THE THEATRE OF THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS OF EUROPE AND AMERICA FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

THE THEATRE OF THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS OF EUROPE AND AMERICA FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

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Edmund B. Lingan

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Moving between the disciplines of theatre studies and sociology of religion, this dissertation examines "New Religious Movements" or "NRMs" that were founded in Europe and America in the last two hundred years. Much of the general population of the societies in which these NRMs emerged consider them to be an alternative to conventional religions, and all of the NRMs studied here incorporate elements of Western esotericism—astrology, invocation, tarot card divination, alchemy, etc.—into their teachings. They also create performances that they describe in theatrical language. The NRMs treated here include The Theosophical Society, the Anthroposophical Society, the Ordo Templi Orientis, and various Neo-Pagan groups.

My dissertation considers the ways and reasons that NRMs use theatre—a subject seldom discussed by theatre historians. NRMs sometimes use theatre to articulate their teachings, because, unlike the theology of well-known religions, NRM theology is unfamiliar to many people. Other NRMs draw connections between their own theatre and the dramatic traditions of ancient mystery religions—a technique that provides a sense of history, a basis for creating new theatrical forms, and a way of differentiating their tradition from the traditional religions of the societies in which they emerge.

Regardless of stylistic and philosophical differences, all of the NRM theatre examined here represent "theatre" as having the potential to spiritually transform human beings.

This study provides a variety of new perspectives about the relationship between theatre and religion, establishes criteria for discovering religious theatre in non-traditional settings, and provides specific examples of how religiosity affects theatrical practice. It also broadens and deepens our understanding of how theatre and religion have interacted in the past and how they interact in the present. Thus, Western religious theatre is presented here as a diverse and living tradition out which new theatrical forms will arise in the future.

Acknowledgments

Here I would like to say thank you to those who helped me complete this project through their advice, insight, support, participation, and examples.

Thank you to Randell Grubb, David Wietersen, and Grace F. Knoche of The Theosophical Society. David not only assisted me in the process of gaining access to the Theosophical Society Archives, but also organized an immense amount of materials so that I could sort through them efficiently and quickly. Randell and David both patiently drove me back and forth from the Theosophical Society Archives and also assisted me in the process of developing photographs. Of course, I cannot thank Grace enough for allowing me to use the photographs of Katherine Tingley's theatrical productions and of other activities at the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society headquarters in my dissertation, as well as for the conversations I had with her and the hospitality that she provided me while I conducted my research in the archives.

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I thank Pamela Sheingorn for responding to my writing with great honesty for inspiring me to overcome what at times felt like insurmountable obstacles in the writing process. Professor Sheingorn also taught me to seek intersections between the spiritual currents of modern and contemporary NRMs and those of the Medieval and Early Modern cultures. By doing so, she enabled me to see NRM performance as part of a continuing process of religious and spiritual development, as opposed to a historically specific phenomenon of the past two hundred years.

Daniel Gerould's writings about avant-garde playwrights and artists who were members of secret societies and occult groups first suggested to me that there might an esoteric performances tradition that is associated with NRMs, and that this tradition might be substantial enough for a dissertation length study. In addition to this, I thank Professor Gerould for always welcoming me into to his office to talk about my work. I am always amazed at Professor Gerould's ability to guide me back to the central questions of my thesis and to rekindle the interest that inspired me to choose this topic in the first place—all within the context of a relaxed conversation. I consider it a privilege and a pleasure to have had the opportunity to work with him in this way.

At this point I should turn to my peers at the Graduate Center, who have provided me so much support throughout the writing process. Among the people who have indulged me by allowing me to talk endlessly about my dissertation and provided me with excellent company are: Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, Kevin Byrne, Loren Edelson, Michael Garber, Amy Hughes, Milton Loayza, Kathleen Pots, Sarah Standing, Jill Stevenson, Susan Tenneriello, Elfin Vogel, Marion Wilson, Kate Wilson, and Jordan Schildcrout.

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Preface

This dissertation examines the theatrical concepts and practices employed by esoteric groups that sociologists of religion refer to as "New Religious Movements" or "NRMs." With the term "esoteric" I refer to the range of "esoteric spiritual currents" that Arthur Versluis lists in his 2001 book, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance*, including alchemy, Hermeticism, Cabala, Rosicrucianism, theosophy, cartomancy, geomancy, necromancy, alchemy, astrology, herbalism, and magic.[1] The complex issues of determining exactly what an "NRM" is will be grappled with more thoroughly in the next chapter. However, for the purposes of this preface, an NRM is, in highly simplistic terms, a group or organization founded in the last two hundred years whose goals are perceived by certain religious studies scholars as "religious" and that does not consider itself to be the fulfilment of any major world religion. Rather, the NRMs studied in this dissertation form their theology by combining ideas from various sources—both religious and non-religious.

This project belongs to the area of theatre studies that examines what Marvin Carlson refers to as the "essentially contested' relationship [that] appears to exist between the concepts of 'religion' and 'theatre.'"[2] This relationship perpetually inspires the work of theatre practitioners, commentators, and scholars. From the City Dionysia through the cycle plays of the Middle Ages to the Mormon Hill Cumorah passion play that is annually performed in upstate New York, practitioners have combined religion and

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[1] Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

[2] Marvin Carlson, "The Eternal Instant: Some Thoughts on Theatre and Religion," *Assaph C* 12 (1997), 34.

theatre in various ways to probe spiritual and religious matters. Commentators like Amalarius of Metz have metaphorically, if not literally, equated their own religious ceremonies and religious spaces with theatrical performances and spaces. Others, like Tertullian, have depicted the theatre as a location of sin associated with demonic and pagan religions that true Christians should avoid and abhor.

Shortly after the Protestant Reformation the bond between religion and theatre became so provocative that several European monarchs forbade the performance of religious plays. However, legal decrees were not enough to remove religious themes from theatre, as plays like *Dr. Faustus* demonstrate. Between the Enlightenment and the present, openly expressed skepticism of established religious systems and the creation of scientific and psychological theories that throw the central tenets of Christianity into question have allowed for increasingly dynamic interplay between religion and theatre. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, plays like Ibsen's *Ghosts* questioned the value of traditional Christianity's teachings in the lives of modern human beings, and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axel* dramatized the rejection of Christianity, and the adoption of an occult-based religion as the path toward salvation.

In more recent times, Paul Rudnick's *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told* challenged the maxim about "Adam and Steve" versus "Adam and Eve." An influx of Eastern religious leaders into the United States in the second half of the twentieth century has led to theatrical events associated with religions that are not indigenous to Western culture, such as Joonyi Hong and Joonho Hong's presentation of *The Dharma Path* on 5 November 2002. Produced in conjunction with the New York City Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism, *The Dharma Path* was "a tribute to Zen Master Seung Sahn" held in

New York City's Lincoln Center.[3] Of course, the theatrical productions and writings associated with the NRMs to be discussed in this chapter also evince the dynamic relationship between religion and theatre in Western culture.

Among the various ways that theatre scholars have viewed the relationship between religion and theatre, Carlson identifies the "most likely image" as that of "a play with a theme or with subject matter produced within a culture that is based upon what that same culture has accepted as its sacred writings"; such a drama is "generally assumed to be produced within a reception community at least sympathetic to and preferably believing in the sacred character of these writings." After bringing up the "most familiar example in the Western tradition…of the rich dramatic tradition of the medieval period, the vast majority of which was drawn directly from the sacred writings venerated by the medieval church," Carlson asserts that current theatrical performances like those of the medieval religious tradition have "been largely relegated to smaller and more homogenous sub-communities, which still generally share a common religious belief and which sponsor and perform drama primarily as an aid to or supplement of their religious observances."[4]

The groups and organizations that are the subject of this study—the Theosophical Society, the Anthroposophical Society, groups based on the teachings of Aleister Crowley, and Neo-Pagan groups—have been described by sociologists as NRMs at one time or another and, if this description is accepted, may subsequently be viewed as "sub-communities" similar to those that Carlson discusses above. I believe that a

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[3] "The Dharma Path" (program, play presented at Lincon Center in New York City, 5 November 2002), 26.

