

The Serpent Rises in the West

Positive Orientalism and Reinterpretation of Tantra in the Western Left-Hand Path

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In the last century or so, Tantra has gone from being an extremely polemic and detested subject to achieving immense popularity in Western spirituality. As Hugh Urban has shown, the process has involved drastic reinterpretations of the subject matter, which have changed perceptions of Tantra in both the West and its South Asian origins¹. In the West, Tantra is commonly represented as “sacred sex”, and consequently other, more central characteristics, are all but neglected. In essence, Western Tantra has very little to do with its South Asian forefather. This is, however, not an article on Tantra in the West per se, nor is it an examination of the reinterpretation of Tantra in the larger esoteric milieu in the West. It is an examination of how Tantra is being appropriated in a specific stream of contemporary Western esoteric magic – the so called Left-Hand Path. In this milieu the interpretation of Tantra differs quite drastically from what could be termed more “New Age” appropriations of the same. Instead of the sexual aspects, more focus is placed on the attainment of power and the antinomian possibilities Tantra provides. In effect, the Western Left-Hand Path appropriations of Tantra are an example of a positive orientalism through which certain disliked characteristics of Western cultural and religious traditions can be critiqued, examined comparatively, and discarded in seemingly legitimated ways.

¹ Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2003).

I will start by discussing Western esotericism and the significance of othering for it, as well the dubious connections between Western sex magic and South Asian Tantra. I will then go on to discuss the Western Left-Hand Path in more detail, along with its connections to and appropriation of Tantric discourse.

Western Esotericism and the Primacy of the Exotic Other

As this article is primarily focused on Western appropriations and reinterpretations of Tantra in esoteric contexts, it is warranted to provide some discussion on the nature of Western esotericism. There are many different takes on the subject. Here I will forgo the sociological discussions and definitions presented by scholars such as Edward Tiryakian and Marcello Truzzi, and instead move directly to the more historically focused approaches of Antoine Faivre, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Kocku von Stuckrad.

In 1992, Antoine Faivre formulated a characterization of Western esotericism which has become very popular among scholars of esotericism. It can even be regarded as one of the most central factors leading to the study of esotericism becoming a discipline in its own right. Faivre posits 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 denominator²”. This collection of spiritual currents is furthermore characterized by four intrinsic and two extrinsic features. The intrinsic characteristics consist of the idea of correspondences – that everything in existence is connected in some way and that affecting these connections is possible; the idea of living nature – that nature is permeated by divine forces, in essence being the body of God; the primacy of mediation by “higher beings” and the human being’s imaginatory faculties in achieving spiritual insight; and the goal of transmutation – the purification of the soul to the degree where it can approach the divine³. Furthermore, Faivre’s determines that Western esotericism

² Antoine Faivre, “Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe,” in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. Antoine Faivre & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 2.

³ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10–15.

proper came into existence during the Renaissance, when different religious practices and traditions were unified in a common frame of reference⁴. Faivre's approach is somewhat problematic as it can be read as a strict prescription where all the main characteristics need to be present in order for something to be "truly" esoteric. As the definition is based on a historically limited source material, Renaissance phenomena will easily appear more esoteric than later (or earlier) expressions.

Wouter Hanegraaff has always stressed the scholarly constructed nature of Western esotericism – that the subject matter consists of a very diverse set of philosophies and practices lumped together under a common denominator for the sake of analysis – and has in recent times developed a conceptualization of esotericism which differs quite radically from Faivre's. From having built on Faivre's notions and Gilles Quispel's idea of "gnosis" as a third stream in Western culture⁵, different from but intermixed with the streams of reason and faith, Hanegraaff has gone to analyze the esoteric through what he calls the "Grand Polemical Narrative"⁶. He builds on Egyptologist Jan Assman's idea of mnemohistory as "collectively imagined history" and posits that the focus of the study of Western esotericism is Western religious phenomena that have, at one time or another⁷, been regarded as contrary to established orthodox knowledge in the West, and subjected to polemic discourses where the subject is presented as dangerous, immoral, irrational, or simply wrong. Hanegraaff sees this conflict as largely one between monotheism, where the divine is far removed from the human sphere, and cosmotheism, where the divine is imma-

⁴ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 386–388.

⁵ See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Reason, Faith, and Gnosis: Potentials and Problematics of a Typological Construct," in *Clashes of Knowledge: Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Meusburger, Michael Welker & Edgar Wunder (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2008), 133-144.

⁶ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Contested Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research," in *Aries* 5:2 (2005): 225-254; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Western Esotericism," in *Polemical Encounters: Esotericism and Its Others* (Leiden: Brill: 2007), 107-136.

⁷ This is an important detail, as Hanegraaff stresses that his focus is largely on post-Enlightenment discourses, where many previously accepted phenomena such as alchemy and astrology are a posteriori defined in polemic ways.

nent but hidden. While my presentation of Hanegraaff's ideas surely do not do the complexity of them justice, I do see some problems with his approach. The Grand Polemical Narrative runs the risk of broadening the scope of the field to the level where it can essentially encompass almost anything. An example Hanegraaff himself provides is that of contemporary polemical depictions of Islam⁸. Surely there is some merit in keeping an analytical distance between mainstream, orthodox Islam and subjects such as astrology, alchemy, and magic? Hanegraaff's approach is also problematic in that it denies any stability in the subject matter of that which is examined. In some ways, Hanegraaff is engaged descriptions of the occult as a "waste basket of knowledge" in the line of Marcello Truzzi, whom Hanegraaff himself strongly criticises on the exact same grounds⁹.

In 2005 Kocku von Stuckrad presented an alternative view on esotericism, although not presented as a definition per se. Here esotericism is regarded a structural element in Western culture, consisting of discourses of "higher knowledge" and "ways of accessing higher knowledge", including mediation from higher beings and personal experience of the divine. Stuckrad furthermore suggests that esoteric worldviews are often based on ontological monism¹⁰. An important point is that no strict list of necessary attributes is presented, and this discursive take on esotericism therefore makes it easier to discuss esotericism in different historical periods. The problem with Stuckrad's conception is similar to that of Hanegraaff's; it easily becomes all too inclusive. While both Hanegraaff and von Stuckrad are shifting the focus to issues of legitimacy and power, they do so in very different and at times conflicting ways.

