the phenomenon. Most North American scholars use the term neopaganism, while some European, chiefly British, scholars prefer terms such as ‘modern paganism’, contemporary paganism, or simply paganism.\(^{69}\) This can be regarded as a result of the increasing number of self-identified (neo)pagans involved in the academic study of the phenomenon, particularly in so called pagan studies. These scholars feel that the addition of ‘neo’ is pejorative. It is true that ‘neopaganism’ was conceived as a polemical term, coined by Christian apologist W.F. Barry in 1891 to ridicule people who romanticized ancient pre-Christian religion.\(^{70}\) However, the term ‘pagan’ has an equally problematic

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67 For more on the *OTO* in Sweden, see Granholm, ‘Occultist Groups in Sweden’.
history, being used for a long time for all religion that was not properly Christian, and thus diverged from ‘true faith’. Furthermore, I feel that the alternative terms that have been proposed obscure the fact that we are dealing with a distinctly modern religious development rather than a continuous tradition. Even the term neopaganism might, however, be taken to imply that it is meaningful to lump together all European pre-Christian religion as ‘paganism’. It is not. Doing so disregards the immense variation of European ‘paganisms’, and therefore the use of pre-Christian religions, in the plural, is preferable. The terms pagan and paganism should be reserved for discussions relating to emic discourse, either Christian historical polemics or modern neopagan reinterpretations.71

Contemporary neopaganism is most often thoroughly non-Christian, and at times anti-Christian. However, during the Renaissance when the interest in the pre-Christian religion and mythology of Europe was considerable, the focus was almost exclusively on ancient Greece as the foundation of European culture, but in a Christian frame of reference.72 Similarly, Johannes Bureus’ (1568–1652) *Kabbalah Upsalica* (named after the Swedish town of Uppsala) was supposed to demonstrate the essential truth of Christianity. In a vision in 1613, Bureus received the secret knowledge of the fifteen *Adulrunes* (which can be translated as ‘noble runes’) and constructed the *Adulruna* – a glyph inspired by John Dee’s (1527–1608/9) *Monas Hieroglyphica*73 and consisting of the combined *Adulrunes* in the shape of a concentric solar cross.74 For Bureus, the *Adulruna* functioned as both a symbol of and a map to God. He considered there to be essential correspondences between Kabbalah and the runes.75

The roots of modern non-Christian neopaganism lie in Romanticism, particularly in its German variant. While it would be an over-simplification to distil Romanticism to only this one factor, it certainly involved a reaction to the universalistic ethos and general demystification of the world that Enlightenment ideals ushered. The decline of the hegemony of Christianity

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73 For more on John Dee and particularly interpretations and reinterpretations of his enochian magic, see Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*.
74 Åkerman, *Rose Cross Over the Baltic*, 44–45.
75 For more information on Bureus, see Ibid.; Karlsson, *Adulrunan och den götiska kabbalan*; idem, *Götisk kabbala och runisk alkemi*. A later important figure in Swedish rune mysticism is Sigurd Agrell (1881–1937), professor of Slavic Languages at the University of Uppsala from 1921. He developed the idea that the common rune row, the *Futhark*, should really be an *Uthark*, as the ancient rune masters had planted the *Fehu* rune as a decoy at the start of rune row. See Andersson, *Runor, magi, ideologi*, 209–210, 240–246.
resulted in the search for alternative religious expressions, and in an elevation of the particular the attention was directed towards the ancient and the native.\textsuperscript{76} Romanticism involved the ‘discovery of nature’ as something that was animated in and by itself rather than by an external divine force,\textsuperscript{77} as well as the birth of modern nationalism, the two being fused in early neopaganism. In Germany, Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744–1803) philosophy formed the foundation of the notion of \textit{Volksgeist} – a ‘folk-spirit’ that united all members of a particular people throughout the ages.\textsuperscript{78} Later in the nineteenth century, this notion was combined with apocalyptic fears of the ethnic uniqueness of the German folk being in danger of extinction due to the influences of foreign people and ideas, spawning the influential \textit{völkisch} movement.\textsuperscript{79} Born and raised in this atmosphere, the Austrian Guido von List (1848–1919) developed a system of Ariosophical rune mysticism where the Germanic god Wotan was the saviour of the German people and von List himself the Wotan’s prophet.\textsuperscript{80} In \textit{Das Geheimnis der Runen} (\textit{Secret of the Runes}, 1908) he introduced the \textit{Armanen} rune row, with three distinct and increasingly esoteric levels of runic interpretation. Already by 1910, societies were formed to explore practical application of von List’s ideas, such as Rune Yoga where the practitioner contorts his/her body in the shapes of the various runes, in order to achieve an \textit{Armanen}-level comprehension of them.\textsuperscript{81} The German \textit{völkisch} ideologies fostered an atmosphere of racialism, particularly evident in the Thule Society of which several important later Nazi party politicians were members, and this has remained a theme which contemporary Germanic neopagans have had to confront regularly.\textsuperscript{82}

With the terrors of the Nazi regime Germanic neopaganism fell into disfavour and gained a bad reputation that in many regards persists even today. It is instead a different stream of neopaganism, originating in England, that has dominated the milieu since the latter half of the twentieth century. In her works \textit{The Witch-Cult in Western Europe} (1921) and \textit{The God of the Witches} (1931) Egyptologist turned anthropologist Margaret Murray (1863–1963) argued that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{76} Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age Religion and Western Culture}, 419.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} See Ibid., 387–388; Faivre, \textit{Access to Western Esotericism}, 82–84.
  \item \textsuperscript{78} Gregorius, \textit{Modern Asatro}, 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 55–56.
  \item \textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 57–58; Goodrick-Clarke, \textit{The Occult Roots of Nazism}, 50–51.
  \item \textsuperscript{81} Gregorius, \textit{Modern Asatro}, 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Asprem, ‘Heathens up North’. It should be noted that occult groups across the board, including heathen ones, were outlawed when the Nazi’s rose to power, and the widespread belief that Nazi Germany was greatly influenced by occultism – an idea popularized by Trevor Ravencroft in his \textit{The Spear of Destiny} (1973) – is thus erroneous.
\end{itemize}
the people who were convicted in medieval witch trials were actually members of a secret pre-Christian religion. Murray based her arguments on the works of scholars Karl-Ernst Jarcke and Franz-Josef Mone, as well as on the writings of American adventurer Charles Godfrey Leland, most notably *Aradia* (1899), which Leland claimed was the gospel of a Italy-based branch of the pagan religion that had been passed on to him by one of the last remaining members of this tradition. It was Leland who had characterized the alleged pre-Christian religion as ‘the Old Religion’, and this was an important part of neopagan self-identity for a long time. See Hutton, ‘Modern Pagan Witchcraft’, 31–34.

According to Gardner he had actually been initiated into Ordo Templi Orientis in 1946 but had decided not to play an active part in the order. Elsewhere it has been stated that the early Gardnerian initiations and rituals owe much to Aleister Crowley, even to the extent of being written by him for Gardner (see Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, 148–153). Research by Aidan Kelly has shown that Gardner’s early texts are based on direct quotations from works by Aleister Crowley and Charles Leland, from Samuel Mathers’ translation of the grimoire *The Greater Key of Solomon the King*, and of Margaret Murray’s descriptions of the witches’ cult. The Golden Dawn and Freemasonic ceremonial texts provided the base for the rituals. See Hutton, ‘Modern Pagan Witchcraft’, 49.

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God of traditional Wicca is deemphasized or discarded, is another prominent development. Feminism is an ‘ancillary discourse’ that has become so influential that it can be regarded to be a core component of many forms of Wicca. The majority of Wiccans are solitary practitioners who are not members of any organized group.

Two ‘sub-currents’ of neopaganism are particularly relevant for Dragon Rouge: neoshamanism and Ásatrú. The history of shamanism is convoluted and tied to both nationalist and religionist concerns. It suffices to say that it is a construct in as many ways as neoshamanism, and thus one should not mistake the former to be in some way ‘more authentic’. They are different types of constructions, however. Whereas shamanism – largely due to the influence of Mircea Eliade – is projected as a ‘universal and archaic technique of ecstasy’ that can be found among most ‘ primitive peoples’ across the world, neoshamanism is a modern practice influenced by this purported ‘universal and archaic technique’. The latter is thus something of a construction upon a construction. Neoshamanism became a countercultural trend in the 1960s with the publication of Carlos Castaneda’s (1925–1998) *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968), which was followed by a whole series of books detailing the author’s apprenticeship with the Yaqui ‘medicine man’ Don Juan Matus. Castaneda was a student at the Department of Anthropology at University of California, Los Angeles, and was even awarded a doctorate in 1973 for the third book in the series, *Journey to Ixtlan* – even though there were already serious doubts regarding the factuality of Castaneda’s purported field work and indeed even the existence of ‘Don Juan’. Another important figure for neoshamanism is ‘anthropologist-gone-native’ Michael Harner (b. 1929) and his 1980 handbook on shamanic practices, *The Way of the Shaman*. Neoshamanism has been very popular in the Swedish esoteric milieu for a long time, with Jörgen I. Eriksson (b. 1948) and Mikael W. Gejel (b. 1952) as key figures. Gejel founded the Yggdrasil Guild in the mid 1970s, and in 1976 the first issue of the magazine *Gimle*, primarily dealing with shamanism, was published by people involved in the guild. In 1994 Yggdrasil was incorporated into the Merlin Order.

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89 See pages 38–39.
90 Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth*, 50.
91 See Asprem & Granholm, ‘Constructing Esotericisms’.
92 See particularly Eliade, *Shamanism*.
95 See Gejel, ‘Gimle 20 år!’.
(founded in 1988), which was itself re-formed as *Svenska Misraimförbundet* (The Swedish Misraim Society) in the summer of 2007. The esoteric bookshop *Vattumannen* (Aquarius) is a focal point for Swedish esoteric religiosity. It was originally opened in 1972 in Uppsala, but moved to its current location in central Stockholm in 1973. Many of the key Swedish neoshamans have been active in the bookshop in one way or another, and several neoshaman works have been published under the *Vattumannen* publishing imprint.

The first Asatrú, or Odinist/Heathen, organizations were founded independently of each other in the UK, USA, and Iceland in the early 1970s. Of these, the American Asatrú has had the strongest influence on subsequent European heathenism. On Iceland, Asatrú has since 1973 been an officially recognized religion with the right to provide legalized life rituals, claiming nearly 800 members in the mid 2000s. Which group is to be considered the first North American heathen organization is contested, with Stephen McNallen’s (1948–) Viking Brotherhood, founded in 1969/1970 and registered as a religious organization in 1972, and the Odinist Fellowship, founded in 1969, contending for the title. A large part of the problem is that both scholars and practitioners tend to distinguish between politically racialist Odinism and the more apolitical Asatrú. The Odinist Fellowship was a radically racialist group in contrast to the Viking Brotherhood, and the latter is therefore regarded

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97 Gejel, ‘Gimle 20 år!’.
98 Interview 2007–03, February 15, 2007; For the current website, see Misraimförbundet, ‘Hemsida’.
100 See Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene*, 10, 29.
102 Gregorius, *Modern Asatro*, 76. It should be noted that although there is a strong influence of North American Asatrú on its European manifestations, this influence does by no means imply that modern Asatrú is identical in the different localities. As Egil Asprem notes: ‘Even when much of the ideological production of modern Ásatrú stems from an American context, its export to other countries is not to be viewed as a homogenising process, but will always involve adaptation to local cultural and political circumstances’. Asprem, ‘Heathens up North’, 42.
104 Ibid., 74–77.
105 Asprem, ‘Heathens up North’, 46.
106 Ibid., 45–46.
as the first proper Ásatrú group. While there is some merit to the distinction, a clean-cut categorical division is somewhat problematic to make,\textsuperscript{107} not least since the race-versus-culture tensions exist in most groups. In the present context, however, the Viking Brotherhood is of more relevance. This group was reformed as the Ásatrú Free Assembly (AFA) in 1976, and finally dissolved in 1986, much due to the tension discussed above. The splinter groups Ásatrú Alliance – with a racist agenda – and the Ring of Troth – with a cultural focus, were founded.\textsuperscript{108} The AFA was re-founded by McNallen in the mid 1990s.\textsuperscript{109}

There are several Ásatrú organizations in Sweden, most of them with only a handful of members.\textsuperscript{110} Sveriges Asatrosamfund (the Swedish Ásatrú Society), founded in 1994, functions mainly as an umbrella-organization for a number of smaller independent groups. In 1998 the society had an estimated 250 members, of whom 40 percent were women.\textsuperscript{111} Some other groups active in the late 1990s Sweden were Breidablikk-Gildet, founded in 1975, Svitjods Asa-Gilde, founded in 1990 and later fashioned into Fröjslunds Världshus.\textsuperscript{112} Samfälligheten för Nordisk Sed, founded in 1997 and registered as a religious organization in 2000, and the racist Svensk Hednisk Front.\textsuperscript{113} An estimated 600–700 Swedes were members of heathen organizations in the late 1990s, and a still greater number of people identified themselves as heathen without being members of an organized group.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{Satanism and the Left-Hand Path}

With the changing cultural and religious atmosphere in nineteenth century Europe certain groups and individuals began to regard Satan as a symbol of liberation and rebellion rather than one of evil. This ‘cultural Satanism’ is present in the works of poets such as Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), Lord Byron (1788–1824), Charles Baudeleire (1821–1867), August Strindberg (1849–1912),

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 47–48.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Gregorius, \textit{Modern Asatro}, 82.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 78–79.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Frisk, \textit{Nyreligiositet i Sverige}, 149.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 149–150.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} In contrast to other neopagan organizations, Fröjslunds Världshus was led by one central authority figure. Furthermore, the organization was not strictly speaking Ásatrú, as it was not the Aesir race of gods who were at the centre of worship, but rather the fertility gods, the Vanir, of whom Frey was especially revered.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Skott, \textit{Asatro i tiden}, 50–57.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 49. See also Gregorius, \textit{Modern Asatro}, 119–122.
\end{itemize}
and Stanislaw Przybyszewski (1868–1927). Satan also took centre stage for a small number of practicing occultists such as Maria de Naglowska (1883–1936) and Ben Kadosh (Carl William Hansen, 1872–1936), and the figure was popular enough in the late nineteenth-century occult milieu for Madame Blavatsky to name her occult journal ‘Lucifer’ (1887–1897).\footnote{See e.g. Faxneld, ‘The Strange Case of Ben Kadosh’; idem, ‘Witches, Anarchism, and Evolutionism’; idem, \textit{Mörkrets apostlar}.} However, organized Satanism is a fairly recent development, starting with the founding of the Church of Satan in 1966.\footnote{There are Satanist groups that purport to represent ‘traditional Satanism’ but the ‘modern’ variant represented by the Church of Satan is actually older.} Satanism is a problematic term in several ways. Firstly, it conjures many preconceptions, often negative and erroneous, which are difficult to dispel.\footnote{See e.g. Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan’, 1–2.} Thus, labelling a group – that does not already do so itself – as Satanic might have a negative impact on it,\footnote{Compare to the labelling of a religious group as a cult, a practice that has more or less been abandoned by sociologists of religion due to the negative connotations the term has amassed.} not to mention that it limits the potential for unbiased analysis. Secondly, in order for the moniker ‘Satanism’ to be appropriate, a group must by necessity relate intimately to the ‘the words Satan, Satanism, Satanic and Satanist’.\footnote{Petersen, ‘Introduction’, 8.} Problems amass when scholars writing about Satanism include increasingly inclusive lists of synonyms for ‘Satan’, including but not limited to the Egyptian Set, the Zoroastrian Ahriman, or the Old Norse Odin. Even with similarities in rhetoric, philosophy, and practice, to call a group that revers e.g. Odin ‘Satanic’ is nonsensical. Mainly, however, the term Satanism has very little analytical value (compounded by the preconceptions often actuated by the word), and does not by itself help to understand the groups so labelled. There is a massive range of different Satanisms, evident in the numerous sub-categories that have been introduced by scholars since the 1980s. The differences between e.g. ‘rebellious teenage Satanism’\footnote{Lowney, ‘Teenage Satanism as Oppositional Youth Subculture’.} and ‘rationalistic Satanism’\footnote{Hermonen, ‘Rationalistic Satanism’. For some categorizations of different forms of Satanism, see Gilhus & Mikaelsson, \textit{Kulturens refortrylling}, 112–114; Lanning, ‘Investigator's Guide to Allegations of “Ritual” Child Abuse’, 708–710; Hermonen, ‘Rationalistic Satanism’, 559.} are far greater than the similarities. More focused analytical categories are needed if anything more than generic labelling is the goal.\footnote{For my critique of general uses of the term Satanism as well as attempts to introduce alternative terminology, see Granholm, ‘Dragon Rouge’; idem, ‘Embracing Others Than Satan’; idem, ‘The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism’.}
One of these more analytically useful categories is ‘Left-Hand Path’. As a term it is both broader and narrower than ‘Satanism’, in the sense that it includes movements that are strictly speaking not Satanic, while excluding some that clearly are. The term has received far less attention in academia than ‘Satanism’, with brief discussions provided by Richard Sutcliffe, Graham Harvey, and Dave Evans.\footnote{Sutcliffe, ‘Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick’, Harvey, \textit{Listening People, Speaking Earth}, 97–99; Evans, \textit{The History of British Magick After Crowley}. See also Flowers, \textit{Lords of the Left-Hand Path}. Flowers identifies much of the same foundational elements as I do, but his discussion differs from mine in that he sees the Left-Hand Path as a universal ‘tradition’ whereas I firmly situate it in a culturally and historically specific context.} None of these do, however, provide a proper definition. In my use the Left-Hand Path is, as per the discussion in Chapter 1, a specific current of contemporary esotericism characterized by a combination of three distinct discourses.

The first of these is an \textit{ideology of individualism}, where the individual and his/her spiritual development is foregrounded. The individual assumes the absolute centre of his/her own existential universe. This is the primary concern even for individuals operating in groups, and organizations are typically likened to schools where the individual magician can acquire the tools necessary for his/her personal magical progress. The individual is contradistinguished to the collective, and this often results in a form of elitism that posits the magician as an elect individual. While it could be argued that esotericism throughout history has been individualistic in its essence, the Left-Hand Path is distinct in that it raises individualism to the level of explicit ideology.

The \textit{goal of self-deification}, where the aim of the practitioner is to become a creator – or a god – through initiatory processes, is the second key discursive component of the Left-Hand Path. The exact nature and implications of this self-deification are interpreted in different ways by specific individuals (as groups rarely define it in a singular fashion), but the tropes and rhetoric devices used are very similar – namely focusing on particularly \textit{individual-focused self-deification}.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the Left-Hand Path is its inherent \textit{antinomianism}. Collective religious and cultural norms, as well as personal taboos, are questioned and defied in the pursuit of individualized ethics and spiritual evolution.\footnote{Granholm, ‘Den vänstra handens väg’} Most often this takes place on a mental level as thought experiments, but rule- and taboo-breaking in rituals, ceremonies, and magical workings is also common. The aim is to abandon sets of ethics that are culturally and socially given, and instead develop ones that are personal,
individualized, and, most importantly, based on conscious reflection. The idea is that this will grant the magician the freedom and autonomy that is required for his/her individualization and self-deification. Part of the antinomian discourse and rhetoric is that any particular Left-Hand Path exists in an antithetical relation to what it perceives to be ‘the Right-Hand Path’. This includes religious, philosophies, political ideologies etc. that are thought to be ‘mainstream’, collectivistic in character, and/or conforming in ideology and practice. A particular Left-Hand Path thus defines itself in opposition to this ‘Right-Hand Path’, and aims to be what this ‘mainstream’ religiosity is not. Also part of the Left-Hand Path antinomian stance is the use and positive appraisal of certain symbols and images deemed to represent ‘evil’ or ‘the liminal’ in Western culture. Examples include the figure of Satan (and other ‘sinister’ gods or demons), the colour black, and the ‘inverted’ pentagram.

As a term, the Left-Hand Path can be traced back to nineteenth-century Western reinterpretations of Indian religious sources, particularly Tantra. The history of this process is much too complex to treat in detail here, but in a general sense early commentators, such as William Ward (1769–1823) and Horace H. Wilson (1786–1860), presented Hindu Tantra as a despicable and degenerate form of religion.125 While many Tantric texts name seven or more ‘paths’,126 the idea that Tantra could easily be divided into the two main traditions Vāmamārga or Vāmācāra (‘left way’) and Dakṣiṇamārga or Dakṣiṇācāra (‘right way’) eventually emerged, and resonated with the already established occultist division of black and white magic.127 Notions of ‘left’ and ‘right’ had of course been part of the occultist milieu for a long time, based already on Biblical tradition, but it was Helena Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society who popularized this Indian and Tantric connection.128 The idea of a benevolent ‘Great White Brotherhood’ was a common feature in nineteenth-century occultism, as was the notion that it had a counterpart in malevolent and self-centred ‘Black Adepts’ or ‘Brothers of the Left’.129 Accusations of working with these
malevolent forces were then directed at fractions in the occult milieu one was not on good terms with. Sir John Woodroffe’s (1865–1936) ‘deodorization’ of Tantra also played an important role in popularizing the idea of two Tantric paths, and provided legitimacy for (certain forms of) Tantra.\textsuperscript{130}

Aleister Crowley, discussed earlier, is also immensely important in the development of the Left-Hand Path. While Crowley did not identify as a Left-Hand Path magician – in fact he himself denigrated his opponents as associates of ‘the Black Brotherhood’ – his use of sex as an initiatory tool, his antinomian stance towards conventional society and religion, his focus on Will as the primary tool of the magician, and his uncompromising attitude to spiritual progress have all influenced the Left-Hand Path. As with so much else in twentieth-century esotericism, popular culture has played an important role for the Left-Hand Path as well. Certainly, one of the most important sources for the popularization of the term ‘Left-Hand Path’ itself is Dennis Wheatley (1897–1977), who in many of his novels included satanic antagonists who identified as ‘Left-Hand Path adepts’.\textsuperscript{131} The two ‘founding fathers’ of Left-Hand Path magic discussed below, Kenneth Grant and Anton LaVey, would certainly have been familiar with, and most likely enticed by, Wheatley’s fiction.

From the early 1970s onwards, a positive re-evaluation of the term Left-Hand Path emerged in the works of British magician and author, and former student and personal secretary of Aleister Crowley,\textsuperscript{132} Kenneth Grant (1924–2011). In the early 1950s he opened the New Isis Lodge of the OTO in London,\textsuperscript{133} but was expelled in 1955 after a dispute with the then head of the order, Karl Germer. Grant responded by declaring himself head of the OTO,\textsuperscript{134} and while this claim has never been generally accepted, Grant nevertheless continued to run his ‘Typhonian’ OTO.\textsuperscript{135} Grant’s particular interpretation of the Left-Hand Path is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{130} See e.g. Woodroffe, \textit{The Serpent Power} (1919); idem, \textit{The World as Power} (1921). For a discussion of Woodroffe and his significance for Western understandings of Tantra, see Urban, \textit{Tantra}, 134–164.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} See e.g. Wheatley, \textit{Strange Conflict} (1941); idem, \textit{To the Devil a Daughter} (1953); idem, \textit{They Used Dark Forces} (1964). On Wheatley, see Evans, \textit{The History of British Magick After Crowley}, 189–193. Evan’s and my views regarding the role of Wheatley differ. Evans regards Wheatley’s fiction and the movies based on it to have ‘considerably helped to reinforce this negative view of the LHP and its adherents’ (ibid., 189), whereas I consider them to have helped provide the inspiration for the creation of actual Left-Hand Path groups. I, in contrast to Evans, do not regard a Left-Hand Path current to have existed before the mid 1960s.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Kaczynski, \textit{Perdurabo}, 440–441
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Grant, \textit{The Magical Revival}, 145n5.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Pasi, ‘Ordo Templi Orientis’, 905.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} Others claim that the Typhonian OTO was formed only in 1970. Koenig, ‘Introduction’, 25–26.
\end{itemize}
primarily spread through his writings, in particular the three Typhonian Trilogies published between 1972 and 2002.\textsuperscript{136} His views are aptly exemplified in the following discussion of the kliphoth – or negative counterpart of the Kabbalistic ‘Tree of Life’:

Occultism in the West, however, has been dominated by interpretations that take into account only the positive aspect of this great symbol. The other side, the negative or averse of the Tree has been kept out of sight and sedulously ignored. But there is no day without night, and Being itself cannot be without reference to Non-Being of which it is the inevitable manifestation.\textsuperscript{137}

Grant considered it important, and even as a prerequisite for high level magical progress, to balance the negative and positive aspects of existence.

As noted, many Left-Hand Path groups can also be labelled as Satanic. This applies to the first representative of the North American stream of the Left-Hand Path, Anton Szandor LaVey’s (Howard Stanton Levey, 1930–1997) Church of Satan. LaVey’s self-claimed biography is very colourful.\textsuperscript{138} He is for example supposed to have worked as a lion tamer at a circus and a photographer for the San Francisco police department, had affairs with both Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield, and appeared as the Devil in Roman Polanski’s movie \textit{Rosemary’s Baby} (1968). While many details of his life are contested, and on good grounds,\textsuperscript{139} there can be no doubt that LaVey was the key figure in the creation of the Left-Hand Path in the form of ‘modern’ Satanism. In the early 1960s LaVey started hosting lectures on various occult subjects in his home, a black-painted house at 6114 California Street in San Francisco – aptly named ‘The Black House’. These meetings eventually assumed more organized forms, and the Church of Satan was officially founded in 1966. Milestones in Satanism are the publications of LaVey’s \textit{The Satanic Bible} in 1969 and \textit{The Satanic Rituals} in 1972. These books, which are still in print as mass-market paperbacks, are the single-most influential documents in informing the practices and beliefs of

\textsuperscript{136} The first trilogy consists of \textit{The Magical Revival} (1972), \textit{Aleister Crowley & the Hidden God} (1973) and \textit{Cults of the Shadow} (1975), the second trilogy consists of \textit{Nightside of Eden} (1977), \textit{Outside the Circles of Time} (1980), and \textit{Hecate’s Fountain} (1992), while the third and last trilogy consists of \textit{Outer Gateways} (1994), \textit{Beyond the Mauve Zone} (1999), and \textit{The Ninth Arch} (2002). See Bogdan, Kenneth Grant.


\textsuperscript{138} See e.g. Barton, \textit{The Secret Life of a Satanist}.

\textsuperscript{139} See e.g. Aquino, \textit{The Church of Satan}.
modern Satanists.\textsuperscript{140} While LaVey was the first to employ the term Left-Hand Path as a self-designation,\textsuperscript{141} it is interesting to note that the ‘Right-Hand Path’ receives much more exposition in his books. This exemplifies the importance of the ‘other’ in Left-Hand Path discourse.

Some self-defined Satanist groups are closely related to the Left-Hand Path but do not demonstrate the requirements of the category according to the discourse analytical model presented earlier. An example is the Swedish Misanthropic Lucifer Order (re-organized as the Temple of the Black Light around the mid 2000s). This group, closely connected to the Swedish Black Metal scene through the band Dissection and its principal member Jon Nödtveidt (1975–2006), has borrowed much of its terminology from both Dragon Rouge and the Temple of Set. However, in striving for a reunification with primordial chaos through escaping the material prison created by an oppressive demiurg this ‘chaos-gnostic’ group diverges from the focus on individualized self-deification that characterizes the Left-Hand Path current.\textsuperscript{142}

One of the prime examples of a Left-Hand Path order that is often problematically labelled a Satanist group is the Temple of Set. Members of the Temple identify themselves Setians, have the Ancient Egyptian ne\text{\text{\text{"}}er Set as their principal deity, and rarely discuss terms such as Satan or Satanism in the order’s official forums.\textsuperscript{143} Thus, using the term Satanism to describe the Temple is erroneous.\textsuperscript{144} The Temple does, however, have a background in Satanism, being formed in 1975 by former members of the Church of Satan, chief among whom was Michael A. Aquino (b. 1946).\textsuperscript{145} In the process of severing his affiliation to the Church, Aquino performed a ‘Higher Black Magic Working’ on the night of June 21–22, 1975, and received the prophetic text \textit{The Book of Coming Forth by Night}.\textsuperscript{146} The text is structured as a monologue by the Egyptian ne\text{\text{\text{"}}er Set, identified as the origin of non-natural isolate existence and creator of the spark of self-consciousness in the human being (the ‘gift of Set’), and as an exemplary to emulate in one’s pursuit to become more aware, free, and divine.

\begin{enumerate}
\item[140] Lewis, ‘Infernal Authority’.
\item[141] See e.g. LaVey, \textit{The Satanic Bible}, 151.
\item[143] See Granholm, ‘Embracing Others Than Satan’, 96.
\item[145] See Aquino, \textit{The Church of Satan}, 412–427.
\item[146] Idem, \textit{The Temple of Set}, 170–175. Note the books relation to the ancient Egyptian text \textit{The Book of Coming Forth by Day}, which is also known as the \textit{Book of the Dead}. This implies that the Temple of Set’s prophetic text is intended as a ‘book of life’.
\end{enumerate}
The Temple’s philosophy and practice is centred on the concept of *Xeper*, described by Aquino as referring to ‘the transformation and evolution of the Will from a human to a divine state of being – by deliberate, conscious, individual force of mind’.\(^{147}\) *Xeper* is the first of a number of ‘Aeonic words’ within the Temple, i.e. concepts that when formulated by a magician (and accepted by that magician’s superiors) indicate that he/she has “stepped outside” the totality of the existing Aeonic formula to alter it in an evolutionary way and attained the status of Magus/Maga (the fifth degree in the Temple’s initiatory system).\(^{148}\) *Xeper* was the ‘Aeonic word’ uttered by Aquino when he founded the Temple. Some other words that have been formulated by the members of the Temple are *Arkte*, *Remanifest*, *Runa*, and *Xem* – all with their own complex meanings, and the Temple also acknowledges concepts such as Aleister Crowley’s *Thelema*. The Temple operates with the notions of the subjective and the objective universe, where the former represents each individual’s personal existential reality and the latter the world of natural laws and collective norms and rules. These notions are linked to the Temple’s primary magical practices; Lesser and Greater Black Magic. The former is thought to affect the objective universe and the latter the magician’s own subjective universe. Greater Black Magic aims at the spiritual evolution and transformation of the practitioner, but is thought to have repercussions in the objective universe as well.

As the Temple of Set has a background in the Church of Satan it could be termed a ‘post-Satanic’ group.\(^ {149}\) In the context of the larger Left-Hand Path milieu, which includes many forms of Satanism, the concept of ‘post-Satanism’ can be of use in studying how the milieu and its discursive characteristics change over time. In particular, it is of use when examining representatives of the milieu, both groups and individuals, who have a background in self-professed Satanism – such as the Church of Satan – but have chosen to abandon this self-identification while still remaining within the milieu. This would entail the shift of focus away from the figure of Satan to other deities and mythological beings.

Another group that has connections to the Left-Hand Path and is of relevance for the present study is the Rune-Gild, formed in Texas in 1980. This group is, as the name implies, focused on Old Norse and Germanic religion, mythology, and culture. It does, however, have a connection to a self-avowed Left-Hand Path organization – the Temple of Set – and operates with many


\(^{148}\) Ibid., 31.

\(^{149}\) For more discussion on the concept of post-Satanism, see Granholm, ‘The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism’.
concepts familiar from this context. The founder and leader of the Rune-Gild, Edred Thorsson (Stephen E. Flowers, b. 1950), is a high-level initiate in the Temple. The Gild is, however, equally informed by the Radical Traditionalist and neopagan (particularly heathen) currents of esotericism, and thus represents an interesting example of ‘currental convergence’.150

The ‘New Age Movement’ and the Popularization of Esotericism

In the latter part of the twentieth century esotericism has undergone a popularization that rivals, and quite possibly outshines, the ‘occult revival’ of the latter part of the nineteenth century. As this development has been connected to overarching changes in the ways people approach religious issues and increased fascination with apparently ‘Eastern’ themes and perspectives, concepts such as ‘the spiritual revolution’151 and ‘the Easternization of the West’152 have been suggested as explanations. These suggestions are problematic in their own right, but also problematic is the notion that much of this ‘emerging easternized spirituality’ is generated in and through a semi-homogenous ‘New Age movement’. Part of the problem is that scholars across the board have been unable to provide sufficiently satisfactory clarifications as to what characterizes this ‘movement’ and how it is distinguished from other forms of late modern religiosity. An example is George Chryssides’ article ‘Defining the New Age’, which despite the title offers no actual definition. Instead the author approaches the issue first from the perspective of what the New Age is not (e.g. a religion, a new religious movement, or a cluster of new religious movements), secondly from the perspective of what New Age rejects (Christianity), and then finally, and vaguely, describes New Age as a ‘counter-cultural Zeitgeist’.153

Attempts to delineate New Age often take the approach of introducing lists of Wittgensteinian ‘family resemblances’, where particular manifestations of New Age may display some, but rarely all, traits on the list. Different manifestations are then related in the same way as ‘two members of the family may bear almost no resemblance to each other, although they both resemble a third member’.154 Definitions of this kind tend to be extremely inclusive, often using

151 See e.g. Heelas, ‘The Spiritual Revolution’; Heelas & Woodhead, The Spiritual Revolution.
152 Campbell, ‘The Easternization of the West’; idem, The Easternization of the West.
lists of such broadness that almost anything could be labelled New Age. For example, in the work of Paul Heelas and George Chryssides such diverse phenomena as alternative therapies (e.g. Reiki and Zone-therapy), borrowed and reinterpreted religious practices of indigenous peoples (particularly shamanic practices), divinatory techniques (e.g. astrology, tarot reading, and I Ching), channelling, beliefs and practices pertaining to UFOs and parapsychology, business training (e.g. Erhard Seminars Training), alternative science, and spiritual approaches to various fields of life, such as diets (e.g. macro-biotic), education, art (‘New Age’ music and the novels of James Redfield), and home furnishing (e.g. Feng Shui), are identified as some of the possible ingredients of New Age spiritualities.\textsuperscript{155} There seems to be no scholarly consensus as to what exactly New Age is, and there is little substance to all the various conceptualizations that are presented. There exist only external attributes and no scholar has been able to show in a satisfactory manner how these attributes are related – or even that they are related.\textsuperscript{156}

‘New Age’ has come to be used as a vague general term that lumps together all that which does not easily fit into any other category of religiosity, much in the same way as the terms occult and esoteric have been used in the sociology of religion. Often this leads to the abandonment of all attempts to demarcate ‘New Age’, and this, naturally, causes serious methodological problems. A glaring example is Miguel Farias and Pehr Granqvist’s study on ‘the psychology of the New Age’. Based on empirical examination of a number of people the authors conclude that ‘New Agers’ are characterized by left temporal lobe dysfunction, individualist rather than collectivist goals, schizotypical and suggestible personalities, inclination towards magical thinking, dissociative mental states, elevated subjective suffering, ‘bursts’ of feelings and creativity, as well as having backgrounds of parental insensitivity to their needs as children and/or experiences of traumatic loss and/or abuse.\textsuperscript{157} Besides the patologization of a (supposed) religious orientation, a considerable problem is that Farias and Granqvist never venture on a proper discussion of what actually constitutes a ‘New Ager’, other than that the participants in the study were ‘recruited at “alternative centres”’.\textsuperscript{158} The authors fail to demonstrate that the people studied


\textsuperscript{156} For a critical assessment of the academic construct of a ‘New Age movement’, see Sutcliffe, Children of the New Age, 21–25.