[4] Marvin Carlson, "The Eternal Instant," 35-6.

comprehensive study of the theatre associated with sub-communities such as these will add breadth and diversity to our understanding of the Western religious theatre tradition. For when searching library catalogues and databases for theatre that is associated with religions or a religious movements, one finds few books and articles discussing NRM theatre. One is more likely to find material dealing with the theatre of religious movements whose status as a religion is readily recognized by theatre scholars (i.e. Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.).

Works theorizing about the allegedly religious roots of theatre in ritual, the religious aspect of the ancient Greek and Roman theatres, and the Christian theatre of the Middle Ages are too numerous to list here (although my bibliography includes some of these titles). The use of theatre and drama to represent the theological concepts of major world religions is a concern of various works, including Dalmia Vasudha's *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*[5] and V. A. Kolve's *The Play Called Corpus Christi*.[6] Other books are dedicated to religious elements in the work of specific playwrights, such as Edward L. Shaughnessy's *Down the Nights and Down the Days: Eugene O'Neill's Catholic Sensibility*.[7]

Although theatre and religion scholarship does not generally dedicate a great deal of time to NRM and theatre, the subject has not been entirely overlooked. There has been enlightening work done on the subject by both theatre scholars and scholars working in other disciplines. In her article, "Le Premier Goetheanum: Forme Utopique ou Forme

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[5] Vasudha, Dalmia, *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).

[6] V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Staford University Press, 1966).

[7] Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Down the Nights and Down the Days: Eugene O'Neill's Catholic Sensibility* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996.)

Exemplaire?," for instance, Liliane Brion-Gufrry studies the architecture of the first Goetheanum that Rudolf Steiner had built in Dornach, Switzerland. Brion-Gufrry views this ill-fated structure that was destroyed by fire as a sacred space, suggesting that the architecture of the building reveals its spiritual purpose.[8]

Scholars who study the avant-garde theatre movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe and America have also shed light on NRM theatre. The turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century in Europe was a time of religious and theatrical experimentation. By noting instances when these lines of experimentation intersected, some scholars have illuminated the existence of NRM theatre. In *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Jane Goodall discusses Artaud's art and his worldview of the universe in relation to Gnosticism. This approach results in some very coherent analyses of Artaud's work.[9] Maria Carlson's *No Religion Higher Than Truth* is notable for its acknowledgement of both Theosophical and Anthroposophical theatre and drama.[10] This Russian literature scholar's work is an important contribution to our knowledge of NRM theatre, since it contains not only information about Anthroposophical and Theosophical theatre and performance but also explications of the doctrine of these two NRMs. In *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde*, Frantisek Deak devotes a great deal of attention to the relationship between Gnosticism and Rosicrucianism and the

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[8] Brion-Gufrry, Liliane. "Le Premier Goetheanum: Forme Utopique ou Forme Exemplaire?" (n.p., n.d.)

[9] Jane Goodall, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1-5.

[10] Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

development of French symbolist drama.[11] When talking about Rosicrucianism and Gnosticism, Deak acknowledges that some of the avant-garde theatre practitioners in late nineteenth-century France used Rosicrucian and Gnostic concepts to create new theatrical forms. Daniel Gerould discusses the NRMs that some symbolist authors adhered to in the introduction to his anthology, *Doubles, Demons, and Dreamers*[12]; and, in an article titled "The Drama of the Unseen—Turn-of-the-Century-Paradigms for Occult Drama," Gerould and Jadwiga Kosicka list a variety of occult theatre forms that appeared in Europe during the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century. Gerould and Kosicka point out that many theatre practitioners studied the occult for various reasons and that some of them were even dedicated occultists. [13]

Because it is dedicated entirely to the study of theatre and performances associated with NRMs, the 1978 "Occult and Bizarre" issue of *The Drama Review* is valuable asset for anyone studying NRM theatre. It contains lengthy articles about Aleister Crowley's 1910 production of *The Rites of Eleusis*, Rudolf Steiner's mystery dramas, and George Gurdjieff's whirling dancers.[14] Emmet A. Greenwalt's *The Point*

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[11] Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.)

[12] Daniel Gerould, "The Art of Symbolist Drama: A Reassessment," in *Doubles, Demons, and Dreamers*: *An International Collection of Symbolist Drama* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1985).

[13] Daniel Gerould and Jadwiga Kosicka, "The Drama of the Unseen—Turn-of-the-Century-Paradigms for Occult Drama," in *The Occult in Language and Literature* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), 3.

[14] *The Drama Review* 22, no 2 (June, 1978).

Loma Community in California 1897-1942[15] discusses the Theosophical music, dance, and drama that were such an important part of life at the Theosophical Community that Katherine Tingley established in Point Loma, California. Richard Rosenheim dedicates an entire chapter to Anthroposophical theatre in *The Eternal Drama*, which is an attempt to construct a history and analysis of spiritual theatre.[16]

Although the relationship between theatre and new religions has been acknowledged in many of the sources listed above—a list that includes works from several disciplines and that is by no means exhaustive—few of these studies have been dedicated entirely to studying the way NRMs use theatrical practices and concepts of theatre. This dissertation will do just that, with the goal of gaining not only a deeper understanding of the religious function or religious intent behind the plays and performances examined, but also in order to deepen our understanding of the rich and active relationship between religion and theatre in Western culture. Artistic or aesthetic merit is a secondary concern here. Rather, this study is concerned with the way that theatre has played a part in the spiritual and religious transformation of Europe and America.

In my research, I use a combination of tools, including secondary scholarship dealing with NRMs that create theatre, primary research materials printed by the NRM in question, the internet, and, when possible, attending performances. For instance, in 2000 I learned in *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement*

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[15] Emmet A. Greenwalt, *The Point Loma Community in California 1897-1942: a Theosophical Experiment* (Berkeleley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955).

[16] Richard Rosenheim, *The Eternal Drama: A Comprehensive Treatise on the Syngenetic History of Humanity, Dramatics, and Theatre* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952).

in Russia, 1975-1922, that Rudolf Steiner constructed a large theatre in Dornach, Switzerland in the early twentieth century called the *Goetheanum* to house his Anthroposophical Mystery Dramas.[17] I then acquired published versions of lectures that Steiner gave on the topic of theatre. Going to the internet, I found the official website of the *Goetheanum* and discovered that all four of Steiner's Mystery Dramas were being performed in Dornach during the Christmas Season. With the help of a grant, I saw these four dramas performed in Switzerland. In the case of Steiner and his Mystery Dramas, my research methods were quite diverse and successful; however, I did not manage to see a live performance in every situation.

I employ direct obserbvation in my research by conducting interviews and participating in rituals. While some sociologists warn that researchers employing direct observation may be "deliberately or inadvertently duped by manipulative groups."[18] and most sociologists agree that "any observational process will necessarily be selective," many also believe that "good observational practices are essential to research on religious movements."[19] I think that the potential insight to be gained by these methods outweighs the danger of making misguided conclusions based upon them.

My status as a non-initiate of the esoteric movements and societies I study has affected my ability to research, because I am only allowed to access materials and to participate in rituals that are open to non-initiates. I was pleased to discover during the

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[17] Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement of Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 101.

[18] James A. Beckford "Some Questions About the Relationship Between Scholars and the New Religious Movements," *Sociological Analyst* 44 (1983):11-32, Robbins 15.