Von Stuckrad and Hanegraaff both note the importance of othering to esotericism. However, I do not feel that they give it enough importance as an integral element of esoteric worldviews. I want to argue that the creation of and focus on a positive other is at the very

⁸ Hanegraaff, "Forbidden Knowledge", 227.

⁹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "On the Construction of 'Esoteric Traditions'," in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. Antoine Faivre & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 40-42.

¹⁰ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief ??? to Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005); Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: ..." in ??? 2005.

centre of esoteric spirituality. True, in European contexts (and its eventual offshoots in e.g. North America) the creation of an exotic other through which self-understanding and self-identity can be constructed is a structural element in the European history of religion and ideas. Here, however, the construction of the exotic other is generally negative, whereas the esoteric construction of the esoteric other is primarily positive. We see numerous examples of this in the history of Western esotericism. In the renaissance the focus was shifted to the Greece of antiquity and its philosophers. Later on, as the Greek antiquity became more familiar, focus was shifted to Egypt as the cradle of esoteric knowledge. Eventually this was no longer enough and India and the mystic orient became home of “true religion”. Of course, imaginary esoteric centres such as Agharti in Tibet and the lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria also represent the exotic and esoteric other. In the twentieth century various indigenous and pre-Christian pagan religions, arguably representing even more exotic and esoteric subjects, have become more and more important. The example of traditionalism¹¹ is an enlightening one. This is a form of esotericism originating in the writings of René Guenon in early twentieth century France, where modernity and the modern West is regarded as spiritually dead and the focus is shifted to “authentic traditions” such as Islam (and its esoteric practice of Sufism) and Orthodox Christianity. An important point is that East and West are primarily emic categories in the world of the esoteric, and should not be regarded as definite categories in a scholarly, etic sense.

It is precisely due to this positive orientalism and exoticiation that Tantra has become an important element in contemporary esoteric teachings in the West. The Gnostics, Rosicrucians and Templars of European history and their imagined sexual rituals were not exotic enough as the world shrunk in processes of globalization, and the gaze was increasingly turned to the East. Tantra thus became the preferred “origin” of sex magical practices, and it is for this reason more than any else that we find more references to Tantra than to e.g. Paschal Beverly Randolph in discussions of sex magic techniques and philosophies of groups like the Ordo Templi Orientis and Dragon Rouge, and writers such as Kenneth Grant and Zeena and Nicholas Schreck. The exotic is simply more esoteric, not to mention more erotic!

¹¹ See Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) for the definite work on Traditionalism.

The Left-Hand Path

The stream of contemporary esotericism called the Left-Hand Path has received very little attention in academia. Scholars such as Richard Sutcliffe and Graham Harvey have discussed it briefly, and others such as Dave Evans and I provide lengthier treatments¹². However, beside my own later work¹³, no thorough discussion as to what actually defines this stream of esotericism is given. All of the abovementioned scholars do identify antinomianism as a central ingredient in Left-Hand Path spiritualities, and discuss the aim of Left-Hand Path magic to transcend the boundary the dualisms of “black” and “white” magic, and good and evil. However, more substance is needed in a definition of the Left-Hand Path.

Drawing from emic self-understandings, I propose an etic definition of the Left-Hand Path as a distinct development of contemporary Western esotericism, which can be identified by the following characteristics:

The ideology of *individualism*. Discursively, the individual and his/her spiritual development is the primary concern in Left-Hand Path spiritualities, even with individuals operating in groups. Organizations are typically likened to schools or universities where the individual magician can acquire the tools necessary for his/her magical progress. This is mainly a rhetorical device, as Left-Hand Path organizations, like others, naturally involve individuals who invest much time and energy

¹² Richard Sutcliffe, “Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick,” in *Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Charlotte Hardman & Graham Harvey (London: Thorsons, 1996), 109-137; Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 97-99; Dave Evans, *The History of British Magick after Crowley: Kenneth Grant, Amado Crowley, Chaos Magic, Satanism, Lovecraft, the Left-Hand Path, Blasphemy and Magical Morality* (London: Hidden Publishing, 2007); Kennet Granholm, *Embracing the Dark: The Magic Order of Drag-on Rouge – Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2005).

¹³ See e.g. Kennet Granholm, “‘The Prince of Darkness on the Move’: Transnationality and Trans-locality in Left-Hand Path Magic,” (Torino: CESNUR, 2007) URL: http://www.cesnur.org/pa_granholm.htm; Kennet Granholm, “Left-Hand Path Magic and Animal Rights,” *Nova Religio* 12:4 (2009): 28-49; Kennet Granholm, “Embracing Others Than Satan: The Multiple Princes of Darkness in the Left-Hand Path Milieu,” in *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jesper Aagaard Petersen (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 85-101.

into running the organization in question. The individual is positioned in opposition to the collective, and this often results in a form of elitism, which posits the magician as an elect individual. I have earlier termed this condition “uniqueism” as the term elitism is rather pejorative and the common understanding of it not really capturing the essence of the phenomenon¹⁴. It could be argued that most or all esoteric traditions throughout history have been individualistic in character. However, the distinction with Left-Hand Path spiritualities is that this individualism is raised to the level of explicit ideology.

The view of *the human being as a psycho-physical totality*. The essence of man is considered to be both physical and mental, and any absolute separation of these spheres is considered unsound, reductionist, or even impossible. The terminology and specific foci will differ in various Left-Hand Path traditions. While some traditions have a stronger focus on “psyche”, views of the body as (merely) the temple of the soul are uncommon.