\textsuperscript{157} Farias & Granqvist, ‘The Psychology of the New Age’, 144.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 125.
constitute any kind of coherent group, and the very ‘definition’ of New Age is based on circular argumentation – the people studied are New Agers because they frequent certain shops, and these shops are in turn New Age-shops because they are frequented by the aforementioned people. One can thus easily draw the conclusion that the study actually deals with a random group of people, united more in their (purported) psychological complications than any forms of practices, philosophies, or worldviews. Clearly, more substantial definitions are needed if ‘New Age’ is to be a term of any analytical usefulness.

It can be asserted that there indeed did exist a New Age movement, and that it is possible to delimit it in a more satisfactory manner than is the standard practice. By examining texts by generally accepted key New Age spokespersons through the discourse analytical approach to esoteric currents presented in Chapter 1, the core elements of the New Age movement, in a proper sense, can be established. Marilyn Ferguson’s *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980) is generally accepted as the work that launched New Age into the mainstream and it is therefore a good source for establishing the parameters of the current. The label of the ‘movement’ as well as the following quote from Ferguson’s book demonstrate the most central discourse of the New Age current – the narrative of the imminence of a revolutionary shift in consciousness, on a personal, societal, or even planetary level:

> For the first time in history, humankind has come upon the control panel of change—an understanding of how transformation occurs. We are living in the change of change, the time in which we can intentionally align ourselves with nature for rapid remaking of ourselves and our collapsing institutions.

If this discourse on ‘the coming of a New Age’ is not present, it is – or at least should be – nonsensical to describe a group or a spokesperson as part of ‘the New Age movement’. The secondary discourses concern the human potential for extraordinary, even supernatural, feats, and New Thought-discourses on the human mind producing reality. Together these discourses flesh out a world where a new glorious, spiritually enlightened age of humanity is on the verge of emerging, where both the world and individual humans reach new and higher levels of being, and this new world is ushered by human realization that we ourselves create our phenomenal world. In addition, the New Age current

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159 For further discussion on the subject, see Granholm, ‘Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes’.

160 *Ferguson, The Aquarian Conspiracy, 29*.
operates with an overarching ‘holistic’ discourse; Not only is body and spirit regarded as unified (albeit often with ‘the mind creating matter’), but a general convergence of disparate fields such as science and religion, different religions etc., is posited. The actual New Age movement is what Wouter Hanegraaff describes as ‘New Age sensu stricto’, whereas his ‘New Age sensu lato’ characterizes a broader, more diverse, and unorganized interest in the esoteric.\(^\text{161}\)

The heyday of this New Age movement was relatively short, with the movement emerging in the 1970s, achieving immense popularity in the 1980s, and largely dissipating by the early 1990s.\(^\text{162}\) Interestingly, the New Age movement was more or less defunct by the time scholars started paying attention to it. This does not, however, mean that the New Age is dead and buried. Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*\(^\text{163}\) is a fairly classic rendition of New Age that gained considerable popularity in the mid 2000s when it was endorsed by Oprah Winfrey.\(^\text{164}\) The movement also played an important role in the mass-popularization of esoteric discourse. Still, in the early twenty-first century few of the movements and practices generally regarded as belonging to the ‘New Age’ focus on, or even discuss, the coming of the Age of Aquarius or regard societal transformation as essential.\(^\text{165}\) What is often described as ‘New Age’ thus represent an increasing popular acceptance and appropriation of esoteric notions and discourses.\(^\text{166}\)

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162 For a similar assessment, see Melton, ‘Beyond Millenialism’, 77.
163 Byrne, *The Secret*. The book was preceded by a motivational film, both published in 2006.
164 See Peck, *The Age of Oprah*, particularly chapter five.
166 See Granholm, ‘New Age or the Mass-Popularization of Esoteric Discourse’. 
CHAPTER 3

Dragon Rouge

History, Philosophy, Structures

History

Thomas Karlsson

Any treatment of Dragon Rouge that aims to be comprehensive needs to start with its founder, Thomas Karlsson. Born in 1972, Karlsson had a normal middle-class upbringing in the suburbs of Stockholm, Sweden, with the religious zeal of his mother\(^1\) tempered by the atheistic inclination of his father. He recounts having been fascinated with myth, religion, and obscure symbols from a young age. This extended into an interest in the operas of Richard Wagner and the surrealist art of Salvador Dalí, something that was encouraged by his parents. Karlsson claims to have had extra-corporeal experiences from age three onwards, and consequently did not regard these altered states of consciousness as odd or even uncommon until age twelve when he realized that they could be termed ‘occult’. At about this time, he and a friend of the same age started experimenting with the occult, performing demonic evocations by way of old magic books (i.e. grimoires), using a Ouija board, and visiting cemeteries and pre-Christian cult sites. Karlsson also got in touch with the Stockholm-based spiritualist associations Sanningssökarna (The Seekers of Truth) and Stockholms Spiritualistiska Förening (Stockholm Spiritualist Association), but was disappointed with what they had to offer. At age fourteen, on one of his regular visits to the esoteric bookshop East and West, Karlsson met a person who would have a lasting influence on him. This person, identified by Karlsson with the pseudonym ‘Varg’, was ten years older than Karlsson and well-travelled in international occult circles. ‘Varg’ came across Karlsson while the latter was eyeing through Anton LaVey’s The Satanic Bible, and struck up a conversation. He claimed to have visited LaVey recently, and that he was in apprenticeship with a North American Left-Hand Path magician. Karlsson banded together with ‘Varg’ and some schoolmates to start an informal group to explore magic and the occult.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Karlsson’s mother comes from a pentecostalist background, but had in her youth been rather uninterested in religion. However, Karlsson says that she dreamed of spiritual baptismal when she was very young, mirroring Karlsson’s own childhood experiences. When Karlsson was about five years old, his mother joined the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Interview 2011–01, June 10, 2011.

By the time Karlsson reached age seventeen he worked part-time at the esoteric bookshop Vattumannen and did tarot readings at another, Jolanda den tredje. He also attended shamanic- and witches-meetings, participated in Yoga-courses, met and discussed with ‘heavy metal Satanists’, and ‘New Age’ consultants. He was thus deeply immersed in the esoteric milieu of the late 1980s Stockholm. It was while working at Vattumannen that Karlsson came into contact with a man in his forties who was a member of a small Gothenburg-based group practising yezidic and typhonian magic. Karlsson reports having learnt many of the terms and concepts later used in Dragon Rouge from this particular group, as well as having received some important texts and artefacts from it. In addition, this older magician directly encouraged Karlsson to start a proper magic order, and suggested using the red dragon as its main symbol.3

The decisive incitation to found Dragon Rouge came in early 1989 when Karlsson visited Morocco in the company of, in Karlsson’s words, ‘an insane Englishman with suicidal tendencies’.4 Karlsson had met ‘Saul’, who dealt in precious stones, only a couple of weeks earlier, but was able to convince his parents to let him take the trip. Although problem-ridden, the trip was worthwhile. While sitting at a café at the famous Jamaâ El-Fna square in Marrakech, a Sufi mystic walked up to Karlsson and proclaimed: ‘Old temples have fallen. A new temple will rise. A temple for the Red Dragon’.5 Due to an evocative dream he had had shortly before the trip, Karlsson took this as a prophecy. In the dream Karlsson had witnessed what he interpreted as the destruction of an Atlantean temple, with the all-important temple fire being saved by a young boy. Back in Sweden, Karlsson narrated his experiences to his fellow explorers of magic, and with their encouragement decided to found a proper magic order, in ‘an unprejudiced search for a darker spiritual ideology or path, with a fascination for the symbols encircling the Left Hand Path’.6

I have no reason to doubt Karlsson’s account. However, this narrative of prophetic declaration also functions as an appeal to legitimacy through lineage. This is particularly evident in the statement on the Dragon Rouge website that the order was founded ‘following the advice from a circle of old Yezidi-Typhonian magicians who left their great work of awakening the dragon force to their younger inheritors’.7 This is a standard trope of occultist discourse, as discussed

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4 Questionnaire 2001–03. The interviews with and questionnaire answers by Dragon Rouge members are in Swedish. Quotations in English are translated by me.
7 Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’.
in regard to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in Chapter 2. Considering that not all of the account is publically available e.g. on the order’s website, it would seem that it is more of a demonstration of the influence of earlier narratives than a conscious attempt to provide legitimacy for Dragon Rouge.

**Dragon Rouge – Early Development**

For nearly a year Dragon Rouge operated as a closed order, but on New Year’s Eve 1990 the order was officially and ceremoniously opened for general membership. This ceremony was enacted to the sounds of Wagner’s overture to ‘Tannhauser’ in the home of ‘Varg’, and this time Karlsson envisioned himself receiving the torch with the temple fire from his previous dream. ‘Varg’ seems to have been a key person in the early development of the order. While Karlsson appears to have been the lead ideologist, and the visionaries, he describes ‘Varg’ as having a strong natural affinity for magic, regularly falling into trance states and even conducting impromptu magical workings at rave parties. ‘Varg’, however, had for a long time considered Karlsson to be something of an ‘incarnated spiritual master’.

In the early 1990s, most meetings of the fledgling order were arranged at cemeteries, in forests, and other natural environments, and the activities and overall approach were characterized by a certain degree of disorganization and an atmosphere of youthful exuberance. Karlsson had felt irritation over the accentuated theory-centeredness of the magical and esoteric groups he had encountered, and thus wished to foster a strong focus on practice. He admits to organizations such as the Typhonian OTO and the Temple of Set having been inspirational in the early days of the order, but says that Dragon Rouge soon came to develop along a different path. The Church of Satan and Anton LaVey’s writings seem to have played a very minor role, although Karlsson, and most likely most of the other early members, had read The Satanic Bible. Karlsson admits that LaVey might have had some significance very early on, but claims that a conscious differentiation from Satanism was always present. It is a common view among the order’s members that LaVey and his Church may spark an initial interest in the darker aspects of magic, but that members will eventually outgrow that kind of Satanic philosophy. In general, LaVey’s materialistic philosophy conflicts with Dragon Rouge positions in many aspects.

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10 This is quite similar to views in the Temple of Set, where the Setian is sometimes considered an ‘evolved Satanist’. See Granholm, ‘Worshiping Others Than Satan’, 96.
The Mid to Late 1990s

Until the mid 1990s the membership of the order grew slowly but steadily. Things changed radically in 1995, however, when a baptismal ceremony for the child of two order-members was arranged. Representatives of the Swedish tabloid paper *Aftonbladet* were present at the baptismal, and the result was a sensationalist and derogatory report where Dragon Rouge was labelled a dangerous satanic organization and the child in question was said to have been baptized in the name of Satan. According to representatives of the order, the ceremony had involved the channeling of the life-affirming ‘Draconian force’ for the benefit of the child. The parents of the child were, however, outspoken Satanists – the father even being a member of the explicitly satanic Black Metal band Dark Funeral – and their beliefs and values were taken to represent Dragon Rouge as a whole. Although the order had appeared in Swedish mass media before – the first time was in 1991 in the TV-programme *Friszon* (Free Zone) – the response had never been this intense or negative. Dragon Rouge making the headlines in *Aftonbladet* attracted even more media attention, which had the (probably unforeseen, and certainly unintended) effect of the order’s membership increasing considerably. The number of members doubled from about 250 to 500 in a very short time. While some of the new members had a serious interest in magic and the order, many were primarily attracted by the sensationalist – and ultimately erroneous – image manufactured by the media. Consequently, veteran members of the order have somewhat ambivalent sentiments on the media frenzy of the mid 1990s.

The significant increase in members caused problems for the order, which at this point was still quite unorganized and loosely structured. According to a

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13 svt, *Taxi*.
14 Questionnaire 2001–08.
15 See Arlebrand, *Det okända*, 11.
16 See e.g. Göteborgsposten, ‘Mördare driver Dragon Rouge’; Stugart, ‘Satanister snart på svart lista’; idem, ‘Magiska ritualer åter på ropet’; svt, *Taxi*; Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, ‘Satanism’. A member told me how a picture of him – taken from the story in *Aftonbladet* – was attached to an article titled ‘Satanists Molest Young Women’ in the Swedish adolescent girls’ magazine *Veckorevyn*. The article itself had nothing in particular to do with either Dragon Rouge or this member. The baptismal ceremony was even given some attention in Finland, with Finnish evangelical Riku Rinne mentioning it in one of his books, see Rinne, *Pimeyys väistyy*, 13–16.
long-time member, the organizational structure of Dragon Rouge in the mid-1990s could effectively accommodate no more than fifty members, with the system structured in a way that required the central administration personally knowing each member. This was naturally impossible with a membership of 500.\(^{18}\) The order’s information letter was manually copied and sent out and consequently appeared irregularly, Karlsson was almost solely responsible for the administration of the organization, membership lists and information of dues payments consisted of an unorganized collection of hand- and typewritten notes, meetings were held at odd intervals and in varying locations (usually in the homes of various members). For a time, a return to being a closed order was considered, but eventually the decision to institute large-scale structural and administrational changes was taken. Two long-time members had started to help Karlsson with practical and administrational tasks, and together some structural changes were agreed upon. The most significant of these involved a rationalization of the administration of the order, including a division of the workload among the core members, the restructuring and modernization of the membership register involving more effective structures for membership renewal, and handing over the task of copying membership material to a professional copying firm.\(^{19}\)

Up to this point the application of the order’s initiatory system had been as unorganized as its administration, largely relying on personal acquaintance and intuitive assessment of would-be initiates. The system was rationalized by issuing an introductory correspondence course through which new members could familiarize themselves with the core principles of the Dragon Rouge magic system. A final agreement was the decision to withdraw from the mass media and only appear in contexts that were deemed to be of particular relevance and benefit for the order. As Dragon Rouge had grown and attained more of a societal presence the increasingly negative media attention had a much more serious impact on the order. Engaging with mass media was thus more of a risk. Meetings were partially standardized as well, as the order acquired its first fixed premises where the first Dragon Rouge temple was instituted.\(^{20}\) For a time, the magic shop *Mandragora*, run by three female Dragon Rouge members, functioned as a nodal point for the order.\(^{21}\)

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19. Ibid.
20. This first semi-permanent temple was used until late 1998 (Dragon Rouge, *Draksädd* 3:1998, 1), and the new permanent one was acquired in August 1999 (Dragon Rouge, *Draksädd* 3:1999, 1, 10).
An annual meeting was held for the first time soon after the reorganization of the order and during this meeting some additional changes were agreed upon. It was decided that the order’s information letter – now called Draksådd [Dragon Seed] – should appear in regular intervals four times per year, and that the newly created correspondence course already needed to be reworked.\textsuperscript{22} A decision to issue an English-language version of the letter, named Cauda Draconis, was taken, as the order wanted to attract more foreign members. To further facilitate this, as well as to simplify initial contact with potential members and those wanting information on the order, a webpage was to be created. Most of these goals had been achieved within a year of the meeting. With the withdrawal from the mass media, sensation-seeking new members no longer sought out the order, and consequently the percentage of serious and active members greatly increased.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{The Twenty-First Century}

The twenty-first century marked the internalization of Dragon Rouge. The order achieved an online presence through a simple webpage created in the late 1990s, which was substantially developed and expanded in the coming years. Karlsson and other long-time members attribute great significance to this online presence in attracting foreign members. While the first non-Swedish members joined the order already in the late 1990s, a virtual explosion in foreign membership requests occurred in the early 2000s, with a continuous growth towards the end of the decade. Today, more than two-thirds of the Dragon Rouge membership consists of non-Swedish members, and the order can thus be said to have become truly transnational. This is also apparent in the online presence of the order, with the webpages of Dragon Rouge until a couple of years ago being viewable in nine different languages: English, Swedish, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Russian, and Czech.\textsuperscript{24} The internalization of the order is signalled in the name-change of its information letter, with all the different language versions being titled Dracontias since 2002. In the last couple of years the order has attracted a growing membership in North America, something which it has not been able to achieve earlier.

\textsuperscript{22} Both these issues are discussed in the first issue of Draksådd, Dragon Rouge, Draksådd 1.1998, 1.

\textsuperscript{23} Questionnaire 2001–08.

\textsuperscript{24} The webpage was earlier viewable in Polish as well, but this is no longer the case with the discontinuation of the Polish lodge Magan in 2009. A webpage in Japanese was being developed in mid 2011. Interview 2011–02, June 13, 2011.
A probable further reason for the impressive growth of Dragon Rouge can be sought in increasing book publication by members of the order. Long-time member Christofer Johnsson published the book *Mörkrets stig* (The Path of Darkness) already in 1996, but it was a small print of only a hundred copies, self-published by Johnsson. Tommie Eriksson’s *Mörk magi* (Dark Magic) was published by Ouroboros press in 2001, widely distributed, and became a best-seller at *Vattumannen*. Thomas Karlsson’s first book, *Uthark: Nightside of the Runes* (2002), was written in English and translated into German. It was popular in both Sweden and on the German version of the online Amazon store. Karlsson’s subsequent books have been written in Swedish, but consistently translated to several different languages, including English, German, Russian, Italian, and Portuguese.

One of the most important developments in twenty-first century was the opening of a permanent temple on the island of Gotland, southeast of Stockholm. The temple is located in an old barn on Karlsson’s family grounds, and functions as the symbolic centre of the order today. Annual meetings were held on this location from 2004, along with week-long ‘magical camps’ each summer from 2004 and onwards.25 The annual meeting of 2009 signalled the twentieth anniversary of Dragon Rouge, and it is interesting to note that the available spaces for the meeting and following magical camp were reserved several months in advance.26 This has been the case ever since.

On a personal level, Karlsson has also been involved in academia, earning a doctorate on a thesis on the seventeenth-century Swedish rune mystic and Kabbalist Johannes Bureus in the History of Religions at Stockholm University in 2010.27 The thesis is in the field of Western esotericism, and is thus closely related to Karlsson’s personal magical interests. However, Karlsson makes a point out of keeping his esoteric practice separate from his academic work.28 Nonetheless, this academic connection is important, as it has fostered what could be likened to an academic atmosphere of inquiry, along with the use of scholarly terminology, rhetoric, and sources, within the order.

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25 Magical camps on Gotland have been occasionally arranged since at least 1998 (Dragon Rouge, ‘Magisk vecka på Gotland’), but regular annual camps have only been organized since the mid 2000s.

26 Interview 2011–01, June 10, 2011. In 2011 the available spaces were reserved within two weeks of announcement of the magical camp.

27 Karlsson, *Götisk kabbala och runisk alkemi*.

28 Information derived from personal correspondence with Thomas Karlsson.
Basic Tenets

The Nature of Reality: Chaos and Cosmos

The dichotomy of Chaos and Cosmos is central to the Dragon Rouge worldview. Where Cosmos is taken to represent manifest structures, as in the physical world and the conscious mind, Chaos represents something much greater and more primordial; it is the source containing all the possibilities of existence as elements not yet manifested. It is Chaos that is the focus for the Dragon Rouge magician, primarily represented by the order’s main symbol; the Red Dragon. As expressed in the order’s introductory correspondence course in magic order, the Dragon represents an ‘original and limitless force’, i.e. Chaos. The principle of the Dragon/Chaos is identified in the mythologies of a vast number of different cultures. For example, in the Babylonian creation-saga Tiamat and Apsu are regarded to represent primordial Chaos whereas Marduk is the bringer of order. The manifest universe, i.e. Cosmos, is created out of Tiamat’s body, i.e. out of Chaos. The same perspective is applied to many other primordial beasts of myth, including the Biblical Leviathan, serpent, and in some aspects Satan, who are all along with Tiamat seen as representations of the Dragon. In representing a larger and more primordial reality all these ‘dragons’ possess immense power and potential that the magician can tap into. It is the Dragon who sets the magician on his path to self-deification, and it is ‘both the inner and the outer power personified’. Whereas the outer form of the Dragon represents primordial Chaos that is external to the practitioner, its inner form manifests in the kundalini-force that provides a personal resource for the power of creation. These two forces are, however, only superficially separate. One of the tasks of the magician is to realize the essential unity of the external and the internal, with the same essential life-force flowing through everything in the ‘breath of the Dragon’. The fact that primordial dragon-beasts have been so feared is thought to be the doing

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29 Interview 2001–03.
30 See Granholm, ‘Two Symbols of the Magic Order Dragon Rouge’.
33 Cf. Ibid., 121. See also Ibid., 41, where Tiamat and Leviathan are compared.
34 See Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’.
36 Eriksson, Mörk magi, 130–131.
of ‘life-denying religions’ that are concerned with an afterlife in another world, as well as due to the sheer power and potential attributed to the draconian force. The website of the order presents ‘Draconian Aphorisms’ that shed some additional light on the symbol of the Dragon:

The Dragon is the winged serpent. The Dragon unites the serpent with the eagle, what is below with what is above.
The Dragon is the four elements. The wings are Air. The reptile body is Earth. The scales is [sic!] Water and the burning breath is Fire. Thus the Dragon is the fifth element – the Spirit.
The Dragon is, in the form of Ouroboros, the serpent that bites its own tail. The dragon is the beginning of the end and the end of the beginning.
The Dragon is beyond good and evil, night and day, female and male, plus and minus. The Dragon arises through the meeting of opposites. The Dragon is the polarity between plus and minus.
The Dragon is the symbol of Tao – the Journey – and the Journey is the goal. The Dragon is dynamic eternity.
In darkness we can find fear. Through confronting darkness we are confronting fear and we can be free from it. If we escape the darkness our fear will grow for what is in the darkness.
In Dragon Rouge a balance between dark and light, the creative and the destructive is the goal.37

In short, the Dragon is everything, and at the same time beyond everything. The Dragon symbolizes the all-encompassing energy of existence and beyond existence. By connecting with this force, the magician awakens power and energy latent within him-/herself, as well as gains access to the power and energy inherent to the potential of Chaos.

Different aspects of the Dragon are discussed in the order. In its most common form, the red Dragon symbolises Chaos as well as the universal and personal life-forces. However, in some advanced material the Dragon appears in a black form, and then representing death and decay. However, these two aspects are connected, as life springs out of death and decay, thus further emphasizing the Dragon’s all-encompassing qualities.38

37 Dragon Rouge, ‘Philosophy’. The last two of the aphorisms have been added sometime in the late 2000s.
**Dark Magic**

Magic is the name given to the methods by which a human can approach and control the unknown. The unknown is dark from our perspective. To call magic dark indicates that it is about researching and awakening things that lie outside the structure we are situated in.

_**Tommie Eriksson, Mörk Magi, 2** (my translation)_

When asked to provide a definition of magic, most of the Dragon Rouge members I have spoken to built on Aleister Crowley’s famous definition: ‘Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will’.\(39\) Variations included ‘[m]agic is the ability to influence things in accordance with one’s will,’\(40\) ‘[magic is] the technique to change reality in accordance to my will, by other-worldly means,’\(41\) and ‘[magic is] to make things happen in accordance with one’s wishes, by using the Will’.\(42\) This relates to an interesting feature of occultism discussed in Chapter 2; the rhetoric of magic as a technique rather than a religious practice, which justifies an interpretation of it as an empirical science. As one member says:

> For my part magic is about understanding what we don't often see or think about in everyday life. No human being can understand or grasp the real world, what we experience as the real world is a 'model'... At the 'periphery' of the model we meet things that we don't know and don't think exist, sometimes they can even manifest themselves in our model as 'unexplained occurrences'. By _studying_ these 'peripheral phenomena', the concealed, the occult, we broaden our model, we see how the occult affects the mundane, we can progress in the way we want to and _acquire greater knowledge_... The characteristic of good knowledge is knowledge that can be _verified in practice_... When an occultist uses practical magic he _verifies_ (by analogy with scientific experiments) that his model is of use and that he has learnt something of value.\(43\)

This rhetoric establishes Dragon Rouge as an order focused on exploration and research, in contrast to faith-based movements. It is also evident in the ways in

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\(39\) Crowley, _Magick_, 131.
\(40\) Questionnaire 2001–09.
\(41\) Questionnaire 2001–07.
\(42\) Questionnaire 2001–02.
\(43\) Questionnaire 2001–06. Italics added.
which the order is organized, with more advanced members not being identified as a gurus or masters, but instead as tutors. However, magic goes beyond the limits of conventional materialist science, making it possible to criticize both ‘irrational religionists’ and ‘reductionist scientists’. Magic can even be presented as an enlightened science through which the meaning of life can be discerned:

Magic is a science revolving around this [the question of human intellect and the capacity for abstract thought], which, in distinction to religions (which mainly build on theoretical philosophies and a few prophets’ practical experiences or revelations), builds on empirical experiences both from a large number of predecessors and contemporary colleagues as on one’s own.\(^\text{44}\)

At the same time, however, we are dealing with multiple, individual meanings rather than a singular one. As a long-time member puts it: ‘Since magic is a sort of science, one does not view these [answers] as static or as dogmas, but simply as different explanatory models that describe the same phenomenon’.\(^\text{45}\)

As the definitions presented above clearly explicate, ‘Will’ is one of the most essential qualities emphasized in magical practice, with Karlsson even describing magic as the art or philosophy of Will.\(^\text{46}\) Like Crowley, however, a distinction is made between the ordinary, more mundane will, and a magical, inner, and True Will. True Will is regarded as the essence of the magician, sometimes also described as the magician’s ‘Daemon’ or ‘Higher Self’.

The Dragon Rouge form of magic is commonly specified by the qualifier ‘dark’, which is chosen due to the alternative term ‘black’ having such negative connotations.\(^\text{47}\) According to the order, this ‘embracing the dark’ should not be interpreted in any moral sense as an alignment towards ‘evil’. ‘Dark’ simply implies that the Dragon Rouge magician is focused on the ‘exploration of the unknown’, both in his/her own psyche and in the universe.\(^\text{48}\) Magic in itself, it is said, can be used for both good and evil ends, and the practitioner is almost certainly unable to comprehend the full consequences of his/her actions: a ritual meant to be beneficial can have disastrous consequences.\(^\text{49}\) It is also

\(^{44}\) Questionnaire 2001–08.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{47}\) Karlsson, *Bland mystiker och magiker i förorten*.
stressed that working with darkness does not entail leaving out the light. In fact, many of the Dragon Rouge magicians I have talked to consider this to be almost impossible, or if possible, then certainly dangerous and not very productive. The dark magician needs strengthens his/her existing structures, the ‘light’ aspects of his/her existence, in order to cope with the hidden, unconscious, and dark aspects.

In order to attain a clearer view of what Dragon Rouge members mean by ‘dark magic’ a closer look at what is intended by ‘light’, or ‘white’, magic is useful. Light magic is considered to operate with the known structures of Cosmos, as well as with the magician's conscious self. The white magician aims ‘to strengthen or re-establish an imagined ideal original order’. The dark magician of Dragon Rouge has a different goal. By working with the powers of Chaos, he/she aims at tearing down existing structures in order to craft new ones, and in doing so becoming part of a new, self-created order rather than a pre-existing one. He/she ‘break[s] borders and find[s] new unique paths in which the magician does not serve the plans of some god, but becomes a god and creator himself’.

Connected to this goal of self-deification is the reluctance to use magic for purely mundane effects. As stated in the first correspondence course in magic:

Not infrequently do people who have recently developed an interest in magic want to obtain help with something trivial in everyday life, for example a money-ritual, curses or – perhaps most often – a love spell. It is certainly possible to realize all these wishes with the help of rituals and magic... If one seeks magic in order to escape into a false world of rituals and all sorts of hocus pocus due to being too weak to deal with the ordinary world, one should definitely avoid the worlds of magic... If one does not have the will necessary to contact the person one desires, one will not be able to win the person with the help of magic, other than possibly very briefly and disharmoniously.

While magic could be used to obtain money, promotion at work, or a relationship with the object of one's desires, there are easier non-magical ways of

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50 See e.g. the last of the order’s ‘Draconian Aphorisms’ which states that ‘[i]n Dragon Rouge a balance between dark and light, the creative and the destructive is the goal’, idem, ‘Philosophy’.
53 Ibid. My translation.
attaining these goals. Furthermore, as magic is potentially dangerous and highly demanding on the adept, using it for mundane goals that can be achieved in other ways is unwise:

The magnitude and gigantic potential of existence and the universe is demanding. It is exhausting to become aware. It takes power to gain power and to have power (like regular [sports-] training sessions!). To Will is demanding and requires responsibility.55

Another common term used in the order is ‘Draconian magic’.56 Here the focus is on the connection between the personal ‘inner Dragon’ and the universal ‘outer Dragon’, and the manipulation of reality by way of the correspondences they provide.

Dragon Rouge material presents magic as operating with three basic principles: Vision, Power, and Action.57 Vision has a two-fold meaning. First, it represents a deeper sense of perception, allowing the magician to observe reality without the distortions of time, space, and causality. Second, it refers to the magician’s ability to visualize the changes that he/she wants to occur. The two understandings are linked: As the reality of Chaos is essentially fluid the magician may by his Vision actively shape it. In order to realize Vision, Power is required. Partly, envisioning ‘true reality’ grants Power, but it also spends it. The magician uses the Power of the ‘inner Dragon’ to gain access to the unlimited Power of the ‘outer Dragon’, which is made possible through Vision revealing this correspondence. In order to be a true magician, however, Action is required. As can be read on the Dragon Rouge homepage: ‘Action is the expression of magic. Through the force of the actions the magician can make his visions real’.58 Utilizing the Power gained, the magician realizes his/her Vision in magical ritual, thus ‘causing change to occur in conformity with the Will’. According to official Dragon Rouge material, however, magic is not limited to only conventional ceremonies and rituals. Instead, all conscious acts can be regarded as expressions of magic.59

The notion of control is central in regard to ‘causing change to occur in conformity with Will’. The feeling of being in control of one’s own life is pivotal for

55 Ibid. My translation.
56 ‘The Draconian Current’ is presented by Kenneth Grant as the ancient, true form of spirituality, see Grant, Cults of the Shadow; idem, Nightside of Eden.
57 Dragon Rouge, ‘Philosophy’; Eriksson, Mörk magi, 141–144.
58 Dragon Rouge, ‘Philosophy’.
59 Idem, Magikurs 1, ‘brev 1’, 1.
the dark magician, and one of the key potentials of magic is that it can provide ‘the power to become creators of the future, instead of being creations of the past’. This is often explicated through a passage from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* where the netjer Khepera is identified as the ‘self-created’ or ‘the great god who created himself’. Control relates to power, and power relates to elitism. Magicians, especially those dealing with darker forms of magic and with individual-centered goals, are often accused of promoting an elitist agenda. When one reads Dragon Rouge material selectively, this judgment indeed lies near at hand. To give a few examples: ‘Most people sleep. They live their lives in lethargy and lack any coherent will’, ‘Magic is for the strong, or for those who sincerely aim at becoming strong’, ‘To take the step and join an occult organization is a unique choice. It is made by avant-garde people who have understood that the world is run by mechanisms and forces which can not be seen or explained by the great masses, but nevertheless affect your life’. Aware of the negative implications of elitism, as well as of the socially sinister agendas often attributed to occult movements due to their focus on power, disclaimers are included in order to downplay perceived elitism:

This should not be understood in some collective political meaning or in connection with thoughts about the rights of the strong, which is often advanced in some occult circles in a vulgar-elitist way. Magic power is the power of one’s own spirit, the power over one’s self.

Looking more closely at the above elitist statements one notices that it is not the individual magician *per se* who is regarded to be better than other people; it is the *choice* of entering an esoteric order that is regarded as an elite decision.

**G. O. T. A.**

Dragon Rouge is extremely eclectic, incorporating elements from a nearly unlimited number of cultures, religions, and philosophies. In fact, the various

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61 See e.g. Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 130, 246n2, 324–325. Cf. Ibid., 1, where Khepera is identified as the ‘creator of the gods’. Referred to in Karlsson, ‘Förord’, xi.
practices tried out and theories discussed in the order's official courses and meetings are presented more as introductions, with the individual practitioners then having the possibility, and responsibility, to more closely explore the themes that are of particular interest to them. Even with this inherent eclecticism, however, the order has a general framework according to which all these diverse themes are organized. This framework, the ‘four pillars’ of Dragon Rouge philosophy, is expressed in the formula G.O.T.A. The four letters stand for ‘Goetic Kabbalah’, ‘Odinic Runosophy’, ‘Vāmācāra Tantra’, and ‘Typhonian Alchemy’. Besides a general overview of Dragon Rouge philosophy, the examination of these pillars, in combination with a close scrutiny of the order’s history, also sheds some interesting light on early influences on Dragon Rouge.

In highlighting the Kabbalah, the first of the four pillars is the one that relates most closely to classic nineteenth-century ceremonial magic in the legacy of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Dragon Rouge approach differs, however, in not focusing on the sephiroth but instead on its negative counterpart, the kliphoth. In simplification, in Kabbalistic legend the world was created by Ain Sof through emanation of divine light, which was in turn collected in ten vessels that are called the sephiroth. The kliphoth, then, are conceived of as shards of vessels that broke due to being unable to contain the divine light. These shards, in which sparks of the divine were trapped, fell into the abyss, formed a shadow-creation to the pure and original creation of Ain Sof. Whereas the sephiroth, as the ‘Tree of Life’, is by occultists most often used as a map depicting the road back to union with the godhead, the kliphoth – in Dragon Rouge understanding as the ‘Tree of Knowledge’ – instead map a path away from the godhead and towards individual-focused self-deification. According to the order, ‘[t]he Qliphoth is [sic] the principles of the shadow and the antitheses that are hidden behind everything’, representing ‘fractals and principles of chaos’ to the sephiroth’s ‘mathematical/ geometrical principles’. Where the sephiroth structure and order, the kliphoth instead tear down and break order – not for the sake of destruction in itself, but so that new structures can be erected in place of the old ones. Kliphotic Kabbalah is
also central in that it forms the basis of the Dragon Rouge initiatory system, mirroring a similar use of the sephiroth in the Golden Dawn. ‘Goetic Kabbalah’ does not, however, only relate to the kliphoth. It also refers to the Dragon Rouge use of classic demonology and the medieval (and later) magic books commonly labelled grimoires.\textsuperscript{71} In fact, the very name of the order is (at least partly) derived from one such book; \textit{Le Dragon Rouge}, better known as \textit{Grand Grimoire}.\textsuperscript{72}

Few classic Kabbalistic sources discussing the kliphoth have been translated from their original languages. The subject is also one that has received very little scholarly treatment,\textsuperscript{73} and occultist discussion is equally scarce.\textsuperscript{74} One of the most detailed occultist treatments can be found in Manly P. Hall's \textit{The Secret Teachings of All Ages} from 1928,\textsuperscript{75} and Karlsson admits to having read works by Hall at a young age.\textsuperscript{76} Karlsson also says that much of the early information on the kliphoth was sourced from the works of e.g. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Éliphas Lévi.\textsuperscript{77} However, the influence of Kenneth Grant, by way of the Gothenburg-based group practicing ‘Typhonian magic’ that Thomas Karlsson was in contact with in his youth, should not be dismissed. ‘Typhonian’ is a central term in Grantian occultism, and Grant presents one of the most detailed discussions on the kliphoth to be found anywhere, as well as the earliest positive appraisal of the subject. Books by Grant are also recommended reading in Dragon Rouge's correspondence courses in magic, and there are apparent similarities in rhetoric and vocabulary in Grant's books and Dragon Rouge material. Karlsson states, however, that it took him several years to realize how much the material he received from this Gothenburg-based group was based on Grant's ideas.\textsuperscript{78}

Odinic Runosophy is in official Dragon Rouge material described as ‘the Nordic and Gothic tradition of initiation’.\textsuperscript{79} Odin is seen as a ‘dark and
demonic god', being an exemplar to follow in the quest for self-deification as he is ‘the foremost initiate in these [the runic] mysteries’.\textsuperscript{80} Regarding the runes, Dragon Rouge notes that the word ‘runa’ can be translated as ‘secret’, ‘mystery’, or ‘hidden wisdom’, and exploration of the symbols thus reveals ‘the forces of the universe’ and can grant the explorer vast magical power.\textsuperscript{81} While this focus on Old Norse themes could warrant the labelling of the order as a heathen group, Dragon Rouge wants to steer clear of this label. The motivation is that whereas Ásatú is connected to a time and a place, the Gothic magic of Dragon Rouge is universal and timeless. This can also be seen as a way of dispelling the potential racialist/racist implications of heathenism, and making the order more compelling for a broader audience. The order also seeks to differentiate itself in aligning its runic interests to the Old Norse goddess Hel, with Odinic Runosophy being ‘a path to the realm of death and the goddess of the death’.\textsuperscript{82} Similarly to the interest in Chaos, the focus on death is not an expression of nihilism. Death is instead used as a symbol of secrets and mysteries, and an initiatory intimacy with it is regarded a necessity for achieving immortality.