[19] Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts, & Charisma* (London: SAGE Publications, 1988), 15-16.

course of this dissertation, that there is a great quantity of written sources and performances of this sort. My research was deepened even further by the willingness of initiates to speak with me about their beliefs and practices. Even though there exists within the context of some of these organizations a boundary that prevents certain information and practices from ending up in the hands of outsiders, I have learned that the information that is available is enough to gain new insights into the relationship between the beliefs and performance practices of each organization.

Written accounts by NRM members are a controversial source of NRM information that I will utilize in my work. Sociologist Thomas Robbins explains that "Retrospective accounts of converts or ex-converts" are a problematic source of evidence because they are "fundamentally interpretive and influenced by the respondents' present situation."[20] I acknowledge that such accounts are a biased form of evidence. However, I believe that firsthand accounts of NRM theatre are not any more questionable than similar accounts of controversial plays. Since the details are frequently manipulated according to the intentions of the observer, it is crucial to consider as many accounts of a single event as possible. In any case, I have certainly learned more by reading these accounts than I would have by ruling them out as dubious evidence.

Some NRMs have archives and special collections with rare publications and other primary source material. The Theosophical Society is one such organization, and I was very fortunate to have received permission from that organization to access their archives in Altadena, California, for my chapter on the theatrical work of Katherine Tingley.

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[20] Ibid., 14-6.

By utilizing secondary scholarship, direct observation, reminiscent accounts of NRM performances, NRM plays, archives, and special collections, I reveal several forms of esoteric NRM theatre that have emerged in Europe and America between the nineteenth century and the present. While doing this, I challenge representations of the Western religious theatre tradition as something that is solely a matter of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Furthermore, I show that the tradition of creating occult theatre that was so prevalent amongst avant-garde artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century continues into the present and reveal connections between esoteric theatre and the outdoor community theatre movement that emerged in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In relation to the field of theatre and performance studies, I introduce an area of study with the potential to deepen our understanding of how the relationship between religion and theatre has operated in the past and continues to operate in the present.

Contents

Abstract iv

Acknowledgements vi

Preface x

1. Sociology of Religion and New Religious Movements 1

2. Katherine Tingley and the Theatre of the UBTS 30

3. Anthroposophical Theatre and Performance 74

4. Aleister Crowley's *Thelemic* Theatre 116

5. Neo-Pagan Theatrical Forms 178

Conclusion 224

Bibliography 231

Illustrations

1. Katherine Tingley 31

2. Ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone of the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquities, Point Loma, CA, February 23, 1897 36

3. Cornerstone of the S.R.L.M.A. which is currently located on the grounds of the Theosophical Headquarters in Altadena, CA 36

4. Point Loma grounds 39

5. The Spalding residence, which now stands on the campus of Point Loma Nazarene University 39

6. Point Loma Orchestra 40

7. Greek Open-air theatre, Point Loma 41

8. Greek Open-air theatre, Point Loma 42

9. Greek Open-air theatre, Point Loma 42

10. Interior of the Isis Theatre, 1910 42

11. Interior of the Isis Theatre, 1910 43

12. Furies menacing Orestes in Point Loma production of *The Eumenides*, 1922 50

13. Furies transformed into the Eumenides, the "beneficient ones," in Point Loma production of *The Eumenides*, 1922 51

14. *As You Like It*, staged in Newbury, MS, 1920 56

15. *The Tempest*, Open-air Greek Theatre (transformed into a cave), Point Loma, 1926 56

16. *The Aroma of Athens*, performed at Greek Theatre, Point Loma, 1922 65

17. The Pageant of the Seven Kings, San Diego, 1915 71

18. Alchemical Fire Circle erected at *FIREDANCE* event in California 215

Chapter One:

Sociology of Religion and New Religious Movements

The focus of this dissertation is the theatrical activity, both written and performed, of groups that are frequently and sometimes inaccurately called "cults," but that are referred to by many sociologists of religion as "New Religious Movements" or "NRMs"—terminology that I prefer and will use here. My reasons for using "NRM" rather than "cult" will be explained in more detail later. I focus specifically upon NRMs that emerged in Europe and America between the nineteenth century and the present, and by "America" I refer not only to the United States but to all of America.

These NRMs do not think of themselves as the fulfilment of any mainstream, Western religion, such as Christianity or Judaism. Contrarily, their ideas and tenets are frequently a self-reflexively constructed combination of theologies, spiritual ideas, and philosophies gathered not only from Western and Eastern culture but also from fiction, scientific theories, historical constructions, and the original teachings of NRM leaders. Furthermore, all of the NRMs that I discuss use or have used theatre—either in practice or in theory—for a variety of goals. Theatrical concepts and practices have been employed by a number of NRMs fitting the qualifications listed above, including the Theosophical Society, the Anthroposophical Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Gnostic Church, and the Ordo Templi Orientis (both of which organizations associate their ideas with the writings of Aleister Crowley), certain Rosicrucian orders, and some of the many neo-pagan groups active today.

The purpose of this dissertation is to learn how and why these NRMs, which emerged during the last 200 years, use theatrical notions and practices. However, before delving into this issue, I must talk about the history of the term "NRM" and what this term implies. I borrowed the term NRM from sociologists of religion who study NRMs, and this scholarship has helped me to develop and clarify my own ideas about what I have come to call "NRM theatre." Realizing that my employment of terminology invented by sociologists of religion in a theatre studies dissertation necessitates the introduction of concepts that are unfamiliar to most theatre scholars, I have written this chapter to acquaint the reader with some of the constructions of the "religious" and of NRMs that have significantly influenced the development of my thesis.

NRM sociologist Eileen Barker explains in the following passage from her 1998 article, "New Religions and New Religiosity," that NRMs are not a phenomenon that is limited to the past two hundred years:

> Firstly, there is nothing new about new religions….There have been periods when people have been particularly likely to turn to new ideas and hopes—when, for example, there has been some kind of social change due to economic disruption, colonial invasions, technological, political or social upheaval. Waves of new religions occurred during the late Roman period, and there were many other small sects around the time that Christianity emerged. In Europe there were successive waves of new religions during the 4th, 12th, and 17th centuries. In North America there was the 'Great Awakening' of the mid-eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century saw the rise of such sects as the Jehovah's Witnesses,

> the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons), the Seventh Day Adventists, the Christadelphians and Christian Science. Around the turn of the century, there was Theosophy, followed by Anthroposophy and Alice Bailey . . . . It has been estimated that as many as 10,000 new religions have appeared in Africa over the past 100 years. Japan saw its 'Rush Hour of the Gods' immediately after the Second World War, and was to witness a wave of what have become known as shin shin shukyo or 'new new religions' after 1970.[21]

Barker's comments make it clear that the emergence of NRMs can be limited no more to a specific geographical area than to a specific time.

Barker also writes that, "largely because of [their] alternative beliefs and practices," NRMs "have tended…to exist in tension with the rest of society."[22] So, even if the NRM theatre that I shall discuss here bears some resemblance to the medieval tradition that Carlson mentions in his article—after all, NRM theatre is "based upon" material that the NRM in question "has accepted as its sacred writings"—it differs from the Christian theatre of the Middle Ages in that it is not produced within the context of a larger mainstream society with which it stands more or less in theological agreement. Although the highly specific audience of an NRM theatrical performance can be "assumed to be…at least sympathetic to" or "believing in the sacred character of these

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[21] Eileen Barker, "New Religions and New Religiosity," in *New Religions and New Religiosity*, eds. Eileen Barker and Margit Warburg (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998), 10-11.

[22] Ibid., 21.

[NRM] writings,"[23] the same cannot be said for the larger, mainstream society within which these performances are created. In fact many members of mainstream society may view an NRM's ideas and beliefs with suspicion or even fear.