The appraisal of *life in the here-and-now*. The focus of Left-Hand Path spiritualities is on corporeal existence in the present, not on an afterlife. All aspects of life are valued, even its destructive aspects (e.g. death), which are regarded as necessary components of life. Moderate to extreme hedonism is advocated, as one it is thought that life should be enjoyed, and again in both its positive and negative aspects. Ways of enjoyment (e.g. sex) are sometimes used as methods for spiritual development. This applies to the negative aspects of life as well, such as symbolically and ritually confronting one’s impending death¹⁵.

The goal of *self-deification*. The aim of the practitioner is to become a creator, or a god, and this is effected through initiatory processes. The nature of this self-deification is interpreted in various ways by different individuals (as groups rarely define it in a singular fashion). On the one side of the continuum we find psychological interpretations in which self-deification signifies assuming total control over one’s own personal existential universe. On the other side we find purely metaphysical interpretations in which the practitioner is thought to become an actual god.

¹⁴ Granholm, *Embracing the Dark*, 129-131.

¹⁵ Kennet Granholm, “Symbolisk död och återfödelse i den vänstra handens väg,” *Finyar årsskrift 2006/2007* (2008): 35-51.

An *antinomian* stance. Collective religious and cultural norms are questioned in the pursuit of individualized ethics¹⁶ and spiritual evolution. The magician seeks to abandon his/her culturally given set of ethics, and adopt personal and individualized ones. This is often realized in ritualistic fashion in spiritual practices in which the magician breaks religious, cultural, and personal taboos (most often on a purely mental level)¹⁷. The idea is that this will grant the magician a level of freedom and separation in his individualization and self-deification. Part of the antinomianism 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 (and often political, ideological etc.) groups that are “mainstream” and confer to established norms, as well as many forms of alternative spirituality which are regarded as being essentially collective in character, and/or conforming in ideology and practice (including esoteric spiritualities such as “New Age” and Neo-Paganism). A particular Left-Hand Path thus defines itself in opposition to this “Right-Hand Path”, and becomes what this “mainstream” spirituality is not¹⁸. Part of this antinomian stance is the preference of symbols and rhetoric that is commonly regarded as “satanic,” e.g. the inverted pentagram, talk of “The Prince of Darkness,” and terms such as black magic.

The origin of the term Left-Hand Path can be traced back to nineteenth-century Western reinterpretations of Indian religious sources, particularly perceptions of Tantra. The idea that Tantra could easily be divided into the two main traditions as *Vamamarga* or *Vamacara* (“left way”) and *Dakshinamarga* or *Dakshinacara* (“right way”) resonated with the already established division into black and white magic. The popularization of the terms can probably be attributed to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society, who used them in her work *The Secret Doctrine*¹⁹. The term did occur relatively frequently in

¹⁶ Kennet Granholm, “Den vänstra handens väg: Moral, etik och synen på ondska i en mörkmagisk orden,” in *Hotbilder – våld, aggression och religion*, ed. Maria Leppäkari & Jonathan Peste (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2006), 37-50.

¹⁷ Sutcliffe, “The Left Hand Path”; Granholm, *Embracing the Dark*, 137-138.

¹⁸ Granholm, *Embracing the Dark*, 138, footnote 43; see also Granholm, “The Prince of Darkness on the Move”.

¹⁹ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine. Volume 1: Cosmogony* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Ltd, 1888), 6, 193; Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doc-*

the early 20th century magical milieu, but almost solely as a derogatory term.

The evolution of the Left-Hand Path cannot be discussed without mentioning the most well known occultist of the twentieth century; Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). While Crowley did not use the term Left-Hand Path as a self-designation, his magical philosophy and practice has been extremely influential on the later Left-Hand Path milieu²⁰. Crowley received his initial training in magic and occultism in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (founded in 1888), and came to develop his own magical religion, Thelema, from 1904 onwards. In 1912 Crowley became involved with the German-originated magic order Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), which is the main organization expounding Crowley's teachings today²¹. Crowley's use of sex as an initiatory tool, his antinomian stance towards traditional society and religion, his focus on Will as the main instrument of the magician, and his uncompromising attitude to spiritual progress have all influenced Left-Hand path spiritualities.

From the early 1970s onwards, a positive re-evaluation of the term Left-hand Path can be found in the works of British magician and author Kenneth Grant (b. 1924). Grant was the personal secretary of Crowley for a short period in 1945, and further developed the Thelemic system of his mentor. A few years after Crowley's death Grant made an attempt to take over the O.T.O., and although this ultimately failed he has maintained his own branch of the order, commonly identified as the Typhonian O.T.O.²². Even though Grant's O.T.O. has never had more than a handful of members, his writings are well known within

trine. Volume 2: Anthropogony (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Ltd, 1888), 26.

²⁰ Aleister Crowley's influence is apparent in most contemporary esotericism, for example on Neo-pagan witchcraft and Wicca, see e.g. Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007), 147-155. However, it is not uncommon that this heritage goes unmentioned, as the image of Crowley is still rather negative.

²¹ Marco Pasi, "Ordo Templi Orientis," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff with Jean-Pierre Brach, Roelof van den Broek & Antoine Faivre (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 898-906.

²² Peter R. Koenig, "Introduction," in Aleister Crowley & Theodor Reuss, *O.T.O. Rituals and Sex Magick. Edited and Compiled by A. R. Naylor* (Thame: Essex House, 1999), 25-26.

the occult milieu. The most central of these are the three Typhonian Trilogies, published between 1972 and 2002²³. Grant's *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (1973) contains one of the first positive appraisals of the term Left-Hand Path, and subsequent books give much attention to the same. For example, in *Cults of the Shadow* Grant writes "It is the almost universal failure to understand the proper function of the Left Hand Path that has led to its denigration...²⁴", and this sentiment is expressed in *Nightside of Eden* as well²⁵. Grant identifies the Left-Hand Path as a genuine and important spiritual path, and considers it to be as valid as the more common "right-hand path".