Two older systems of runosophical speculation have become particularly influential in Dragon Rouge; the ‘Gothic Kabbalah’ of Johannes Bureus and the Uthark theory of Sigurd Agrell. Karlsson has published books on both these subjects.\textsuperscript{83} Bureus in specific has caught Karlsson’s attention, and he has written both a PhD thesis and the lyrics for a metal album dealing with Bureus and his runosophy.\textsuperscript{84}

In Dragon Rouge Vāmācāra Tantra is regarded as a primordial tradition, and one which the Western Left-Hand Path is aligned to. Understandably then, Tantric vocabulary and Tantra-derived practices are central to the order. Kundalini-meditation, as a practice in which the ‘inner Dragon’ is awakened and strengthened, is a component of nearly all Dragon Rouge magical work, and one can find plenty of discussion on the chakras – energy nodes in the human body which are activated as the kundalini gains strength and rises in the practitioner’s body. The order operates with the seven chakras that are standard in most Western representations, from \textit{Muladhara} at the base of the torso to \textit{Sahasrara} above the head, but it also includes discussion on additional ‘black’ chakras such as \textit{Sunya}, located above \textit{Sahasrara}, and the \textit{Talas}, a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Karlsson, \textit{Uthark}; idem, \textit{Adulrunan och den götiska kabbalan}.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Idem, \textit{Götisk kabbala och runisk alkemi}; Therion, \textit{Gothic Kabbalah}.
\end{itemize}
number of energy nodes located below *Muladhara*. In most Western interpretations, Tantra is highly sexualized. While this sexual ingredient is present in Dragon Rouge as well, e.g. with the kundalini representing sexual energies (among other aspects of the human life-force), it is regularly downplayed. For example, sex magic is rarely linked directly to Tantra in the order’s material. This can be seen both as an attempt to escape the hypersexuality of modern Western culture, and as a critique of and opposition to modern Western appropriations of Tantra, presenting the Dragon Rouge approach as more ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ than ‘New Age Tantrism’.

In tracing potential influences for the Dragon Rouge interest in Tantra one yet again encounters Kenneth Grant. Grant discusses Tantra extensively in his books, links Crowley’s sex magic to Tantra, and presents Tantra as one of the most primordial esoteric traditions, particularly in its Vāmācāra form. Much of the same rhetoric that is used by Grant can be found in Dragon Rouge. Another source of influence, although a later one, is the Traditionalist Julius Evola, who is even explicitly mentioned in the order’s short introductory text on ‘G.O.T.A.’ on its webpage. In line with this, some members have demonstrated a partial alignment with the Traditionalist current of esotericism. One of these is long-time member Tommie Eriksson, who is the order’s most active author on the subject of Tantra.

The fourth pillar, ‘Typhonian Alchemy’, represents more of a philosophical framework, and is not the direct basis of practice in the same way as the other pillars. According to the Dragon Rouge webpage, ‘[t]he alchemistic process transforms coal, the fundamental element of all life, from its most weak and porous form through a hardening and ennobling process into the eternal indestructible black diamond’. (Typhonian) alchemy thus represents the foundation of the dark magician’s path to self-deification, which ideally leads

86 Dragon Rouge’s second correspondence course in magic does deal with both Tantra and sex magic, but the two are not directly linked.
87 For a discussion of the Dragon Rouge use of Tantra, see Granholm, ‘The Serpent Rises in the West’.
88 Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’. For discussion on Traditionalism and Evola, see Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*.
89 E.g. Eriksson, ‘Tantra och den vänstra handens väg (del 1)’; idem, ‘Tantra och den vänstra handens väg (del 2)’. As Evola’s Fascist and Nazi connections are well known it is important to point out that this is an aspect that is not present in the Dragon Rouge appropriation of Evola and Tantra.
90 Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’.
the magician to identify his/her higher self or true Will, ennoble it, and thus eventually end up with the pure essence of himself (i.e. the ‘Black Diamond’).91 The order also has an alchemical symbol, displaying the five primary levels of development that the Dragon Rouge initiatory system is divided into (Image 2).

The three previous pillars have something of a geographical or cultural focus, and this is the case with Typhonian Alchemy as well. This time the focus is on ancient Egypt, regarded as the birthplace of alchemy, with neferu such as Set, Khepera, and Khem (Min) mentioned as particularly important. The very specific focus on Set and Khem reveals a probable influence from the Temple

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of Set. ‘Varg’, identified by Karlsson as an important early member of Dragon Rouge, was the apprentice of a North American magician who was focused on ancient Egypt and particularly the concept of Khem.\textsuperscript{92} This magical mentor was in fact Ronald K. Barrett, High Priest of the Temple of Set from 1979 to 1982.\textsuperscript{93} Barrett presented ‘Xem’ as his ‘Aeonic word’\textsuperscript{94} in 1977, but he fully severed his ties to the Temple when stepping down as High Priest. Later, Barrett’s approach has been described as ‘more mystical than magical’ by some members of the Temple, and it is interesting to note that a mystical approach is relatively common in Dragon Rouge.\textsuperscript{95} However, we can yet again discern a potential influence from Kenneth Grant, whose particular branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis is usually labelled with the prefix ‘Typhonian’.

**Structures**

**Membership**

The membership numbers of Dragon Rouge have fluctuated greatly throughout the years, which indicates that Eileen Barker’s observations on the high level of turnover in new religious movements are true for the order as well.\textsuperscript{96} While reliable membership numbers from the earliest period of the order are hard to come by, a person who joined in 1991 estimated that around fifteen or twenty people were involved at this time.\textsuperscript{97} Media reports from the mid 1990s place the membership numbers between 200\textsuperscript{98} and 300,\textsuperscript{99} with scholarly estimations placing the numbers at approximately 400 in 1997.\textsuperscript{100} Other sources claim an even larger membership of 500 in the same year.\textsuperscript{101} An official inquiry made in 1998 by the social department of the Swedish government numbers the dues-paying members of Dragon Rouge at 350.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{92} Idem, *Bland mystiker och magiker i förorten*.
\textsuperscript{93} Interview 2011–01, June 10, 2011.
\textsuperscript{94} For discussion on the Temple of Set and ‘Aeonic words’, see page 65.
\textsuperscript{95} For information on Barrett, see Aquino, *The Temple of Set*. Although flawed in most regards, Gini Graham Scott’s *The Magicians* gives some insight into the Temple of Set during Barrett’s High Priesthood.
\textsuperscript{96} Barker, *New Religious Movements*, 17–18.
\textsuperscript{97} Questionnaire 2001–08.
\textsuperscript{98} Nilsson, ‘Religionens nynazister’; idem, ‘Min son skall tro på djävulen’.
\textsuperscript{99} Stugart, ‘Magiska ritualer åter i ropet’.
\textsuperscript{100} Frisk, *Nyreligiositet i Sverige*, 143.
\textsuperscript{101} Arlebrand et al., *Ny tid ny tro?*, 89, 112.
\textsuperscript{102} SOU, *I god tro*, 65.
According to information received directly from representatives of the order, the membership was around 320 to 350 in mid 2001. Furthermore, national membership figures were given as 200 in Sweden, 70 in Germany, and 50–75 members elsewhere. In 2004, membership had dropped considerably over the board, to 130 members in Sweden, 34 in Germany, and 16 in Italy, with the total membership estimated at 250. Later in the decade the membership numbers have been on the rise. In early 2007 Dragon Rouge was reported to have approximately 360–370 members, with the Swedish members amounting to 140–150, and in August 2009 the membership numbers were around 450. A considerable number of the new members were from the US, a region where the order did not manage to attract many members before the mid 2000s. This also helps explain some aspects of the quite drastic and sudden drop in membership numbers in early 2010, to approximately 300 members. The fact that the loss was predominantly in the US membership probably relates to the late 2000s financial crisis being more acute in the US than in Europe. Even with this fluctuation in membership numbers Dragon Rouge is the largest existing Left-Hand Path magic order. It is also interesting that since the 2000s the majority of members have been non-Swedish.

Official membership numbers are a poor indicator of the societal impact of a religious group. First, they only measure the number of people who have paid their membership dues, and say nothing about their level of activity. Thus, the number of people actively involved at any particular moment in time should be considered to be significantly lower than indicated by the total membership numbers. Second, a religious group affects the surrounding society and often evoke some kind of societal response. Thus more people than the official members fall within the organization’s field of influence, and non-members may even be more significant actors than members in this regard. This is certainly true in regard to Dragon Rouge, considering the massive media attention it triggered in the mid to late 1990s. Thomas Karlsson’s books have also sold in an excess of 20,000 copies, far outnumbering the people who have at one point or another been members of Dragon Rouge. Considering the media-presence of Dragon Rouge, the impressive book sales, and the high level of turnover in the membership, it is safe to say that the order has affected the lives of a great larger number of people than the current membership numbers indicate.

103 Information obtained at the 2001 Dragon Rouge annual meeting.
104 Questionnaire 2001–08.
105 For member activity in the US, see Dragon Rouge, ‘First Official DR Meeting in the USA’; idem, ‘Via Nocturna: Meeting in the US’.
106 Interview 2011–01, June 10, 2011.
There is a considerable spread in the age of members in the order, with the order's webpage simply stating that Dragon Rouge has ‘members in most ages’. According to a former member, people as young as thirteen were involved in the order in 1996. Since the late 2000s, however, an age-limit of eighteen has been set. According to information provided by representatives of the order the average age of members was between eighteen and thirty in the early 2000s. This is corroborated by my own observations in the Stockholm mother-order, with the most active group of members being in ages twenty-five to thirty-five. However, the active non-Swedish members seemed to be somewhat older, ranging from about twenty-five to forty years of age. With the maturation of the order and its core ideologists, the age of active members seems to be on the rise as well. According to my observations the core active members in the Stockholm-region are in their early to late thirties.

Dragon Rouge is a male-dominated order, although the actual ratio of male to female members has varied throughout the order’s history. According to information provided by a representative of the order, three fourths of the membership was male in the early 1990s, less than forty percent in the mid 1990s, and slightly more than fifty percent in the early 2000s. Based on my fieldwork experience from 2001–2004 it would seem that the percentage of female members was slightly exaggerated, with about twenty to thirty percent of the members attending various Dragon Rouge activities on a regular basis being female. It should be noted, however, that this applies to the Stockholm region (although my observations among other Sweden-based groups are similar), and does not take into consideration members who do not actively participate in the order’s formal activities. It is possible that the membership is quite equally divided in terms of gender, but that this cannot be determined by observations at official gatherings. From limited experience in the 2010s it would seem that the gender balance is levelling out.

Male dominance is apparent in the administration of the order as well, with approximately two thirds of the members of the inner circle being male in 2001. Likewise, almost all of the Dragon Rouge material is written by male members and most of the courses and meetings are led by male

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107 Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’.
108 Questionnaire 2002–01.
109 Interview 2011–01, June 10, 2011.
110 Questionnaire 2001–08.
111 Ibid.
112 Questionnaire 2001–03.
members – although changes on both these fronts are apparent from the mid 2000s onwards. Representatives of the order express a desire to have more female members participating actively and there exists a specific women’s group within the order. The conviction is that groups of this kind can function to inspire female members to become involved in the order’s inner workings, as well as help them in their own individual magical development. In regard to the predominance of men in the inner circle it should be remembered that no current female members have been active within the order for as long as the senior male members. The women who have been with the order for a considerable length of time are beginning to take on more official tasks. Some of the non-Swedish lodges also have female members in high positions, such as (the now defunct) Lodge Magan in Poland that was run by female members, and the Italian lodge Sothis that had at least one leading female member.

This apparent over-estimation of the numbers of female members, the keenness to demonstrate an even gender balance, and the readiness to point out that measures have been taken to ensure a greater involvement of female members are interesting factors in themselves. One can also find attempts to assert that the relative scarceness of women in the administration of the order actually demonstrates the absence of a gender-based hierarchy, due to the administrational tasks being among the most tiresome and mundane aspects of the order’s work. Partly, this drive to both perceive and establish an important role for women in the order is an expression of the aspiration to focus on female magical, religious, and mythic characters and themes, and a natural extension of this discursive primacy of the feminine divine. These themes will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

**Organization**

Dragon Rouge is organized in three layers. The outer layer consists of all members who have paid the yearly membership fee. These members receive the Dragon Rouge journal *Dracontias* four times a year and have access to the order’s intranet. Earlier, up until the late 2000s, most courses and meetings arranged in Stockholm were open to uninitiated members, and even to non-members if they contacted the order beforehand. This was changed due to practical reasons, as some practices were not suitable to uninitiated members. Dragon Rouge members also have the opportunity to take correspondence courses in

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114 See Questionnaire 2001–08.
115 Questionnaire 2001–03.
116 Interview 2011–01, June 10, 2011.
magic, which in turn makes it possible for them to be initiated\textsuperscript{117} and thus gain access to the second organizational level.\textsuperscript{118} Besides deeper insight into the order’s magical system, initiation into the degrees also gives admittance to some specialized courses and meetings. Usually these courses are more elaborate and require more serious and/or experienced participants. When being initiated into the third degree, the initiate enters the third organizational structure, the Dragon Order. The initiate swears the Dragon Oath, ceremonially declaring him- or herself willing to be more deeply involved in the practice of magic as well as the organization’s inner workings.\textsuperscript{119}

The administrative, ideological, economic, and other practical spheres of the order are managed by an inner circle. The members of this circle are not elected. It is instead comprised of various individuals who have more experience with the order and have taken a more active role in the organization.\textsuperscript{120} This is accentuated by the circle having a dynamic structure, where the specific constitution depends on the questions discussed.\textsuperscript{121} However, certain members have a more or less constant presence. In particular, this applies to Karlsson and two other members who have been involved in the order since the early 1990s. These three persons, with Karlsson leading, have produced the vast majority of the order’s material, and thus have the most influence in both the Dragon Rouge magical system and the order’s administration. Since the early 2000s a number of other members have become more or less constant members of the circle as well. Members of the inner circle have expressed a wish for the order not to be dependent on any one individual member, and that Dragon Rouge should be able to exist even if its long-time members cease to be active for some reason or another.\textsuperscript{122} In addition, Dragon Rouge lodges have their own inner circles, officially consisting of the lodge leader, secondary lodge leader, treasurer, and scribe.

In comparison to another of the larger Left-Hand Path groups, the Temple of Set, the Dragon Rouge administration is much less structured and ordered. Organized as a corporation, the Temple has offices of High Priest and Executive Director, the holders of which are chosen by a council of nine members who

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} See e.g. Dragon Rouge, ‘Magikurser’.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Questionnaire 2001–03.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid. Aleister Crowley saw magical oaths as beneficial for the magician’s development; they are expressions of Will and something that one should not, or cannot, break. See Crowley,\textit{ Magick}, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Questionnaire 2001–01; 2001–04; 2001–05; 2001–08.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Interview 2001–04, April 2, 2001; Questionnaire 2001–08.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Questionnaire 2001–08.
\end{itemize}
are elected by the Priesthood, i.e. all members who have achieved degree three or higher.123

Local Groups

Dragon Rouge was founded in Stockholm, Sweden, but has spread to several other locations in both its country of origin and elsewhere. The Dragon Rouge group in Stockholm is called the mother-order, and it is there that the central administration of the order is located and where all major order-wide decisions are made. The local chapters of the order are divided into ritual groups, temple groups, and lodges.

Regionalized Dragon Rouge activity first commenced with lodges, with the early 1990s Gävle-based Black Earth Lodge being one of the first local groups.124 In December 2013 there were three lodges in Sweden (besides the mother-order) and one in Italy. The Swedish lodges are called Sinistra – located in Malmö and founded in 2001,125 Atlantis – located in Uppsala and recognized as a lodge in 2010,126 and Chimera – located in Gothenburg, founded as a ritual group in 2006, promoted to temple group status in 2009,127 and recognized as a lodge in 2013.128 The Italian lodge Sothis, located in Naples, started out as a ritual group in late 2002 and attained lodge-status in late 2003.129 Until 2013 the webpage of Dragon Rouge listed a German lodge, Heldrasil, which started as a ritual group in 2003, attained lodge-status in 2004 and was located in Thüringen. It was an outgrowth of the earlier German lodge Thagirion that operated in Hagen between 1999 and 2002.130 Between 2004 and 2009, the order also had a Polish lodge, Magan, based in Silesia. The current lodges have a lodge-degree between 1.0 and 5.0, reflecting the time the local group has been an official lodge of Dragon Rouge as well as its level of activity.131 Lodge Sothis has lodge-degree 3.0, Sinistra lodge-degree 2.0, and Atlantis lodge-degree 1.0. As a newly founded lodge, Chimera holds lodge-degree 1.0. Heldrasil had lodge-degree 2.0 when it was still listed.132

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123 Granholm, ‘The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism’. In addition the Temple has offices for treasurer and information director.
124 Håkansson. ‘Den röda drakten’.
128 Idem, ‘Inauguration of Lodge Chimera’.
129 Idem, ‘Ritual Group Neapel, Italy’; idem, ‘Lodge Sothis’.
131 Idem, ‘Lodges and Ritual Groups’.
132 Idem, ‘Lodges’.
A long-time member of Dragon Rouge divides the lodges into three generations.\footnote{133} The first-generation lodges were all situated in Sweden, and were not as organized as the later lodges. The second-generation lodges, e.g. Odins in Karlshamn (1997–2001)\footnote{134} and Helheim in Gothenburg (ceased operations in 2004),\footnote{135} contributed with material, were more organized, and worked in closer co-operation with the mother-order than those of the first generation. The third-generation lodges, with Sinistra as the first one, are subject to far stricter rules than the earlier two generations.\footnote{136} In the late 2000s the order has assumed an even stricter policy. Rather than encouraging the formation of lodges, the order now awards lodge-status to those local that which have functioned exceptionally well for a longer period of time.\footnote{137}

In 2001, at the same time as the third generation of lodges came into existence, the ritual group structure was introduced. This is generally considered as a preliminary organizational stage, where the most successful and active groups may reach the status of lodges over time. In the issue 2.2013 of the member's journal *Dracontias* only one ritual group is listed, located in Curitiba, Brazil.\footnote{138} Previous ritual groups have existed in Prague, the Czech Republic (2001–2004); Buenos Aires, Argentina (2001–2003); Krezepice, Poland (2002–2003); Växjö, Sweden (2004); an unspecified location in the South-Western Germany (2004–2005); and Mexico (2007–2009).\footnote{139} In addition, some ritual groups have successfully been transformed into lodges, or, more recently, temple groups. The latter is a mid-level organizational structure that was introduced in late 2008, with the ritual groups in Finland (formed in late 2005) and Uppsala, Sweden (formed in late 2004, became lodge Atlantis in 2010), being the first to be promoted.\footnote{140} The latest listed (December 2013) temple groups are located in Finland, Liverpool (England), and Athens (Greece). The group in Athens was founded as a ritual group in 2006 and became a temple group in 2013.\footnote{141}
Initiatory Structure

As noted earlier, the Dragon Rouge use of the kliphoth as the basis of its initiatory structure is similar to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn’s use of the sephiroth. However, whereas the Golden Dawn had ten degrees to mirror the ten sephirothic spheres, Dragon Rouge operates with eleven initiatory degrees. This is to mirror the total separation from the godhead when reaching the final initiatory level. The tenth and the final klipha is described as a split sphere with two ‘demon rulers’. Eleven is also a number described by Kenneth Grant as the number of magic.142 The Dragon Rouge initiatory degrees are:

1.0 – Lilith
2.0 – Gamaliel
3.0 – Samael
4.0 – A’arab Zaraq
5.0 – Thagirion
6.0 – Golachab
7.0 – Gha’agsheblah
8.0 – Satariel
9.0 – Ghagiel
10.0 – Thaumiel
11.0 – Thaumiel143

The initiatory system is furthermore divided into five stages, depicted in the Dragon Rouge alchemical symbol. These stages are: ‘The womb of Lilith’ – involving the first degree, ‘the chalice of the astral’ – involving degrees two through four, ‘the black sun’ – involving degrees five through seven, ‘Daath’, and ‘the star level’ – involving degrees eight through eleven.144 This is similar to divisions of the Golden Dawn’s initiatory structure – the first/outer (degrees 0° to 4°), second/inner (degrees 5° to 7°), and third orders (degrees 8° to 10°, devoted to the ‘secret chiefs of the order’) – and the Ordo Templi Orientis – ‘The Man of Earth’ (degrees 0 to IV), the lower triad (degrees V to VII), and the hermetic triad (degrees VIII to IX, as well as the administrational degrees X and XII and the additional degree XI). In the occultist-Kabbalist lore Daath represents the abyss, a void that the initiate needs to pass before reaching the lowest levels of the kliphoth. In Kenneth Grant’s understanding, Daath represents a
shadow-sephira under the three highest sephiroth, and the kliphoth are accessed through it (Image 3). ¹⁴⁵

To proceed with the initiation, the member needs to buy correspondence courses in magic and do the exercises described in them. The correspondence course for degree 1.0 became available in 1995 or 1996,¹⁴⁶ and first updated in 1998.¹⁴⁷ It was thoroughly updated in 2004, at which point the introductory course ‘0.0’ was also made available.¹⁴⁸ The course for degree 2.0 was introduced in the late 1990s,¹⁴⁹ and for degree 3.0 in early 2001.¹⁵⁰ For degree 3.0 only half of the course is contained in the correspondence material. For the rest, the initiate is expected to communicate with representatives of the order and thus personalize and individualize his/her exercises. The course extends for a minimum period of six months for courses 1.0 and 2.0, and one year for course 3.0. Earlier, a personal contact-person was assigned for the initiate, but since the late 2000s initiates instead correspond with several members of the order through the Dragon Rouge online discussion forum. Upon finishing the first course the initiate is expected to write a short report of at least one page, summarizing his or her experiences and sensations during the course. The initiate also writes a text of at least one page elaborating on his/her view on the Dragon Rouge magic system. After finishing the first course and having sent in the texts dealing with his/her experiences with and interpretation of the order’s magic system, the initiate can be allowed into the first degree of Dragon Rouge. The first-degree initiation can be performed by the initiate him-/herself, but for higher degrees the presence and assistance of at least two members initiated in the same or higher degree is required. The requirements get progressively more demanding with the increase in degrees. Upon completing the second correspondence course the initiate writes a lengthier essay on his/her experiences, and also expresses in what direction he/she would like to steer his/her magical development. Members can buy the first and second correspondence course without having been initiated, but the third one is strictly for those initiated into the second degree. After initiation into degree 3.0, and the Dragon Order, the magical development of the initiate is more closely

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¹⁴⁵ Grant, Cults of the Shadow, 7–8.
¹⁴⁷ This is mentioned in Dragon Rouge, Draksådd 1998, 1.
¹⁴⁸ Idem, ‘Magikurser’.
¹⁴⁹ The second correspondence course is first advertised in early 1999 (idem, ‘Magikurs 2.0’), and first mentioned in early 1998 (idem, Dracontias 1998, 1).
¹⁵⁰ The third course is first advertised in the first issue of the order’s information letter of 2001. Idem, ‘Magikurs 3.0’.
Image 3  The Kliphotic 'Tree of Knowledge', basis for the Dragon Rouge initiatory structure
ILLUSTRATION BY T. KETOLA
connected with the activities of the other members who have attained higher degrees and with the development of the order as a whole as well.\textsuperscript{151} No correspondence courses for degrees beyond 3.o exist. The reason given is that after this stage the development of initiates is so diversified that more individualized and personalized approaches are required.\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{151} Information gained during my participation in the 2001 Dragon Rouge annual meeting.
\item\textsuperscript{152} Interview 2007–04, April 22, 2007.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
CHAPTER 4

Ethnographies of Dark Magic

In the following chapter I will share some of my first-hand experiences with Dragon Rouge, and thus provide a more vivid insight into the actual practice of the magicians of the order. I will detail and analyze a course on ceremonial magic in 2001, the opening of lodge Sinistra in Malmö, Sweden, also in 2001, and my own initiation into the second initiatory degree of the order in 2004. Finally, I will discuss prominent trends in Dragon Rouge ritual practice, outlining a more generalized framework in which to situate the ethnographies presented here.

Course on Ceremonial Magic

I was full of anticipation, and a fair amount of anxiety, when I awoke on the morning of Saturday August 5, 2001. This was the day when a rather unique two-day course on ceremonial magic was to be arranged in the regime of Dragon Rouge, and one I would be expected to take a fairly active role in. I was in no way unfamiliar with the order and its ritual practice, having started my fieldwork in February of the same year, but I still felt that my relatively short time as a participant-observer had not really prepared me for what lay ahead. It was just about five pm when I arrived at the metro station close to the Dragon Rouge temple in Stockholm, and two of the order’s members were already waiting there. The dark-clad male and the equally dark-clad female, both in their mid twenties, were familiar to me so I walked up to them and stroke up a conversation. My anxiety must have been apparent, because they both reassured me that I had nothing to worry about. Soon, we started to make our way to the Dragon Rouge temple, just a five-minute walk from the station. We were among the first to arrive, but it did not take long before other members started to drop in. In total we were six men and three women, all of whom had at least some experience in magic and the order. Sitting down at various seats in the temple, some at the two tables and others on the sofa, the aroma of incense and the sound of casual conversation filled the room.

At about five-thirty pm, Thomas Karlsson started the course by handing out magic correspondence tables. Most responded by picking up notebooks and pens, but it took a while for the conversations to fully die down. ‘Occultist magic in the tradition of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn often relies
on complex and complicated ritual work, with equally complicated symbolism, ritual attire, and architecture', Thomas started. 'The meaning of these rituals can be difficult to penetrate, and it can sometimes feel a bit weird to do them', he continued. To shed light on the perplexities, he went on to discuss the symbolism of Western magic, soon focusing on King Solomon and the temple of Jerusalem allegedly commissioned by him. In white magic, Thomas said, ‘we see how the notion of the temple is connected to the idea that there exists an ulterior perfect geometry, the image of which all of creation was originally intended to be shaped in’. ‘With the fall of man’, he continued, ‘that perfect geometry was disturbed, an element of Chaos that destroyed this perfect geometry entered and the material world was a fact’. White magic, Thomas said, is an attempt to ‘find one's way back to this divine geometry, and to create the soul of the human being in accordance with it, building a temple that is a mirror image of the soul of the human being’. He pointed out what he regarded to be the main problem with the temple-building of white ritual magic: ‘one restores the old form, where we ourselves as individuals perhaps won’t fit’.

Black ritual magic, which Thomas distinguished from ritual black magic, ‘is a sort of counterweight to this idea of the perfect temple, a form of kliphotic ritual magic that is mythologically connected to the forces that destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, which broke the circle to the Garden of Eden’. He further explained: ‘Magic that strives for a sort of rebirth, where one goes from being inside the circle to perhaps becoming a co-creator, first needs to break these mental barriers and structures’. In order to avoid misunderstandings he quickly continued: ‘It’s not about letting the forces of Chaos chew one up, which could happen. One creates a new order with the help of the forces of Chaos’. Summarizing his views on the difference between white and black magic Thomas concluded: ‘One has the ambition to make the circle whole, the other has the ambition to break the circle’.

By this time Thomas had picked up a large lecture pad and placed it on a stand in front of us to further illustrate the points of his lecture. Drawing stylized pictures of ‘typical’ white and black magic temples, Thomas elaborated on the main differences between the two. As white magic strives to re-establish the divine circle of creation and achieve union with the divine, the altar usually stands at the centre of the ritual sphere and is surrounded by the magicians. In dark magic, in contrast, where the goal is to break free from the boundaries of creation, the altar is typically placed in front of the participants, as a portal out. Where the former strives for perfection and has clear shapes, Thomas said, the latter ‘connects to an idea of diabolical architecture, that which is not perfect’, which then ‘confuses the consciousness rather than stabilizes it’ and ‘opens portals to the unknown whereas white ceremonial magic instead closes them’.
The lecture lasted for approximately an hour, and seamlessly shifted to a general discussion on the practicalities of ceremonial magic in general, and on the ceremony we were to perform the next day in particular. Considering the practicalities, Thomas suggested: ‘One variant would be that we make a simple division to start with, we are six men and three women’. Turning to the female members who were present, he continued: ‘so you can represent the letter three’. This he connected to the three alchemical base elements salt, quicksilver, and sulphur, but at the suggestion of one of the women we collectively decided that the women should represent the different aspects of time; past, present, and future. It was more difficult to find logical roles for us men, as our number did not immediately express any obvious magical significance. The four cardinal points were eventually chosen as a starting point. ‘The four cardinal points’, Thomas said, ‘there we have the staff, the goblet, the pentacle, and the sword. What could be added are the above and the below’. The discussion continued well over an hour, slowly shifting to more mundane matters not dealing with magic, and it was about eight-thirty pm when we left the temple.

For the second day of the course the participants were supposed to meet up at the Dragon Rouge temple at five pm, before heading out to the forest for the ceremony. I had, however, scheduled an interview with a Dragon Rouge member before the ceremony so I headed to the temple about two hours earlier. Other members started to drop by at around four-thirty, and after some general conversation, we all headed out at about five-fifteen. August tends to be a rather warm late-summer month in southern Sweden, but this particular Sunday was quite cold. The wind was chilling us to the bones even though we were all wearing extra warm clothes, but luckily the sky was clear and no rain was expected. Leaving the metro, just a few stations from the Dragon Rouge temple, we were met by a few members who had arrived by car. All of those who had attended the lecture the day before were present, and we were joined by a fourth woman who had shown up for the very end of the lecture. Together we entered a narrow woodland path surrounded by mostly pine trees, with scatterings of spruce and juniper thrown in as if to provide some diversity. As we slowly moved along, careful not to unduly disturb any of the forest plants, I was told that we were heading for a spot where a Dragon Rouge ceremony had been performed the previous spring.

Before we could reach the spot, however, Thomas stopped by a moss-covered stony mound and waived us in for a short impromptu lecture (Image 4). ‘The point with the ceremony here is to create a space for not ordinary perception but an experience of mythological time, where myth is present in the here and now’. Everyone was listening intently, and he continued: ‘When one goes out in this way and creates a form of ritual space, one can also create a sort of
meaning and context for oneself. Instead of the trees just being something that we do not reflect on they become set in a context where we ourselves are located. This is an important premise for acts of creation, Thomas told us, and indeed something that a dark magician must practice in a world where structure and stagnation bridles creativity: ‘The problem is that from this Chaos, order has been brought forth, but then order has become so strong that those who are located in it have lost their awareness of that which lies outside it. The security and meaning that order originally was intended to generate has instead of being a shelter become a prison’. In order to be able to create, we must first learn to un-create, seemed to be what Thomas implied, and that was the general intent of the ceremony we were going to perform. Thomas ended by suggesting that we start by meditating on nature itself, and pointed towards the mound we were standing by, urging us to note the view.

And the view was indeed fantastic. The mound was not much elevated from where we had been standing, but the other end of it revealed a steep drop of a couple of metres, providing a panoramic view of the rather densely packed trees in the forest below. Our silent meditation lasted for only a few minutes, and was not guided like most of the other meditations I had experienced in the order thus far. When finished, Thomas asked us to search the forest and pick an
object that for some reason appealed\textsuperscript{1} to us. The dead bird that we had passed just before starting the meditation was to be used as the centrepiece of our altar, and was thus not to be specifically chosen by any of us. Strolling around near the mound, most of us chose twigs found lying on the ground, with two of the female members choosing pine cones. Led by Thomas, we then made our way to the spot intended for the ceremony.

Had it not been for the members who had visited the spot earlier pointing the area out to me, I would not have recognized it as anything special. There were no visible markers to distinguish it from the rest of the forest. It was up to the magician, by way of his/her intuition and imagination, to demarcate the area as a magical temple. Forming a line, we proceeded to enter the area through a ‘portal’ formed by two pine trees standing next to each other (Image 5). Before entering, each of us used the objects we had gathered to symbolically open the portal to let us in. Thomas led us to a rock, split into two levels and located some twelve metres from the portal, which was to function as the altar in our ceremony. We had brought with us four small tealights,

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image5.jpg}
\caption{Course on ceremonial magic: Portal to the temple}
\label{image5}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
PHOTOGRAPH BY KENNET GRANHOLM, 2001
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{1} Thomas used the Swedish word ‘Tilltala’, which can be used both in the meaning ‘to please’ (as in: this object pleases me) and in the meaning ‘speak to’ (as in: ‘this object speaks to me’). In the above sentence ‘appeals to’ should be understood in both of these meanings.
two large and thick candles, the ceremonial dagger and bell from the temple, and a jar of incense, all of which we now placed on our stony altar. A bunch of twigs collected from the forest were also placed on the rock, most simply lying flat but three of them erected to form a ‘split’ triangle pointing towards the sky. The carcass of the small bird found earlier was placed on top of the altar (Image 6). Having performed these preparations, Thomas pointed out a tree standing behind and slightly to the right of the altar, which was to function as an additional focal point in the ceremony – an *Axis Mundi*.

We had had a general discussion concerning various aspects of the ceremony the day before, but the specifics had not yet been agreed upon. Thomas took the lead, and suggested that we should use our own discern rather than rely on any directives found in the writings of other magicians: ‘It concerns how we should create a space’, Thomas said, suggesting that the three women who were to represent time – as the three Norns, *Urd* (past), *Verdandi* (present), and *Skuld* (future) – could line up from the portal to behind the altar. The placement of the fourth woman, who would assume the role of the Old Norse death-goddess Hel, was trickier. ‘Hmm… Where should Hel be placed’, Thomas wondered. Collectively we decided that instead of having a stationary role, she should move to always stand on the left side of the person performing his/her ceremonial duties. Thomas was satisfied with this: ‘I think
the symbolism is pretty clear’. We men were to represent the cardinal points manifested as the elements corresponding to beings from Old Norse myth, so placing us with the help of a compass was easier, with the exception of the two who were to represent the extended cardinal points of above and below: ‘somebody will have to climb up a tree to represent “that which is above” and somebody will have to bury themselves to represent “that which is below”’, Thomas jokingly said, quickly adding ‘does anyone have any good ideas?’ in a more serious tone. Some ideas were thrown around, but at the suggestion of one of the female members we soon decided that it would be enough if ‘above’ and ‘below’ would simply keep their focus on the crown and roots, respectively, of the tree representing the axis mundi. The order of the ceremony was also opened up for discussion. ‘Do you think we should start with time or space’, Thomas asked, to which one of the women promptly answered ‘time’. Thomas agreed: ‘Time has to be what starts the act of creation, and after that space is formed’. ‘Which cardinal point would be best to start with’, Thomas also wondered, to which ‘north’ was suggested and quickly agreed upon. In the same fashion, the ceremonial proclamations that each participant was to utter were subject of collective discussion, and we agreed on a basic structure with the specifics to be improvised. The debate was briefly interrupted when Thomas accidentally stepped on a twig and broke it, saying: ‘Oh, now I broke, somebody’s individuality’. Laughter filled the woods and one of the male members further elaborated on the joke. Soon we continued in a more serious tone, however, with Thomas briefly reiterating the aim of the ceremony: ‘the actual purpose of the ceremony is to create this temple, but also to conjure the true soul out of Chaos, that is to say the Red Dragon, out of the order in Chaos that we have formed’. He continued, ‘through creating a ritual space, a temple, a magical space, we have the ability to find a place where we can communicate with Chaos – a place where we are co-creators in the continuous movement of Chaos’. All these preparations, with the brief interruptions, took well over twenty minutes.