Speaking not only about sociologists of religion but also about the general public, Barker asserts that "after 1970 . . . the West became aware of what have become known as NRMs (new religious movements), alternative religions, or, more commonly and more pejoratively, 'cults' or 'sects.'"[24] As is indicated in the previous sentence, the term "cult" is problematic, and has inspired some sociologists to seek a different label to describe these groups. Although "cult" is a perfectly good word for describing the sum of devotional practices of a particular religious body or worshippers (i.e. in reference to the cult of a saint), this term is charged with negative meaning when it used to define a non-mainstream religious movement. In his 1986 book, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*, J. Gordon Melton re-asserts Barker's wariness of the term "cult," describing it as a "pejorative label used to describe certain religious groups outside of the mainstream of Western religion."[25] Giving concrete examples of a strained relationship between the mainstream culture of the United States and NRMs, Melton presents various definitions and representations of "cults" that evangelical Christians, anti-cult activists, and social scientists have constructed.

First presenting an antagonistic evangelical definition of a cult as "a perversion" and "a distortion of Biblical Christianity" promoted by two evangelical Christian authors

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[23] Marvin Carlson, "The Eternal Instant: Some Thoughts on Theatre and Religion," *Assaph C* 12 (1997), 35.

[24] Barker, 11.

[25] J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook or Cults in America* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 3.

named Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Melton mentions another hostile definition formed by the "secular anti-cult movement" that "became the dominant force in the public debates on cults in the 1970s":

> The definition has shifted and changed over the last decade. It did not develop out of any objective research on alternative religions; rather it emerged in the intense polemics of parents who had been disturbed by changes observed in their sons and daughters who had joined particular religious groups. These "cults"…had, they charged, radically altered the personality traits of their children.[26]

Described by secular anti-cultists as "destructive cults," certain NRMs were accused of having "hypnotized or brainwashed recruits, destroyed their ability to make rational judgments, and turned them into slaves of the group's leader."[27] Among the groups most often condemned by the secular anti-cult movement of the 1970s were "the Children of God, the Church of Armageddon, the Unification Church, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the Church of Scientology."[28]

In *Cults, Converts, and Charisma* (1988), sociologist Thomas Robbins mentions that accusing cults of brainwashing unsuspecting victims seems to rule out the possibility that many converts undergo a religious change by personal choice. Robbins then suggests that it is the apparent social and behavioral changes that many cult members undergo that convince their friends and families that they have been altered, writing that, since "religion has a routine or even nominal quality for many Americans," "persons who

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[26] Ibid., 4-5.

[27] Ibid., 5.

[28] Ibid., v.

actually 'live' their religion in a thorough and totalistic manner, particularly when marginal exotic and deviant perspectives are involved, are perceived as having undergone an unnatural metamorphosis."[29]

Robbins also argues that the anti-cult movement's "access to media" and "the substantial degree to which dominant media images of cults have reflected ACM [anti-cult movement] perspectives" has damaged the reputation of NRMs:

> Perhaps the significant turning point which consolidated the media hegemony of negative stereotypes of cults…was the horror of the People's Temple holocaust in Jonestown, Guyana, where over 900 American followers of Reverend Jim Jones, who had recently relocated from California, were either murdered or committed suicide in 1978.[30]

In more recent years, the media attention given to the 1993 burning of David Koresh and about 80 sectarian Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas,[31] the 1997 mass of suicide of Marshall Applewhite and a total of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate UFO movement (many of whom had "undergone voluntary castrations in the months leading up to the mass suicide"),[32] and the 2002 claims of Rael (Claude Vorilhon), the leader of the Raelian UFO movement, and Brigitte Boisellier, the scientific director of Clonaid, to

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[29] Thomas Robbins, *Cults, Converts, & Charisma* (London: SAGE Publications, 1988), 63.

[30] Ibid., 7-8.

[31] CNN, "New Waco probe ordered," http://www.cnn.com/US/9908/26/fbi.waco.03/ (accessed 30 August 2005).

[32] CNN Interactive, "One year later, Heaven's Gate Suicide leaves only faint trail," US News Story Page, http://www.cnn.com\US\9803\25\heavens.gate/ (accessed 30 August 2005).

have produced the first human clone—a baby named "Eve"—have not improved the reputation of cults.[33]

The general public is likely to continue viewing NRMs with suspicion when the mainstream churches, the anti-cult movement, and the media frequently present them as a breeding ground for legal problems, violent and deadly catastrophes, immoral behavior, and dangerous beliefs and practices. In *Sects, Cults, & Alternative Religions* (1996), David Barrett writes about the news media's tendency to favor NRMs that are 'headline-catchers" and that can serve as a "strange, often disturbing, sometimes even frightening" attraction for readers and viewers.[34] Such media representations of NRMs continue to affect public opinion, in spite of the exhortations of sociologists like Barker, who writes:

> But our research has shown us over and over again that, just because a group is new and religious, it does not follow that it resorts to irresistible and irreversible brainwashing techniques, financial skulduggery, orgies, ritual child abuse, bloody murder and/or mass suicide.[35]

Although Barker's assertion is well-supported by sociological evidence, Barrett reminds us that "Evil cult stole my daughter" is a more "lively front page headline" than "Thousands of People Give Their Lives to God."[36]

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[33] CNN, "Raelian leader: Cloning first step to immortality," Health. http://archives.cnn.com/2002/HEALTH/12/27/human.cloning/28 (accessed 30 August 2005).

[34] David Barrett, *Sects, Cults, & Alternative Religions* (1996; reprint, London: Cassell PLC, 1998), 13.

[35] Barker, "New Religion and New Religiosity," 14.

[36] Barret, *Sects, Cults, & Alternative Religions*, 14.

Melton also discusses the history of the term "cult" as employed by scholars, by writing about the social scientists who "first began their discussion of cults in the 1920s."[37] He describes these sociologists as the "least pejorative in their use of the term [cult].[38]" For these early twentieth century sociologists, a "cult" is a religious organization that is distinguishable from "churches" and "sects" by specific characteristics. "Churches" are defined as "the large denominations characterized by their inclusive approach to life and their identification with the prevailing culture." "Sects" are said to be "groups that have broken away from the churchly denominations" and that "tend to follow the denominations in most patterns," although they "tend to be strict in doctrine and behavioural demands placed upon members and emphasize their separation and distinctiveness from the larger culture." Finally, "cults" differ from churches and sects, because they "follow an altogether different religious structure, one foreign and alien to the prevalent religious communities," representing "a force of religious innovation within a culture."[39]

Although some social scientists (including Melton) still attempt to use the term "cult" objectively and scientifically, the negative connotations of the word are so overpowering that many of today's sociologists have adopted other terms to describe these organizations and groups. In *Peculiar Prophets* (1999), James R. Lewis discusses the replacement of the term "cult" by certain sociologists who study NRMs:

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[37] Melton, 4.

[38] Ibid., 3.

[39] Ibid.

> Because of its negative connotations, mainstream scholars working in the field now tend to avoid the term, preferring the label "new religion" or "new religious movement." This term appears to have been taken from Japanese scholars of religion, who coined the term "new religion" to refer to the many groups that exploded onto the Japanese religious scene in the years following the war. Even this term, however, is problematic because the great majority of religious organizations—even new organizations—view themselves as embodying a much older religious tradition. There is thus no truly adequate term currently in common usage.[40]

Clearly neither "new religion" nor "new religious movement" is, in Lewis's opinion, "truly adequate" terms to describe this phenomenon. However, this newer terminology, according to some sociologists, seems better suited to academic study than "cult." While Barker writes that the rejection of "a pejorative label" by a sociologist should not "give the impression that" the sociologist believes "new religions are a 'good thing,'" this less culturally charged terminology helps sociologists "describe, understand, analyse and explain a phenomenon in order to give as accurate and objective an account as possible."[41]

Significantly, sociologists of religion do not unanimously agree that "NRM," or any other term, adequately describes the movements to which such labels are applied. Barrett illustrates the range of terminology that exists among sociologists of religion:

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[40] James R. Lewis, *Peculiar Prophets: A Biographical Dictionary of New Religions* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1999), xiii.