If the term Left-Hand Path is not directly used as a self-designate by Kenneth Grant, it is used so by Anton Szandor LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan (1966) and "father of modern Satanism". For example, in *The Satanic Bible* the following line is included as part of an incantation: "Strengthen with fire the marrow of our friend and companion, our comrade on the Left-Hand Path²⁶". Also discussed is the "Right-Hand Path", portrayed as representing religions of ignorance and fear²⁷. It is interesting to note that this "Right-Hand Path" is treated a lot more thoroughly than the Left-Hand Path. This is an example of the importance of a negative other for Left-Hand Path spiritualities.

Some other representatives of the milieu are the Temple of Set, founded in California, USA, in 1975, the Texan author Michael W. Ford and his Order of Phosphorus, and the Swedish originated Dragon Rouge²⁸, founded in 1990 and currently the largest Left-Hand Path order with its approximately 400 members worldwide. Of these groups

²³ The first trilogy consists of *The Magical Revival* (1972), *Aleister Crowley & the Hidden God* (1973) and *Cults of the Shadow* (1975), the second trilogy consists of *Nightside of Eden* (1977), *Outside the Circles of Time* (1980), and *Hecate's Fountain* (1992), while the third and last trilogy consists of *Outer Gateways* (1994), *Beyond the Mauve Zone* (1999), and *The Ninth Arch* (2002).

²⁴ Kenneth Grant, *Cults of the Shadow* (London: Skoob Books, 1994 [1975]), 1.

²⁵ Kenneth Grant, *Nightside of Eden*, (London: Skoob Books, 1994 [1977]), 52.

²⁶ Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, (New York, N.Y.: Avon Books, 2005 [1969]), 151.

²⁷ E.g. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 42.

²⁸ See Granholm, *Embracing the Dark*, for a thorough study of the order.

and individuals Dragon Rouge is of most significance in the present article, as it incorporates a particular interpretation of Tantra into its very foundations – in an eclectic synthesis with Kabbalah, alchemy, and Old Norse rune mysticism.

Sexual Mysticism, Sex magic, and Tantra in Western Esoteric Contexts

While Indian Tantric practice is not automatically sexual in nature, in the Western imagination they have certainly become highly sexualized. Sexuality and sexual mysticism has always played a part in Western esotericism. Examples of this is are e.g. the treatment of the female aspect of the godhead in Kabbalah, the Shekhina – often interpreted as Israel, the Jewish people – and the mystical union of the Shekhina and the male aspect of God²⁹, and discussions by such important renaissance esotericists as Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno – who regarded sensual desire as central to spiritual attainment³⁰. It was, however, not before the mid to late nineteenth century before sexual techniques were systematically incorporated into esoteric teachings in the West in any substantial degree.

Paschal Beverly Randolph³¹ (1825-1875) is generally considered the first proper sex magician in the history of Western esotericism³². Randolph was born in New York, an illegitimate child to a black woman and a white man – something he always had problems with. From about his mid twenties to the early 1860s he was deeply involved in spiritualist circles as well as active in women's rights and anti-slavery movements. By the late 1850s he had started to become disillusioned with spiritualism and, after he had come into contact with older esoteric currents – e.g. Rosicrucianism and magic – on his travels in Eu-

²⁹ Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1991), 140-196.

³⁰ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Under the Mantle of Love: The Mystical Eroticism of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno," in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff & Jeffrey J. Kripal (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 175-207.

³¹ See John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997) for the definite work on Randolph.

³² Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2006), 55.

rope, he started developing a system which focused on the use of sexual intercourse to effect spiritual progress. He died by his own hand at age forty-nine, having difficulties managing his feelings of jealousy towards his wife. Randolph's teachings were picked up by the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor³³ – probably founded by Max Théon (Louis Maximilian Bimstein, 1848-1927) in 1884. The order marketed itself as an alternative to the Theosophical Society, for those who had grown tired of the predominantly Eastern focus of that organization³⁴. The order more or less ceased to exist after a financial scandal in late 1885, but even though it existed for such a short time its impact on the esoteric milieu has been huge. It is also mainly through the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor that Randolph's sex magical teachings have spread.

Aleister Crowley, mentioned above, and the Ordo Templi Orientis³⁵ (O.T.O.) are commonly regarded as the most important progenitors of sex magic in the West. Crowley had immersed himself in sexual practices already in his teens, published a collection of erotic poems called *White Stains* in 1898 – the same year he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and included some sexual techniques in his magic since at least the early 1900s. However, it was not until 1912 when he came into contact with Theodor Reuss, the German founder of the O.T.O., that Crowley seriously began to develop a sex magical system. The O.T.O. was founded on paper in the early 1900s, but it is doubtful if the order was operational before Crowley's involvement with it. According to its own origin myths the order was founded in cooperation by Carl Kellner (1851-1905) – who had travelled in the East and probably come into contact with Tantric practices – and Theodor Reuss – an entrepreneur in the occult world who managed several fringe masonry groups. While it is likely that both Kellner and Reuss had some knowledge about Tantra, it is not likely that this knowledge was particularly extensive³⁶. As the order's activities probably com-

³³ See Christian Chanel, John Patrick Deveney & Joscelyn Godwin, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (New York, N.Y.: Samuel Weiser, 1995) for the definitive work on the order.

³⁴ Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 246.

³⁵ See Pasi, "Ordo Templi Orientis," for more information on the order.

³⁶ Hugh B. Urban, "Unleashing the Beast: Aleister Crowley, Tantra and Sex Magic in Late Victorian England," *Esoterica* 5 (2003): 148.

menced well after Kellner's death his potential knowledge of Tantra probably did not have a huge impact. What is known is that after Crowley become affiliated with the O.T.O. he produced the ritual material and aligned the order according to his vision of Thelema³⁷.