The ceremony began with the lighting of the incense at the altar and a brief preparatory meditation. Hel rang the ceremonial bell, stating: ‘I am Hel, that which is hidden’. She then moved to positions behind the rest of us, and we similarly and in turn – from the Norns in chronological order to the extended cardinal points – presented ourselves and our cosmic functions. ‘I am Urd, the border to the past; memory, birth!’, ‘I am Verdandi, the middle and the being!’, ‘I am Skuld, the border to the future!’, the women proclaimed in due order, each time followed by Hel ringing the bell. The men continued: ‘I am Fenris, the border to the north, carrier of the unyielding earth!’, ‘The clear thought of
the east am I, Loki of the air!; ‘I am Surtr, the border to the south; fire, energy!; ‘I am Jörmungandr, the border to the west!; ‘I am Nidhögg, that which is below!; ‘I am the eagle, Hraesvelgr, the border to the above; the sky and the hail!’ The ringing of Hel’s bell was heard after each proclamation. When this first part of the ceremony was finished, in essence amounting to the creation of a dark magical universe, Hel moved back to her own position at the left-hand side of the altar. The rest of us approached the altar, in the same order as before, and presented our ceremonial objects to it, while calling out the Red Dragon from our respective cosmological realm and adding the standard Dragon Rouge proclamation ‘Ho Drakon ho Megas!’ The otherwise silent forest echoed with ‘Ho Drakon Ho Megas!’ in chorus as we all responded to each others’ declarations. Finally, Hel moved up to the altar to present her sacrifice, repeating the ceremonial uttering thrice, with all of us responding in like and each time with increased volume. After a silent meditation for about two minutes Thomas declared the ceremony ended. All in all the ceremony had lasted approximately twelve minutes, far less than the preparations for it.

We collected the items that we had brought with us and removed the dead bird from the altar stone, primarily in order not to raise undue suspicion in people who might visit the same spot. Leaving our sacred object at the altar, we left through the same portal that we had entered through, this time using our hands to symbolically open and close it.

**Analysis**

The course on ceremonial magic was quite uncustomary in the Dragon Rouge context as it involved the participants taking on specified and distinct roles; in most of the order’s ritual practice this is not the case. In many other ways, however, the course aptly exemplifies the standard model of Dragon Rouge practice. Courses usually start with the ‘teacher’, usually one of the active long-time members, standing in front of his/her ‘class’ giving a theoretical talk on a specific subject that is relevant in the context. While the lecturer’s own experience is important, it is common to refer to the works of various authorities to substantiate the claims made. Theories and discussions of other magicians are included, but primarily the references are to scholarly sources from religious studies, anthropology, or some other relevant field. The patterning of Dragon Rouge courses on the basis of university lectures is not all too strange; most of the members who teach courses in the regime of Dragon Rouge have some background in academia. The similarity to university lectures also extends to the ‘students’, who commonly take notes and ask questions after the ‘lecturer’ has finished talking, and often comment during the lecture. The point I am
trying to make is not that the course leaders of Dragon Rouge use deceitful means in order to make their claims more credible, or that the Dragon Rouge course is a false simulacrum of the genuine thing, a regular university lecture. What I am saying is that for both the course leader and for many of those participating in the course, the university lecture is an accessible and familiar pattern to model the learning situation on. The rhetoric of much modern magic literature, just as modern magic practice, is modelled on rationalist-scientific examples, portraying magic as the study and exploration of the unknown, the methods and results of which are then communicated to the audience – in a superficial resemblance of academic works.

Dragon Rouge courses always include practice. Representatives of the order frequently criticize what they perceive to be an over-emphasis on theory in many other magic orders and occult organizations, and the statement ‘[i]t is not possible to be a theoretical magician’ is one of the guidelines of the order’s first correspondence course in magic. In contrast to most other courses in the regime of Dragon Rouge, the course on ceremonial magic involved practice not in a ritual chamber but in the confines of nature. It was similar, however, in that it started with an initial meditation, the purpose of which was to achieve a separation from everyday reality. The ritual space was not set apart from the outset as is the case with a ritual chamber, and the establishing of it was an important aspect of the ceremony itself. A break was taken before entering the ‘temple’ and magical tools were used to ‘open a portal’ to it, both in order to establish a sacred space and to catalyze a suitable mind-set. In the same way, the ‘closing of the portal’ that was performed when leaving the temple marked a return to ordinary reality. The participants of the ceremony established the borders of the sacred space by their own positions, thus forging an intimate connection and interdependence between the temple and its occupants. The act of establishing borders, with the ceremonial officers declaring their cosmological roles, also functioned as the very ‘creation of a dark magical universe’. Hel, representing ‘the hidden’, starting and ending the presentations – and indeed the whole ceremony, signalled that the source of everything lay in the realm of Chaos. The second part of the ceremony was then a symbolic act of endowing the newly created magical universe, and the occupants and ‘gods’ of it – the ceremonial officials, with power.

Various ceremonial tools commonly have a central function in magical ceremony. Among the most important of these, as described by Aleister Crowley, are the ‘Wand, Cup, Sword, and Pantacle [or pentacle], to represent his

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2 See e.g. Interview 2001–04, April 2, 2001.
[the magician's] Will, his Understanding, his Reason, and the lower parts of his being, respectively’. Some of these tools were present in the Dragon Rouge ceremony as well, but had partially different functions and interpretations. Only the sword, in the form of a dagger, had been brought along, and in the Dragon Rouge context it primarily represents protection and the element of air. The cup (or goblet) tends to be interpreted as representing the feminine. The altar, and the whole of the temple, could be seen as representing the element of earth, and thus ‘the lower parts of the magician’s being’. The only direct correlation to conventional magical symbolism as described by Crowley lay in the wand representing the magician’s Will. In this case, however, the wand took the form of the ‘sacred items’ that had been collected in the forest before the ceremony, and the collecting of these objects strengthened the magician’s identification with and connection to the forest, and imbued him/her with the power of Chaos present in nature. Interestingly, a central aspect of the ceremony was the sacrifice of the magic item representing the magician’s Will. However, as the magician also represented the symbolic universe in the ceremony, the sacrifice was directed to the magician him-/herself. The sacrificial act can thus be seen as an act of ultimate emancipation where the magician not only becomes a universe in and by him-/herself, but also fully self-sustaining in feeding him-/herself with his/her own energy and power in an eternal cycle of recreation. The bell is another central magical tool mentioned by Crowley, of which he writes: ‘At the sound of this Bell the Universe ceases for an indivisible moment of time, and attends to the Will of the Magician’. The ringing of the bell can be understood as the act through which the magician’s ritual uttering is rendered real, in the case of this particular ceremony the act through which the aspects of space and time came into existence. It is of significance that the bell was rung by Hel, who was the primary representative of Chaos in the ceremony.

The Ceremonial Opening of Lodge Sinistra

During my early field studies, only my second trip in fact, I was invited to witness something quite rare and unique, the ceremonial opening of a Dragon Rouge lodge. The day was Saturday February 17, 2001, and the place was Malmö, Sweden. Arriving at the Malmö railway station in the early afternoon I was met by Dragon Rouge members from the region, as well as from Stockholm,

5 Ibid., 11.
Gothenburg, and a small city in southern Sweden. We walked to a Chinese restaurant for food and conversation, and at about four pm we decided to venture to the home of the Malmö-based member where the lodge-opening ceremony was to be performed. The residential building we entered was as unassuming as the rest in the area, but entering the residence itself provided something out of the ordinary. The living room, about three meters wide and five meters long, had been specifically prepared for the ceremony. The dark red walls and even darker hardwood floor gave a solemn impression, with only the white of the ceiling and the radiator by the window providing a contrast. There was no electrical lighting in the room, and the four spaces in the chandelier hanging from the ceiling held no candles. The room was dimly illuminated by six red candles on the one meter high candelabra standing in the left-hand far-side corner of the room (Image 7). The only window in the room, on the short side close to the candelabra, was covered with black canvas, and in front of it a table furnished as an altar had been placed. It was covered with black cloth, and adorned with a wooden dragon-statue at the very centre, three lit red candles on each far end, three unlit candles sporadically placed, a metal bell, a metal cup for incense, a ceremonial dagger with its sheath, and a wooden stick functioning as a magic wand. Red roses and rose-petals surrounded the items.
The sinister design was made complete by the two bullwhips and bouquet of dried roses hanging on the left long-side wall of the room.

It was about twenty to six when everyone who was planning to attend, six women and eleven men in total, had arrived. Before starting the opening ceremony, however, a few of the Malmö-based members were to receive their first-degree initiations. Thomas invited the inner circle of the order, the lodge-leaders who were present, and those about to be initiated to step into the ritual chamber, and told the rest of us to wait in another room. The door to the chamber was closed, but I could hear chanting, ringing of the ceremonial bell, and what I made out to be the ‘invocation of Lilith’.

‘Lepaca Lilith!’, Thomas called out in a stern voice, to which other voices replied in like. ‘Ruach! Badad! Arioth! Samolo! Sched!’, he continued, again with other voices responding after each word. As the other voices died down, Thomas continued:

Lilith, open your womb, open the shell of darkness and appear from the cave of dark dreams! Lilith, let your blood stir like the lava from the volcano to become the force through which the Dragon rises!

He then called out more names and words of power, ‘Opun Lilith! Ama! Layil! Naamah! Rimog! Arioth! Lirochi! Lilith!’; again with the other voices responding.

Oh Lilith, in your embrace the world is seduced and there the remnants of the ages meet under the shadow of your cruelty!

‘Naamah! Rimog! Arioth! Lirochi Lilith!’, Thomas continued, again with responses:

Lilith, you hold the sceptre and you hold the domination. Give us dominance and the fulfilment of dreams!

‘Lepaca Lilith! Ruach! Arioth! Naamah! Samalo! Sched!’, and yet again other voices thundered in response. Finally, Thomas called out the Dragon Rouge greeting ‘Ho Drakon Ho Megas!’ thrice, each time with increased volume, and with other voices repeating in chorus.6
The initiations were finished in about half an hour, after which a short break was held. Before starting the lodge-opening ceremony, Thomas showed the soon-to-be lodge officials and me the lodge contract, a document stating the rights and duties of a Dragon Rouge lodge. We all moved into the ritual chamber, to an expectant atmosphere intensified by the scent of Dragon’s Blood incense and the scant candlelight illuminating the altar. Thomas moved to stand in front of the altar, and invited two of the long-time female members from Stockholm to sit down on the chairs beside it. The rest of us stood in a semi-circle around Thomas and the altar, with the three lodge leaders present, and me, standing closest. Wielding the magic wand, Thomas led us into the Dragon ceremony:

Melez! (Melez!)8

I call the Dragon, the lord of Ancient Atlantis, you who dwell in the abyss in the depth of my soul. I call the Dragon. Rise up out of the depths of the oceans. Emerge out of the darkness. Let your fires light up the darkness of my existence!

Lepaca Kliphoth! (Lepaca Kliphoth!)


May the flames from your jaws become the power of my existence.

I call you, you the most ancient of the ancient. Oh Tehom, emerge from

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7 The original document had nine points, stating that (1) the lodge is approved as a fully fledged part of the order and has the right to identify itself by a lodge name; (2) the contract is valid for a period of two years; (3) the lodge receives degree 1.0, and can advance through age, activity, increase in members, and magical, organizational, and economic contributions to the order; (4) the lodge is obliged to arrange activities regularly, at least six times per year, as well as plan and finance a visit by representatives of the inner circle once per year; (5) the lodge is obliged to report on its activities and inner workings four times per year; (6) the lodge is obliged to keep a good economy and expand its activities and influence; (7) the lodge should actively strive to attract serious members, and only bar unsuitable members in negotiation with the inner circle; (8) the lodge leaders should work for the benefit of the other members of the lodge, and lead by way of example; and (9) the lodge may not under its own name pursue activities outside or in conflict with Dragon Rouge as a whole (Dragon Rouge, ‘Regler för att starta en magigrupp och loge inom Dragon Rouge’). The most recent version of the contract is from 2006, and adds a tenth point; that ‘[t]he Lodge shall base its magical, theoretical and practical activities on the magical system of Dragon Rouge’, and strive for a balanced inclusion of the ‘different aspects of the dark magical systems that Dragon Rouge emphasizes’ (idem, ‘Structures for Lodges and Ritual Groups’).

8 Text in parentheses indicates repetition by the other participants in the ceremony.
the kingdom of shadows, rise from the black sea of chaos and destroy the lies we take as truths. I conjure your power so that it becomes a part of my being. May I, wanderer on the path of the Dragon, be filled up by the life-giving and death-delivering fires from the red dragon's jaws!

Tehom! Harombrub! Roggiol! Buriol! Abahim! Theli! Ipakol! Loriol! (Tehom! Harombrub! Roggiol! Buriol! Abahim! Theli! Ipakol! Loriol!)

Ho Drakon Ho Megas! (Ho Drakon Ho Megas!)
Ho Drakon Ho Megas!! (Ho Drakon Ho Megas!!)

HO DRAKON HO MEGAS! (HO DRAKON HO MEGAS!)9

Thomas then requested us to do a kundalini-meditation while standing in our chosen places. The strong scent of the Dragon's Blood was almost intoxicating by this point, and when we ended the meditation by drawing three deep breaths we were all properly primed for what was to follow. Thomas focused his gaze on the soon-to-be lodge leaders and ceremoniously proclaimed the reason for us all being present this day; the ceremonial opening of lodge Sinistra. He spoke of the mythical being Lucifer, and the being's role as the light-bringer who can show the magician the path out of creation and lead him/her to become a creator in his/her own right. Thomas held a copy of *Le Grand Grimoire* in his hands, which he soon passed around the room. The grimoire lay opened on a page with a Lucifer-seal, and Thomas asked us to focus on the seal and pronounce the name Lucifer. As the book made its way back to Thomas, the two women sitting on the chairs beside the altar drew the shape of the seal in the air, using the magic wand. Next, Thomas led us through an invocation of Lucifer from the grimoire, in the customary fashion with him reading it aloud and the rest of us repeating choice passages. Finally, Thomas drew an inverted pentagram in the air with the wand, and the time for the inauguration of the new lodge was at hand. One of the Malmö-based members stepped up to the altar and signed two copies of the lodge-contract, with this act becoming the leader of lodge Sinistra. The new lodge leader moved back to his position among the rest of us, and Thomas ended the ceremony by drawing a final symbol from the grimoire in the air with the magic wand.

With the ceremony ended I felt exhausted. The experience had been intense; the darkness of the room and the strong aroma of incense, combined with the fact that a whole crowd of people had intently focused on the same ritual activity made the occasion very powerful. After the ceremony, we blew out the

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candles and left the ritual chamber. All around me people were commenting on the atmosphere and intensity of the ceremony, mirroring my own emotions. Many of those present were almost in a state of ecstasy, and reported that they had experienced a strong presence in the chamber, almost as if some transcendent being or force had joined us for the ceremony. We took some time to wind down and gather our strength, and then headed out to the city centre to continue the celebrations in a more mundane setting.

**Analysis**

The evening involved two of the most frequently used ritual texts in Dragon Rouge, one for the initiations and the other for the ceremonial opening of lodge Sinistra; the invocation of Lilith and the Dragon ceremony. Besides a demoness, Lilith represents the first kliphotic sphere, which is regarded as the counterpart of the sephira Malkuth. She/it is ‘this world’s nightside’ and the portal to the subsequent kliphotic spheres. The first uttering of the invocation, ‘Lepaca Lilith’, is in the order translated as ‘open up Lilith’. The terminology used in the invocation is quite forceful, including a reference to ‘the cruelty of Lilith’ and a request to ‘let Lilith’s blood stir like lava’, reflecting the Dragon Rouge understanding of the kliphoth and expressing the order’s antinomian ethos. Lilith is attributed power, in the phrase ‘you hold the sceptre and you hold the dominance’, and in performing the invocation the magician partakes of this power. The power-words uttered are the names of various demons, demonesses, and ‘Chaos-dragons’, which are all regarded as connected to the kliphotic realms in general, and the Lilith-klipha in particular. As most ritual texts in the Dragon Rouge context, the invocation ends in the uttering ‘Ho Drakon Ho Megas!’, which both summons and pays tribute to the powers of Chaos in the form of the Red Dragon. The uttering, translated as ‘the great Dragon’, is also used as a greeting among members of the order. The actual lodge-opening started with a Dragon ceremony, which is similar in function to the invocation of Lilith in summoning the forces of Chaos. In this particular ceremony, however, the magician conjures these forces from within him-/herself, in the form of the coiled kundalini-serpent that is stimulated to rise in the magician’s body and activate a set of energy nodes that are called chakras, as well as the forces of Chaos in a more general sense than in the invocation of Lilith. As is normally the case, the Dragon ceremony was followed by a

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10 Eriksson, Mörk Magi, 99.
11 Dragon Rouge, Magikurs 1, ‘brev 1’, 5.
12 Mythological dragon-like beings, which in Dragon Rouge are seen as representing Chaos.
13 Dragon Rouge, Magikurs 1, ‘brev 1’, 5.
kundalini-meditation with the intent of strengthening the awakened forces, along with the added function of focusing the body and mind on the magical process at hand.

While the decor of the ritual chamber expressed the aesthetic preferences of the inhabitant of the apartment first and foremost, the items on the altar were of particular importance and are those typically present in the Dragon Rouge context (Image 8). The dragon statue is a key object on all Dragon Rouge altars. It represents the forces of Chaos as well as the magician's own life-force in the form of the kundalini-serpent, and thus both the internal and external energies that the magician can learn to control through the use of magic. In the Dragon Rouge context, the magic wand, an essential part of almost all magic as a representation of Will,\textsuperscript{14} is typically a simple uncrafted piece of wood such as a branch of a tree rather than an ornately designed object. This symbolizes the naturalistic orientation of the order, where a crafted wand would represent civilization, structures, and stagnation instead of the dynamic forces of Chaos. Dragon's Blood incense is made of the dried fruit of a palm tree, \textit{Daemonorops}
Draco, and gives off heavy smoke and has a strong and distinct scent. It is used on rare occasions, both due to its expense and in order to mark special events. In its name, of course, it represents yet another connection to the forces of Chaos. The interpretation of Lucifer in both this specific ritual context, and in the order in general, must also be addressed. Lucifer is not considered to be an evil entity, but instead conjured as ‘the light-bringer’ who can guide the magician and help him/her find his/her way in darkness. This is an interpretation that has been common in occult circles since the late nineteenth century. A comparison can be made to the Neophyte initiation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, in which the initiate was to declare: ‘[m]y soul is wandering in darkness, seeking for the Light of Occult Knowledge, and I believe that in this Order the knowledge of that Light may be obtained.’ The grimoire that the Lucifer seal was taken from, Le Grand Grimoire, is also of particular significance, as the other name it is known by – Le Dragon Rouge – is often given as one of the sources of the name of the order. The grimoire is used very rarely; during all of my fieldwork I have only witnessed its use twice.

As for ceremonial functions, all but the two female members sitting on the chairs beside the altar (as well as the conductor of the ceremony, of course) played indistinct roles. While the order does not normally attribute specific functions based on gender, the fact that two women were chosen is of significance. Dragon Rouge generally operates with a non-essentialized perception of gender, but sometimes the view is expressed that women have a closer connection to magic in general, and kliphotic energies in particular. The women seated on the chairs thus acted both as channellers and representatives of the kliphotic forces. Finally, the signing of the lodge contract was done in a ritual context and can be thus be interpreted as a magical oath. Such oaths are distinguished from others, as they are supposed to reflect the Will of the magician and thus breaking them is considered to have grave consequences.

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15 See Kaczyński, Perdurabo, 505 n37. See also Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, Vol. 2, 162, where Lucifer is identified as ‘the spirit of Intellectual Enlightenment and Freedom of Thought’. Blavatsky also founded an esoteric journal titled Lucifer, see, Santucci, ‘Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna’, 182. Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy operated with a similar view of Lucifer, with the being standing ‘for forces that try to lift man from the earth by accelerating normal development’, Leijenhorst, ‘Anthroposophy’, 84.
16 See Bogdan, Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation, 131.
17 See e.g. Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’. Also see page 85 in the present volume.
18 See Crowley, Magick, 62, where magical oaths are said to be irrevocable.
Initiation into Degree 2.0

The minimum time to prepare for the first two initiatory degrees in the Dragon Rouge initiatory system is six months per degree. For me it took longer than that, with my first degree initiation in 2002, and the second one, for degree 2.0 – Gamaliel, on Tuesday, November, 30, 2004. About a week and a half prior, I had sent a two-page long text detailing my experiences with and reflections on my magical progress and the Dragon Rouge system of magic to my tutor within the order, Thomas Karlsson. The initiation ceremony was preceded by a regular weekly meeting, and as I had done so many times before, I arrived at the metro station close to the Dragon Rouge temple at five minutes to seven pm. A few members were already present, and more arrived after me. Together we started walking towards the temple.

I was already well familiar with the Dragon Rouge temple, having visited it regularly for the last three years, but the special occasion beckoned me to see it with new eyes. I was struck by how perfectly ordinary the residential building in which the Dragon Rouge temple was located looked. A residential high-rise building from the 1950s or 1960s, identical to most of others in the area, and nothing betrayed that this particular building housed the official centre of one of the most controversial esoteric groups to ever have existed in Sweden. I ascended the stairs down to the basement where the temple was located, and straight away when entering the feeling of ordinariness vanished. Even if fresh incense had not been burning, more than six years of its ritual use on the premises would have provided an exotic aroma, signalling that I had stepped into another world. If there had been any doubt that I had ventured ‘down the rabbit’s hole’, all the odd and curious objects I saw around me would have been enough of a reminder. The temple, a rectangular windowless area of about sixty-five square metres in size, was divided into three rooms. The quadrangular front room was the largest with its approximately forty square metres. Two large wooden tables, each surrounded by four wooden chairs, formed the main gathering area. Although the tables had candelabras on them the room was illuminated by four wall-mounted electric lamps. The right long-side of the room housed an old two-seater sofa, with a small table supporting a globe to the right of it and a mini stereo system to the left of it. The left long-side of the room was empty except for a cupboard. The otherwise plain walls of the room were decorated with borders featuring Egyptian hieroglyphs. Another interesting furnishing detail was the small Feng Shui-fountain separating the two smaller rooms from the larger one.

The playful atmosphere of Dragon Rouge was apparent in the small red flag with the Clavicula Nox-symbol that was stuck to the globe – humorously
announcing Dragon Rouge world domination, and I recalled the comments on a particular segment of the wall border that Thomas Karlsson had made in 2001 when I visited the temple for the first time: He had smiled mischievously when pointing to a hieroglyph above the sofa, a male figure apparently fondling himself: ‘That’s Khepera, “the self-created”. I guess the old Egyptians were quite literal in some of their depictions’ (Image 10). Even though the members I have met are very serious about their magical practice and Dragon Rouge as an order, they are not averse to joking about subjects important to them. This was also apparent in the posters and signs in the tiny bathroom on the right-hand side of the entrance to the temple. They included a comic strip making fun of Lutheran priest and an old-fashioned sign condemning the crudeness of swearing. The humour was disrupted by a poster of a painting by Salvador Dalí.

The two smaller rooms of the temple could not have been any more different from each other. The smaller of them, on the right-hand side and about ten square metres in size, seemed to mainly function as a storage room and held various items not used regularly in the temple, as well as books, a refrigerator, and a hotplate. The larger of the rooms was the definite main attraction of the temple. Shielded by black drapes, this rectangular room of about seventeen square metres in size was the ritual chamber. The far back side of the room

**Image 9** The Dragon Rouge temple in Stockholm: Ritual chamber
PHOTOGRAPH BY KENNET GRANHOLM, 2011
housed a two-layered altar covered with dark canvas and adorned with a number of ceremonial objects: a statue of a dragon – sitting on the higher level, glaring out into the ritual chamber; four candlesticks – two on the higher level and two on the lower; and an incense holder, a bell, a dagger, a magic wand, and a metal goblet on the lower level of the altar. The imposing visage was perfected by a trident that leaned towards the wall behind the altar, and swords propped up on each side of the altar. Large black pillars stood on each side, and the remaining empty space was taken up by pieces of black canvas hanging from the ceiling, each with a large symbol in white resembling the letter ‘y’ with a protruding ‘spike’ at the base pointing to the upper left.19 The floor was covered with grey carpet, and a large circular mirror had been placed on the middle of the floor – both details that had been added since I first saw the ritual chamber in February of 2001 (Image 9).

19 This symbol represents ‘Sorath’, commonly identified as a sinister sun spirit, or d(a)emon, and could thus easily be linked to the fifth Dragon Rouge degree, Thagirion – the symbol of which is the ‘black sun’. However, in the Dragon Rouge initiatory system, Sorath is often equated with the Old Norse fire thurs/giant Surtr and linked to the sixth degree – Golachab. Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’.
Sitting down at one of the tables, I had a difficult time concentrating on the discussions at the meeting, knowing that my initiation ceremony was to be performed right after it. The meeting ended around eight pm, with some members lingering in the temple for a while after. Thomas had told those present about the initiation ceremony, and informed that those who already held
degree two or higher could attend if they wished to do so. Of the eleven members present, only Thomas, two additional male members, and a female member – and I of course – stayed for the initiation. Borrowing an empty sheet of paper from one of the male members, I sat down at the table to tidy the ceremonial text that I had composed for the occasion, while the others stood by the sofa in order to give me some privacy. After finishing the text, in the best handwriting I was capable of, I handed it to Thomas. ‘Is this the version for archiving?’, he asked, to which I responded that I would first need to use it during the ceremony. It was ten to nine when we were ready to start the initiation ceremony, and a final thought struck me: ‘Will I be expected to read the Dragon ceremony out loud?’, I asked, ‘because I don’t know it by heart!’ ‘That won’t be a problem’, Thomas responded, ‘there’s a copy of Mörk Magi by the altar, you can read the ceremony from it’. Thomas turned to the others and asked their opinion about what kind of music we should use. One of the male members suggested that some music with ‘shamanic drumming’ would be suitable, and we all agreed. Thomas inserted the proper disc in the CD-player and went to the cupboard to grab a copy of Le Grand Grimoire. He then asked us to move to the ritual chamber.

The lights in the temple were switched off and the only illumination came from the candles in the ritual chamber; one red candle in a dragon-shaped candleholder, placed on the mirror on the floor, and four red ones on the altar. We started by doing a short meditation, sitting down around the mirror. The music that was playing threw me off a bit at first, making it a bit difficult to focus on the candle in front of me as I was supposed to, but as my nervousness eased it became easier to concentrate. ‘When you’re finished, take three deep breaths’, Thomas said softly when we had been sitting quietly for a couple of minutes. One by one we did so, and Thomas gave a short talk on the significance of the second initiation. ‘The second-degree initiation is particularly important’, he said, ‘as it is the last one before an initiate swears the Dragon Oath and enters the inner order – Ordo Draconis et Atri Adamantis’. When finished, Thomas invited us to stand up and assume our places. The two male members, who were going to perform the role of guardians during the ceremony, each grabbed one of the swords in the ritual chamber, and positioned themselves by the corners of the altar. They both faced me, with the swords stretched out in the air. Thomas stood in front of the altar and I in front of him, near the middle of

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20 The reflective accounts of the initiation courses and the ceremonial texts are archived by Dragon Rouge. They become a sort of documentation of the initiate’s magical progress.

21 Eriksson, Mörk Magi.
the ritual chamber, with the female member on my right-hand side, slightly behind me.

Thomas picked up the magic wand with his right hand and the book lying by the altar with his left. He started by reading the Dragon ceremony from the book, whilst pointing the wand towards the altar. As usual, the rest of us responded by repeating the power words and the reading was ended by the ceremonial uttering, ‘Ho Drakon Ho Megas!’ Next, Thomas picked up *Le Grand Grimoire*, which had been placed on the right-hand side of the altar, and opened it up to the page with the same invocation of Lucifer that had been used during the ceremonial opening of lodge Sinistra. ‘We are going to read the Lucifer-invocation in order to bring the Luciferian light into the ceremony’, Thomas said, proceeding to read the invocation out loud. He did it by himself first, and then a second time with all those present repeating each word. He put down the grimoire and turned to me: ‘step up to the altar, it is time for your initiation’. As I took a step forward, Thomas handed me the book with the Dragon ceremony. I read the ceremony out loud, with my voice steadier than I had expected, and the others present repeated the power words. When finished, I put the book down on the right-hand side of the altar and picked up the paper with the ceremonial text that I had prepared. Holding it in my hands, I read the text out loud and the others responded to certain phrases:

I, Daemon Gaeh’Nae’Ha, invoke Lilith, Hel, Hekate and Kali. I invoke you in the name of Tiamat, Leviathan, Jörmungand and Nidhögg – in the sign of the Dragon. Give me power to tear down and destroy the Old in order to give birth to the New. I promise to go deeper into the unknown and hidden in my Self and in existence. I want to walk in the darkness of the night and the black fires in order to be born in a new dawn. Give me strength, courage and endurance to tread the paths that lead to the dark mysteries. Give me courage, strength and endurance to face and embrace the dangers and setbacks I encounter on my journey. Give me courage, strength and endurance to walk my path to its end.

Lepaca Lilith! (Lepaca Lilith!)\(^{23}\)

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\(^{22}\) Magical names are used in certain Dragon Rouge context, although it is rare to directly address members by them in the same way as in e.g. the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Whereas many esoteric groups use ‘Frater’ (i.e. ‘brother’) or ‘Soror’ (i.e. ‘sister’) in front of the magical name, as per the legacy of the Golden Dawn, the Dragon Rouge practice is to instead use ‘Daemon’ for both sexes.

\(^{23}\) Text in parentheses indicates repetition by the other participants in the ceremony.
Initiate me in your mysteries. Take me in your dark embrace and envelop me. Burn away the restricting and make me free.

Lepaca Gamaliel! (Lepaca Gamaliel!)

Lilith, take me in, give me your dark kiss and lead me on your nighttime journey. Take me beyond my limitations and show me the possible in the impossible. I swear an oath to unrelentingly continue my journey on the path I have taken. I willingly step into the jaws of the Dragon, into the womb of Lilith, and am tempered in the destructive fires. Kali, ancient mother, show me the secrets to giving birth to myself. Lilith, Hel, Naheema, Hekate, Kali – embrace me and step into me. Consume me so that I may create myself anew! I swear an oath to give to my order as my order has given to me. I stand by the side of my sisters and brothers and face the unknown together with them.

Ho Drakon Ho Megas! (Ho Drakon Ho Megas!)

When I had finished Thomas turned to me again and declared that I was now initiated in the second degree of the Dragon Rouge initiatory system. He shook my hand as a welcome, and the other members present followed his example. Thomas declared the initiation ended and said that we could leave the ritual chamber. I left first, bowing towards the altar when I was at the exit. Blowing out the candles and turning on the electrical lights in the temple marked a return to ordinary reality. I had some brief discussion with Thomas and the other members who had officiated my initiation, after which I handed my ceremonial text over to Thomas for archiving. We then put on our outdoor clothes and left the temple, wandering out into the cold November night.

**Analysis**
The Dragon Rouge initiations, at least for the first three degrees, can be likened to university exams. The student of magic does the exercises described in the correspondence course, and then composes a paper detailing his/her progress, experiences during the course, and reflects on the general topic of the Dragon Rouge magic system. The order then makes an assessment on whether or not to approve the candidate for initiation. The documents the candidate provides can be seen as a form of ‘proof’ that the member has undergone the necessary training and that he/she is proficiently advanced in his/her practice of magic. Each successive initiation requires an increasingly extensive, elaborate, and personal text. In contrast to the ‘exams’ of many other magic orders, however, the initiate is not assessed on the basis of knowledge of correspondences, ritual functions, etc., but rather on maturity and
ability to make his/her own interpretations, as well as demonstrated ability to practically apply this in his/her own life. For the initiation ceremony, the initiate is expected to author a ceremonial text by him-/herself, and this text is also expected to be more extensive, elaborate, and personal for each subsequent initiation. This means that each text and ceremony will mirror the specific interests and dispositions of the initiate. The requirement that the initiate writes his/her own ceremonial text for the initiation has a twofold purpose. Firstly, the intent is to stimulate the initiate and his/her imagination and train him/her in the construction of rituals, and thus to become self-sufficient and independent as a magician. Secondly, the ideology of individualism that is a fundamental element of the order’s general outlook demands an approach that caters to the personal preferences and tastes of each individual magician.

In my text I chose to refer to a number of supernatural beings, primarily female ones, from a mix of different mythologies. All of them are often referred to in the Dragon Rouge context. I also consciously included sexualized language, which were combined with self-annihilating passages indicating submission to the forces called upon. The text also has a devotional tone that is, while not unheard of, still an exception in Left-Hand Path contexts. As suggested in the correspondence course for the second degree, the text included ceremonial oaths in which I declare my future magical intents, as well as my attitude and intentions towards the order.

As for the ceremony itself, it started, as most Dragon Rouge ritual activities, by burning incense, switching off the electrical lighting and igniting the candles in the ritual chamber, and the playing of meditative music that led into an initial meditation. This helped set the mood for the ceremony, helping both the initiate and the ceremonial officers to focus, and marked a shift from everyday reality to a magical one. The magic wand was used in the incantations and invocations, directing the Will of the person doing the reading. The Dragon ceremony, a feature of many Dragon Rouge rituals, was read twice; once by Thomas Karlsson after the initial meditation, and once by me just prior to reading the ceremonial text that I had composed myself. The first reading can be interpreted as a general invocation of the forces of Chaos for the benefit of the ceremony itself, while the second one functioned as an invocation of power for my own benefit. This was followed by the invocation of Lucifer, which was used in a similar fashion as at the opening of lodge Sinistra, described above, providing a ‘guiding light in the darkness’ for the future work of the initiate. The reading of my own personal ceremonial text was the climax of the initiation, functioning both as a demonstration of my ritual prowess and as a cementation of my status as a second degree initiate. The shaking of the hands of the ceremonial officials, Thomas
declaring the initiation ceremony ended, and us all leaving the ritual chamber, marked a return to everyday reality.

It is interesting to compare this initiation ceremony to the Neophyte ritual of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the latter of which marks the initial admission of the initiate into the Golden Dawn.24 The Neophyte ritual is ordered in a strictly regulated fashion; there is a prescribed number of ceremonial officers, each of whom holds a specific title, placed at fixed positions and engaging in prescribed activities; the ritual text is to be read and proceedings to be performed in specified ways, according to a predefined order. Dragon Rouge rituals and ceremonies are much less rigidly bound, to the degree of being constructed individually for each and every occasion, and even including the possibility of improvisation. Exemplifying the *ad hoc* character of the ritual setup, the number and function of ritual officers was not determined beforehand. The only rule was that those attending had to be of at least the same degree that the candidate was to be initiated in. In comparison to the rituals and initiations of ‘traditional Wicca’, Dragon Rouge initiations likewise appear much less rigid.25 It should be noted, however, that most Wiccan and neopagan rituals are much more flexible than the original Gardnerian ones.26

The Nature of Dragon Rouge Ritual Practice

Dragon Rouge ritual practice is very diverse and varied, with the courses and meetings mainly functioning as introductions to themes and subjects that each individual member can explore more fully by themselves if they feel compelled to do so. Thus the ethnographies contained in this chapter only provide a brief and limited glimpse. Still, they do provide good examples of the basic ethos of Dragon Rouge ritual practice. This mainly relates to the atmosphere of improvisation, personalization, and readiness to cater for individual tastes that characterizes the order. Indeed, if there is any structure to be found in Dragon Rouge ritual practice it is the general absence of set structures. Some ritual texts, such as the invocation of Lilith and the Dragon ceremony, are more frequently used and are accessible in official material as well as in books written by members of the order. However, no member is expected to learn them by heart – something that is aptly demonstrated by even the order’s founder.