[41] Barker, 14.

> The usual terminology in this subject is loaded….To avoid this problem, some authorities now use the term 'new religious movements' or NRMs, coined by the British authority on the subject, Professor Eileen Barker of the London School of Economics. I prefer the term 'alternative religions,' in which I include Christian offshoots, Eastern-inspired movements, the New Age, Esoteric, and Neo-Pagan groups, and Personal Development organizations. What all these organizations have in common is that they are alternatives to the established religions. Some of the movements in this book aren't new; some say they are not religions; and some, in the technical sense of the words, actually are sects or cults.[42]

This terminological variety is a result of the various types of groups that may be viewed as NRMs. Robbins, also aware of the diverse mixture of groups that fall into this category, asserts that "NRM" "denotes a rather ambiguous phenomenon."[43] Barker states that "the only thing they [NRMs] all have in common is that they have been put into the single category of new religion, cult, sect or what-have-you, and whatever generalisation one may attempt to make is almost bound to be refuted by one of their number."[44]

Although any of the terms that sociologists use to describe movements commonly referred to as "cults" have merits and disadvantages, I shall employ the term "New Religious Movements" or "NRMs" when referring to these groups. Regardless of any claims for being a continuation of little-known ancient religious traditions, the groups

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[42] Barrett, 16.

[43] Robbins, 134.

[44] Barker, 18.

discussed in this dissertation are "new," compared to the long-established religions of the West, since they were officially founded within the last two hundred years. The term "New Religious Movement" also stresses that NRMs need not be strictly defined as a religion. As indicated by the long quotation taken from Barrett's book above, many groups that have been defined as NRMs deny that they are either religious or a religion. H.P. Blavatsky, for instance, states in the introduction to *The Secret Doctrine*, that Theosophy is "not a *religion* nor is its philosophy new."[45] Indeed, scholars who use the term "NRM" are aware that these groups and organizations cannot be assigned a limiting definition and that many of the groups to which this label has been applied have objected to it. Nevertheless, the term "NRM" is firmly established as acceptable terminology to describe groups such as those that are the subject of this work. For all of these reasons, I will use "NRM" when referring to the groups that are discussed in this dissertation. (I will also, however, note any objections that NRM members make to this term and discuss other terms that they feel more accurately describes their organizations.)

The quotations above, taken from NRM sociologists, make it clear that there is as much disagreement about what an NRM actually *is* as there is about the appropriateness of terminology. In his 1973 book, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, Robert S. Ellwood describes "new religions" as religious movements that have appeared in the United States between roughly 1800 and the present with tenets that are "at great variance with the Christianity and Judaism found elsewhere."[46] Melton uses the terms

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[45] H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (1888; reprint, Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1999), xxxvi.

[46] Robert S. Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 3-4.

"cults," "alternative religious movements," and "nonconventional religious movements" to describe religious movements that "follow an altogether different religious structure, one foreign and alien to the prevalent religious communities." Furthermore, Melton rules out "sects" as alternative or nonconventional religions, since these movements have "broken away from churchly denominations" and "follow familiar cultural patterns to a large extent."[47] In other words, Melton would view the Episcopalian Church as a sect that broke away from the Catholic Church, but he would label the Theosophical Society, which is based on the ideas and writings of the people who founded the movements in 1875, as an alternative religion or NRM. Some of the NRMs that Melton refers to as "established" are Christian Science, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Fundamentalist or Polygamy-Practicing Mormon Groups, The "I Am" Religious Activity, the Identity Movement, Jehovah's Witnesses, Rosicrucians, the Church of Satan, Spiritualism, Theosophy, The Universal Peace Mission Movement of Father Divine, and The Worldwide Church of God.[48] With the exception of the Identity Movement, Spiritualism, and Father Divine, Barrett discusses all of the same organizations and movements in *Sects, Cults & Alternative Religions*, explaining that all of these organizations have been referred to by some sociologists as NRMs.[49]

Esoteric NRMs such as Theosophy and Rosicrucianism are quite different from movements such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints or Christian Science, which are clearly outgrowths of Christianity. That such differences exist is to be

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[47] Melton, 3-4.

[48] Ibid., v.

[49] Barrett, 16.

expected, since NRMs are so diverse in form that Barker believes "the only generalisation which can be made about new religions is that one cannot generalise about them."[50] However, sociologists note that many of the NRMs founded in Europe and America in the last 200 years have separated themselves in varying degrees from the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of the West. In 1973, for example, Ellwood wrote that new religions are "not normatively Judaeo-Christian" and that these groups' "central symbols or teachings are not directly derived from mainstream interpretations of Jewish or Christian sources."[51] Barker, like Ellwood, also sees a movement away from traditional interpretations of Judeo-Christian theology among NRMs, writing that "unlike most of the sects that emerged in the West in the nineteenth-century and, indeed, earlier periods since the arrival of Christianity, the current wave of new religions is not confined to the Judeao-Christian tradition."[52] Melton attributes "a new availability of Asian teachers" in the second half of the twentieth century to the 1965 raising of U.S. immigration quotas for Asians, and he describes this new availability as "the major factor in the growth of alternative religions in the last two decades."[53] The "alternative religions" to which Melton refers employ Eastern religious ideas in their teachings. Although Melton is concerned with a surge of Eastern NRMs in the West that began in the second half of the twentieth century, Ellwood proves that the introduction of Eastern religious ideas in the West by NRMs was already occurring in Europe and America by

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[50] Barker, 18.

[51] Ellwood, 3.

[52] Barker, 18.

[53] Melton, 8.

the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries via groups such as the Theosophical Society and the Anthroposophical Society. Thus, there are many different forms of NRMs that have developed in the last two hundred years and it is difficult to draw any useful generalizations about them.

One false generalization to avoid is the assumption that NRMs differentiating themselves from traditional Judeo-Christian religions of the West are, in fact, entirely non-Judeo-Christian. Many of the NRMs examined here are dependent to some degree upon Judeo-Christian ideas and symbolism. One need only read the works of Rudolf Steiner, who founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1913, to realize that, although Steiner depends heavily upon the Eastern doctrines of karma and reincarnation, he also incorporates a great deal of Christian symbolism into Anthroposophy. Barret describes NRMs such as Steiner's Anthroposophy, which combines Christian and Eastern theology, as syncretic,[54] rather than non-Judeo-Christian, foregrounding their collection of beliefs from different sources as a significant factor that sets them apart from religious organizations that view themselves as having inherited a single theological legacy. However, no matter how many religious traditions from which a syncretic NRM borrows, it is always possible that it owes a great deal to Judeo-Christian religion. This may even be the case for a religion that stands in staunch opposition to Christianity, like Aleister Crowley's Thelemic religion. By depicting himself as the Beast 666, Aleister Crowley became a dramatic representation of a famous character in Christian eschatology. Indeed, Crowley's powerful and imposing self image would have been impossible to create without Christian theology.

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[54] Barrett, 32.

Although Crowley clearly used imagery from the Bible to develop parts of his public image and doctrine, many syncretic NRMs leaders, including Crowley, turned to less conventional literary material in order to develop their spiritual teachings. In some cases, NRM members revere the writings of NRM leaders as full of spiritual insight. Scientologists, for instance, view L.Ron Hubbard's original book, *Dianetics,* in this way. The same cannot be said for those who are not Scientologists, and this demonstrates some of the tension that exists between NRM members and outsiders. Hubbard is by no means the only syncretic NRM leader to write an essential text for his own religion. Both Madame Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley did the same thing. Furthermore, Rudolf Steiner's numerous published lectures are also considered central expressions of the Anthroposophical worldview. I am by no means suggesting that Hubbard, Blavatsky, Steiner, and Crowley are philosophically synonymous. Rather, the worldview of each of these figures stands in stark contrast to the other. However, these original writings, so cherished by the members of the NRMs that they established, demonstrate the tendency of many syncretic NRMs to adopt original material, rather than long-established religious texts, as the literary expression of their doctrines and mythos.