Crowley is often regarded one of the most important persons in bringing Tantra to Western esotericism. As John Symmonds writes in his foreword to Crowley's autohagiography: "His greatest merit, perhaps, was to make the bridge between Tantrism and the Western esoteric tradition, and thus bring together Western and Eastern magical traditions³⁸". Kenneth Grant also emphasizes the connections between Crowley's system and Tantra, see e.g. his *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God*. According to Hugh Urban, however, this interpretation is largely wrong. While Crowley might have come into contact with Tantric practices on his travels³⁹, and was very knowledgeable about different forms of Yoga, his knowledge of Tantra was severely limited⁴⁰. Similarly, the O.T.O. is often given a certain Tantric pedigree on rather dubious grounds. It seems far more likely that the original inspiration for the sexual practices of the order lie in the teachings of Paschal Beverly Randolph, as conveyed by the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. For example, both Randolph and the O.T.O. have the idea that the magician should focus his/her will on the desired outcome at the moment of orgasm, while this idea is absent in Tantra. There are, however, some rather pronounced differences as well. For Randolph sex magic was strictly to occur between husband and wife, whereas the O.T.O. had no such limitations and even opened for the possibility of homosexual magical practices – something Crowley himself practiced. Another difference to Randolph, and something which does occur in Tantric contexts, was the ritual consumption of the combined male and female sexual fluids.

³⁷ See Marco Pasi, "Crowley, Aleister," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff with Jean-Pierre Brach, Roelof van den Broek & Antoine Faivre (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 281-287.

³⁸ John Symmonds, "Introduction," in *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. Kenneth Grant & John Symmonds (London: Arkana, Penguin Books, 1979), 25.

³⁹ Hugh B. Urban, "The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity", in *Nova Religio* 7:3 (2004): 12.

⁴⁰ Urban, "Unleashing the Beast", 140.

If Tantra was not the primary inspiration for Randolph, Crowley, or the O.T.O., it was for others. As noted by Hugh Urban⁴¹, discourses on sexuality were in no way absent in Victorian England. Rather, they were a preoccupation. Sir Francis Burton (1821-1890) was an important figure in the construction of the idea of a sexualized tantric India. In 1883 he translated the Kama Sutra, a publication that came to be falsely associated with Tantra⁴². Another Brit, John Woodroffe (1865-1936) – working as a barrister for the High Court in British India, is regarded as the father of Tantric studies. Under the pen name Arthur Avalon he wrote several volumes on the subject of Tantra, and was to a large degree responsible for producing a moralized, “deodorized”, version of Tantra in both the West and the East⁴³.

The contemporary Western views of Tantra as “sacred sex” can large be attributed to the influence of Pierre Arnold Bernard (1875?-1955) – also known as “the Omnipotent Oom”. The American Bernard had travelled in India in his youth, but probably came into contact with some Tantric teachings via an Indian yogi in California in the early 1900s. In 1906 he founded the Tantrik Order in America, which focused on the sexual aspects of Tantra⁴⁴. Although Bernard and this early “Tantric movement” was the focus of much controversy the sexual techniques and discussions of the importance of them for spiritual development and enlightenment have proliferated since the second half of the twentieth century.

So, if the sex magical practices of the likes of Randolph and Crowley and the American Tantra of Bernard are so different from South Asian Tantric practices, what is this “original Tantra” then? Not being an expert on the subject, and assuming that the present volume will provide immensely more detailed and qualified discussion on the subject I will keep my discussion short. As portrayed by David Gordon White the origin of Tantra lies in the Kaula practices of rural India. Here female deities/demonesses, identified first “seizers” – and later

⁴¹ Hugh B. Urban, “The Omnipotent Oom: Tantra and Its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism,” *Esoterica* 3 (2001): 219.

⁴² Ibid, 222-223.

⁴³ Urban, *Tantra*, 136-147.

⁴⁴ Urban, “The Omnipotent Oom,” 218-259.

as Yoginis, are terrible and frightful entities that need to be calmed by sacrifices of foodstuffs. Otherwise they would feast on unborn babies and the vital energies of man. In elite quarters of these traditions ideas where the truly heroic individual (a *vira*) could instead make an offering of his vital male fluids, semen, and be rewarded by receiving supernatural powers through the intake of the Yoginis' female fluids. Rites where human women represented, and indeed worked as manifestations of, the Yoginis emerged. These rites culminated in sexual rituals at the end of which the mixed sexual fluids of the male and female practitioner were consumed⁴⁵.

White, and other scholars of Tantra such as Hugh Urban, stress that sexual rites have always been a very small part of the whole world of Tantra, and references to such are few and far between in classic tantric literature⁴⁶. It could also be argued, as traditionalist Julius Evola does, that Tantra is more about power than about sex⁴⁷. The main goal of the tantric practitioner was to achieve bodily supernatural powers, Siddhis (where the word Siddha, the person who has achieved such powers, means perfected being), such as immortality and flight. Ideas about spiritual enlightenment came later, in the theological speculations on tantric practices. Eventually, from the twelfth century onwards, attempts were made to sanitize Tantra so that even more orthodox Indians could engage in its practice. The sexual elements, and the importance given to actual women, were sublimated and ideas of the internal feminine power of the male practitioner, the Shakti, and the symbolic reading of the forbidden elements of tantric practice were instituted⁴⁸. The act of actual sexual intercourse became internalized as the symbolic union of the male Shiva and the female Shakti in the body of the tantric practitioner. This is when ideas of the feminine energy of man came to be represented as the coiled Kundalini serpent which could be awakened in meditation and thus activate energy point, chakras, came into being and was put at the centre of tantric philosophy and practice. No longer was it the main goal of the tantric

⁴⁵ David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric Sex" in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago, I.L.: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 27-93.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 13; Urban, *Tantra*.

⁴⁷ Julius Evola, *Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti and the Secret Way* (Rochester, V.T.: Inner Traditions International, 1992).

⁴⁸ White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 219-257.

adept to achieve bodily superpowers, but to achieve spiritual enlightenment. This theological speculation on Tantra could be called *tantrism*⁴⁹, whereas the former term would then represent the broader field.