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26 Harvey, ‘Boggarts and Books’.
usually relying on a printed version when reading them – and the particularities of their use is in no way prescribed. These principles extend to other aspects of ritual practice as well. When magical tools and their correspondences were discussed in preparation for the course on ceremonial magic, several different interpretations were presented, and choices that fit that particular occasion were collectively made. The same applies to the decoration of ritual chambers and altars; some items may be more common than others, and may even be expected as centerpieces – such as a statue of a dragon, but ultimately the decor will, and is expected to, reflect the individual magician’s personal preferences. Ritual attire is another attribute that is important in many magic orders, as well as other types of initiatory societies. For Crowley the crown and the robe were as important for magic rituals as the wand, cup, pentacle, and sword.27 In Dragon Rouge, however, the use of magical attire is exceedingly rare, so far so that I have only witnessed it once during my fieldwork – in the presentation of the work of the Women’s circle during the annual meeting of 2004. Similarly, books of conjurations, which are also specifically mentioned by Crowley,28 are not as central in Dragon Rouge ritual practice as they are in many older magical orders. Yes, the Grand Grimoire was used in two of the ceremonies described, but these are also the only two occasions where I have witnessed the use of the book. The order’s ritual work is simply too improvisational in character for magic manuals, and if and when they are used it is mainly for their symbolic value as curious arcane objects.

The fragmentary nature of Dragon Rouge practice, with more or less abecedarian explorations of the most varied subjects, can partly be explained by the individualistic ethos of the order. Indeed, the courses simply function as introductions, nothing more and nothing less, and the actual primary practice is first and foremost expected to be performed by individual members in the times and places of their own choosing rather than under the order’s watchful eye. As I have not studied the private practices of individual Dragon Rouge members I cannot say much on the subject. However, the order’s correspondence courses in magic provide some perspectives on practices that can be expected to form the core of the magical work of the individual members. The first part of the first correspondence course teaches the basics of meditation, focusing on kundalini meditation in specific, and guides the student through fundamental exercises in which Will and concentration are trained.29 The second part focuses on rituals, teaching the student how to construct his/her own

27 Crowley, Magick, 46.
28 Ibid.
29 Dragon Rouge, Magikurs 1, ‘brev 1’.
rituals rather than giving ready-made recipes for them (even though a basic purification ritual is described). The practice of dream control, and subsequently astral travel and projection, is also described and recommended, and is also the overarching theme of the next two parts of the course. Part five explores Tantra, going more in-depth into the practice of kundalini-meditation by discussing the energy travelling through the different chakras, and offers a basic overview of sex magic (while not directly linking it to Tantra). The concluding part of the first course describes a quite elaborate ceremony as a conclusion to the first chapter of the magician’s initiatory journey. Most of the exercises are described in only the most rudimentary fashion, while the theory and rationale behind them are treated in length. In this way, the adept will be able to mould the rituals and practices in ways that suit him/her best and gives him/her the most efficient means through which to approach magic. Even the rituals described at length function mainly as examples of how to possibly go about practising magic. The second correspondence course provides even less detailed descriptions, and here as well the emphasis lies on explaining the underlying ideas behind the exercises. The only examples that receive more detailed description are a witchcraft ritual and a few demonic invocations. A few of the more cursorily described exercises in the second course are: kundalini-meditation, astral- and dream travel, meditative exercises in nature, demonic invocations, and visualisation practice. The practices learnt earlier, however, are not to be forgotten and left by the wayside as one progresses; much of the material in the second course consists of more advanced elaborations of subjects introduced in the first course.

The exercises are also, as could be expected, designed for individual practitioners, not for groups of magicians. The point of focusing on the individual is not to foster an attitude of isolation among adepts. Instead, the correspondence courses are meant to be suited for anyone interested in the practice of the Dragon Rouge type of dark magic, and as many would-be practitioners are likely to be the only ones in their respective regions, exercises that do not require the attendance of more than one practitioner are the rational choice. The magician who masters the exercises by him-/herself will be able to use the techniques when performing magic in a group setting as well. The elementary descriptions of possible exercises, combined with the advice for the adept to
construct his/her own forms of practice, also foster the novice magician to assume a pragmatic attitude to the practice of magic.

There is another feature, in addition to improvisation, that is central to Dragon Rouge practice, aptly described by Galina Lindquist in the notion of play in her discussion of neoshaman ritual activity.\[^{35}\] In her understanding, a play involves ‘a basic existential modality generative of spirituality and creativity, where an agreement on the altered conventions of behaviour allows the players to generate alternative social spaces which can be subjectively experienced as a different reality’.\[^{36}\] In this perspective, ritual reality is collectively crafted in the context of the ritual and, in the rules of the play and during the play, it becomes the relevant reality. A stage play is a suitable comparison. In performing Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* the actors take on the qualities of the characters in the play. The stage becomes the court of the King of Denmark, and, if the actors are good, the audience can for the duration of the performance experience the course of events as reality. At the very least, the emotional attachments and reactions should be genuine.

Related to the notion of play, and also relevant in the context of Dragon Rouge ritual, is playfulness. The mood of the participants in between specific ritual elements is very light-hearted. While the actual ritual elements are performed in a serious state of mind, the shift to a much more relaxed atmosphere can be almost instantaneous when the ritual elements are interrupted or the ritual is ended. The participants are determined and take their activities seriously, but this does not hinder them from joking about it when the time is appropriate. This is a common feature of much late modern esoteric practice, and seems to be particularly prevalent in Left-Hand Path groups. The ritual-as-play perspective can shed some light on this basic modality. The actors in the ritual adhere to the rules of the play, while the play is being acted. In a largely improvised ritual, which is common in the Dragon Rouge setting, there are nonetheless conventions and rules of conduct. Each actor knows the modes and approximations of the ritual setting and can play them out. When the ritual is over, or paused for some reason, the participants no longer follow the rules of conduct. In fact, maintaining the serious atmosphere outside the context of the ritual might detract from it, as the period in between might then be experienced as a part of the actual ritual setting. In a way, the jokes before and after a ritual frame the ritual by marking the borders between it and ordinary reality.

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\[^{36}\] Ibid., 124.
In Chapter 1 I presented a model for systematizing the study of esoteric currents by considering their core discursive building blocks, and in Chapter 2 I discussed the use of this model in the context of the Left-Hand Path current. To reiterate, the Left-Hand Path is characterized by an ideology of individualism, a goal of self-deification, and an antinomian stance. As clarified in the preceding discussion, the core discourses of a current will manifest in different ways in specific contexts. In this chapter I will examine the Left-Hand Path discourses as they manifest in the context of Dragon Rouge, looking at both their individual operation and their interaction and impact upon each other.

The Left-Hand Path Discourses in the Context of Dragon Rouge

The Ideology of Individualism
The Left-Hand Path discourse of the ideology of individualism posits the individual as the absolute centre of his/her existential universe. Collectives are counterposed to individuals, and even in group settings the individual's concerns will reign supreme. The centrality of this discourse in Dragon Rouge is demonstrated by ‘ultimate autonomy’ – which involves an individual-centred apotheosis – being described as the very goal of ‘Draconian initiation’.1 Furthermore, supreme individuality is not only a goal, it is also a process and a practice through which apotheosis is effectuated. However, the individualism sought and advocated is differentiated from ‘regular’ forms of individualism. The individuality of the dark magician is said to be something completely different from the prevalent individuality of modernity, the latter which is chiefly expressed in materialism. One can read on the Dragon Rouge webpage that ‘[m]aterialism...leads to a superficial and desperate form of individualism' characterised by ‘[e]go trips and superficial satisfaction' and therefore ‘becomes destructive both for the individuals and their surrounding world’.2 The individualism of modernity is, according to Dragon Rouge, no true individualism at all:

2 Dragon Rouge, ‘Contra 3 M’.

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In a world which is becoming increasingly standardized and centralized the notion of free will becomes more and more distant. Not infrequently, [the notion of] free will is used as an argument for its opposite, which everything from politics to advertisements provide ample examples of: ‘Follow your true will and buy our product!’

Rather than being static, individuality is considered to be enveloped in on-going process of transformation and development, which, if harnessed correctly, can ultimately lead the magician into a divine state of being. True individuality is thus something that can be achieved, but it is not automatically possessed by human beings. The dark magician goes through two distinct processes of individuation. The first is the stage that all humans go through, the process of ‘becoming an individual in relation to the mother’. The second stage is achieved through dark magical practice and leads to a second birth through which ‘we become individuals in relation to existence’.

While individualism is of central importance in the order, the hyper-individualism that is perceived to characterize certain forms of Satanism is discouraged. Dragon Rouge is construed as an organism consisting of its individual members, formed by its members, and thus ultimately dependent on its members. The order can, in fact, be seen as a collective of individuals that is held together by the very discourse of individualism. For this reason, overindulgent hyper-individualism that would fully overshadow the collective is seen as counterproductive. It would be a detriment to the order as a whole, and thus to the individuals it consists of as well. A sort of ‘tribe-mentality’ can even be discerned, where magicians ‘constantly help each other to increase their power’ while simultaneously keeping in mind that it is of crucial importance that the individual ‘must first stand on his/her own two feet and only then collaborate with the other magicians’. ‘No student of magic will receive help if he/she is a strain on others’. As a part of his/her magical progress ‘[t]he magician will realize that desperate egoism does not benefit his individualism, but that individualism is developed through an un-egoistic and dedicated fellowship with equals.’

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4 The use of this particular wording is intentional, as C.G. Jung’s ideas are popular among members of the order. For an example of the use of this specific term, see Dragon Rouge, *Magikurs 1*, ‘brev 6’, 2.
5 Idem, ‘Philosophy’.
7 Ibid.
8 Idem, ‘Contra 3 M’.
The perception of Dragon Rouge as organically being comprised of its members could conceivably lead to some problems when trying to determine what the core of the order’s magical system is. As one leading member says:

It’s such a wide spectrum of people involved and our magical system grows all the time, and evolves along with the members, which means that one can really take in anything, with some limitations. If somebody is, for example, really interested in shamanism then it’s a part of the system. So, people may wonder: ‘what is your system?’; and it’s a bit difficult to describe because it can be quite individual.9

In the light of this organic-individualistic self-perception of the order, its extreme eclecticism becomes understandable. The order does operate with a notion of a ‘primordial Draconian Tradition’, but this ‘tradition’ is mostly construed as a general ‘mood’ or ‘setting’ in which a more or less unlimited number of distinct elements can be fitted, in a multitude of different ways. No authoritative interpretation of how the major arcana of the Tarot, the sephirot of the Kabbalah, or the planets of alchemy fit together exists in the same way as it does in e.g. the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Furthermore, in contrast to magic orders such as the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis, and other esoteric movements such as Freemasonry,10 Dragon Rouge has no formalized and standardized ritual or ceremonial structures. The closest thing to this one can find is the Dragon ceremony that is a common element in many Dragon Rouge rituals. However, its use is in no way prescribed. The common Dragon Rouge approach to ritual and ceremony is one based on improvisation and negotiation, as clearly demonstrated in the course on ceremonial magic discussed in Chapter 4. All the elements of this ceremony – from the specifics of correspondences, which supernatural beings to invoke, and the content of the ritual texts – were negotiated and improvised on the spot. At the same time, however, some elements, ‘traditions’, and practices have a greater prominence than others in Dragon Rouge as a whole. This is mainly due to them being favourites of long-time core members and therefore having been elaborated on more frequently within the order.

As discussed in Chapter 4, group rituals are not the primary mode of Dragon Rouge practice. Instead, the focus lies on individual practice, and group gatherings function mainly as contexts where members can learn from each other, exchange ideas and interpretations, and simply meet in a social setting.

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10 See Bogdan, Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation.
Each Dragon Rouge member is free to, and indeed expected to, make his/her own choices regarding the practice of magic, progress on his/her magical journey, and degree of commitment to the order and magic itself. As recounted in the members’ paper: “The Draconian initiation follows certain patterns, but at the same time each initiation is unique.” The leading members I have interviewed go to great lengths to express how important it is that a member is his/her own person and has the right to choose the ways of practicing magic that best suit him/her. This extends to interpretations of magical experiences, which are also posited as individually determined. When discussing early magical experiences and the possibility of his siblings having had similar experiences, a long-time member said:

That is very difficult to determine as these kinds of experiences are often strongly personal. They can be interpreted in so many different ways. So, even if she had them, her context would not legitimize for her to talk about it.

As with specific practices, each member has the right, and indeed responsibility, to independently interpret his/her experiences. With this having been said, members do generally draw upon the experiences and interpretations of others when making sense of their own. After meetings including practice it is common for the participants to sit down to share and discuss their experience with each other. The personal experience is brought to a social level and the meaning of the experience is collaboratively negotiated. Even more fundamentally, the ideology of individualism informs (potential) perceptions of reality. In the order’s first correspondence course on magic one can read that ‘reality is individual’, further clarified as ‘that which one understands as reality is reality’.

Ultimate autonomy thus leads to a deeply personal and individual reality, with the magician as an active creator of all the building blocks involved as well as the architect of the finished product. Not only should the
dark magician be an individual, for him/her all answers, morality, and reality should be as well.\textsuperscript{15}

With the apparent hegemony of the ideology of individualism, is it possible to find a fundament for Dragon Rouge's philosophy and practice? A long-time member told me that at its core, dark magic is a 'dark alchemical road of progress', and that this is the only fundament that the order's members are required to adhere to.\textsuperscript{16} However, he quickly adds the following:

A member who, for example, does not partake in a correspondence course and isn't initiated, who is simply a member, can basically [believe what he/she wants]. Similarly to a political party, we have no control over that. They do not know what alignment all the party members have. I mean, you can become a member of Moderaterna [a capitalist-liberal Swedish political party] even if you're, for example, a communist, in the same way as a Satanist could become a member of Dragon Rouge – and that does not mean that we are Satanists. A Free Church-aligned person could become a member and in that case it's not we who are Free Church-oriented, but those peripheral members.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, even though individualism reigns supreme, a specific individual's right to define Dragon Rouge as an order is linked to his/her level of activity in the organization, and even then said individual is not necessarily seen as representative of the order as a whole.

The seriousness and extent of dark magical individuation is demonstrated in ‘the ritual of the seven power-points’.\textsuperscript{18} This exercise involves the magician reflecting on important relationships, objects, significant episodes and incidents, and other important factors that he/she draws strength from. The goal is for the magician to liberate him-/herself from dependency on these externals, come to the realization that the experienced strength actually derives from a deeper source, and to realize that he/she can instead ‘draw the power directly from the darkness that the seven points lead to’.\textsuperscript{19} The point is not that important relationships etc. should be discarded, but rather that they can be engaged in more fully when they are freely and consciously chosen.

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\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., ‘brev 1’, 3; Ibid., ‘brev 2’, 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Interview 2001–03, April 1, 2001.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} The ritual is described in Dragon Rouge, Magikurs 1, ‘brev 3’, 10–11.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 10.
The ideology of individualism has such hegemony that it even surfaces in discussions that seemingly have no relation to it. One such instance was when I asked two female members about the potential significance of sexual orientation in sex magical practices:

Respondent A: Yes, it can probably have
Respondent B: Yes, in the way that one is as open as one can be, so that I don't have any restriction in that regard either. If one works magically with some form of sex magic, I don't have any restrictions. So, whether it should be masculine or feminine, so in that way, one is probably more open.
KG: Are there situations where, for example, heterosexuality has a role, or where homosexuality has a role, where either has a unique position?
Respondent B: No, but I actually believe that openness on the whole is that which... Not ceremonially at least, possibly in private, but nothing that is part of the system.20

What I intended to ask, and what I thought I was asking, was if hetero- and homosexual acts have specific and different functions, roles, and uses in dark sex magical operations. Instead, however, the interviewees shifted the discussion to an exploration of sexuality in a larger framework revolving around issues of personal liberation. Instead of particular constellations – as can be found in the _oto_’s distinction of autoerotic, vaginal, and anal sex magical practices21 – a readiness to be open in regard to one’s own sexuality is cast as the primary operative element. Here, the ideology of individualism is taken to a personal level where it is proposed that for the truly liberated individual gender (and sexual preference) does not, or at least should not, matter.

**The Goal of Self-Deification**
The discourse of self-deification deals with the magician’s endeavours to achieve and assume ultimate and absolute control of his/her own existential universe. At the most basal level the discourse suggests a focus on the personal growth of the practitioner of magic, but rather than being simply a form of ‘self-betterment’ the possibility of reaching levels of personal evolution that would in most secular worldviews be regarded impossible is proposed. Rather than revolving around the notion of ‘becoming all that one can be’, the dark magician’s personal evolution is ultimately about transcending human
limitations and becoming something more than a ‘regular human being’. It is not enough to become ‘better’ in mundane terms involving e.g. finances, personal relations, and mundane notions of happiness, but one should in fact assume control of all aspects of one’s existence – becoming a creator or a god in relation to one’s own life. While some Left-Hand Path groups are more reticent, the Dragon Rouge rhetoric explicitly deals with the actual deification of the individual, in which ‘[i]nstead of being creations we become creators’.\textsuperscript{22} The magician who has reached the highest stage of magical evolution has perfected him-/herself and becomes an actual god.\textsuperscript{23} Similarly, the self is not understood in the same way as in conventional self-help manuals. The self of the magician is carved out from underneath the layers of false selfhood that veil the True Self (called the Will, as is the case in most forms of contemporary magic). The task of the magician is to find this core-self and to strengthen it gradually, by the use of magic, so that it can grow and evolve. The extent of the self-deification is revealed in the way ‘higher Will’ is defined:

It concerns a sort of more instinctive inner will, which is similar to what Crowley means by the True Will. Although perhaps not. It was his definition and we have another. To in some way fulfil one’s existence, we feel, is to create for oneself such a complete, perfect, and whole soul that it can withstand just about anything. It can withstand death. It’s like its own universe in itself, and only then can one complete one’s existence as one isn’t any longer controlled by the limitations we have here, and to reach a god-stage.\textsuperscript{24}

In contrast to the assertion that the human being is divine by nature that is common in much late modern esoteric philosophy, the view among many members of Dragon Rouge is that divinity – just as true individualism – must be achieved rather than being a quality that one already possesses. The contention is that the unevolved human being uses less than one thousandth of his/her potential, and, through magical training, one can access and achieve the totality of one’s self and the potential contained therein.\textsuperscript{25} The dark magician’s task is to venture beyond his/her limitations.\textsuperscript{26} As stated in the order’s first correspondence course in magic, the goal of the dark magician is to ‘develop an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Dragon Rouge, ‘Philosophy’.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Idem, \textit{Magikurs i}, ‘brev 1’, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Interview 2001–03, April 1, 2001.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Dragon Rouge, \textit{Magikurs i}, ‘brev 1’, 1–2.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., ‘brev 3’, 2–3.
\end{itemize}
The magician should ‘work with the dark forces in order to dissolve all his/her limitations and thereby come into contact with the magical forces and capacities’,28 ‘Control’ and ‘power’ are among the most central operational keywords in the discourse. When these terms are used, however, it is not generally in reference to other people. Rather, the control the magician exercises is over his/her own circumstances, and the power gained and exercised relates to one’s own spirit.29 In this process, the dark magician is not limited to this plane of existence; instead his/her magical evolution reaches into the astral planes and the afterlife. The dark magician will in the end even be able to overcome death.

Divinity and true individuality are not the only things that must be achieved rather than something that human beings automatically possess, the same applies to free will.30 Before going through the dark magical process one’s destiny is predetermined. In order to achieve the advanced stage in which free will is possible, however, the magician must break away from limiting everyday inhibitions. As a way to start upon this long road, the order’s first correspondence course in magic presents a ‘death-ritual’.31 The day-long ritual involves the magician experiencing the day as if it was his/her very last one, reflecting on his/her life-history and the positives and negatives of his/her existence. At the end of the day the magician is to symbolically die, experience the death and rotting of his/her old life, and finally be reborn with a clearer and more conscious approach to his/her new life as a dark magician. This ‘death-ritual’ highlights the importance of awareness in the work of the dark magician. He/she must actively reflect and focus on how exactly he/she wants to evolve, and any degree of passivity is counterproductive to the process.32

Magic can be used in many different ways and for many different goals, and not all of them are beneficial for the magician’s personal evolution. Instead of focusing on mundane gains that can be achieved through magic, such as obtaining wealth or sexual partners, the magician should ‘concentrate on [magic] that is self-developing’.33 The use of magic for e.g. gaining wealth is often presented as a simple and straightforward matter, such as when ‘getting a job’ is described as ‘one of the most effective and well-tried monetary rituals’ in the

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27 Ibid., ‘brev 6’, 1.
28 Ibid., 3.
29 Ibid., ‘brev 1’, 2–3.
33 Ibid., ‘brev 3’, 6–7.
order's first correspondence course in magic.\textsuperscript{34} Such goals are considered to be at least as easy to achieve by non-magical means, and thus something that a proper magician really should not devote too much magical energy on. Not only are magical workings revolving around such matters trivial, they can be outright detrimental to the magician's higher magical development as the risk is that mundane and materialistic goals become too important.\textsuperscript{35}

Alchemy, as noted earlier, is one of the core pillars of the Dragon Rouge magical system. In much contemporary esotericism alchemy is considered to deal with spiritual transmutation and the transformation of lead into gold is only a metaphor. Dragon Rouge is no different in this regard. Instead of gold, however, ‘the black diamond’ is used as the primary metaphor within the order. ‘The black diamond’ represents the deified essence of the dark magician, strengthened to the degree of being able to withstand any force that is directed against it.\textsuperscript{36} The dark magical process of self-deification naturally involves the idea that the magician will be greatly affected and transformed, not only on a symbolic level but also on a deeply personal one, not least of all relating to self-perception. The order's first correspondence course in magic contains an exercise through which one is supposed to reach a more aware perception of oneself as a person.\textsuperscript{37} In this 'soul-mirror’-exercise the adept makes lists of his/her basic character traits; the ones he/she considers to be positive on one list and the negative ones on another. He/she then meditates over the lists, simultaneously diving deeper into his/her ‘true self’ in order to explore the full implications of these character traits. In this process the magician will learn that some of the supposedly positive character traits actually have utterly negative implications and vice versa. With this new knowledge in hand, the lists are revised and the one with the newly discovered negative character traits is burned. The magician thus goes beyond a secular psychological reflection over his/her personality; he/she actively seeks to refine and redefine his/her personality and core essence through ritual.

As the Dragon Rouge focus lies on individualized apotheosis, it is not surprising to find a critique of ‘white magicians’ and ‘New Age practitioners' using their magic to help others in mundane matters:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., ‘brev 1’, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} See Dragon Rouge, ‘General Information’. Cf. Idem, \textit{Magikurs 3}, ‘brev 4’, 11, where the manufacturing of the black diamond is presented as the ultimate goal of ‘typhonian alchemy' and the Dragon Order, and the black diamond itself is linked to the kliphotic sphere of Thaumiel.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Idem, \textit{Magikurs 1}, ‘brev 3’, 1.
\end{itemize}
This thing with constantly running around helping others on a pretty low level, like: ‘Oh, you’ve hurt your knee, now I must help you’. It feels a bit like people wanting to justify themselves by becoming good on paper. It’s like a Jesus-thing; Now we shall sacrifice ourselves for each other. I mean, it’s a classic thing that people who cannot manage to face their own problems fill their lives with the problems of other people… I have seen this in many light magicians who I have met… You can’t help anyone else before you have been helped yourself, and this is probably my basic view on dark magic. One helps oneself, but not in order to help others; you help yourself in order to progress in your own life.\(^{38}\)

Helping others through the use of magic is in no way forbidden, but one should carefully consider the potential consequences. One of my interviewees casts light on the issue by pointing out that it is almost impossible to see all the consequences of one’s actions. A seemingly benevolent thing, such as healing a sick person, can backfire. For example, the person healed might neglect the reasons why he/she became sick in the first place and therefore end up in an even worse state in the future. Similarly, a seemingly malevolent act, such as injuring another person, can be the proper course of action. For example, if the person injured would otherwise have caused greater suffering to others.\(^{39}\) The above quote also highlights the common perspective among Dragon Rouge members that one must first deal with oneself before trying to reach out to others. In the dark magical process of ‘self-betterment’ the magician will realize his/her dreams, live his/her life more fully, and become a more harmonious person, and it is only then that he/she will have the proper awareness to truly help others. In fact, this self-focus may in itself be of benefit to others, as self-perfection will have a direct effect on the dark magician’s surroundings and personal relations. By exploring both oneself and the totality of existence in meditation and ritual practices, the magician supposedly acquires a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of everything. A long time member of the order elaborates:

To cultivate oneself to become more enlightened, to be able to have access to more energy, to really go deep into oneself, is certainly something that is really demanding and does not provide immediate rewards. It’s rather in the way that you live more, you get more out of life, and you can do more stuff, which has the result that you will give more back.

\(^{38}\) Interview 2001–03, April 1, 2001.

You can't avoid giving back. I mean, if you as a dark magician reach different enlightenments, different energies, through these different systems and techniques, then that is surely what your magical practice will amount to. You should attain these things for yourself, of course, but when you do, you will unavoidably spread it further to others.40

A satisfied and fulfilled person will exude harmony and peace, is the supposition. The interviewee is here supposed to be answering a question related to ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in the context of magical practice. However, the goal of self-deification has such hegemony that this question is unanswerable without relating it to processes of magical development. The magician's personal evolution is primary, and it is only in and through this process that questions of morality and ethics can be assessed.

**Antinomianism**

The Left-Hand Path antinomian discourse revolves around the questioning and breaking of collective religious and cultural norms, as well as transcending personal taboos. The point is not to foster an atmosphere of ‘lawlessness’, but to achieve liberation from perceived oppressive external influences, as well as one’s own inhibitions. Also, while all discourse operates on both linguistic and non-linguistic levels, the antinomian discourse is interesting in being the Left-Hand Path component that is most ubiquitous in its expression in non-linguistic visual signifiers. A common Left-Hand Path antinomian symbol, the ‘inverse’ pentagram,41 is conspicuous by its absence in the Dragon Rouge context.42
This is a result of Dragon Rouge actively attempting to avoid identification with Satanism – arguably not primarily due to apprehensions concerning the potential social stigma this could incur, but due to the inherent volatility of antinomian symbols: they all lose their antinomian potential when they are too extensively used and become too familiar. The inverse pentagram is clearly identifiable as related to a specific ‘tradition’, namely Satanism – many expressions of which can be regarded as part of the Left-Hand Path current. In the Dragon Rouge context identification with ‘Satanism’ would be counterproductive to antinomianism due to two reasons in particular. Firstly, the fact that it is recognized as a specific ‘tradition’ (whether it in fact is one or not) renders it ‘safe’ to a certain degree. This factor also makes it less useful in the individual-centred eclectic framework of the order. Secondly, due to the ‘overuse’ of ‘Satan’ and related terms and symbols by e.g. Anton LaVey’s Church of Satan, and their simultaneous and subsequent spread to and popularization in entertainment media, these classic antinomian symbols have lost much of their previous antinomian power – the primary Left-Hand Path form of symbolic capital. The ‘inverse’ pentagram itself has been prominently featured in graffiti, album covers of Heavy Metal bands etc., and has thus become a symbol with an extreme level of cultural exposition. In many regards, Satan and related symbols have become both ‘sanitized’ and ‘declawed’, rendering them impotent to some extent. Compare this to how the anarchist A-symbol has been commodified in a similar fashion, and thus effectively rendered (more or less) useless as a serious anti-capitalist symbol of rebellion.

Instead, other symbols are featured in Dragon Rouge. The main one is the Dragon seal of the order (Image 12). It consists of a stylized snake-like dragon with large wings, encased in a circle. At the very middle of the symbol – comprising the body of the snake-dragon and/or an emblem from which it emerges – is an oval shape within which a circle containing an inverse triangle with a dot is encased. This shape, which in itself comprises an important emblem, is sometimes called the ‘Eye of Shiva’, ‘Eye of Lucifer’, or ‘Womb of Lilith’. Along with a number of other interpretations, the Red Dragon is identified as the serpent that gave the fruit of knowledge to Eve in the Garden of Eden. This serpent/dragon is also the one who directs the magician to his/her path to self-deification. Another primary symbol, the Clavicula Nox – ‘key...
of dark/night';

45 represents similar ambiguous antinomianism. The symbol, or emblem, consists of a circle, representing the dark feminine divine, penetrated by (or encasing, depending on one’s preference) a three-pronged trident, which represents the dark male divine (Image 13). The trident could easily be interpreted as the pitchfork of the Devil, but it could just as easily represent the trident of Shiva – and both interpretations are accepted, and equally acknowledged, in Dragon Rouge. What is apparent, and in contrast to the symbol-language of e.g. the Church of Satan, is an intentional ambiguity in regard to the symbols used. They can contain classic Satanic connotations, but they can also be interpreted in a large number of other ways – and the order officially

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45 See Granholm, ‘Two Symbols of the Magic Order Dragon Rouge’. 
endorses no specific interpretation over another. This ambiguity, in fact, renders symbols that might otherwise be prone to antinomian devaluation perpetually potent, at least in theory.

The name of the order itself demonstrates the same ambiguous antinomianism. Representatives of the order refer to the grimoire *Le Dragon Rouge*, as well as to the kundalini-force (which is interpreted as life-force), when elaborating on the choice of name.\(^{46}\) Still, it is hardly an accident that the order has chosen a name with close ties to Christian representations of evil. The same goes for the term ‘dark magic’; the order’s material explains ‘dark’ as referring not to moral qualities, but to the exploration of that which is unknown, which due to it being hidden appears as ‘dark’.\(^{47}\) While ‘black magic’ may invoke more unambiguous sinister connotations than ‘dark magic’, the two terms are certainly close enough to be seen as synonyms, and they are often used so by members of the order.\(^{48}\)

On the linguistic, and particularly on the narrative, level the antinomian discourse finds expression in descriptions of dark magic as being ‘difficult,

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\(^{46}\) *Dragon Rouge*, ‘General Information’. See also *Karlsson, ‘Le Dragon Rouge’*.

\(^{47}\) Idem, ‘Philosophy’.

\(^{48}\) See e.g. the discussion at the course on ceremonial magic, detailed on pages 100–109.
demanding and dangerous'\textsuperscript{49} As stated in the first correspondence course in magic: '[m]agic is not for the weak', '[i]t is tiring to become aware' and '[i]t takes power to acquire power and to have power'.\textsuperscript{50} What the magician does is not something for the faint of heart. The magician has to throw him-/herself fully into the practice of magic, he/she has to eat, drink, breathe, and sleep magic. Already from the start, the adept has to be a balanced and powerful individual in order for him/her to become a truly successful magician. Here, we also see the courageous aspect of the magician. When asking if magic demands mental stability and if it can be dangerous, I received the following answer:

Respondent B: I believe it can be dangerous (laughter), yes
Respondent A: Yes, at least this form of magic that we work with. I mean, one goes so much into the hidden aspects of oneself and so I believe it can be. If one is unstable then it can easily be too much chaos. Like ‘wow’, and not being able to [deal with it]. It is important as a chaos magician to be able to keep an eye (laughter), to work upwards, and if one is a bit unstable it can be really dangerous. One can go insane.
Respondent B: One loses oneself. I believe one has to have a quite basic order in oneself, not on a superficial level but as a basic order and a quite open self-image and [self-]perception. So that one – it is difficult to say ‘reality’ – has some kind of contact with the outside world, which is at least at a level adjusted to society (laughter). Otherwise I believe that it is really easy to get lost in all sorts of things in oneself and in everything one draws up because one draws up pretty strong forces sometimes. I believe that it can be very dangerous if one is unstable or if one is just depressed
Respondent A: But at the same time it is good to have a system to go by as we have here. I believe that it would be really dangerous in any case for me if I worked completely by myself not having any contact with other chaos magicians or something... It can be good with us all having a system to go by. One has to have a light in the dark.\textsuperscript{51}

In summary, when asked if they would recommend magic for any- and everyone the two female members unequivocally proclaimed: 'No, I would not. Not this form of magic'.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{49} Idem, \textit{Magikurs} 1, ‘brev 1’, 1. Cf. Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 2. See also Ibid., ‘brev 3’, 4.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
In Dragon Rouge rhetoric dark magic can be dangerous even for the fully aware, attentive, and stable magician. In the order’s first correspondence course in magic, a magical experiment that almost resulted in disaster is described.53 A group of Dragon Rouge members had gotten together in order to perform joint astral travel. As the magicians gathered on the astral plane they discovered that one of them was missing. He had gotten lost on the astral plane and had ended up in a sort of ‘astral labyrinth’ from which he could not find his way out. It took the joint effort and considerable risk of all the other magicians in the group to help him find his way back. After waking up, he felt ill and was disoriented. Several Dragon Rouge members have also told me how they have experienced nausea and almost suffered physical injuries when practicing kundalini meditation and the kundalini-force was awakened all too rapidly and strongly.54 The representation of magic as potentially dangerous establishes the practice of it as an activity for unique, brave, and exceptional individuals – individuals who are truly extraordinary. The magician should ‘dedicate all his power and attention’ to his magical activities and progress is only attained through ‘great sacrifices’.55 The rhetoric can also help to protect the practitioner from the possible lack of understanding, and in many times probably even ridicule, from outsiders.

A classic antinomian rhetoric involves the alignment to evil. However, as has already been made clear, the Dragon Rouge approach leans towards ambiguity. Considering morality, a member had this to say:

...I see it as a natural development. I see the kliphoth, the existence of the dark side, as natural. It’s not like there’s something wrong, it’s something that’s completely natural. In other words, not to take in the dark side, that’s unnatural. It is something that is a part of us in the same way as we have a shadow, and it’s interesting because I believe that there is some theory stating that Jesus cut off his shadow and thus created the Anti-Christ. That has to be in some way the worst thing one could do, to cut off one’s shadow, because the shadow is a natural part of you. As long as you are in harmony everything will be good, but if you cut it off then it means that we have total duality where one part is totally good and the other is fully evil. It has to be very dangerous to let loose this other side. It is really not being responsible.56

54 Personal correspondence with Dragon Rouge members.
55 Ibid., ’brev 3’, 10.
The antinomian discourse has an impact on ethics and morality in the Dragon Rouge context. Despite the general unwillingness of the order’s representatives to dictate moral rules, certain kind of ethics are actually advocated in the order – individualistic situational morality. Each member should acquire a deep knowledge of his/her preferences and values, including the ones rooted deeply in one's subconscious, and make his/her own moral judgements when the situation so demands. This strategy begs for the abandoning of static, rule-like ethical codes found in for example many conventional forms of Christianity. Zygmunt Bauman identifies such closed formulations as the modern approach to morality, and the amorphous approach such as the one advocated by Dragon Rouge as postmodern. In Dragon Rouge a strong critique of the ethics of Christianity, in a specific Dragon Rouge interpretation, is combined with the advocation of amorphous morality in the following argumentation included in the first correspondence course in magic:

It is not possible to generalize every act as either good or evil. How is, for example, a so-called evil act to be viewed if the results are good?... For a black magician there exists only a subjective moral code.

The exposition is followed by argumentation for a subjective morality, pointing at the downsides of rigid moral-laws:

The Christians thought that they would be able to force man to love by morality. A forced love is unnatural and without value... A black magician has rooted out all the 'Thou shalt!' and released 'I want to!' If the human being is successful in breaking free of imposed morality he/she can start loving honestly – a love for the living and not for the meek and dying.