Some syncretic NRMs interpret texts that have been conventionally viewed as fiction as spiritually inspired documents containing hidden spiritual or theological wisdom. Steiner viewed Goethe's writings as occult texts and gave a series of lectures explaining that Goethe's *Faust* was written because the famous playwright was in contact with the same spiritual forces that led Steiner to found the Anthroposophical Society in

1913.[55] Aleister Crowley offers the student of "magick" a list of fictional works that contain occult knowledge—including the works of Lewis Carroll.[56] In both cases, materials traditionally viewed as fictional are held to be full of occult wisdom available to the enlightened reader.

Some NRMs claim a connection to an idealized and glamorous past. This is the case with NRMs that claim a connection to a mysterious medieval era. John N. Ganim argues that constructions depicting a magical Middle Ages are rooted in both the "scholarly and popular varieties" of medievalism.[57] In his 1996 article, "The Myth of Medieval Romance," Ganim discusses scholars of medievalism writing between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, who, influenced by the statements about Greek drama made by the critics of the Cambridge School and by Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, asserted that some Middle English works were continuations of "a folk tradition of pre-Christian myth."[58] This "paganization of medieval literature"[59] is only one example of a representation of the Middle Ages as a time in which certain individuals carried on "ancestral traditions" that were at variance with orthodox Christianity.[60] According to

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[55] Rudolf Steiner, *Geisteswissenschaftlische Erläuterungen zu Goethes <<Faust>>* (1931; reprint, Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1967).

[56] Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1976), 212-214.

[57] John M. Ganim, "The Myth of Medieval Romance," in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, eds. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 148.

[58] Ibid., 159.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.,156.

Ganim, these constructions of literature made a significant impact not only on conceptions of the medieval era, but also in the contemporary world in which the constructions were created:

> By the early nineteenth century, romance had become a "popular" genre and the medieval revival had become a widespread style. Not only were medieval romance and medievalism fashionable, they defined social ideals. Medievalism was propounded as an ideology, with a specific religious, political, and cultural agenda. Medievalism was associated with a return to high Anglican ritual.[61]

Although Ganim's article concerns a continuing effort among professional scholars of medievalism to "replace a static and romanticized conception of the medieval past with one more complex and striated,"[62] such romanticized conceptions are adhered to by NRMs that connect their religion to traditions pre-dating and separate from the Judeo-Christian religious tradition of the West.

For instance, in *The Occult*, Colin Wilson discusses the emergence of certain European Rosicrucian orders, writing that, although "most of the legends about their origins [sometimes connected with the famous alchemist, Paracelsus] seem to be fabrications[,] . . . the notion of this mystical brotherhood…seems to have satisfied some demand in the imagination of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."[63] As is made apparent by the Rosicrucian societies that formed in the nineteenth and twentieth

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[61] Ibid., 152.

[62] Ibid., 162.

[63] Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 319.

centuries,[64] some of which still operate today, the Rosicrucian current continues to satisfy the demands of the imagination in the twenty-first century.

Other NRMs leaders, aware of the influential works of the Cambridge School and Frazer, have connected themselves theologically and practically to scholarly constructions of various ancient pagan religions. These representations of the ancient religious past in the Near and Far East are the subject of what Inge Nielsen calls "the century old discussion on the relationship between ritual and myth" in her 2002 book, *Cultic Theatre and Ritual Drama*.[65] Scholarly accounts of the Rites of Eleusis and the ancient religious practices of Egypt have inspired many NRMs to claim a connection to these older faiths. In fact, historians know very little about specific aspects of the ancient religious beliefs and practices of the Near and Far East, but this lack of information allows creative freedom to those NRM leaders who attempt to write about or reconstruct ancient rites in an effort to reawaken these beliefs in the present.

Important scientific theories also influence the development of NRMs. The Emin assertion that human life is the high point of the development of creation indicates a dependence upon evolutionary theory.[66] Blavatsky refers to the Secret Doctrine examined in *The Secret Doctrine* as the synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy.[67] Aleister Crowley asserts that magick is like "modern science," since, "in its [magick's] pure unadulterated form, it is assumed that in nature one event follows another

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[64] Melton, 68-75.

[65] Inge Nielsen, *Cultic Theatres and Ritual Drama: A Study in Regional Development and Religious Interchange between East and West in Antiquity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002), 15 & 17.

[66] Barrett, 243.

[67] Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrin*e, title page.

necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency."[68] Rudolf Steiner also utilizes scientific thought in his Anthroposophical doctrine. As Maria Carlson writes in "*No Religion Higher Than Truth"* (1993), Steiner presented the Anthroposophist as a "'spiritual researcher' who investigates a spiritual (not merely physical) science"—a terminological approach that "made Steiner's occult science more accessible and acceptable to the educated European mind."[69] This desire to utilize scientific thought in the service of religion is something that many NRMs of the past two hundred years have in common.

Studying the basis of religious texts associated with NRMs becomes problematic when the subject labeled as an NRM asserts that neither they nor the texts associated with them are religious. Barrett mentions that The Emin is such a group. The official Emin viewpoint is that "they are not a religion as such; rather, they are a group of people pursuing 'a natural philosophy and way of life.'" The Emin, are an important part of my dissertation because they "use…music, dance, theatre and art as a means to unlock human potential."[70]

How then can one maintain that an NRM such as The Emin, which denies being a religion, engages in religious thought and activities? To do this one must allow numerous meanings to be applied to words such as "religion" and "religious." Such flexibility is crucial to the work of both religionists and sociologists of religion, for whom the concept of religion is something that cannot be pinned down with a static definition

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[68] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, ix.

[69] Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 129.

[70] Barrett, 241 & 246.

rather than a concrete idea with a static definition. Providing evidence to support Marvin Carlson's assertion that the notion of religion, like that of theatre, is "essentially contested,"[71] John Bowker lists ten definitions of "religion" from various sources in his preface to *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (1997). Among these definitions are Karl Marx's reduction of religion to the "opiate of the people," Emile Durkheim's conception of it as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things," Edward Tylor's "minimum definition," which identifies the essence of religion to be "the belief in Spiritual Beings," Freud's assertion that "religious beliefs correspond closely with the fantasies of infantile life . . . concerning the sexual life of one's parents," R.N. Bellah's pronouncement that religion is "a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate condition of his existence," and Melford Spiro's notion of religion as a "culturally constituted institution," which, with its "belief system," "action system," and "values system," only "differs from other institutions in that its three component systems have references to superhuman beings."[72]

Discussing the Latin root of the word "religion," Bowker concludes that a strict adherence to a single linguistic meaning associated with "religion" results in an oversimplification of the concept:

> The Latin *religio* refers to the fear of God or the gods, and (much later) to the ceremonies and rites addressed to the gods. But it does so through its reference also to the scrupulous and often over-anxious way in which rituals are conducted. The Latin poet Lucretius addressed strong words

[71] Marvin Carlson, "The Eternal Instant," 34.

[72] John Bowker, "Religion," in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xv.

> against religion….But Lucretius had in mind the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis as a demonstration of the disastrous consequences of an over-scrupulous insistence on the exact detail of ritual. So the Latin word supports the modern sense of 'doing something religiously', i.e. with an obsessive attention to detail….But this sense of the word is far too restricted. When people do things religiously, they not only do them scrupulously: they do them devotedly, generously, ecstatically, prayerfully, sacrificially, superstitiously, puritanically, ritualistically, and in many other ways as well.[73]

The multitude of definitions for religion (as well as their shortcomings) and the variegated nature of religious activities inspired Bowker to make the humorous observation that "a strange thing about religion is that we all know what it is until someone asks us to tell them."[74]

Instead of trying to pin down a single definition for religion, Bowker discusses religion as one of the earliest cultural systems "of which we have evidence for the protection of gene replication and the nurture of children,"[75] as a device to protect "the potentialities of the brain and body," as "large-scale and coherently organized"

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[73] Ibid., xv-xvi.