It should, of course, be noted that, similarly to catholic theology and actual Christian practice, the theological forms of Tantra were never the most widespread ones. Hugh Urban also notes that it is in the complex interplay between orientalists and scholars, and native Indians, that the view of Tantra and tantrism that is predominant today arose⁵⁰. Thus, this dialogical process created a new form of Tantra which changed philosophies and practices both in the West and in South Asia. It should also be noted that tantrism, before being constructed as such in the modern period, was never a singular monolithic category. As such, Tantrism is the result of the meeting of East and West⁵¹. In the West, however, the idea of *Tantrism* as a singular and more or less homogenous tradition exists, along with the common idea in contemporary Western magic contexts of the right-hand path (dakshina marg) and left-hand path (vama marg) as the two fundamental schools of tantrism.

The Sexualized Feminine Divine, Tantra, and Positive Orientalism in The Western Left-Hand Path

When Tantra is appropriated in Western Left-Hand Path contexts it can be attributed partly to experienced misrepresentations of the feminine in Western religious history, and partly to a form of positive orientalism where the "East" is valued for both its exotic qualities and imagined spiritual virtues. The appropriation and positive reappraisal of the feminine in the Left-Hand Path is linked to the idea of antinomianism, discussed earlier. In Western culture the feminine has traditionally been considered impure, worldly, potentially evil, and thus separated from the divine. In Jewish mysticism the character Lilith has

⁴⁹ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁰ Urban, *Tantra*.

⁵¹ Ibid, 40

some prominence. According to some sources she was the first woman, created equal to Adam, the first man⁵². However, when she was not willing to submit to Adam she was cast out of or fled from the Garden of Eden and became the mother of numerous demons and things evil, as well as seducing men as a succubus⁵³. In some accounts Lilith is said to have become the consort of Samael/Satan after she left Adam, and in still others the existence of two Liliths who wage war on each other is proposed⁵⁴. The woman has come to symbolize lust in the West, and as lust is sin, she has also come to represent sin, and as the active agency enticing man to sin and impurity. This is clearly noted in Abrahamic views on menstruation as well as in the importance of male dominance over all aspects of female sexuality⁵⁵. In cosmic dichotomy the feminine often represents the dark, negative and passive aspects of the supernatural. At the same time, she can be seen as the active part in things evil, or simply more prone to the temptations of the devil. In Isaak Luria's commentaries to the bible the male and masculine forces are identified with beauty, the day, and the impregnating force which seeds the feminine dry land.

Similarly, the left side has in many cultures been regarded to be the side of evil and wrongful, and often the feminine. The Sanskrit *Vama*, denoting left, wicked, adverse, opposite etc., can also be translated as woman⁵⁶. In India the right hand was used when eating and the left hand when cleaning oneself after visiting the toilet. Thus the left hand symbolized impurity, in physical as well as in spiritual matters and its connection to the female also denotes that the woman is impure. In the Western world the left and left-handed people come to symbolize a broad range of undesirable qualities, such as weakness, clumsiness and dishonesty. The word *left* in the English language origi-

⁵² Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York, N.Y.: Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 218; Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of Kabbalah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 65.

⁵³ Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 210.

⁵⁴ Scholem, *The Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 295-296.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29, 39-40, 104-108.

⁵⁶ Cologne Digital Sanskrit Dictionary, "vAma", <http://webapps.uni-koeln.de/tamil>, accessed 30 June 2009.

nates from Old English *lyft*, which meant weak or worthless⁵⁷. The Italian word for left-handed, *mancino*, has connotations of treacherousness. The Latin word *Sinister* translates as *left* or *wrong*, *perverse*⁵⁸. Not to forget the fact that we shake hands with our right hand, not our left. Earlier Western psychology did consider the left handed person to be a bearer of all sorts of unwanted social behaviours and qualities, such as homosexuality, incestuous desires, impotence, and mental disorders.

The feminine in the Left Hand Path in many ways represents the same as the feminine in traditional spirituality; the difference is in how these characteristics are valued. When nature and the this-worldly are regarded part of the divine, the feminine gains a different position. In the Left-Hand Path order Dragon Rouge, for example, Lilith – who figures strongly in the order’s material, is portrayed as sexually aggressive and dangerous⁵⁹. In Tantric vocabulary, it is only the true *vira* who can manage to approach the deity unscathed. In many aspects influenced by Left Hand Path Tantra Dragon Rouge has taken the same view on spiritual gender. The point is to reassess one’s view on these attributes. In his book *Mörk magi* [Dark Magic] long-time Dragon Rouge member Tommie Eriksson writes that “the feminine primal force has been deported to the darkness and the dark goddess has become nothing more than a symbol of death and decay⁶⁰”. One of the goals of the Dragon Rouge magician is to approach this negative symbol, understand the true meaning of it, and thus reevaluate it. The symbol language of Dragon Rouge has much reference to the sexualized feminine divine. For example, the starting point of the black magician’s road to self-deification entails the magician symbolically “stepping into the womb of Lilith⁶¹”. When the magician’s development reaches its

⁵⁷ Online Etymology Dictionary, “Left”, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=left&searchmode=none>, accessed 30 June 2009.

⁵⁸ Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid, <http://www.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/lookup.pl?stem=sinist&ending=er>, accessed 30 June 2009.

⁵⁹ See Granholm, *Embracing the Dark*, 140-141.

⁶⁰ Tommie Eriksson, *Mörk magi* (Sundbyberg: Ouroboros produktion, 2001), 6.