The Dragon Rouge view is, much in concordance with Bauman’s outline of the postmodern approach to ethics, that a morality regulated by a rigid ethical code is fundamentally false, and as such, basically destructive to humanity. The above quotation states that a rule-governed approach to how one should act is in conflict with the innate nature of human beings and their morality, and is thus dishonest, leading to destructive tendencies in the long run (as argued in the quotations above).

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59 Ibid.
The Complex of Left-Hand Path Discourses

As discussed in Chapter 1, the identifying signifying characteristic of the constituting discourses of a specific esoteric current is that they deeply interact with, impact upon, and direct each other. The various individual discourses that constitute a complex – a current – are interdependent and inform each other at the deepest level. Each individual discourse assumes a unique form due to its dependence on the other discourses constituting the complex. This condition and process of coexistence and interdependency could be likened to a web. Each and every thread in a web has its own individual and necessary function, and the web can in fact not consist without it, but it is only in connection to the other threads constituting the web that the individual threads are fully functional. While this has been implicitly evident in the above treatment of the Left-Hand Path discourses in the context of Dragon Rouge, a more explicit treatment is in order. All of the abovementioned discourses are deeply interwoven and operate dialogically with each other. The prerequisites of one discourse can be seen in one or both of the others and in this way the discursive complex becomes a coherent whole.

The discourses of self-deification and the ideology of individualism are linked at the most intimate level. The ultimate autonomy sought by the Dragon Rouge magician requires both the fostering of individuality and deep-level personal development: In order to become a god the magician must develop his/her individuality to its full extent, and in order to achieve true individualism apotheosis needs to be achieved. Neither is fully possible without the other; a fully realized individuation signifies the deification of the magician, and achieved apotheosis means that the magician has become a perfected individual. Although a key notion in the ideology of individualism is the freedom and responsibility of the individual to make his/her own choices, the entanglement of the discourse with that of self-deification highlights a perhaps more basic, and arguably more magically oriented, point: Individual freedom relates primarily not to any sort of mundane freedoms in regard to life choices, but is meant to serve a higher purpose in the long-term goal and process of apotheosis. That is to say, personal emancipation requires following one's more deep-seated Will, not one's immediate wants, even though this might lead to situations which are seemingly negative in the short term.

One of the most obvious linkages between the discourses of the ideology of individualism and self-deification lies in discussions concerning ethics and morality in relation to magic. I will repeat an earlier quote in order to demonstrate:
For a black magician there exists only a subjective moral code...[he/she] has rooted out all the ‘Thou shalt!’ and released ‘I want to!’ If the human being is successful in breaking free of imposed morality he/she can start loving honestly – a love for the living and not for the meek and dying.\(^{61}\)

In order for the dark magician to become the ultimate individual he/she not only has the right to discard collective and imposed morality and determine his/her own subjective and personal ethics, he/she in fact has the obligation to do so. However, with great freedom comes great responsibility, and as a god in the making who has chosen his/her own ethical rules of conduct the dark magician cannot blame anyone else for his/her bad choices and their consequences.\(^{62}\) This is regarded as one of the most important realizations, and steps, on the road to self-deification. The above excerpt also relies on the discourse of antinomianism, as discussed earlier. This applies particularly to the elitist implications – which are in general greatly frowned upon in a purportedly egalitarian society such as Sweden – of the suggested ability to responsibly choose one’s own subjective ethical rules. One can even find explicit statements presenting the dark magician as an ‘elite individual’ distinguished from ‘regular humans’.\(^{63}\) As with most instances when the Dragon Rouge discourse of antinomianism is actuated, however, an ambiguity is present.

At the same time as elitist sentiments are expressed their potentially problematic implications are disarmed by pointing out that it concerns ‘elite choices’ rather than positioning one human being over another.\(^{64}\) A long-time member also attempted to conciliate by comparing magical skill to musical aptitude, noting that the fact that some people are more naturally inclined to learn music than others is not in itself an expression of elitism, and in the same way a person’s aptitude for magic is not an expression of elitism either.\(^{65}\) It is just a matter of fact. The discourse of self-deification also intersects with the discourse of antinomianism in the presentation of magical self-development as a volatile activity which requires personal sacrifice and total devotion.

Finally, I will briefly demonstrate how deeply all three Left-Hand Path discourses are interwoven by exemplifying their close interaction in a single short piece of text:

\(^{62}\) Ibid., ‘brev 6’, 9.
\(^{63}\) Idem, *Välkomstbrev till nya medlemmar*.
\(^{64}\) Idem, *Magikurs 1*, ‘brev 1’, 3.
\(^{65}\) Interview 2001–03, April 1, 2001.
The individual dives down into the darkest regions of himself and existence in order to there mythically find the treasure of power guarded by the Dragon. The treasure is the Dragon-force, the kundalini, and the black diamond, which represents the perfection of the individual. The magician steps down into the underworld in order to magically die and recreate himself as a god. The magician goes from being a creation to becoming a creator. This happens through occult knowledge, which is the fruit of knowledge that the serpent gives to the humans in Genesis 3:5, in order for their eyes to open so that they shall become as God.66

This quote expresses that it is the task of the individual to explore core aspects of him-/herself, with the goal of the ‘perfection of the individual’ and aim of the individual to recreate him-/herself. This individual-centred exploration is for personal perfection, and the recreation is of the magician as a god, in a process where he/she goes from being a creation to becoming a creator. The antinomian discourse is demonstrated by terminology such as the darkest regions, stepping down into the underworld, a requirement to magically die, and the quote from the Bible in which the ‘serpent in the Garden of Eden’ is mentioned. In the quote the three discourses are weaved together to draw a portrait of the individual magician, working individually in order to reach apotheosis, and doing so by way of transgressive acts.

CHAPTER 6

The Impact of Broader Cultural Discourses

As noted in Chapter 1, esoteric currents construed as intertwined sets of specific discourses are ideal types, and when currents manifest in real-world esoteric groups, philosophies, and practices they rarely look exactly like these ideal typical models. A group may be firmly set in the discourses of one particular current but it will commonly be influenced by other currents as well. One interesting example is the rune magical group the Rune-Gild, which sits at the nexus of three distinct currents – the Left-Hand Path, Neopaganism (in its Heathen variant), and (Radical) Traditionalism – drawing in a fairly equal degree from all three.1 Dragon Rouge is clearly recognizable as a Left-Hand Path group. However, in contrast to other archetypical Left-Hand Path groups such as the Temple of Set and the Church of Satan Dragon Rouge is heavily influenced by Neopagan discourses. As discussed in chapter 2, the Neopagan current is characterized by discourses pertaining to ‘revival’ or ‘reawakening’ of old European, pre-Christian religion and culture, as well as discourses that posit nature as the principal domain of the divine. In Dragon Rouge, one can certainly find the first of these discourses. Old Norse mythology and religion, particularly pertaining to the runes, has a very central, though not exclusivistic, position in the order. It is, however, the second ingredient of the neopagan current – the focus on nature – that is of particular significance in the order. Many forms of neopaganism have also, from the 1970s, been closely aligned to feminism, and particularly focused on the divine feminine. This is another element in Dragon Rouge’s connection to neopaganism.

The Primacy of Nature

The notion of correspondences, the idea that linkages ‘exist between visible and invisible layers of reality…between the seven metals and the seven planets, between these and the parts of the human body, between the observable cosmos and the (super) celestial levels of the universe, and so on’,2 is an important aspect of most esoteric worldviews. While this certainly has had a bearing on esoteric

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1 Granholm, ‘The Rune-Gild’.
2 Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture, 398.
perspectives on and relations to nature since at least the Renaissance, the specific interpretations and implementations have varied greatly. Renaissance esotericists such as Marisilio Ficino and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa operated with notions of ‘natural magic’,\(^3\) as well as conceptions of a ‘book of nature’ that could be read for esoteric truths in unison with the Bible.\(^4\) However, for them nature was animated by external divine forces, and it was not until eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romanticism that nature started to be regarded as enchanted in and by itself.\(^5\) Today, this view of nature as inherently sacred is most prominent in various forms of neopaganism, but the notion has spread well beyond this esoteric current. The appraisal of nature often coincides with a critique of Christianity. The critique of Christianity, and monotheistic religion in general, and its perceived devaluation of nature is a key factor in the Dragon Rouge discourse of the primacy of nature:

...there was a harmony where one did not destroy nature unnecessarily. But then when this started, with Christianity, all forms of nature worship were posited as miscreant idol-worship... In Sweden, for example, this form of earth-religion continued for a very long time. Instead of calling for Odin one called for Jesus, but it was exactly the same force that came.\(^6\)

Instead of a dualistic monotheistic worldview, members of Dragon Rouge advocate a pantheistic, ‘holistic’ worldview where ‘there are connections between everything’ and ‘where the divine light is [still] present in man’.\(^7\) The order is opposed to the materialistic notion that, according to official Dragon Rouge material, stipulates that ‘nature and the animals are made for man to use’ and that ‘[m]an can do what he likes with animals and nature’.\(^8\) Not only are nature and non-human animals bereaved of their divinity (and dignity), but the human being itself becomes a ‘soulless organism being compared to cars or computers’.\(^9\) This view of the human being, animals, and nature is considered to seriously impede the possibility to reach beyond one’s limitations and fulfil one’s potential.

\(^3\) See Lehrich, The Language of Demons and Angels.


\(^6\) Interview 2001–03, April 1, 2001.

\(^7\) Dragon Rouge, ‘Contra 3 M’.

\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Ibid.
Due to the perceived hegemony of Western materialism it is not enough to simply treat nature as if it was enchanted; the dark magician is actively engaged in re-enchanting it:

What one does as a dark magician is to start to animate nature again through experiences. We work with the kundalini, which is the life-force incorporated in the body and it’s awakened through different channels and [illegible], and when this force is awakened one can more easily have magical experiences. All of this means that one gains a slightly different perspective of things. Suddenly the trees aren’t pieces of wood but can again become cosmic.10

This is important in regard to the requirement for active agency bestowed upon the Dragon Rouge magician. The ‘art and science of magic’ is supposed to be one of conscious exertion of one’s will, and the dark magician is thus expected to actively shape his/her perceptions, and in and through this activity shape the world around him/her.11

As the dark magician is part of nature, injuring or harming it in any way would be equal to harming oneself. The dark magician should feel a connection to, and respect for, all living things, and act in a compassionate and responsible manner. In experiencing the totality of existence and the interconnections between oneself and other living beings, the magician is supposed to not only display sympathy, but develop an empathic relation to sentient beings as well as the living, non-sentient, aspects of existence:

Yes, for me it’s self-evident that everything is linked, everything belongs together, everything I do affects somebody else – both humans and animals and the whole planet. So for me, it’s really important that I do not destroy unnecessarily. I do as much as I can in order to take care of everything living. I feel this is strongly connected to magic, exactly because one is aware of [correspondences]. I mean, if one did not believe that everything was linked then one wouldn’t even be a magician.12

The discourse of the primacy of nature is also interesting due to it going beyond the linguistic, as well as the symbolic, level. One of its clearest articulations is seen in practices, which in a discourse psychological framework are discursive
acts to the same extent as those expressed in linguistic and non-linguistic communicative systems. Much Dragon Rouge magical practice operates with and in nature in one way and form or another. In the first Dragon Rouge correspondence course in magic, the adept is encouraged to write down a list of what he/she wishes to accomplish in life and to bury that piece of paper in the soil or release it in a natural body of water. Although not stated explicitly, the idea seems to be that nature, through the soil or the water, imbues the magician with power to realize the wishes on the list. A similar strategy is described in the ‘soul-mirror’ ritual, discussed on page 137. As detailed, the ritual culminates in the creation of two lists of character traits, one with positive and one with negative traits. The magician is told to ‘plant’ (note the choice of word, my translation from the Swedish ‘plantera’) the list with positive character traits in a place in nature that feels meaningful and personal to the magician. Furthermore, it is said that powerful magical items can be found when ‘strolling in the forest’. The magician should not, however, take possession of such items indiscriminately. When using living parts of nature in rituals, such as cutting a piece of a living tree as opposed to using a fallen branch, the magician should ‘ask the living natural object for permission’ before doing so. Disturbing nature is thus not completely out of the question as long as the magician recognizes it as animated and divine, and pays it due respect.

In discussing witchcraft, as a distinct form of dark magic, nature is often said to be the best teacher that the witch and warlock can have, and the best place to come into contact with truly magical forces is in nature untouched by human hands. This relates to the dichotomy of Chaos and Cosmos that is central to Dragon Rouge cosmology. The city, as the quintessential manifestation of human civilization, represents the cosmic forces, structured existence, and stagnation that are antithetical to creativity and thus complicate and inhibit the magician’s development. Nature, on the other hand, represents primordial Chaos and the dark forces of dissolution and (re-)creation. The forces of order are passive and stable, and solicit this reaction in humans as well, whereas the activity and inherent instability of the forces of Chaos instead support and strengthen creative agency.

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13 Dragon Rouge, Magikurs 1, ‘brev 1’, 15.
14 Ibid., ‘brev 3’; 1.
15 Ibid., 7.
16 Ibid., ‘brev 5’; 9.
18 See Chapter 3.
19 Dragon Rouge, Magikurs 1, ‘brev 2’; 5.
The discourse of the primacy of nature also assumes antinomian qualities in the context of Dragon Rouge. Nature is regarded as enchanted in and by itself, but the focus is primarily on it as dark, chaotic, and dangerous qualities. The nature Dragon Rouge is concerned with is not primarily the realm of beautiful flowers, chirpy songbirds, and cute fluffy bunnies, but of savage wolves and treacherous paths. In this regard, representatives of the order also criticize what the purportedly selective outlook of representatives of ‘white spirituality’, who supposedly disregard darkness as a part of the whole and falsely attribute more benevolent characteristics to nature than it actually represents. As such, the Dragon Rouge approach to nature is presented as more ‘holistic’ – and more ‘natural’ – than the approaches of most other religious, esoteric, and magical groups, including representatives of self-avowed nature religions such as Wicca.

**The Dark Feminine Divine**

Dragon Rouge has a very strong focus on the feminine divine, far stronger than what can be found in Left-Hand Path groups such as the Church of Satan, the Temple of Set, and the Rune-Gild. Kenneth Grant does provide some treatment of the (dark) feminine divine in his Typhonian Trilogies, but the theme has nowhere near the same prominence as in Dragon Rouge. As noted above, neopaganism is the esoteric current where it is most common to find a focus on the feminine divine, and it would be a reasonable conjunction that the Dragon Rouge magicians have drawn from the same cultural reservoir in the occult milieu as neopagans. However, in its almost exclusive focus on the dark and dangerous aspects of her the Dragon Rouge approach to the feminine divine differs from that which is common in neopaganism. Female mythological beings, such as the Hindu/Tantric goddess Kali, the Old Norse death-goddess Hel, and the Kabbalistic demoness Lilith, play eminent roles in the order’s philosophy and practice. While male deities are far from absent in the Dragon Rouge magical system, and can have quite prominent ritual functions, they are often overshadowed by their female counterparts.

The purported aim of the magicians of the order is to provide a holistic approach to and representation of the feminine divine While the role of the
feminine divine as a birth-giver and nurturing mother is not completely discarded, she is most commonly discussed in more destructive terms. There are plenty of examples to be found in the order’s material. In an article on the Celtic goddess Morrigan she is described as ‘the crow – psychopomp of death, the she-bitch, the white haired hag, the vengeful and embittered maiden, the collector of heads’, and the ‘sanitization’ of her in neopagan and ‘New Age’-circles is strongly criticized. Similarly, although in a more ambiguous fashion, the Old Norse Hel is described as ‘a dark goddess, which [sic] unites life and death’. In discussions of ‘dark forces’ in the Finnish national epic the Kalevala the witch-queen Louhi is given special attention. The witch-goddess of the underworld, was the subject of one of the working projects of the German lodge Heldrasil since 2009. As an expression of broader trends within the order, the focus of its second correspondence course in magic is largely on ‘dark witchcraft’; several articles on this particular theme and elements related to it have appeared in the members’ paper Dracontias in recent years, and the Malmö-based lodge Sinistra has had a project-circle devoted to ‘initiatory witchcraft’ since at least 2006. While witchcraft is not a practice only for women, Dragon Rouge does envision it as dealing with ‘feminine’ magical forces.

A particularly interesting, and persistent, example of the focus on the dark feminine divine is found in treatments of Vāmamārga Tantra – one of the ‘four pillars’ of the order’s magical system. In a two-part article in Dracontias from 2008/2009, the dark and dangerous feminine divine is presented as an essential aspect of Tantra, and the Sanskrit word ‘Vāma’ is connected to ‘woman’. In fact, the Sanskrit word for ‘woman’, while being similar to ‘Vāma’ which denotes left, adverse, wicked, opposite

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25 Dragon Rouge, ‘Mörka makter i Kalevala’.
26 See e.g. idem, ‘Aktiviteter’ (2009), 18.
27 Idem, Magikurs 2, particularly ‘brev 3’.
30 This was one of the themes of the presentation by the Women’s Circle during the 2004 Dragon Rouge annual meeting.
31 For the role of Tantra in Dragon Rouge, and the interpretations of it, see Granholm, ‘The Serpent Rises in the West’.
33 Idem, ‘Tantra och den vänstra handens väg (del 2)’, 5.
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etc.,\textsuperscript{34} is actually ‘Vāmā’, which also denotes ‘lovely, dear, pleasant, agreeable, fair, beautiful, splendid, noble’.\textsuperscript{35} In Western simplified spelling the two words appear very similar, but no etymological connection between them has been established. Now, it is certainly true that many Tantric texts and practices have a strong focus on the feminine,\textsuperscript{36} but the interesting thing with the two articles published in \textit{Dracontias} is the author’s promotion of this aspect as the defining one over others that could conceivably have received equal treatment.

As should be clear from the above, the Dragon Rouge focus on the feminine divine is deeply informed by the antinomian discourse. It is through this discursive entanglement that the Dragon Rouge treatment of the feminine divine assumes its specific focus on the ‘dark and dangerous’ aspects. The order is able to maintain its essential rebellious/antinomian ethos, and still adhere to a neo-pagan interest in the feminine aspects of the divine. The feminine is simply reassessed, re-imagined, and re-presented in ways that makes it antinomian. In fact, the focus on the feminine divine is such that it actually strengthens the antinomian discourse. By selecting sources in which the feminine is presented as demonic and evil, i.e. ‘dark – which, in all honesty, is not particularly difficult in the context of the European history of religion – and as ‘dark’ in the order’s vocabulary denotes ‘ancient and hidden’, it is possible to present the Dragon Rouge perspective on the feminine divine as dealing with authentically perennial qualities. Whereas the masculine represents the ubiquitous forces of light, the feminine represents the dark and hidden aspects of reality. Lilith, as the quintessential ‘dark, demonic woman’, ‘represent[s] the gate to the dimensions of magic’,\textsuperscript{37} ‘[s]he is Mother Earth and through her womb life is born and dies... She is the underworld and the mother of all life’.\textsuperscript{38} The focus on the dark feminine divine is actually so central that it even receives visual representation in the order’s main symbol, the Dragon seal.\textsuperscript{39} The body of the Dragon in the seal consists of a symbol that is itself identified as ‘the eye of Lucifer’, or ‘the womb of Lilith’ (Image 14).

The Dragon Rouge focus on the dark feminine divine also closely relates to its discourse on the primacy of nature. Throughout Western cultural and

\textsuperscript{34} Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, ‘vāmā’.
\textsuperscript{35} Idem, ‘vāmā’.
\textsuperscript{36} See e.g. White, \textit{Kiss of the Yogini}; Gröndahl 2000, \textit{Den gudomliga kroppen}, 63; Walker, \textit{Tantrism}, 59.
\textsuperscript{37} Dragon Rouge, \textit{Magikurs} 2, ‘brev 3’, 3.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} See Image 12.
religious history, woman has been considered to be closely related to nature while man has been related to civilization. Dragon Rouge repeats this same dichotomy, but as it values nature over civilization it also values the feminine over the masculine. Female mythological beings are considered to be more representative of the dark and unknown forces that dark magicians strive to work with, and nature in itself is where these forces are to be found. In the same way, woman has a closer connection to dark magical forces, and nature itself is imbued by the feminine divine.

**Discoursive Realities**

All discourses have real-world political, ideological, and practical implications, and tend to inform power relations. Dragon Rouge is, of course, no exception, and both the intrinsic Left-Hand Path discourses and the additional key discourses discussed above inform and direct social action and relations among members, between members and non-members, and between the order and the world at large. Official representatives of Dragon Rouge explicitly and vehemently oppose the order advocating any particular political, ideological, or religious dogmas. This is in line with the centrality of individualism, where no matters of doctrine should be imposed on a member of the order.
Nonetheless, while the ideology of individualism may reign strong, the actual implementation of ideological and doctrinal neutrality is not simple and uncomplicated. First, Dragon Rouge operates with a degree structure, which could easily have hierarchical implications that conflict with the quest for ultimate autonomy. Second, even though collectivistic ideologies and movements are explicitly criticized it is nonetheless possible to find strands of politico-ideological positions in the order that are, while not imposed, frequently advocated. When asked about their views on certain topics such as politics, equality, ecology and religion/spirituality, all of the Dragon Rouge members I have engaged in my research have indicated that environmentalism and gender equality are of particular importance. The same topics are frequently highlighted in many neopagan circles as well, and Dragon Rouge is, as noted, strongly influenced by neopagan discourses. In this second part of the chapter I will examine the key esoteric discourses of Dragon Rouge in the light of broader relational and ideological contexts. The phenomena I will focus on are the power problematicsthat emerge when an ideology of individualism is combined with a hierarchical degree structure, the potentials and consequences of a focus on nature as animated and divine, and the potential and realized feminist implications of the focus on the feminine divine in combination with the ideology of individualism and drive towards apotheosis.

**Ultimate Autonomy and Degree Structures – Non-Hierarchical Hierarchy?**

Since at least the occult revival and the founding of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1888 initiatory degree structures have been key components of magic orders. From the very beginning, these degree structures have had a dual function: an initiatory and ‘spiritual’ one dealing with streamlining processes of personal and magical development by the structured and gradual transmission of esoteric knowledge, and a social one in which the degree not only signals the adept’s level of spiritual maturity, but his/her social and organizational standing in regard to other adepts as well. Not surprisingly, the latter has come to function as the primary driving force for some individuals, and this has in some cases even come to characterize whole groups. Thus initiatory degrees have, fairly often, become arenas of struggle and dispute.

Dragon Rouge is, like most major Left-Hand Path groups, an initiatory order with a degree structure. This would seem to be an ill fit with the inherent individualism of the Left-Hand Path, and this potential problem is indeed one of

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41 See pages 45–47.
the major motivations given for attempts to diminish hierarchical implications in the order, as well as in many other Left-Hand Path groups. The ideology of individualism posits the individual as the absolute centre of her experiential world. Everything else is secondary, including affiliation to and responsibilities towards the initiatory community that the individual is part of. When the focus is on the individual, and the discourse of individual and personal freedom, choice, and diversity is so central, problems arise if trying to construct a rigid degrees structure of general applicability. Degree structures have indeed been implicated in conflicts within the milieu in general. For example, one of the main reasons given by Michael Aquino, founder of the Temple of Set, for leaving the Church of Satan in 1975 was objections relating to the Church’s degree structure, and in particular the apparent corrupted implementation of it.\footnote{Aquino, \textit{Black Magic}, 6; idem, \textit{The Church of Satan}, 399–414; idem, \textit{The Temple of Set}, 19–24.} It is not uncommon to come across the perception that many older magical institutions are corrupted, and that their degree structures have become vehicles for external status seeking. The claim is that this results in a situation where \textit{true} initiation suffers and externally based \textit{false} initiation comes to dominate. Purportedly, the endeavour in Dragon Rouge is to recognize \textit{true} advancement, development, and initiation through catering for each individual’s personal and highly individual path of progress.

Initiatory degrees themselves invite to comparison between members, and it would appear to be difficult to fully escape their inherent hierarchical implications. In general, Left-Hand Path groups endeavour to diminish the hierarchical implications of initiatory degree structures, by various means and more or less successfully. One common strategy is to downplay the significance of the degrees as a measure to compare individual members, framing the degrees as relating to individual progress and processes that cannot be comparatively measured in any meaningful way. That is to say, degree X will imply a different thing for person A than for person B, and while they both signify a certain level of spiritual maturity and growth, this growth can be totally different for the two individuals in question. As the founder of Dragon Rouge, Thomas Karlsson, expresses it: ‘It is the progress one has experienced that is important, not the objective level one is on’.\footnote{Interview 2007–04, April 22, 2007.} The point is that an individual’s progress can only be measured in light of that person’s point of departure, and that sort of assessment can be properly done only by that person him-/herself. If personal development is indeed individual, then any comparisons between members would be irrelevant.\footnote{Ibid.} Another common strategy is to downplay the significance of
degrees as valuable in their own right, and emphasize their essentially pragmatic function. As Thomas Karlsson continues: ‘there is no point in itself to hold a degree, the point is to travel on the path of initiation’. This mirrors what Kenneth Grant writes regarding the OTO degrees, which he considers to be ‘lesser circles upon the rim of that greater Circle or Wheel which is in process of continual revolution’, implying that all degrees are essentially equivalent.

This is not to say that members of Dragon Rouge regard the initiatory degree structure as arbitrary or inconsequential in any way. Quite the contrary; one of the primary reasons given as a motivation for diminishing the hierarchical implications of the degree structure is the desire to avoid any devaluation of the initiatory process – something that is argued to have happened in older magic orders. It is felt that if attaining degrees would be a merit in itself, then members might be tempted to focus more on external factors than on internal development. In order to prevent members from ‘competing’ with their degrees certain measures are taken. Primarily, members are encouraged to not reveal their ‘ranking’ in the degree structure, and while this is nowhere issued as a rule or even semi-official guideline, members seem to maintain this arrangement fairly strictly. I have known several members of the order for more than ten years, who based on their level of involvement, level of activity, and years of being members can be assumed to be initiated in at least the third degree (i.e. they belong to the ‘inner order’, the Dragon Order). However, none have revealed their specific degree to me. One's standing on the degree scale is simply not discussed among members, and so it is nigh impossible to know what degree another member holds. The rationale is that if degrees are kept ‘secret’, then they will not become markers of organizational prestige.

If one's level of spiritual and magical development is deeply personal and individual, one could assume that progress in the degree structure itself would become difficult. Rhetorically, this is resolved by each and every member being his/her own authority when assessing the level of initiatory maturity. Nevertheless, the order of course keeps track of the specific degrees of its members, and an individual member is not fully free to simply adopt a degree this member feels that he/she deserves. It is the inner circle of the order,

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45 Ibid.
46 Grant, Cults of the Shadow, xiii.
47 See pages 93, 97–99.
49 Ibid.
relying on the ‘tutor’ the adept has worked in closest cooperation with, who ultimately decides if a person is ready to assume the new degree. In practice, the process involves the member requesting to receive initiation into a specific degree from the inner circle, who then decide if the member in question is mature enough. Only then can a ritual of initiation be performed, and the member’s new status officially be recognized.\footnote{For more specifics on this process, see pages 123–124.} Of course, while the member needs to report on his/her initiatory progress in order for the inner circle to be able to make its assessment, the order really has no objective way of assuring that the member in question is truthful in his/her account. Also, a member cannot ‘skip’ degrees, but needs to follow each step of the initiatory path in its proper order. This is the general conduct in regard to members of the third degree or below. After having received his/her third degree initiation, and having joined the Dragon Order, a member has a much greater freedom to him-/herself assess the level of development. The idea is that the further one progresses in one’s development, the more personal and individual the path becomes, and the harder it therefore becomes for anyone else to assess that progress or level of development.

Even though Dragon Rouge tries to escape the hierarchical implications of having a degree structure, it acknowledges the need for some form of hierarchy on an administrational level. Even here, however, attempts are made to diminish at least the appearance of hierarchy. While some orders have a very structured administrational system – such as the Temple of Set that has a High Priest or Priestess chosen by a Council of Nine, which is in turn elected from a number of candidates nominated by members of degree four and above\footnote{Granholm, ‘The Left-Hand Path and Post-Satanism’.} – Dragon Rouge has not. The order as a whole has no officially recognized leader, and its inner circle is not chosen in any kind of general election.\footnote{A common view among Dragon Rouge members is that inner circle-members are not distinguished from ‘regular members’ to any significant degree. Questionnaire 2001–01; 2001–04; 2001–05; 2001–08.} The situation is a bit different with the order’s lodges, where five officials are chosen and identified as key personnel at the time of formation.\footnote{See pages 117–125.} The situation is similar to the one in the inner circle, however, in that these leaders are not democratically elected. In both the order as a whole and in its lodges, the initiatory structure is differentiated from the administration, and a member’s influence in the organization is dependent on his/her level of engagement in organizational tasks rather than on initiatory degree. In theory,
then, a member with a low initiatory degree could become influential if he/she volunteers for many organizational tasks. There is, however, an area where one’s initiatory status plays a significant role; the development of the initiatory system. Thomas Karlsson feels that it would be wrong if a low-degree member would gain too much control over the development of initiatory structures as that member will not have the required expertise. At the same time, however, a low-degree member can nevertheless influence the doctrinal development of the order as a whole as he/she has the possibility to have his/her texts published in the members’ paper *Dracontias*.

While representatives of Dragon Rouge express a strong wish to diminish hierarchies, the very vagueness of the order’s structures, the lack of influence on the administration by ordinary members, and the general lack of insight into the order’s inner workings might make the abuse of power a real possibility. For example, while a low-degree member could in theory become influential, his/her possibility to achieve this may very well be, and most likely is, dependent on his/her relations with more advanced long-time members. Thus, personal conflicts could compromise a member’s standing, and perhaps future, in the order and its various geographical chapters. Furthermore, although the order has no formalized leadership, its founder Thomas Karlsson is in effect its leader, along with a core of long-time members who are influential partly due to their history with the order, and with Karlsson.

### Vegetarianism, Animal Rights, and Environmentalism

The discourse of the primacy of nature is, while not a formative part of the Left-Hand Path as a whole, a central aspect of Dragon Rouge. Nature is regarded as the realm of magic, a place where the transformative forces of Chaos constantly engage the structuring forces of Cosmos. Being as close one can be to the dynamic forces of Chaos imbues the magician with power, and subsequently facilitates his/her personal evolution. However, nature is not considered as a mere tool for the magician to use at whim and will. The magician is, or can become, part of nature, and in this process it, as well as non-human animals, is
considered to have value in itself.\footnote{See e.g. Dragon Rouge, ‘Contra 3 M.’} One of the ‘Five Elementary Draconian Principles’ of Dragon Rouge states that ‘all is one’, implying correspondences and a total unity of everything in existence,\footnote{Idem, ‘Philosophy’.} and this partially explains the attitudes towards the environment and non-human animals that are common among many members of the order. This involves a focus on environmentalism and animal rights, which have surfaced as key concerns for many of the order’s members.\footnote{For more on this theme, see Granholm, ‘Left-Hand Path Magic and Animal Rights’.} The starting point is the conviction that the life-denying materialism that is prevalent in Western societies has seriously negative consequences:

The nature and the animals are made for man to use. Man can do what he likes with animals and nature... Dark magic is theriocentric and views man as an animal and a part of nature. Man can become god by entering outside the human limits and by recognizing the importance of the beast. This is not to be interpreted as if one is giving in to all lower instincts. It is rather a way to value nature and the animals. The draconian philosophy is a pantheism where the divine is present in nature... Nature has become dead and man and the animals have become soulless organisms being compared to cars or computers. This leads to people seeking fast satisfaction of the basic instincts instead of striving to reach divinity... By invoking the old spirits the world is re-enchanted and man and nature win back their soul. A fellowship in a magical order should mean that the individuals become more than themselves.\footnote{Dragon Rouge, ‘Philosophy’.}

One of the tasks of the magician is to free him-/herself from this ideology and experience him-/herself as a part of the divinity of nature. Thus, the adoption of an affinity for nature, involving ecological living, environmentalism, and vegetarianism can be treated as an essentially magical project.

In Dragon Rouge, animal rights issues are commonly raised from ecological concerns. There are more members of Dragon Rouge who regard ecological living and environmentalism to be important than there are members who have adopted a vegetarian diet or who actively engage in animal rights work. However, when discussing ecology, animal husbandry often surfaces as a key theme, and this in turn raises the issue of the treatment of animals onto the table. Many members take quite lengthy excursions into the issues of factory farming and other forms of mistreatment of animals in these contexts.
Although ecological concerns surface as primary in Dragon Rouge, issues pertaining to animal rights receive treatment in their own right as well. An overwhelming majority of the members involved in the inner circle of the order, and many of the active Stockholm-based members, are vegetarian. A member of the order since 1991 professes to be an environmentalist and animal rights activist, and says that many Dragon Rouge members are vegetarians and that a large majority entertain environmentalist ideals.

The members of the order who are vegetarian or vegan commonly rationalize their choice of diet as being motivated by a respect for animals. On the Dragon Rouge homepage one can read that ‘[m]an can become god by entering outside the humans limits and recognizing the importance of the beast,’ and in the process of identifying with ‘beasts’ vegetarianism could be seen as the only logical dietary choice. As a female member expresses it: ‘I see all living creatures as equal…[E]veryone has the same value and potential as we have.’

Still further, adopting a vegetarian diet is regarded by some members to be a magical act in and by itself, as well as a significant step on the magician’s path to self-deification. The very realization of one’s connectedness to everything is considered to be an important tool for magical progress. The order’s discourse of self-deification highlights the magician’s need to assume not only total control of his/her existential universe, but also total responsibility. It is a fairly common view, among the vegetarians of the order, that adopting a vegetarian diet is a natural consequence of cultivating one’s personal ethics and responsibility. In a presentation of the order to a group of university students in 2001, vegetarianism was also identified as one of the strongest ethical themes prevalent in the late 1990s. Of course, societal and cultural trends play a part here. The general rise of animal rights awareness in western Europe and North America has brought new issues to the arena of ethics, and this has naturally not gone unnoticed by Left-Hand Path magicians. In a worldview that demands self reflection the issue could not have gone unaddressed for very long.

Even though efforts are made to not officially involve the order in politics and ideology, the question of the mistreatment of animals and even animal

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62 Questionnaire 2001–08.
63 Dragon Rouge, ‘Philosophy’.
66 Questionnaire 2001–04.
rights come close to operating in this arena. Animal rights are commonly treated as a moral issue. Several members are of the opinion that eating meat and the exploitation of animals is unjustifiable from a moral standpoint, and that the lack of responsibility in the populace in general, and among political leaders in particular, is appalling. It is argued that the human being is essentially no different from non-human animals, and that one needs to acknowledge this. The horrors of factory farming are often given as the rationale for adopting a vegetarian diet. Sentiments that the contemporary meat industry is perverse, morally and magically reproachable, and irresponsible are expressed. One member goes as far as comparing the meat industry with slavery in the pre-Civil War US, and the Holocaust in Nazi Germany – as did the animal rights movement PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) in 2003.