[74] Ibid., xv.

[75] Ibid.

organizations that "become offensive or defensive" when their boundaries, be they geographical or "metaphorical," are threatened, and as a means to "the End."[76]

In *The World's Religion*, Ninian Smart shows that he, like Bowker, has also struggled with the multiple meanings of "religion":

> In thinking about religion, it is easy to become confused about what it is. Is there some essence which is common to all religions? And cannot a person be religious without belonging to any of the religions? The search for an essence ends up in vagueness—for instance in the statement that a religion is some system of worship or other practice recognizing a transcendent Being or goal. Our problems break out again in trying to define the key term "transcendent." And in answer to the second question, why yes: there are plenty of people with deep spiritual concerns who do not ally themselves to any formal religious movement, and who may not themselves recognize anything as transcendent.[77]

Ruling out any all-encompassing generalizations, Smart writes that "it is more practical to come to terms . . . not with what religion is in general but with what *a* religion is."[78]

Smart then describes *a* religion as a worldview with seven "dimensions"—"practical and ritual," "experiential and emotional," "narrative or mythic," "doctrinal and

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[76] Ibid., xxvii, xix, & xxii.

[77] Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (1989; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 10-11.

[78] Ibid., 11.

philosophic," "ethical and legal," social and institutional," and "material." [79] Smart explains that not all religions possess all of these dimensions to the same degree. Though he feels that all complete religions possess something of all of these different dimensions of religion, Smart also asserts that:

> Naturally, there are religious movements or manifestations where one or other of the dimensions is so weak as to be virtually absent: nonliterate small-scale societies do not have much means of expressing the doctrinal dimension; Buddhist modernists, concentrating on meditation, ethics, and philosophy, pay scant regard to the narrative dimension of Buddhism; some newly formed groups may not have evolved anything much in the way of the material dimension.[80]

Finally, Smart admits that his goal is not to find a definition of religion, but to "give a balanced description of the movements which have animated the human spirit and taken a place in the shaping of society."[81]

According to Smart, some of these society-shaping movements are "new religions" that are part of a "growth of new religious traditions which incorporate elements from differing worldviews" and that have been nurtured by increasing "interactions between traditions." Smart predicts that "one can expect this to go on."[82]

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[79] Ibid., 12-21.

[80] Ibid., 21,

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 556-59.

Between the writings of Bowker and Smart we have criteria for identifying things that are in one way or another "religious." We can use these criteria to learn more about various NRMs. Such criteria are necessary, because not all NRMs are fully developed into organizations that Smart or Bowker would consider to be full-fledged religions. Robbins brings this matter up, mentioning sociologists Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge's system designed to "differentiate cults [NRMs] in terms of a three-point ordinal scale of increasing formal organization."[83] The system that Robbins describes is contained in Stark and Bainbridge's 1983 article, "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements," in which the authors differentiate between the "audience cult," the "client cult," and the "cult movement."[84] Discussing Stark and Bainbridge's article, Robbins explains that the audience cult is "the most diffuse and least organized kind of cult" and that "membership in such collectives is a consumer activity which manifests 'virtually no aspects of formal organization'…although some members may occasionally gather to hear a lecture, witness a demonstration, etc."[85] Robbins then discusses Stark and Bainbridge's notion of a client cult, in which "the relationship between promulgators and partakers of cult doctrine closely resembles the relationship between therapists and patients, or consultants and clients."[86] Discussing the client cult, Stark and Bainbridge write that "considerable organization may be found among those offering the cult service

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[83] Robbins, 156.

[84] Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, "Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements," in *Alternatives to American Mainline Churches*, edited by Joseph H. Fichter (Barrytown, NY: Unification Theological Seminary, 1983), 3-26.

[85] Robbins, 156.

[86] Ibid.

but clients remain little organized"; in fact, "client involvement is so partial [in client cults] that clients often retain an active commitment to another religious movement or institution."[87]

The most developed form of cult is the cult movement, which Stark and Bainbridge describe as:

> fully fledged religious organizations which attempt to satisfy all the religious needs of converts. Dual membership with any other faith is out. Attempts to cause social change, by converting others to membership, become central to the group agenda.[88]

It is therefore apparent that a group labeled as an NRM might range anywhere from a noncommittal gathering of people attending a single event to an organization that Stark and Bainbridge might consider a "fully fledged religious organization" that exhibits all seven dimensions of religion listed by Smart.

The multiple conceptions "religion" and "religious" formed by sociologists of religion have allowed organizations such as NRMs to be viewed as religious or religious movements—regardless of whether or not the group being studied agrees with this interpretation. This sociological process involves labeling a group of activities as "religious," and speaking about groups exhibiting many of these traits as "religious" (at least in theory). Ellwood, for instance, states that groups or individuals claiming to have insight into the "means of Ultimate Transformation"[89] are making a religious assertion.

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[87] Stark and Bainbridge, 15.

[88] Ibid., 16.

[89] Ellwood, 5.

Hence, because the sixth "Philosophical Tenet" of The Emin, which states that "There is life after death and . . . this must be planned for and worked for individually,"[90] is concerned with preparing human beings for Ultimate Transformation, we may describe this notion as "religious," if we choose to adhere to Ellwood's concept of the "religious." If I use Ellwood's notion of the "religious" to view the Emin as a group that engages in religious activities, I am not suggesting that the Emin are lying or incorrect when they describe themselves as a non-religious organization, I am simply analyzing their activities with a very specific conception—a conception that the Emin do not necessarily agree with—of the "religious" in mind.

Barker has developed a very broad conception of the religious which she uses to locate groups that exhibit religious behavior:

> Again, for purely heuristic purposes , new religions can be considered *religious* in so far as they *address and offer answers to some of the ultimate questions* that have traditionally been addressed by mainstream religions. I am referring to questions such as: Who am I? What is the purpose to life? Is there a life after death? Is there any meaning to my life? Am I more than my body? Is there a spiritual aspect to life? Is there a God? It might be noted that it is the questions, rather than the answers, that are being used to define a religion. Belief in a God, Goddess or gods is not a necessary part of the belief system of a new religion as thus defined—Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists and the Raëlians are

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[90] Barrett, 244.

> by no means the only people who say that they belong to an 'atheistic religion.'[91]

Barker's comments suggest that The Emins' tenets are religious, even if they claim not to be a religion. After all, the third Philosophical Tenet of the Emin states that "the human is spiritual and has a duty to the universe, to itself and to the rest of humanity."[92] If Barker's definition of the religious is embraced, the Emin tenet above seems religious.

Just because this dissertation is dedicated to NRMs that use theatre, not all NRMs employ theatre or view it favorably. One such example is John Alexander Dowie's Christian Catholic Church, incorporated in the United States in 1896. The Christian Catholic Church's tenets were dictated by Dowie, who presented himself as "Elijah the Restorer (Malachi 4), the fulfillment of biblical plans to renew humanity."[93] Dowie condemned prescription drugs, newspapers, most other congregations, and, of course, theatre; indeed, his condemnation of these things was so controversial that he "endured numerous threats against his life."[94]

Although Dowie's NRM differs from the syncretic NRMs examined here in that it is presented as the perfect fulfillment of Christianity, Christian NRMs are not the only ones that reject theatre. In fact, many of the NRM theatre practitioners that I shall discuss criticized or condemned other forms of theatre, presenting their own theatrical models as an improvement. For instance, in an essay entitled, "The Drama," Katherine Tingley

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[91] Barker, 16. Barker's emphasis.