⁶¹ Dragon Rouge, *Magikurs 2, brev 6*, 2-3. Unpublished internal document.

climax the womb is represented as the staring eye of chaos, through which the magician steps out. By stepping into the “womb of Lilith” the magician in essence impregnates him- or herself, and by stepping out through the “Eye of Lucifer” he/she gives birth to him-/herself as a god. Lilith’s womb is displayed prominently in the alchemical symbol of the order, along with a goblet also representing the womb. In the symbol achieved divinity is represented as the union of the male and female in the form of a stylized Shiva-Lingam (also termed the Eye of Lucifer). Official Dragon Rouge material holds that the darker aspects of spirituality are feminine: “She represents the gate to the dimensions of magic. She is Mother Earth and through her womb life is born and dies. She is the gate to the underworld and the goddess that the witch and the warlock step down into in order to be initiated. She is the realm of death and the mother to all life⁶²”.

The feminine aspect of the divine is as important as it is to Dragon Rouge largely because it is felt that this is an area of the human experience which has been neglected and demonized by the dominant religion in the West, Christianity. When this religion is criticized, it is often on the grounds of it having legitimated the repression of women and presenting her as an evil and dangerous other⁶³. This rhetoric needs to be understood in the context of the contemporary Sweden in which the order was born and developed. In Swedish society the notion of equality between the sexes is a very important and normative guideline. As in all of contemporary West the aspiration in Sweden has since the mid 1900s been to forge a society where individuals of both sexes have equal opportunities and possibilities. The political powers have attempted to effect this process through law and education. The Scandinavian societies have been forerunners in the ideology of equality and Sweden has taken a particularly active role in the process. In addition, this discourse of women’s liberation is to be understood in the context of the reappraisal of the feminine aspects of the divine. As the order, and most spiritualities with neopagan influences, has some notion of the dichotomy of male equals civilization and female equals nature, whilst striving for the reappraisal of nature, the woman and the feminine quite naturally become a key notion, something to be revered.

⁶² Dragon Rouge, *Magikurs 2, brev 3*, 3. Unpublished internal document.

⁶³ Dragon Rouge, *Philosophy*, <http://www.dragonrouge.net/english/philosophy.htm>, Accessed 30 June 2009.

As stated earlier, a form of orientalism where the exotic and far away – in space and/or time – is a foundational aspect of Western esoteric discourse. Considering this, and the centrality of antinomianism for Left-Hand Path spiritualities it is easier to understand why Tantra appears so attractive for these groups. Tantra provides an avenue for “double rebellion”. As I have shown, the turn to the feminine divine in groups such as Dragon Rouge is to a high degree motivated by antinomian concerns. The feminine has in Western culture often been repressed by being demonized, and in Dragon Rouge this demonization is reinterpreted in a positive light. The feminine divine represents aggressive sexuality and power, which is dangerous, but if approached in the right manner it can be beneficial for one’s magical development. Tantra provides a religious tradition which has models for this aggressive and dangerous sexualized feminine divine, at the same time as it provides the added allure of being an exotic other. Indian feminine deities in Tantric contexts such as Kali, Durga, and Tara are often represented as dangerous, and as apparent reversals of the passive feminine in Western contexts. The Indian example provides a model of the feminine divine that is destructive, but in a way that can be used for positive means. Being an exotic other means that Tantra can also be used to legitimate similar reinterpretations of Western demonic femininities. In comparing Lilith with Kali similarities can be found, and the interpretation that the former can represent the same positive qualities as the latter does can be made. This can furthermore be used in discourses where the dominant religious traditions can be criticized on the grounds of repressing the feminine, and given added legitimacy for positive reinterpretations of existing Western notions and traditions. The exotic other, viewed with a positive orientalism, becomes a lens through which the familiar can be seen in new light.

So, how then is Tantra appropriated and used in the Western Left-Hand Path? First off it needs to be recognized that there is a huge variance among various groups. In some groups, such as Dragon Rouge, and among some influential authors such as Kenneth Grant and the former Church of Satan and Temple of Set member Nicholas and Zeena Schreck, Tantra is very prominent, whereas in other groups, such as the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set, discussion of Tantra is almost completely absent on an organizational level. I will here focus primarily on the appropriation of Tantra in Dragon Rouge and the publications of Kenneth Grant.

Kenneth Grant builds from Aleister Crowley’s magical system and, as said earlier, presents the latter as very knowledgeable concerning

Tantra. Grant is the single-most significant individual in the Left-Hand Path when it comes to cementing the idea that the Western Left-Hand Path is largely analogous to, or even a direct descendant of, Indian *vamacara* Tantra⁶⁴. In *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* he distinguishes between *vama marg* and *dakshina marg*, in a move central to Western esoteric discourses where the former is presented as the esoteric and the latter as the exoteric aspects of Tantra⁶⁵. Most of Grant's "Typhonian Trilogies" are abundant with references to Tantra. His *Cults of the Shadow* (1975) deals predominantly with groups and "traditions" that are either tantric or which Grant interprets as having a close affinity to Tantra. Interestingly enough, the only chapter in the book which does not refer to Tantra in any way is chapter six which deals with Aleister Crowley. In addition to Aleister Crowley, Grant regards the artist-magician Austin Osman Spare's ideas as having an affinity to Tantra, and even existing in "straight line" of tradition related to it⁶⁶. This focus on Tantra does seem to occur sometime in the late 1960s, as the Carfax Monographs, published between 1959 and 1963, make no reference to Tantra and instead focusing on the more traditional sources of Western esotericism, such as Kabbalah, the Golden Dawn, and Egypt. A possible influence from Tantra can be glanced on a 7" vinyl record with Aleister Crowley's readings of his poetry released in 1970. The reverse side of the record contains the song "Scarlet Woman" performed by Grant and one or two other people under the name of "Chakra⁶⁷". Grant's presentation of Tantra depicts it as a dark, ancient, and potentially very dangerous form of esoteric religiosity, existing in various manifestations in many pre-Christian cultures, and even legendary centres of esoteric wisdom such as Atlantis. Thus, Tantra becomes something of *the* perennial religion, prior to and elevated from all other traditions.