Many different reasons for adopting a vegetarian lifestyle are given by members of the order, and the idea that animal rights sentiments naturally emerge as a key notion when working with fundamental magical energies is not uncommon. Adopting a vegetarian diet is then a logical step to take when sufficient awareness of oneself and existence in its totality is achieved. Physiological reasons, often connected to the practice of magic, are another common rationale given by Dragon Rouge members for the preference of a vegetarian diet. One member said that eating meat makes him dull and unable to concentrate on his magical work. Another member elaborates on the same

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68 Questionnaire 2001–05.
70 Questionnaire 2001–04.
71 Questionnaire 2001–03.
73 Questionnaire 2001–08.
74 A comparison between the horrors of Nazi death camps and the use and abuse of animals in contemporary society is made in Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 19–22. In the text, which was originally based on talks given by Coetzee in the Tanner Lectures at Princeton University in 1997–1998, the fictional novelist Elizabeth Costello says the following: ‘Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty, and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, selfregenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them.’ Ibid., 21. Coetzee’s text was probably the inspiration for a similar comparison made by PETA, and the author is discussed on the PETA website, see e.g., PETA, ‘Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee on Animal Death Camps’.
subject: ‘when one is working magic, it is quite important to have the right nutritional substances in oneself. Meat is quite hard to break down by the body, and one becomes tired and heavy’. In short, a vegetarian diet is preferable for a magician as it makes the working of magic easier. Or rather, the eating of meat makes the working of magic more difficult. These sentiments are also echoed by Thomas Karlsson. He points out, however, that the choice is not something dictated to anyone on the behalf of Dragon Rouge, it has simply surfaced naturally among many Stockholm-based members. Vegetarianism does indeed not seem to be as important to members outside Stockholm, although this is changing. The choice of a vegetarian diet is thus motivated in various different ways, including concerns for animal rights, ecology, health, and magical efficiency. In fact, the different motivations are somewhat difficult to separate clearly from each other as they are all intertwined; the choice of a vegetarian diet is ecologically sound, and thus good for magical practice, and thus good for spiritual and physical wellbeing.

The discourse of the primacy of nature has an obvious role to play in the rise to prominence of environmentalism, animal rights, and vegetarianism among members of Dragon Rouge. However, curious as it may seem, the key Left-Hand Path discourses also play important roles. The role played by the goal of self-deification and the ethical demands it actualizes has already been discussed, but the ideology of individualism and the antinomian ethos of the order may actually be even more important. Although it would at a first glance seem to be a contradiction, I suggest that the ideology of individualism is one of the most important reasons behind the rise of animal rights awareness and vegetarianism in Dragon Rouge. With a strong individualist ethos the focus is shifted away from communities, and the human species. This shift has the natural effect of causing a reevaluation of the apparent uniqueness of the species, and can lead to a critique of conventional justifications for existing power relations between human and non-human animals. From here, the adoption of animal rights ideologies and a vegetarian diet easily surfaces as a logical course of action. This appears to be what has happened in Dragon Rouge. The antinomianism of the order plays a different role. Historically in the West, the eating of meat has never been the subject of restrictions based on religious or moral edicts, and it certainly is not a taboo in contemporary Western societies. For a Left-Hand Path magician the adoption of a vegetarian diet and animal rights perspectives could be seen as antinomian, precisely due to not being ‘mainstream’.

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78 Questionnaire 2001–03.
The rhetoric and rationale of environmentalism, vegetarianism, and animal rights activism in Dragon Rouge is firmly grounded in the contemporary secular animal rights movement, as pioneered by the likes of Peter Singer and Tom Regan. Rationalist argumentation and substantiated fact are key rhetorical devices. However, spiritual dimensions are added to this rationalist approach. In Dragon Rouge the world is seen as an interconnected place, where humans co-exist with other living beings and where he/she should not have an automatically superior status. Vegetarians in the order regard the adoption of animal rights ethics as a natural consequence of the initiatory process. The combination of secular animal rights activism with religious sentiments is a good example of the fragmentation of liquid modernity, as well as indicative of post-secular discourses where the scientifically rational (i.e. the disenchanted) is combined with the analogical and emotional in order to arrive at the re-enchanted.

**Feminism and Gender Equality?**

Often when a religious group has a focus on the feminine divine, as is the case with Dragon Rouge, this goes hand in hand with feminist aspirations. However, it need not. Such a focus can also have the opposite effect, resulting in gender stereotyping where ‘male’ and ‘female’ become reified as essentialized categories. The Dragon Rouge focus on the feminine divine is often combined with feminist themes, although the term ‘feminism’ itself is not always positively appraised by members of the order. Feminism is, of course, a broad umbrella category that contains ideologies and perspectives of very varying sorts. Some (mainly older) schools of feminist thought operate with strict gender differentiation, whereas others – such as queer theory – strive to problematize, subvert, and transgress such dichotomies. Furthermore, in a broader cultural context, the term ‘feminism’ has received yet other meanings, among which misinterpretations and (deliberate or nondeliberate) misrepresentations of it as a form of ‘female chauvinism’ are common. Here, I will not make an attempt to provide a definition of feminism, but instead use ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ in a broad sense, relating to all positions that critically address gendered coding of human beings, in particular relating to women. The task is to

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80 For ‘difference feminism’, see e.g. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*. For queer theory, see e.g. Butler, *Gender Trouble*; idem, *Bodies that Matter*. For various feminist positions, see Kemp & Squires, eds. *Feminisms*.
81 Although somewhat dated, Faludi, *Backlash*, is still a discussion of various anti-feminist approaches and their rationales.
examine if feminist perspectives and aspirations find expression in Dragon Rouge, and in this case what their forms and potential, and realized and unrealized consequences, are.

Official Dragon Rouge material does voice a feminist critique, and it is largely directed at monotheism in general and Christianity in particular. Christianity is criticized for bringing about, or alternatively being a major manifestation of, a patriarchal world order that has oppressed, among other categories of people, women. In listing what terrible atrocities the ‘all-powerful Christian God’ is involved in according to the Bible, the repression of women is specifically mentioned. Except this and genocide, everything else is simply lumped together as ‘most thinkable atrocities’.\textsuperscript{82} Monotheistic religion is regarded to, as a rule, down-value the feminine in general and women in particular, and the suggested reason is the fact that ‘[t]he monotheistic god is generally always a man’.\textsuperscript{83} This, in turn, has led to Woman being projected as the evil and dangerous Other. This rhetoric is present in the official material of the order, but also common among its members. When asked about her view on Christianity, a female member responded: ‘I don’t like Christianity because it is a denial of femininity on the whole’.\textsuperscript{84} Similarly, other monotheistic religions are subject to the same assessment. In particular Muslim religion and culture is criticized for being oppressive and violent towards women, and compared to medieval Christian religion and culture in this regard.\textsuperscript{85} This critique functions to present Dragon Rouge as a positive alternative, where monotheism in general and Christianity in particular functions as the negative Other. The order’s proposed solution to centuries of symbolic and actual subjugation of women is to re-assess the feminine and develop an affinity for and appreciation of it – something which is seen as a principal dark magical task. As such, the symbolic content of ‘feminine’ is not outright transformed. Instead, the denotations of this content are re-interpreted. This is where the Dragon Rouge discourse of antinomianism comes in. The feminine is not ‘de-demonized’; it is presented as something dark, dangerous, and, most of all, powerful. As discussed in chapter 5,

\textsuperscript{82} Dragon Rouge, ‘Philosophy’.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Interview 2001–08, May 8, 2001.
\textsuperscript{85} Dragon Rouge, \textit{Magikurs 2}, ‘brev 3’, 3; idem, ‘Philosophy’. It is, of course, clear that this argumentation is based on very simplified and homogenizing accounts of both medieval Christianity and present day Islam. The argumentation is also problematic and could conceivably motivate anti-Muslim action, as it presents present-day Islam as backwards while the specific mention of ‘medieval’ in relation to Christianity implies that the religion has progressed.
the traditionally negative connotations of female deities are strengthened rather than lessened, as when the Celtic Morrigan is described as a 'she-bitch' and 'collector of heads':86 These negativities are then put to positive magical use: Morrigan's destructive aspects can be employed in tearing down obstacles to one's magical progress.

A focus on the feminine divine, with women seen as physical manifestations of this immanent force, could conceivably result in essentialized views of what femininity signifies, and in extension of what it means to be a ‘real’ woman. Gender polarity is a central element in some neopagan contexts, which in itself might possibly result in gendered divisions in organizational contexts. Curious of whether this might be the case in Dragon Rouge, I asked two female members if there are differences in the roles of male and female members in the order. Their response was:

Respondent B: No.
Respondent A: There's no difference. We're humans, we're magical creatures.
Respondent B: I'm of the opinion that it really feels like we've moved beyond those, there aren't any gender roles in Dragon Rouge. I've never felt that it [gender] is of any significance.
Respondent A: [I've never felt] that I've been treated differently because I am a woman.
Respondent B: But then again, we are quite atypical...I mean, it is the girls who have driver's licences and fix the cars and it's the boys who sit and, sit at home and... 
Respondent A: ...never having done military service (laughter).
Respondent B: No exactly, no one has done military service, and that is to say we are very untypical, so we've probably moved beyond at least these traditional gender roles.87

In my fieldwork with the order I have, in general, not noticed any indications of gender essentialism. And as the gender-dichotomies of ‘white magicians’ are regularly criticized by members of the order, it is not very likely to occur. As is clear in the above excerpt, the members are careful to represent the role of women in the order as equal to that of men, and this is in turn emphasized through an inversion of conventional gender roles. The order’s women are presented as technologically capable and active, and men as having taken on more

passive, ‘feminized’, roles. The point is not to exhibit the male magicians as passive and effeminate, but rather to stress the fact that female magicians have a strong standing in the order. The two female members also clearly draw on the Dragon Rouge discourse of individualism, presenting members of the order as being atypical, enlightened, and in general liberated. Thus, supposedly, rather than being bound by traditional gender roles the magicians of Dragon Rouge actively formulate and create their own.

Women and the feminine are not essentialized in linguistic representations in Dragon Rouge, but does the same hold true in regard to ritual representations and practices as well? Based on my fieldwork, I would say that this is generally the case. However, there are instances when specific roles are accorded based on gender. For example, in a presentation of the women’s group’s work at the annual meeting of 2004 women were said to channel the feminine forces differently from men; in the ceremonial opening of lodge Sinistra two female members had specific ritual functions; in the course on ceremonial magic the participants were divided into groups according to gender; in my initiation into the second degree of the order’s degree structure the male officials assumed conventional masculine roles as ‘guardians’; and in a working at the 2013 magical camp where sexual energies were raised gender polarity was key. While feminine and masculine forces are thought to exist, their use or presence is not strictly limited to specific genders. Obviously, however, the male–female dichotomy does still play some part in the Dragon Rouge ritual context. In certain situations women are considered to more easily associate with the feminine and men with the masculine, either based on metaphysical relation (less common) or psychological reasons (more common). It should be noted, however, that gender-based ritual functions, as the ones exemplified above, are generally not presented as a necessity, but rather as pragmatic choices, and if no women are present the feminine roles can be assumed by men, and vice versa.

The rhetoric of gender equality is, as could be expected, also in operation on an organizational level. Leading male members are careful to point out that the percentage of female members in the order is high, but there is still a relative scarcity of women in the order’s inner circle. Thus the feminist potential of the focus on the dark feminine divine does not by necessity have all the practical consequences it could have. It should, however, be noted that the members who have been actively involved with the order the longest are mostly male and it is thus only natural that they have assumed roles

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88 See e.g. Questionnaire 2001–03. See also Dragon Rouge, Magikurs 1, ’brev 1’, 7; idem, ‘General Information’.
of greater responsibility. With a number of women having been actively and continuously involved with Dragon Rouge for an extended period, more than fifteen years, things appear to be slowly changing. Also, a separate space – ‘a room of one's own’ – has been carved out in a ‘women's circle’. This group, which has been active in different forms since the 1990s and has since 2003 gone under the name of ‘Nyx’, is described as ‘an international Internet-based circle that focuses on magic channelled by female magicians’.\(^89\) In its earlier incarnations the group was not strictly limited to female magicians, although it rarely involved any male members. A female member active in the formation of the women’s circle had the following to say about the group in 2001:

> For the order itself, it [the women's group] is very important because if it would only be men who hold the threads all the time things will obviously take a specific direction. So I feel that it is very important and I know that Thomas and the others also feel that it is important.\(^90\)

The existence of a women’s circle demonstrates that there is an experienced need of a group focusing on specifically feminine themes, but also that female members feel the need, at least occasionally, to segregate themselves. This could be the result of negative experiences among the women of the order, a sense of it as a ‘boys only club’, but none of the female members I have spoken to have expressed any sentiments of this sort.

The feminist rhetoric incorporated into the discourse of the dark feminine divine has, of course, not developed in isolation; the social context needs to be taken into account. A strong political and cultural feminist discourse is prevalent in Sweden, and the notion of equality between the genders is a very important and normative guideline in the country. As in most contemporary Western societies, the aspiration in Sweden has since the middle of the twentieth century been to forge a society where individuals of both genders have equal opportunities and possibilities, and the political powers have attempted to facilitate this through both law and education. The Scandinavian societies have been forerunners in the ideology of equality, and Sweden has taken an especially active role in the process. This is not to say that the ideology has been successfully implemented in practice: Swedish rape statistics are well beyond those of any other Nordic country, or any other European country for

\(^89\) Idem, ‘Nyx’. The group had its last mention in *Dracontias* in late 2009, but it still exists at the time of writing.

that matter,\textsuperscript{91} the juridical system is seriously outdated and contains clauses that make the conviction of rapists difficult even in cases where there is no doubt that a crime has been committed.\textsuperscript{92} The gendered salary gap of the country may be lower than the OECD average (17.3 percent in 2006) but still in 2006 approximately fifteen percent in disfavour for women,\textsuperscript{93} and until 2013 Swedish law required forced sterilization of anyone undergoing surgery for gender-correction. It could also be claimed that the ‘institutional feminism’ advocated by Swedish politicians in general operates on a gender-essentializing framework that restricts rather than expands the possibilities for non-normative gender identities, and it certainly has resulted in a fair amount of backlash. Still, however ineffective, the ideology is in place, and Dragon Rouge is a part of Swedish society and adheres to many of the ideals that are hegemonic in it. This also betrays the limits of the antinomian discourse of the order. It would be an easy path of antinomianism to turn from gender equality and instead advocate ‘traditional’ gender roles that favour men, and this is indeed something that is advocated in some Satanist groups.\textsuperscript{94} However, this would both act to make the group less compelling to women and counteract the critique of monotheistic religion that is brought forth in the order’s discourses of ideology of individualism, primacy of nature, and above all focus on the dark feminine divine.

As alluded to earlier, the presence of observable feminist tendencies does not by necessity mean that the term ‘feminism’ itself is appreciated. In the early fall of 2004, Dragon Rouge was labelled a feminist magic order on an encyclopaedic website, which in turn resulted in some discussion on the order’s web forum. The most common opinion expressed, with some slight amusement, was: ‘now we have been linked to every single existing political ideology’. As the order wishes to stay independent from any specific political ideology or movement, and feminism is generally considered as such, the label was not appreciated and the text on the website in question was changed. The main reason for the disapproval would appear to be that such a seemingly collectivistic ideology as feminism was regarded to be antithetical to the order’s ideology of individualism. This can further be demonstrated through an anecdote: In the

\textsuperscript{91} UN, ‘Rape Statistics’. In fact, for 2008 the only country listed with higher rape statistics than Sweden was Lesotho in Africa. It should be noted, however, that the statistics could also be taken to indicate that women in Sweden feel more secure in reporting rape. In any case, rape is far from an uncommon crime in the country.

\textsuperscript{92} Marmgren, ‘Våldtäkten på 15-åringen i Tensta’.

\textsuperscript{93} New York Times, ‘Gender Wage Gap’.

\textsuperscript{94} The clearest example would be some forms of so called black metal Satanism, which often invoke traditional gender roles as an expression of anti-modernist rebellion. See Sarelin, \textit{Krigaren och transvestiten}. 
summer of 2004 I was visiting Stockholm and had a casual conversation regarding feminism with a group of both male and female Dragon Rouge members. One of the women, who interestingly enough was – and still is – one of the active parties in the women's circle initiative, asked: ‘Why feminism? Why focus on women, not all of humanity?’ This question was not an anti-feminist reaction per se – although it may have been partly based on caricatured representations of feminism as ‘female chauvinism’ – but rather a questioning of collective-based categorizations. In short, the ideology of individualism, in combination with a focus on the dark feminine divine, may provide ample opportunity for individual emancipation, but in doing so it may also function as a hindrance for collective political action. Still, as demonstrated with the example of environmentalism and animal rights above, some level of collective ideological formation does appear to be possible in the context of Dragon Rouge.
CHAPTER 7

Esotericism and Late Modernity

Having dealt with the history, philosophy, practice, and discursive constitution of Dragon Rouge, it is now time to broaden the horizon. This chapter examines modern esotericism in the light of sociological theory, situating Dragon Rouge in its larger social and cultural context. However, the intent of the chapter is more ambitious than that; I aim to demonstrate what sociological theory can reveal about esotericism in modernity in general by using Dragon Rouge as an example. The order is small and the theories explored here are many, and consequently no conclusive generalizations can be made. While I complement the data derived from my research on Dragon Rouge with examples drawn from other esoteric expressions, the discussion here is still cursory and largely speculative. Nonetheless, the insights gained should be useful in further studies of esotericism in late modernity. Although the main focus is on more contemporary issues, dealing with earlier phases of modernity is relevant. First, the processes involved in ‘late’ modernity can, in many cases, be regarded as continuations and radicalizations of developments in earlier phases of modernity. Second, late modern esoteric groups such as Dragon Rouge are influenced by earlier esoteric groups that have been formed and shaped in different modern social and cultural contexts. In order to fully grasp the sociological realities of late modern esotericism it is important to consider social and cultural change in earlier phases of modernity as well.

Modernity and Esotericism

The sociological concept ‘modernity’, distinguished from the historiographical ‘the modern period’, describes a social order impacted by societal and cultural transformations brought on by Enlightenment ideals of reason, rationality, and secularism. The processes involved are manifested in e.g. industrialization, urbanization, and large-scale political reorganization.1 In terms of social organization, modernity is characterized by the drive towards differentiation where previously unified spheres of politics, education, medicine, religion etc. are separated and come to form their own institutions. Although processes of

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modernization started in western Europe they have become ‘more or less worldwide in their influence’.\(^2\) This does not, however, mean that modernization equals Westernization. Following Shmuel N. Eisenstadt notion of multiple modernities, most scholars today recognize that modernization is not a homogenous process affecting everyone in every place in the same way but rather takes different routes in different contexts and assumes culturally distinct forms.\(^3\)

Modernity is a crucial point in the history of esotericism. In an interpretation of Wouter Hanegraaff’s research,\(^4\) it can be regarded as the culmination of the developments that led to the formation of esotericism as a category of rejected knowledge. The processes of differentiation that characterize modernity divided religion and science, among other fields, into their own separate social spheres, and in these processes practices and philosophies that did not comfortably fit either were relegated first to the margins of both, and then brushed aside in embarrassment like excentric distant relatives who did not measure up to the standards of modern social realities. As mentioned earlier, and discussed in detail by Hanegraaff, in the boundary work of the scientific revolution practices were split into the ‘properly scientific’ and ‘pseudo-scientific’, creating initially spurious distinctions between e.g. chemistry and alchemy and astronomy and astrology. In many cases this had not so much to do with the mechanisms of the practices themselves, but with the motivations of those who engaged in the practices. Thus, a ‘chymist’ who did not agree to the separation of religion and science and continued to regard his practice as relating to both scientific inquiry and spiritual pursuits became an ‘alchemist’, whereas his ‘properly scientific’ cousin became a ‘chemist’. In part, these separations, and certainly the terminology applied here, are a result of later historical revisionism in the historiography of science. This revisionism was applied to events preceeding the modern boundary work as well, particularly in cases where key scientific forefathers were simply too important to cast aside. Thus, for example, Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) was regarded – and in mainstream non-expert accounts still continues to be – the father of modern secularized physics while his alchemical practices and his motivation of finding evidence of the hand of God in the mechanisms of the natural world are quietly forgotten.

Modernization, in its western European forms, is fuelled by the key ideological component of secularism, which, in simplification, positions rationalist – and often at least nominally scientific – explanatory models as preferable to


\(^3\) Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations & Multiple Modernities*.

\(^4\) Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*. 
religious ones. I say nominally, as secularism largely revolves around a *rhetoric* of rationalism and scientism, and the connections between the secular and the religious, the ‘modern’ and the ‘traditional’, are immensely more complicated than such dualist dichotomies suggest. Secularism has since the Enlightenment formed a hegemonic discourse overshadowing its competitors, and as sociology and other spheres of modern social theory are deeply entangled in this discourse — forming reality in the practice of describing it — it is of particular importance to critically scrutinize scholarly accounts of social, cultural, and religious change in modernity. Secularism informs what is often regarded as one of the most fundamental expressions of modernization; secularization.

Like the ideology of secularism, the notion of secularization has dominated sociological thinking on religion in the twentieth century, even though the validity of the notion has been the subject of considerable debate since at least the 1960s. In a social constructionist framework, theories of secularization can in themselves thus be regarded as expressions of secularist discourses rather than impartial descriptions of what is/was occurring in the West. It would, however, be erroneous to assume that ‘the secularization paradigm’ consists of a single, simple theory that details a more or less straight-forward process. Rather, there are a multitude of different secularization theories, many of which are impressively complex, that deal with a number of distinct but entangled processes, some of which are impossible to dismiss.

José Casanova identifies three primary ‘sub-theories’ that are common in accounts of secularization, even though they are given varying emphasis by...
different theorists: the differentiation of societal institutions and functions, the decline of religion, and the privatization of religion.\textsuperscript{11} He questions the latter two of these aspects, and contends that the outcomes of the first are diverse and complex. The differentiation aspect, identified by Casanova as the key ingredient, and which is – as discussed above – often regarded as one of the principal characteristics of modernity,\textsuperscript{12} revolves around the process of religion being separated into its own distinct domain. In this process religious actors and institutions – at least in the form of mainline churches – lose much of their earlier influence in the spheres of e.g. politics, economy, and education, and therefore also much of their earlier societal power. Furthermore, as the societal influence of religious institutions lessens they also become less important in the everyday lives of people. This, of course, relates to the second ‘sub-theory’ discussed by Casanova; the decline of religion on the societal, institutional, and/or the individual levels.\textsuperscript{13}

It should be noted that theories of secularization demand explicitly substantive definitions of religion – i.e. definitions stating what religion is, even though functionalistic aspects such as the role of religion as ‘the glue holding a society together’ are often incorporated. If this were not the case it would be impossible to determine whether secularization is taking place or not.\textsuperscript{14} Consequently, theories of secularization commonly operate with more classic understandings of religion, locating it in institutions and ‘belief in transcendent beings’, and they may therefore be less than ideally suited for the analysis of unorthodox religious expressions. The implications of ‘the decline of religion’ in a broader understanding than just ‘de-Christianization’ are thus more complicated. The question that emerges as pivotal is to what extent esotericism should be considered as being specifically religious – in whichever way the latter term is defined. As esoteric discourse may ‘inhabit’ both the religious and the secular, a ‘decline of religion’ implies the decline of some esotericism, the flourishing of some, and various transformations of yet others – and no general trend can be claimed for esotericism across the board. Both the differentiation of societal functions and institutions and the relative loss of power that religious institutions experience do greatly enhance the possibilities to engage in unorthodox religious expressions. This in itself implies that what is described as secularization does not affect the totality of religion in any

\textsuperscript{12} Crook et al, \textit{Postmodernization}, 16–18.
\textsuperscript{13} The different effects of secularization on macro-, meso-, and micro-levels are complex and intertwined, see Dobbelare, ‘The Meaning and Scope of Secularization’.
\textsuperscript{14} Dobbelare, ‘The Meaning and Scope of Secularization’, 600; Bruce, \textit{God is Dead}, 2.
particular society similarly, resulting in a decline of religion as a whole, but instead brings about changes in the composition of the religious milieu of that society in more complex ways. A greater eclecticism is introduced, at least in potential, as it becomes less difficult and volatile to seek inspiration from religions other than Christianity. This is one of the four principal changes of esotericism in modernity that Hanegraaff identifies; increased inspiration drawn from non-Western cultures and non-Christian religions, much influenced by (as well as partly inspiring) the budding comparative study of religions. The relative ‘de-Christianization’ of society also facilitated the creation of an ‘occult sphere’, as expressed in the ‘occult revival’ in the mid to late nineteenth century, where occultism came to be regarded as a ‘tradition’ of its own. This, in turn, was made possible by the earlier modern formation of esotericism as a category of rejected knowledge. If this had not been the case the practices and philosophies that were involved could not later have been appraised as a single independent ‘tradition’ of secret knowledge that had been unduly persecuted throughout history. Occultism, in many ways, took on roles than mainline religion had lost, operating as both religion and science while not exclusively belonging to either, and therefore functioning as a bridge, of sorts, between the two, all the while criticizing certain aspects of both.

The privatization aspect of secularization theories suggests that religion is removed from the public sphere and becomes a private matter for the individual. What about the privatization of esotericism? Some phenomena conventionally included under the label ‘esotericism’, especially astrology, had a place in the public political life in pre-Enlightenment Europe in ways that they do not in modernity. However, if, as Hanegraaff proposes, esotericism came into existence as a category in modernity when certain phenomena, practices, beliefs, and doctrines were deemed ‘rejected knowledge’, it can be claimed that esotericism had a significant public political presence in the early phases of modernity. This very process of marginalization was the result of an active discussion of esoteric subject matter in the political spheres of science, religion, and other cultural institutions. If ‘the public sphere’ is understood more
broadly than simply political life, then the nineteenth-century development of occultism actually represent a massive popularization of the esoteric. While ‘the occult revival’ is more of a birth of occultism as a specific form of esotericism, in another sense ‘revival’ is an apt description of the developments. From having been relegated to the realm of ‘rejected knowledge’ in the Reformation and the Enlightenment, esoteric discourse, practices, and philosophies become very popular in the nineteenth century, much due to their publicization in newspapers and other readily accessible forums. Furthermore, whereas pre-Enlightenment esotericism had primarily been an interest of the elites, occultism elicited considerable interest among the general population as evident in the fiction of the time.

In addition to the increased influence of non-Christian religions, Hanegraaff identifies three further modern developments of particular importance: the active interactions with, and often adaptations to, a rationalist-scientific worldview; the emergence of an evolutionary paradigm in discourses of spiritual progress, and ‘the psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology’. All three are closely linked to secularist discourse. The impact of the rationalist ethos meant that the modern magician was inclined to perceive impersonal, causal laws of nature, and to manipulate occult mechanisms, where the pre-Enlightenment magician might have perceived the world as organic and imbued by divine forces. According to Hanegraaff, modern esotericism operate(d) with an acceptance of ‘a culturally established ideology according to which instrumental causality amounts to a worldview capable in principal of rationality explaining all aspects of reality’. This is an effect of ‘disenchantment’, which Hanegraaff on the basis of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s work defines as:

the social pressure exerted upon human beings to deny the spontaneous tendency of participation, by accepting claims of a culturally established ideology according to which instrumental causality amounts to a

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19 In some ways, ‘the occult revival’ could be regarded an early form of ‘occulture’. See Partridge, _The Re-Enchantment of the West_. See also Hanegraaff, _Esotericism and the Academy_, Chapter 3, which details the mass media interest in occult subject matter in the nineteenth century.

20 This marks more of an alignment to _rhetoric_ of science than to scientific method per se. See Hammer, _Claiming Knowledge_, 201–330. Cf. von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Transfers and Reconfigurations’.

21 Hanegraaff, _New Age Religion and Western Culture_, 421–513; idem, ‘How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World’.

worldview capable in principal of rationality explaining all aspects of reality.23

Hanegraaff’s characterization of disenchantment, and ‘disenchanted magic’, may be too simplified. To note, disenchantment does not outright equal secularization, even though it is often described as a secularization theory. For Max Weber, the rationalization of the world in modernity, partly brought on by elements inherent to Christian, particularly Protestant, theology, led to ‘the elimination of magic as a means of salvation’.24 In effect, as disenchanted views of the world came to dominate, the only forms of religion that could be deemed rational were ones that fully divorced the divine from the natural world. This meant that the divine could in no logical way interact with the natural world. Certainly, disenchantment would then result in religion being altered, but not necessarily in the decline or death of religion as is sometimes argued. Egil Asprem proposes that we ‘abandon the notion of disenchantment as a sociohistorical process, and instead reconceptualise it as a specific intellectual and cultural problem faced by historical actors’.25 That is to say, disenchantment should not be approached as a historical fact but rather as a scholarly concept constructed to highlight and analyze certain aspects of history. Asprem notes that while Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), one of the key examples used by Hanegraaff, (partly) follows the model of disenchantment in operating with a more or less complete separation of the divine and natural realms, this does not hold true for a large number of later esoteric spokespersons.26 Rather, most occultists challenged rather than affirmed the Kantian ‘disenchanted mode of separating the knowable from the unknowable’. They instead operated ‘in the current of “open-ended naturalism”’ in which it was argued that the natural and divine worlds were, in fact, not by necessity separate.27

Also, while Hanegraaff’s characterization of the impact of secularism is sound, his notion of ‘secularized esotericism’ is not. It is ultimately based on a misuse of the term secularization. Theories of secularization deal with changes in society and its institutions, which in turn may have indirect repercussions for religious doctrines, practices, and ‘beliefs’. It is not religion itself that is becoming secularized, but religious institutions, and the same could be said to apply to the esoteric. Hanegraaff’s assertions that ‘the term “secularisation”

23 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 440–446.
27 Ibid., 445.
does not stand for a theory but for a historical fact' and entails ‘a profound transformation of religion' rather than a disappearance or a marginalization of it\textsuperscript{28} is even more problematic.

Detraditionalization and pluralisation are some of the other key features of modernity that are discussed by sociologists. The former is a tricky concept, too often relying on uninformed and homogenizing interpretations of ‘traditional society’ and ‘traditional religion’.\textsuperscript{29} When understood in a more restricted sense as relating to societal and cultural transformations that weaken authority structures that are legitimized through claims to tradition,\textsuperscript{30} the notion of detraditionalization has merit. The destabilization and decline of the authority of orthodoxy goes hand in hand with discursive formations that posits the individual as the foremost authority of his/her own religious life.\textsuperscript{31} Consequently it becomes both possible and compelling for religious actors to ‘dis-embed' individual elements of religious systems and then ‘re-embed' them with other elements in new combinations. This potential is greatly amplified by modern cultural and religious pluralism where people are confronted with a multitude of different systems to borrow from. Pluralism is often taken to imply little more than ‘vague “multiplicity,” a “diversity,” a “ plurality,” or a “pluralization”, when it in fact is far more complex.\textsuperscript{32} Pluralism is based on plurality, the coexistence of ‘a multiplicity of cultural, social, religious, or other groupings, each with its own history, its own norms and evidences', but implies a situation where these groupings together, to a lesser or greater degree, are capable of developing ‘common goals, common value concepts, and so on'.\textsuperscript{33} The maintenance of difference is also significant, as plurality would otherwise shift towards homogeneity. In von Stuckrad's understanding (religious) plurality stands for ‘a simple coexistence of different religious traditions', whereas pluralism ‘denotes the organisation of difference'.\textsuperscript{34} The existence and awareness of other religions forms the basis of European processes of identity

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World', 358.
\item \textsuperscript{29} This applies in particular to what Paul Heelas identifies as ‘radical theorizing', where ‘traditional society' is characterized by closed social systems, fate-based worldviews, epistemological certainty, etc. that are in modernity replaced by their polar opposites, see Heelas, 'Introduction', 3–7.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Heelas, 'Introduction', 2.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Heelas, ‘The Spiritual Revolution’. Note that Heelas' contrasting of religion and spirituality is both simplifying and has problematic ideological implications. He clearly favours the latter and shows it in more positive light than the former.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Welker, ‘Pluralism', 1461.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 1461.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Von Stuckrad, ‘Western Esotericism', 86; see also idem, \textit{Western Esotericism}, 8.
\end{itemize}
construction, where the self is commonly defined through contrasting it to the ‘other’.\textsuperscript{35} Pluralism can also be taken to signify an ideology where the condition of plurality and the process of pluralization are deemed beneficial and desirable.

Esotericism has a built-in drive towards eclecticism, as evident in the notions of *philosophia perennis* and *prisca theologia* that have constituted core elements of esoteric discourse since the Renaissance. However, modern detraditionalization and pluralism promote a more ‘conscious’, extensive, and accentuated eclecticism than what was found in pre-Enlightenment esotericism. This development is apparent in nineteenth-century occultism on the whole, and it is particularly evident in the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Both organizations operate(d) with an eclectic ethos where elements from a multitude of different religious and philosophical traditions were sourced and combined to create novel constellations, and neither organization claimed to operate within any one specific religious system (other than perhaps ‘the occult tradition’). The Theosophical Society in particular took esoteric eclecticism to a new level, combining material from classic European esoteric philosophies and Indian religion to create a wholly new approach that became incredibly influential in twentieth-century esotericism. Both the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn expressed the modern ethos of detraditionalization and simultaneously played important roles in expanding the eclecticism of modern esotericism.

Many scholars of esotericism, including Hanegraaff and von Stuckrad, note the importance of Othering to esotericism.\textsuperscript{36} However, the emphasis is usually on how esotericism has come to function as the Other through which mainstream religion and science is reified as normal. I claim that the creation of and focus on a positive Other is at the centre of esoteric worldviews, and I feel that this aspect has not received sufficient discussion. Esotericism’s natural preponderance for eclecticism is (at least partly) derived from a dominating tendency to look to the horizon, to the foreign and exotic, in the search for ‘ancient wisdom’. True, orientalism and the creation of ‘exotic others’ through which self-understandings and self-identities can be constructed are commonplace in European contexts (and its eventual offshoots in e.g. North America), and this would appear to have been the case since Antiquity.\textsuperscript{37} However, while the

\textsuperscript{35} Idem, ‘Western Esotericism’, 86–87.


conventional construction of the exotic Other is generally negative, the construction of the esoteric Other is primarily positive.\(^{38}\) We see numerous examples of this in the history of esotericism.\(^{39}\) In the Renaissance the focus was on ancient Greece and its philosophers. Later on, in nineteenth-century occultism, the gaze was firmly set on ancient Egypt as the cradle of esoteric knowledge. As Egypt became too familiar, India and the ‘mystical orient’ became home of ‘authentic ancient wisdom’. In modernity the world continuously grows smaller and the ideology of pluralism makes previously weird and alien cultures and religions more familiar, and thus new ‘orients’ need to be found. The huge interest in imaginary esoteric centres such as Agharti in Tibet and the lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria are examples of this tendency, as is the twentieth-century exploration of various indigenous, pre-Christian, and non-Christian religions, which arguably represent exotic and esoteric Others due to their great historical distance from contemporary culture and religion. In the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries the gaze is increasingly turned to outer space in the search for exotic others.

**Late Modernity, Esotericism, and Dragon Rouge**

The present phase of modernity has been identified by many different names; late modernity, accentuated modernity, postmodernity, liquid modernity – to name only a few. Each of these highlight specific aspects, but they are more or less unified in their central premises. ‘Late’ modernity involves an accentuation of many of the processes that began in earlier modernity. For one thing, the drive towards differentiation has in the present phase of modernity progressed to the degree of de-differentiation. Increased social differentiation leads to such an extensive fragmentation that the resulting segments are too small to be able to sustain themselves independently, and this in turn leads to fragments flowing into each other with new constellations constantly being formed, broken up, and reformed.\(^{40}\) For esotericism, this liquidity in which a plurality of seemingly competing explanatory models are merged results in the flourishing of new esoteric forms, functions, and rationales. Scientific and religious worldviews and explanatory models are combined, nature is described

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38 As King, ‘Orientalism and the Study of Religion, 281–282, notes, positive orientalist representations are not uncommon.
as both organic and mechanistic, and these are regarded as different, but not necessarily incompatible, models of explanation. They may be employed in different contexts, or even in the same context in order to produce what is considered to be a holistic perspective.\textsuperscript{41} Focusing on the rejection of the modern ‘grand narrative’ of progress, which operated with a teleological view on history, evolution, humanity, and the natural world, some commentators have expressed the opinion that the West has moved beyond modernity into a phase that should be termed postmodern.\textsuperscript{42} While it is certainly valid to propose that modernity has changed, I do not believe it to have changed sufficiently to be termed post-modernity. Postmodernism as an ideology or philosophy that is critical of the certainties of modernity, however, does exert considerable influence, and does in itself influence and even direct the transformation of modernity. Still, the term late modernity may be insufficient to describe the particularities of contemporary Western modernity. In this regard, Zygmunt Bauman’s term liquid modernity, which centred on the fluidity of contemporary societal organization and life, may be a better term.\textsuperscript{43} The dis-embedding and re-embedding of cultural and religious components is increasingly in pace as detraditionalization progresses, partly due to increased multiculturalism and the pluralization and the fragmentation of worldviews and values it brings. While pluralism can be regarded as a ‘structural element of the European history of culture’ that has been the dominant mode of Europe since at least Antiquity,\textsuperscript{44} it certainly has increased in modernity. Some social commentators go as far as presenting ‘institutionalized pluralism’ as a central feature of late modernity.\textsuperscript{45} The multitude of possible outlooks serves to diminish the power of exclusivistic and hegemonic claims to truth – although they by no means disappear, and might in fact do quite well as oppositional worldviews.