In the magic order Dragon Rouge as well, Tantra has a very prominent position, to the degree where *vamacara* Tantra is presented as one of the four foundational pillars of the order's magical system. Tan-

⁶⁴ Kenneth Grant, *Cults of the Shadow* (London: Skoob Books, 1994 [1975]), 199. Nicholas Schreck & Zeena Schreck, *Demons of the Flesh* (Creation Books, 2002).

⁶⁵ Kenneth Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (London: Skoob Books, 1992 [1973]).

⁶⁶ Grant, *Cults of the Shadow*, 199, footnote 7.

⁶⁷ See Henrik Bogdan, *Kenneth Grant – A Bibliography – from 1948* (Gothenburg: Academia Esoterica Press, 2003), 25.

tra is even discussed before Kliphothic Kabbalah – the source of the order’s initiatory structure – and the Old Norse runes in the magical correspondence course for the first initiatory degree⁶⁸. Kundalini meditation is prescribed as one of the most basic techniques of dark magic⁶⁹, several books on Tantra are listed as recommended reading in the magical correspondence courses for various initiatory degrees, and articles on Tantric subjects are published frequently in the members’ paper of the order.

Interestingly, neither Grant nor Dragon Rouge pay much attention to the more explicitly sexual practices of Tantra, and focus strongly on the search for power. In this, they are very different from most of Western appropriations of the idea of Tantra, where the focus is almost solely on sex, without much thought devoted to other aspects. Nicholas and Zeena Schreck’s representation of Tantra in their *Demons of the Flesh* is then again very focused on the sexual aspects, but then again the theme of the book is sex magic. In all three contexts Tantra, in its vamacara variant(s), is presented as something which only the truly brave and spiritually strong can use. In this sense, the discourses are similar to “traditional” Tantric rhetoric as presented by White⁷⁰ in that it stresses that the teachings are for an enlightened elite, not for the masses. In Dragon Rouge Tantra, and particularly the Kundalini, are strongly linked to sexual energies. However, here sex is regarded as just one manifestation of the internal life-force that the Kundalini represents, and not the primary one in a Dragon Rouge context. Thus, explicitly sexual practices are not considered necessary. Sex rituals are discussed, but appear very secondary to other magical techniques and are never practiced in group settings⁷¹.

There are several differences between Western Left-Hand Path appropriations of Tantra and Tantra in its South Asian contexts. As presented by White, the use of sexual fluids is essential in Indian Tan-

⁶⁸ Dragon Rouge, *Magikurs 1, brev 1*, 3-5. Unpublished internal material.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

⁷⁰ White, *Kiss of the Yogini*, 24-25.

⁷¹ There is one exemption from this. In the year 2000 one of the Swedish Dragon Rouge lodges organized a practical course on sex magic, for heterosexual couples. It is not known how many, if any, couples participated.

tra. In most Western Left-Hand Path discourses sexual fluids are hardly ever mentioned. Also, whereas sex polarity is essential in Indian contexts, as the women participating in the rituals are manifestations of the Yoginis, the situation is different in the Left-Hand Path. The idea is that the opposing forces of male and female exist within each practitioner, and so sexual rituals may be employed with different sex partners, same sex partners, as solitary practice, or even as abstinence from sexual practices (as a form of sublimation of sexual energies).

Conclusion & Discussion

In a way, the Western Left-Hand Path appropriation of Tantra as represented by Kenneth Grant and Dragon Rouge is more in the vein of “Tantrism”, or theological speculation of earlier Kaula practices. Nowhere is the consumption of sexual emissions mentioned, and the individual practice of Kundalini meditation, in integrating the internal feminine Shakti with the internal masculine Shiva through methods other than sexual stimulation, is the predominant approach. However, sexual practices in the form of hetero-, homo-, or autoerotic nature are definitely not discarded as wrong in any way. Far from it. Sex is regarded as very much suited for use in magical contexts, and even more so, as an important avenue for self-enjoyment – which is regarded as having a value in itself. One could argue that the approach of Dragon Rouge, and other Western Left-Hand Path groups and individuals, is an attempt to escape the hypersexualized discursive reality of the modern West described by Michel Foucault. Sex is important both as enjoyment and as a possible path to magical enlightenment, but intercourse and other acts associated with sexual stimulation are not the only expressions of the sexual, or “life force”, energies of the human being. One could see the practices as a synthesis of the Kaula-practices of medieval India and their “deodorized” forms as presented by e.g. Woodroffe. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is a critique and an opposition to modern Western appropriations of Tantra, presented as more “traditional” and “authentic” than that of “New Age Tantrism”. It should be noted that Left-Hand Path spiritualities generally stress the importance of a base in solid scholarship. Thus, an author such as Tommie Eriksson of Dragon Rouge, while earlier referring mostly to authors such as Julius Evola and Robert E. Svoboda, is very much aware of and knowledgeable about the works of scholars such as Hugh B. Urban and David Gordon White. It should also be noted that the Left-Hand Path is highly eclectic and infused with individu-

alist discourses. The picture one gets of an order like Dragon Rouge is quite different if reading the work of founder Thomas Karlsson, who is primarily influenced by rune mysticism such as Johannes Bureus' Adulruna expositions and Kabbalah, than by reading work by Tommie Eriksson, more influenced by Evolian traditionalism (albeit bereft of the worst fascist excesses) and tantric scholarship. It is by reading works by all of the central ideologists, and the synthesis provided in the general material, that one arrives at a complete (or at least less restricted) interpretation of an organization such as Dragon Rouge. Tantra and "tantrism" is indeed at the centre of Dragon Rouge, but if only focusing on material by Tommie Eriksson it will seem to be more at the centre than if reading the totality of the order's material and engaging in discussion with its members.

One way of approaching the Western Left-Hand Path appropriations of Tantra would be to see it as a critique of both negative orientalism and the modern West and its problematic discourses on sexuality, both the restrictive and the ones that overemphasize the centrality of sexual intercourse. At the same time Left-Hand Path groups are often engaged in positive orientalist discourses that cast a longing gaze to the exotic orient, a feature so central to much esoteric discourse.

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