While the nineteenth-century Theosophical Society and Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were markedly eclectic, the various elements they borrowed from different sources were set in structured systems. For example, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn may have combined such varied esoteric ideas and practices as ‘hermetic’ kabbalah, Masonic initiatory structures, and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{41} See Granholm, ‘Post-Secular Esotericism?’
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition; cf. Crook et al., Postmodernization. Zygmunt Bauman used the term postmodern in his earlier writings, albeit with different connotations than Lyotard, but has later come to use other terms. See e.g. Bauman, Postmodern Ethics; idem, Intimations of Postmodernity; idem, Postmodernity and its Discontents.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Idem, Liquid Modernity.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Von Stuckrad, ‘Western Esotericism’, 86–87; idem, Western Esotericism, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Bauman, Intimations of Postmodernity, 187.
\end{itemize}
the tarot, but they were all fitted in a system where the twenty-two cards of the tarot’s major arcane incontrovertibly corresponded with the twenty-two paths of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, and the initiation system of the order in turned followed the ten sephiroth of the Tree. Chaos Magick, as a distinctly late modern development of esotericism, instead actively strives to avoid and discourage such systematizations and structuralizations. Rather than following eclectic mixes constructed by others, Chaos Magickians are conditioned to creatively construct their own bricolages according to their own personal preferences. Furthermore, the constellations created are not supposed to be fixed and stable, but rather flexible and pragmatic with practices and even beliefs being chosen according to what suits a particular situation. Dragon Rouge is not as extreme as Chaos Magick generally, but does demonstrate the same basic ethos. From the outset, the order demonstrates a more accentuated eclectic imagination than e.g. the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as it mixes elements from a far broader range of religious, philosophical, and mythical systems. Furthermore, while the order operates with an initiatory structure and has its ‘four pillars’ that the practice and philosophy rely on, the possibilities for individual interpretation and application are great. The order’s propensity for eclecticism is in fact so pronounced that its official activities primarily consist of trying out new techniques and discussing different mythologies, philosophies, and perspectives that the individual members can then expand on in their own personal magical work. Similarly, the order’s courses on magic are explicitly structured to contain examples and suggestions rather than doctrines and required practices, and individual members are expected to increasingly personalize their systems of practice and philosophy as they reach more advanced stages of magical expertise. The order’s – and in fact the whole Left-Hand Path current’s – focus on the individual could be regarded as a form of extended pluralism where not only groups of people, but individuals as well, have the inviolable right to their own claims to truth.

The fluidic ethos of late modernity is evident in the common Chaos Magickal slogan ‘nothing is true, everything is permitted’. The slogan, derived from the work of seminal author Peter J. Carroll (b. 1953), refers to the proposition that all beliefs and convictions are arbitrary and can be used by the magician ‘as tools for creating desired effects’. Another example of the ambiguity fostered
in Chaos Magick is the current’s propensity to successfully rely on a seemingly impossible combination of both tradition and innovation as legitimating factors.47 While not as pronounced as in Chaos Magick, the Dragon Rouge approach does demonstrate the dual appeal to both science and religion (or philosophy). As noted in Chapter 4, members of the order commonly rely on some variant of Aleister Crowley’s ‘magic is the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will’ when providing their own definitions of magic. The practice of magic is also often framed as an ‘exploration of the unknown’,48 as an activity that revolves around ‘acquiring greater knowledge' that can be ‘empirically verified’.49 At the same time, however, pronounced critique of the materialism of conventional modern science is frequent in the order’s official material,50 and this position is held by most of the members that I have talked to, even among members trained in the natural sciences.

In late modernity we can also find significant challenges to the ideology of secularism, and a growing number of scholars are questioning the validity of the notion of secularization. For example, Peter Berger, one of the first sociologists to develop a coherent and systematic theory of secularization,51 suggests that we are today witnessing processes of ‘de-secularization’.52 Some sociologists, particularly in North America, view the very premise of secularization theory as flawed and present rational choice and supply-side theories as more valid in describing religious change in contemporary society.53 Scholars of this school argue that religious pluralism does not lead to a relativization of worldviews with a subsequent decline of religion, as suggested in some secularization theories, but instead stimulates religious life across the board. Competition on the religious market place therefore demonstrates the vitality of religion in a society. It should be noted that such theories are more applicable to the US than to Europe, due to the former in contrast to most European countries never having had a dominant state church and therefore having from the outset been characterized by the coexistence of several religious alternatives.

Paul Heelas argues that we are in fact experiencing a ‘spiritual revolution’,54 where ‘religion’ – characterized by dogmas, hierarchy, and reliance on outside

47 See Duggan, ‘Perennialism and Iconoclasm’.
48 See Eriksson, Mörk magi, 2.
49 Questionnaire 2001–06.
50 See e.g. Dragon Rouge, ‘Contra 3 M’.
51 Berger, The Sacred Canopy.
52 Idem, ‘Secularization and De-Secularization’, 292.
53 See e.g. Young, ed., Rational Choice Theory and religion.
54 Heelas, ‘The Spiritual Revolution’; Heelas & Woodhead, The Spiritual Revolution. See also Heelas, Spiritualities of Life; idem, ‘Spiritualities of Life'.
authority – is loosing ground to ‘spirituality’ – characterized by a focus on the self, life in the here-and-now, and reliance on internal spiritual authority.55 Yet other argue that we are now experiencing a ‘re-enchantment of the West’. Egil Asprem is critical of ‘the re-enchantment paradigm’, identifying Morris Berman’s *The Reenchantment of the World* from 1981 as the start of a scholarly rhetoric that positioned dominant materialist-scientific worldviews as detrimental to the world and pointed to emerging scholarship that provided more ‘holistic’ perspectives.56 Asprem is certainly correct in noting the extreme simplifications and often faulty depictions of mainstream science that are produced and reproduced by certain scholars, as well as the prominence of this discourse among many authors in contemporary esotericism. He also does important work in showing that such re-enchantment discourse was common already in the early twentieth century. However, I argue that there are scholarly positions in regard to re-enchantment that are more sober and balanced. An example is Christopher Partridge’s discussion of the role of popular culture in the popularization of the esoteric.57 Trends towards the reevaluation of the role and functions of religion by politicians and the general populace also make it reasonable to propose a certain degree of erosion of secularist positions. In fact, the aggressivity of spokespersons of ‘new atheism’58 in the 2000s can be interpreted as a response to the perceived re-emergence of religion and supernaturalism.

The changed societal and cultural perceptions of religion have led some scholars to propose the term ‘post-secular’ as suitable for describing the current state of Western societies in regard to religion.59 Charles Taylor describes ‘the post-secular age’ as one ‘in which the hegemony of the mainstream master narrative of secularization will be more and more challenged’.60 For Jürgen

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55 Heelas also describes ‘theistic spiritualities of life’, which ‘combine belief in a transcendent personal God and other components of traditional (particularly Christian) belief with themes more commonly (and obviously) found in New Age spiritualities of life’, Heelas, ‘The Spiritual Revolution’, 366.


57 Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*.

58 For example, authors such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Ayaan Ali Hirsi, and movements such as skeptics’ groups in the Nordic countries.

59 For discussion on the subject of the post-secular, see Beaumont et al., eds., *Exploring the Postsecular*. See also Lassander et al., eds., *Post-Secular Society*, particularly Moberg et al., ‘Trajectories of Post-Secular Complexity’, 3–8. José Casanova, Charles Taylor, and Jürgen Habermas are regularly identified as key popularizers of the term, see Beaumont et al., ‘Preface’, ix.

60 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 534. However, considering that the word ‘post-secular’ occurs only once in the nearly 900-page-long *A Secular Age* it seems unjustified to call Taylor a
Habermas, a society being post-secular refers to ‘a change in consciousness’ in relation to religion within it, implying not religion ‘returned to a position of renewed public prominence’, but more ‘a revision of a previously over-confidently secularist outlook’. Theorizing the post-secular thus deals with ‘the limits of the secularization thesis’. Problematically, however, in much of the discussion on the post-secular, religion is, like in secularization theory, interpreted through concepts such as ‘belief’, ‘faith’, and ‘convictions’. Unorthodox religious expressions may therefore yet again be neglected. One should also remember that Habermas presents ideals for the relation between the secular state and religious institutions, not an analysis of an existing situation.

As with secularism, approaching the post-secular through a social constructionist framework reveals interesting new dimensions. If secularization theory is bound in secularist discourse, then the post-secular can be regarded as discursive formations that signal the, at least partial, societal breaking up of the hegemony of secularism. These post-secular discourses are themselves heavily indebted to an awareness of the earlier hegemonic position of secularism. A discursive approach also brings to the front the awareness that more religion is perceived at least in part due to the broadened understanding of the term religion itself. Just as secularization theories are dependent on secularist discourse and help bring into being what is described, so post-secular discourses are not simply neutral descriptions of ‘how things are’. It could thus be argued that the post-secular relates more to changes in perceptions regarding religion, among scholars and laypeople alike, than to grand-scale societal transformations in themselves. In seeing religion in new ways, and in according it new (or renewed) roles and functions, we are actively engaged in producing this new reality. This means that we as scholars need to be aware of what we are doing when we project ‘the post-secular condition’, instead of just naively describing ‘the new post-secular reality’ as a simple fact. However, this emerging discourse is not limited to only scholarly discussions, but does represent a theoretician of the term post-secular. As I have argued elsewhere, however, he can be termed a post-secular thinker as he accords religion an important role in secular society, see Granholm, ‘The Secular, the Post-Secular, and the Esoteric in the Public Sphere’, 316–317.

64 Habermas, ‘Religion in the Public Sphere’, 8.
65 These changes in perception of course change religion itself, as religious actors adapt to their new roles in the public sphere, see Knott, ‘Cutting Through the Postsecular City’, 34.
more widespread societal phenomenon. This means that religion is indeed acquiring new and transformed roles and functions, as well as a renewed visibility in the public sphere.

The post-secular framework operates with a goal of ‘re-enchanting’ an existential world that is experienced as having become disenchanted. I again call attention to Wouter Hanegraaff’s definition of disenchantment:

the social pressure exerted upon human beings to deny the spontaneous tendency of participation, by accepting claims of a culturally established ideology according to which instrumental causality amounts to a worldview capable in principal of rationality explaining all aspects of reality.66

Re-enchantment in a post-secular framework can be regarded as an active effort to acknowledge, embrace and seek affective and analogical thinking and action, while at the same time underscoring the insufficiency of rationality. In simplification participation can be understood as a tendency towards emotive, analogical, non-reasoning thought and action, whereas instrumental causality can be understood as a tendency to seek the reasons to events in the world in material causation.67 Esotericism informed by post-secular discourse is not traditionalist in character, or seeking to directly re-emboby pre-Enlightenment values, and does positively value rationality, the advancement of science and technology, and modern developments in general. It can, however, to an extent, be termed ‘anti-modernist’ in its critique of certain aspects of modernity. A common claim is that when it comes to magic and esoteric practice, rationality is simply not the right tool for the job, and when scientific or pseudo-scientific discourse is used care is taken not to overstress the importance of it. Dragon Rouge, and much of the contemporary esoteric milieu, can be claimed to be informed by a post-secular framework. For Dragon Rouge this is exemplified in the fact that while some scientified rhetoric is used, e.g. when defining magic as ‘the art and science of effecting change according to the Will’, the primary modus operandi is one where materialism is criticized and the objective existence of spiritual, magical, and metaphysical realities presented as (at least) a

67 In Hanegraaff’s text: Participation signifies ‘an affective rather than rational stratum in human thought and action ... analogical rather than logical, and is not reduced to primary reasoning’ (Ibid., 375). Instrumental causality refers to a spontaneous ‘tendency to suspect things that happen in the world to be the result of material causation, and to explain events in this fashion’ (Levy-Bruhl, quoted in Ibid., 376).
distinct possibility. This is in stark contrast to the propensity for psychologiza-
tion evident in e.g. the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. One should of
course not forget that the re-enchantment of the existential world is explicitly
expressed as a goal of the magician in official Dragon Rouge material.68

Based on the apparent cultural commodification of society, some sociolo-
gists characterize the current phase of modernity as ‘late capitalism’.69
Commodification, along with rationalization and the differentiation of soci-
etal functions and institutions, is also often considered to be one of the pro-
cesses that gave rise to modernity.70 While the 1980s were largely characterized
by conservative libertarianism, primarily Reaganism and Thatcherism, dis-
tinctly neoliberal tendencies have come to dominate political and economic
life since the 1990s, first in the US and later western and northern Europe.
Neoliberalism operates with ‘the belief that the market should be the organiz-
ing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions’ and promotes a
cultural order where ‘everything either is for sale or is plundered for resources’.71
Commodification is a growing trend in religion as well, particularly in
Protestant Christianity exemplified in the US-dominated megachurch move-
ment, televangelism, and prosperity theology. These movements, but not only
these, engage in conscious branding strategies where one’s own approach,
practices, and institutions are packaged as products that are easily recogniz-
able on the religious market place.72

Esotericism as well has become a product to be bought and sold, in e.g. pop-
ular culture and ‘New Age products’, as an individualized religiosity suited for
the neoliberal age. An apt example is provided in Janice Peck’s discussion of
Oprah Winfrey’s endorsement of Rhonda Byrne’s self-help movie and book
The Secret.73 The message contained in the book is largely a rehash of the New
Thought idea that a person’s beliefs and expectations form his/her reality,
updated to fit the neoliberal ethos where economic realities are highlighted.
Due to Winfrey’s public endorsement of the book on her show it became a
massive success, staying in the top ten of the New York Times bestseller list for
150 weeks (and close to the top ten for several more weeks),75 being translated
into forty-four different languages (not including the original English edition), and having a print run of over twenty-one million copies (as reported by the author). This trend of commodification naturally also results in opposition. In some scholarship this trend, particularly in relation to ‘the New Age movement’, is highlighted and criticized. A clear bias is evident in certain scholarship, particularly in pagan studies, where ‘New Age commercialism’ is not only identified, but also contrasted to ‘benevolent’, ‘non-predatory’, and ‘authentic’ (neo)paganism. This same rhetoric is common in esoteric groups. Commercialized ‘New Age’ is identified, overemphasized, and one’s own position is contrasted to it as ‘authentic’, ‘honest’, and ‘not for sale’. It is not rare to find members in Dragon Rouge who express disgust for the perceived commercialization, and thus devaluation, of the esoteric in ‘New Age’ circles. The Dragon Rouge magician is then portrayed as searching for the ‘authentic’, which is not found in mass market esotericism, and as a consequence the work of the dark magician is framed as more difficult and him/her as therefore more devoted to the craft. This is often set in the anti-modernist counter-culturalist discourse discussed above, where the modern mainstream West is devoid of authenticity, and the dark magician is therefore a courageous individual in going against the stream.

Globalization, described by Roland Robertson as involving the ‘compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole’, is one of the most fundamental forces of late modernity. There is no scholarly consensus of globalization being a distinctly modern phenomenon, but most scholars agree that globalization has accelerated in recent times. While ‘globe-wide connectivity’ is significant, it is ‘global awareness’, or ‘globality’, that is of particular interest in an examination of religion (and esotericism) and globalization. Religious actors in general ‘embody a global

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76 Byrne, ‘World Languages’.
77 Idem, ‘Creative Biography’. It is also interesting to note that the webpage of the book includes the slogan ‘Everything is possible, nothing is impossible’, clearly reminiscent of the Chaos Magick slogan of ‘Nothing is true, everything is permitted’.
78 See e.g. Carette & King, Selling Spirituality.
79 Ezzy, ‘White Witches and Black Magic’.
80 Robertson, Globalization, 8; cf. idem, ‘Globalization, Theocratization, and Politicized Civil Religion’, 451–452. See also Waters, Globalization, 3; Friedman, ‘Global System, Globalization and the Parameters of Modernity’, 70.
82 Waters, Globalization, 4; Martikainen, Immigrant Religions and Local Society, 41.
orientation in their styles of language and physical deportment’, effectively implying a preparedness to comprehend and approach the world as one unified arena of operation. Some scholars criticize what they regard to be the overuse of the term globalization for ‘just about any processes or relationships that somehow cross state boundaries’. Instead, the term transnational is preferred when discussing social relations and connections that transcend the boundaries of individual nation states but are not necessarily global in their reach. This approach has the benefit of highlighting the locality of social relations, an aspect that is often not sufficiently treated in theories on globalization. The term translocality can then be used to denote the different connections and interdependencies that exist between various localities in transnational networks.

Globalizing, transnationalizing, and translocalizing tendencies are evident in even a fairly small esoteric group such as Dragon Rouge. That the webpage of the order is available in languages other than Swedish demonstrates that it aims to operate on a global arena. While the website is now available only in Swedish and English, it was earlier available in ten different languages, which signalled a preparedness to cater for different nationalities and language-groups in typical translocal fashion. The translation of Thomas Karlsson’s books into a relatively large number of different languages demonstrates the same tendency. The translocal tendencies of Dragon Rouge are further exemplified by different localities adding to the whole transnational network of the order. Different groups located in Poland, Germany, Italy, Greece, and Finland have all disseminated distinctly local themes, such as treatment of Old Slavic deities and the Finnish national epic Kalevala, in order-wide forums. Some of these themes are then appropriated by members in different localities, where they are transformed to suit their new context. Similar tendencies can be observed in many other relatively small esoteric groups. For example, the Temple of Set has its 200–300 members spread throughout (primarily) North America and Europe. In fact, Finland is the country with the largest number of

85 Hannerz, Transnational Connections, 6.
86 Smith, Transnational Urbanism, 2–3.
87 Ibid., 169. Cf Robertson’s discussion of glocalization, based on the Japanese business term dochakuka roughly meaning global localization, Robertson, Globalization, 173; idem, ‘Glocalization’.
Setians in relation to the overall population (albeit with less than twenty members). Like Dragon Rouge, local Temple of Set groups often highlight specifically national-cultural themes.

Among the most important factors behind accelerated globalization are the advances in communication technology, e.g. the emergence of the World Wide Web as a global arena and e-mail as an effective and affordable means of communication, that have occurred in the late twentieth century.89 The late modern media climate does not, however, only accelerate globalization, it also introduces new possibilities, gives rise to changed forms, functions, and premises of communication, and potentiates many of the late modern transformations discussed above. It is of relevance to look at how changing forms of mediation affect the lives of modern people, and modern esotericists in particular. Mediation is, of course, nothing new. Peter Horsfield has discussed how the move from oral to written forms of communication had a huge impact on early Christianity,90 and without the invention of the movable type printing press in the fifteenth century the Protestant Reformation would never have been possible. A focus on mediation implies more than this, however; it suggests a perspective where the focus is on interaction rather than beliefs, and on the everyday lives of people rather than authoritative institutions.91 It also suggests that Habermas’ hugely influential politicized understanding of ‘the public sphere’ needs to be modified.92 In order to grasp the nature of contemporary societal life more accurately, the meaning of ‘public sphere’ needs to be broadened to include at least mass media and popular culture.93

Mediatization, implying a situation where social or cultural activities are ‘to a greater or lesser degree, performed through interaction with a medium’ and where these activities become dependent upon the (mass) media they operate through, is increasingly a central social factor.94 Stig Hjarvard distinguishes

91 See Hoover & Lundby, ‘Summary Remarks’, 305.
92 Habermas, ‘Religion in the Public Sphere’, 1.
93 See Moberg & Granholm, ‘The Concept of the Post-Secular’. It should be noted, however, that Habermas already in the 1960s discussed the ‘hijacking’ of the public sphere by the mass media and the change of its meaning in this process, see Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 2.
94 Hjarvard, ‘The Mediatization of Religion’, 13. It should be noted that prospects of the mediatization of religion, as proposed by Hjarvard, are problematic in much the same way as the notion of the secularization of religion. For one thing, such notions tend to equate religion with (often mainline) religious institutions. Cf. Lövheim, ‘Mediatisation of Religion’. 
‘strong’, or direct, from ‘weak’, or indirect, mediatization. The former refers to a social or cultural activity becoming so bound to media that it cannot be performed outside of it, and the latter to a situation where the activity is not necessarily dependent on media but its forms, connotations, uses etc. are still strongly influenced by it. An example of direct mediatization is online banking where a person must access the Internet in order to perform the activity, with trends pointing to online banking becoming so dominant that the possibilities for offline banking are seriously compromised. An example of indirect mediatization is when the consumption of a particular brand of drink or snack elicits memories of the product’s representation in advertisements, which influences the interpretation of the situation in which the product is consumed, and which in turn may influence the perception of oneself in the context of the consumption. As an effect of the ease of communication provided by the Internet, the formation of transnational networks over vast geographical distances is made possible, but at the same time interaction is increasingly being dictated by the medium at hand.

There is no doubt that media has played a very significant role in the development of Dragon Rouge. As detailed in Chapter 3, the rapid growth of the order was a direct effect of mass media portrayals of it. This, in turn, necessitated considerable structural, administrative, and organizational changes in the order. It is thus safe to say that without the influence of Swedish mass media Dragon Rouge would not look the way it does today. Of course, the order’s impact on society also increased exponentially with its exhibition in the public sphere, which led to even more media exposition and to concerned and/or exploitative social actors presenting Dragon Rouge as the archetypical ‘dangerous satanic cult’ for a number of years in the late 1990s. In terms of mediatization, Dragon Rouge can be said to have been ensnared in a weak form of the process as it could not be interpreted in separation from the mass media depictions of it, even after these depictions had been proved to be erroneous. New media has also played a very important role. As long-time members of the order explain, the number of non-Swedish members grew considerably after the order’s first webpage was launched. So, without new media Dragon Rouge would not be the transnational order it is today. The Internet makes it possible for a small group such as Dragon Rouge to have its membership spread throughout the world, while still being able to communicate effectively. The order maintains a members-only intranet that contains a

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96 E.g. Arlebrand, Det okända, 11; Arlebrand et al., Ny tid ny tro?, 89, 112; Nylund, Att leka med elden, 239–242.
considerable amount of material in digital format and includes the possibility of communication via an online forum. There are many neopagan groups, particularly of the Wiccan variant, that operate solely over the Internet. Dragon Rouge, however, is not such a group. In fact, representatives of the order stress the importance of face-to-face interaction. Still, reality often looks different than ideological representations of it, and the fact of the matter is that the Dragon Rouge web forum has become the primary mode of inter-member communication. While this means that individuals who do not reside in a region with a local Dragon Rouge group are on a more equal footing with members who have access to a local group, this reliance on Internet relayed communication can also have negative repercussions. For example, the ease and speediness of communication and interaction through online forums results in face-to-face interaction becoming less frequent between members who live in the same city, and it is not inconceivable that online communication assumes such a central role that the very structures that facilitate ‘offline interaction’ are compromised.

The late modern media climate also increasingly guides people’s construction and maintenance of religious identities, beliefs, and practices. Popular culture plays a significant role in this, and it has even been claimed that the late modern media climate has fostered an atmosphere where Christian culture is giving way to one informed more by the occult. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, popular culture has undoubtedly played a major role in the propagation and popularization of esotericism in the contemporary world, with entertainment media, popular movie and TV actors, and musicians being far more influential in spreading esoteric ideas than the key Renaissance and early modern thinkers who are highlighted by most historians of Western esotericism. This does not mean that the spread of esoteric notions in and through popular culture is the same as the transmission of esotericism (i.e. teachings and practices) through early modern manuscripts. Comprehensive and coherent teachings are exceedingly rare (though not completely absent) in entertainment media. Rather, popular occulture provides a huge treasury of disparate ideas and notions that are both used as material in the creation of popular cultural products and as components in the creation of personalized beliefs and practices, with both ends of the spectrum feeding each other.

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98 See e.g. Clark, From Angels to Aliens; Partridge, The Re-Enchantment of the West; Lynch, ‘The Role of Popular Music in the Construction of Alternative spiritual Identities and Ideologies’.
99 Partridge, The Re-Enchantment of the West; idem, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’.
As an example, Heavy Metal music has often been linked to occultism, both in the imaginations of detractors and in the interests of artists and fans. This is particularly the case with so called Extreme Metal genres such as Thrash, Doom, Death, and Black Metal.\(^{100}\) There certainly exist connections between Heavy Metal and Dragon Rouge, although one should not make the mistake of subsuming either in the other. A particularly close connection exists between the order and the popular symphonic metal band Therion.\(^{101}\) The band’s lead composer Christofer Johnsson has been a member of Dragon Rouge since the early 1990s, and the order’s founder Thomas Karlsson has written the majority of the band’s lyrics since the 1996-album *Theli*. The lyrics, album artwork, and symbolism are all ripe with esoteric themes, and in many cases they are closely related to themes discussed in Dragon Rouge. However, it would be erroneous to regard the band as a mouthpiece for Dragon Rouge, or the order as a ‘Therion fan club’, as has sometimes been suggested by online commentators. Therion’s lyrics are more representative of Karlsson’s personal and professional interests than those of Dragon Rouge officially, and none of the other members of the band except Johnsson (Karlsson has never been an official member) have any connections to the order. For example, the album *Gothic Kabbalah* (2007) revolves around the persona and writings of Johannes Bureus, whom Karlsson has written both a popular book and a PhD thesis on.\(^{102}\) Nonetheless, Johnsson’s and Karlsson’s connections to Dragon Rouge are well known to fans of the band, and this has certainly increased the visibility of the order and likely attracted more than a few members.

While Therion might not be directly linked to Dragon Rouge philosophy or practice, there are bands and artists that more intimately couple their artistic endeavours to their personal initiatory practices and experience in the order. A sub-genre of Extreme Metal that can be termed ‘Ritual Black Metal’ has emerged in recent years, and is particularly prominent in Sweden where it has developed semi-independent scenic structures.\(^{103}\) Interestingly, while there is great musical diversity in the scene – from bands such as Jess and the Ancient Ones\(^{104}\) (Finland) that could be characterized as occult rock with inspiration from rock and pop from the 1960s to the 1980s, to bands such as Ofermod\(^{105}\)
(Sweden) that is incontestably recognizable as (Orthodox) Black Metal – most bands use the label ‘Black Metal’ in describing themselves and/or their fellow bands in the scene. In fact, some artists in the scene regard ‘an authentic esoteric core’ to be so essential that bands that sound like Black Metal are not regarded to be Black Metal at all if they do not express this esoteric core.\footnote{Interview 2012–01, October 12, 2012.} Bands in the scene not only claim a serious religious-philosophical attitude, but frame their artistic activities as authentic religio-occult practice. They are also distinguished from much other occult-inspired Metal by having close and explicit connections to esoteric initiatory orders, and Dragon Rouge is extraordinarily well represented. Relatively prominent bands such as Saturnalia Temple,\footnote{See e.g. the albums \textit{Ur} (2008) and \textit{Aion of Drakon} (2011).} Ofermod, Jess and the Ancient Ones, and Forgotten Horror\footnote{See the album \textit{The Serpent Creation} (2011).} all involve artists who openly profess to being members of the order, and the lyrical and musical treatments directly link to initiatory experiences and/or philosophical themes within the order. However, Dragon Rouge does not acknowledge any of the bands as representing the order directly, nor do the bands claim to do so.
Concluding Remarks

This work has been an examination of the historical, sociological, and discursive contexts of contemporary esoteric magic, with a particular focus on the Sweden-originated Left-Hand Path order Dragon Rouge. While the study has been centred on a particular expression of contemporary esoteric magic, the aim has been to illuminate more than just this one example. Thus, with reliance on a broad set of source materials, I hope to have provided, while nothing in the way of a conclusive and definitive overview, at least an introductory overview of contemporary esotericism in general. This is also a theoretically and methodologically synthesizing work that has combined anthropological research methods with sociological theory and analysis, and included historical perspectives from the study of Western esotericism. It has thus explored new avenues and pointed to paths that future research can hopefully further explore.

As with any scholarly work, there are naturally many themes that I have not had the possibility to explore in more depth, and many of these could have been subjects of studies of their own. I will briefly discuss some of the themes that I believe would have been particularly deserving of more attention, not simply for the sake of identifying them but in order to highlight important areas of contemporary esotericism that require further study.

While Dragon Rouge itself has been thoroughly discussed in this book, the order could have been related more closely to the broader Left-Hand Path milieu in which it exists. A more detailed comparison of Dragon Rouge with other groups, authors, and actors in the milieu would certainly have yielded interesting results. However, while an expanded focus on a particular milieu would have provided more generalizable conclusions, it would also have been more sweeping. It would have made it impossible to provide intimate insight into esoteric practices and beliefs in real-world lived contexts in the same way as a more detailed look at a single group has. In addition, while more case studies would have made generalizations more feasible, the detailed societal, historical, and discursive contextualization of a single group has provided necessary data for a more grounded examination of broader issues relating to societal, cultural, and religious change in late modernity.

A very interesting theme, and one which certainly is of great significance for much late modern esotericism, is the relations between esoteric groups and philosophies and academia. In the case of Dragon Rouge, Stockholm University in particular is of significance as it has functioned as a sort of incubator for many of the order’s members, specifically those who have become leading
ideologists. These members, and many others, have taken courses in various subjects ranging from the history of ideas and the history of religions to ethnology and Sanskrit, Arabic, and other languages – all of which have in one form or another had an impact on the development of the order’s teachings and practices. Again, Dragon Rouge is in no way the only esoteric group to entertain such an interest in academia, although it may be exceptional in terms of the extent of actual real-life connections. What in specific are the implications for the order, and what does it suggest for contemporary esotericism in general? Even when direct connections to academia do not exist, scholarship does seem to impact quite heavily on contemporary esotericism. This should not be too surprising as many spokespersons in the esoteric milieu frame their activities in the rhetoric of empirical examination and research. Furthermore, esoteric inclinations among scholars and scientists are not unheard of, as aptly demonstrated by Egil Asprem’s examination of the origin and development of parapsychology within an academic setting rather than as an external interference on it.¹ Furthermore, particularly with the rise of the discipline of Western esotericism scholarship is having a growing influence on contemporary esotericism. Some of the most prominent scholars in the field stress that ‘esotericism’ is a scholarly construct,² something that ‘does not exist as an object’.³ However, when individuals and groups are increasingly paying attention to scholarship in the field of Western esotericism, and even aligning their teachings and practices to fit scholarly descriptions, esotericism is in fact becoming an object.⁴ Dragon Rouge founder Thomas Karlsson is a trained academic himself, and provides an interesting example of how direct the influence of scholarship can be. In a text intended for internal distribution within Dragon Rouge, but which is available online, Karlsson analyses his own order by reference to Antoine Faivre’s typology of esotericism.⁵ I have also heard rumors of my previously published PhD-thesis having been referenced and used by some members of Dragon Rouge as something of a manual. The impact of esoteric ideas and teachings on scholarship has been discussed,⁶ although certainly not to exhaustion, but the impact of scholarship on esotericism has not. Of course,
for a strictly historiographically oriented scholar this may not be a matter of much concern as his/her sources will not be affected. When studying contemporary esotericism, however, it becomes a very important methodological and ethical concern. If nothing else, it would be an interesting area of inquiry, and perhaps even important enough to be a central area of investigation.

The role of popular culture is another area that has not been examined in detail in this work, and which certainly would have merited its own chapter. Dragon Rouge was formed and shaped in an occultural milieu, in a society characterized by a ‘shift from a Christian culture to one which is more occult in character’. Popular culture plays a very important role in these processes of religious and cultural transformation, and can even be regarded as the principal factor in the massive popularization that esotericism has undergone in the latter part of the twentieth century. Music is a central ingredient in Dragon Rouge, and it is important for many of its members. Two (meta-)genres of popular music in particular are of significance for members of the order, as well as for the esoteric milieu in general; electronic dance music and various forms of Extreme Metal. Many subgenres of the former often involve religious and ‘spiritual’ themes, and electronic dance music is itself often used in ritual contexts and functions even when such themes are not directly evident in the music itself. This is certainly true for Dragon Rouge, with Thomas Karlsson explicitly identifying the late 1980s rave scene as conductive of esoteric religiosity, and one that early Dragon Rouge members were engaged in. In the Dragon Rouge of today, Extreme Metal is perhaps the more important of the two musical genres. As briefly discussed, several members are or have been involved as musicians in various more or less successful metal bands, and some of these have been involved in mediating perspectives developed in the order or even using their artistry as a tool for and expressions of magic. A study of popular culture and Dragon Rouge could entail both looking at how popular culture is appreciated and used within the order, and looking at how the order through popular culture impacts the greater occult milieu, and beyond.

Issues relating to gender have been dealt with briefly, but could have received much more emphasis. With very few exceptions, gender is all but neglected in scholarship on esotericism. Such a neglect is astounding, particularly when considering Jay Johnston’s reflections on queer theory and esotericism as a field of study. She contends that it ‘may seem that the study of esotericism as an academic endeavour is by nature queer with regard to its former (and current?) academic marginalization and its multiple conceptual

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7 Cf. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*; idem, ‘Occulture is Ordinary’.
8 Karlsson, *Bland mystiker och magiker i förorten*. 
lineages that privilege qualities and ontologies of fluidity, multiplicity, as well as its emphasis – in practice and theory – on relations. Feminist theory could certainly be put to good use in the study of esotericism, and not only in the study of gender. Both gender studies and the study of Western esotericism examine marginalized subjects, and scholars of esotericism could learn much from their colleagues in the former field. This is certainly a theme that must become a central area of research in the next couple of years.

Finally, this book deals with sociological theory, and is one of the few studies of esotericism that explicitly combines the sociology of religion with the historiography of Western esotericism. This focus could have been even more pronounced and the treatment of sociological theory and processes in the context of esotericism could have been more extensive. However, it would have come at the expense of the historical-descriptive contextualization that was necessary in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the field of research. The theme is one more suited for a general sociological study of contemporary esotericism, which would have better prospects of dealing more with theory than empiry in order to provide the groundwork for a proper sociology of esotericism. Such a work has been in consideration for some time, and I will hopefully have the opportunity to realize it in the not too distant future.

In general, this work has navigated between the detailed and the general – a balance that is not all too easy to successfully achieve. I hope that I have been at least partially successful, that this work provides enough detailed information on a specific empirical case for it to be satisfying for those readers who are interested in that case in particular, while also having provided enough generalization to be of interest for those readers who have no greater interest in the case study itself. If I have achieved my goals, this work will have an impact on both the fields of Western esotericism and the study of new religiosity. Finally, I hope that the new framework and new perspectives developed in this study will stimulate further research on contemporary esotericism.

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9 Johnston, 'A Deliciously Troubling Duo'.
Interviews and Questionnaires


Interview 2012–01. October 12, 2012. ‘Belfagor’ of the band Ofermod. E-mail interview.

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