[92] Barrett, 243.

[93] Lewis, 77.

[94] Ibid.

laments the loss of the "superb religious dramas" of the ancient Greeks and denounces the "trash that we meet nowadays" in the form of theatrical productions that do not "raise the minds of the youths to a higher contemplation of life" but rather "drag them down, or at best merely entertain, or please the fancy."[95] In his preface to his 1910 play, *The World's Tragedy*, Aleister Crowley writes that "our theatres (too pure for that corrupter Sophocles) are disgraced by the most senseless and witless legshows."[96] In a 1924 letter to her husband, Rudolf, Marie Steiner asserted that "the theater, as it relates to our movement, is only justified through its occult meaning . . . . without this occult foundation it has no justification for existence among us."[97] Thus, these NRMs offer their sacred theatre *in opposition* to other types of theatre, just as they offer their doctrines as alternatives to the doctrines of the traditional Judeo-Christian religions of Western civilization.

At this point, I have spoken a great deal about NRMs and the sociological texts that helped me to formulate my own ideas about NRM theatre. However, I have said nothing about NRM theatre. Sometimes NRM theatre appears in the form of publications, such as books and pamphlets containing dramatic poems, plays, dramatic ritual texts, and even theatre theory or theatre history that is written from the standpoint

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[95] Katherine Tingley, "The Drama," in *The Voice of the Soul* (Covina, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1942), 217, 219.

[96] Aleister Crowley, preface to *The World's Tragedy,* in *The World's Tragedy* (Scottsdale, Arizona: New Falcon Publications, 1991), xxxi.

[97] *Marie Steiner, Ihr Weg zu Erneuerung der Bühnenkunst durch die Anthroposophie*: *Eine Dockumentation*, compiled by Edwin Froböse (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1973), 128.

of the NRM in question. In fact, the publication of dramatic texts has been and continues to be a very important method by which NRMs communicate their ideas to the public.

NRM theatre also occurs in the form of performance. The performances created by NRMs are virtually limitless in form, as Barker's following list indicates:

> Practices may include elaborate ritual, prayer, chanting, meditation, dance, yoga, encounter groups, and a wide range of (possibly very well organized) 'spontaneous happenings'.[98]

Although Barker does not mention it in the list above, some NRM performances are created in the form of conventional Western theatre, involving a play, director, actors, theatre space, design elements, an audience, and a box office. However, regardless of whether or not a work of NRM theatre resembles conventional Western theatre, the fact that the NRM members who created it describe it as such demands investigation. It will be seen that these NRMs freely reshape and redefine the concept and practice of theatre for several reasons. Exactly how and why this happens is the subject of the chapters that follow.

[98] Barker, 19.

Chapter Two:

Katherine Tingley and the Theatre of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society

In order to foster the spiritual transformation of human beings, Katherine Tingley (1847-1929), leader of the Theosophical Society in America from 1896-1929, sought to establish a modern school of ancient spiritual mysteries, along with a theatre to house dramas revealing insights into these mysteries (see figure 1). As a result of her work, Tingley would establish a long-lasting Theosophical community settlement in Point Loma, California, and become the creator of an ambitious experiment in esoteric theatre that would thrive from 1897 until 1929. Tingley's theatrical work challenges a trope within theatre studies asserting that "not until around 1915 did the U.S. begin to be aware of artistic innovations that had long been underway in the European theatre."[99] As will be seen, Tingley was a pioneer of the Greek Revivalism movement, which would become prominent in the U.S. by the early twentieth century. Moreover, her Theosophical interpretations of classic plays and original Theosophical mystery dramas show that the Theosophical movement, which many scholars agree was a major influence on the avant-garde theatre at the turn-of-the-century in Europe,[100] had already made an impact on experimental theatre in the U.S. by the 1890s.

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[99] Oscar G. Brockett & Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 9th ed. (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2003), 457.

[100] Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement of Russia,1875-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Daniel Gerould and Jadwiga Kosicka, "The Drama of the

Fig. 1 Katherine Tingley. Unless otherwise indicated, all other illustrations are made available through the Archives, Theosophical Society, Pasadena, CA.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first, I give an overview of both the basic teachings of Theosophy and the teachings and activities that were specific to Katherine Tingley's Theosophical organization, known as the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. In the second section, I list the types of dramatic and theatrical work that Tingley did and how these projects helped her to promote Theosophical ideas

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Unseen—Turn-of-the-Century Paradigms for Occult Drama," in *The Occult in Language and Literature* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980): 3-42.

and values. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that Tingley's theatre was not only an early instance of avant-garde theatre in the U.S., but also a significant part of the NRM theatrical tradition of Western culture.

THEOSOPHY: BELIEFS AND ACTIVITIES

The Theosophical Society, founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, W.Q. Judge, and Henry S. Olcott in 1875,[101] is dedicated to the syncretistic study of a large variety of religious, spiritual, occult, and mystical traditions from many cultures for the purpose of discovering universal esoteric truths. The core of Theosophical teachings, contained in Blavatsky's two books *The Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled*, proposes the following as key principles of Theosophy: (1) the source of all existence is an unidentifiable Divine Principle; (2) the universe is "ruled by the law of cycles"; (4) the human microcosm replicates the macrocosm of the universe in accordance with the occult philosophy of correspondences; (5) the human being's spiritual goal is to recognize after many physical incarnations that matter is an illusion, to free him/herself from the trappings of that illusion, and to become once again a part of the Divine Principle; (6) reincarnation and karma are facts of nature and any human being's present condition is a result of his/her behavior in past incarnations.[102]

Another central teaching of Theosophy is that there is a single Wisdom Religion or Wisdom Tradition that contains everything that human beings know about what

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[101] G.F.K., "William Quan Judge: Archer, Brother, and Friend," *Sunrise: Special Issue, William Q. Judge, 1851-1896* 45 (April/May 1996): 2.

[102] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth,"* 114-125.

Blavatsky refers to as the Secret Doctrine. According to Blavatsky, the whole of the Secret Doctrine is not contained in the teachings of any one of the major religions of the world:

> The Secret Doctrine is the essence of all these. Sprung from it in their origins, the various religious schemes are now made to merge back into their original element, out of which every mystery and dogma has grown, developed, and become materialised.[103]

The Secret Doctrine belongs "neither to the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Chaldean, nor the Egyptian religion, neither to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, nor Christianity exclusively."[6] Rather, the teachings of each of these religions are only separate parts and incomplete understandings of the Secret Doctrine. Although Blavatsky did not claim that the Theosophical Society possesses the complete Secret Doctrine, she did claim that Theosophical teachings are a part of a Wisdom Tradition that has guarded secrets relating to it throughout history. Blavatsky also asserted that the leaders of the Theosophical Society receive information from Mahatmas, or spiritual teachers, who possess deep knowledge of the Secret Doctrine, and that the Theosophical mission is to reveal this information to humanity at the appropriate time.

Most Theosophists consider *The Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled* essential Theosophical teachings, but they do not all interpret Blavatsky's books in the same way. Serious disagreements among Theosophical leaders have resulted in the emergence of various Theosophical organizations with distinct sets of beliefs. For instance, Annie

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[103] H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Cosmogenesis* (1888; reprint, Theosophical University Press, 1999), viii.

Besant's European segment of the Theosophical Society held radically different views than did the followers of W.Q. Judge in the U.S., and their differences of opinion were so extreme that Judge and his followers ended their affiliation with Besant in 1891 to form The Theosophical Society. The capital "T" at the beginning of the name of Judge's organization differentiates it from another organization called the Theosophical Society in America, which is affiliated with the Theosophical Society in Adyar, India.

Even different leaders within single Theosophical organizations emphasize different beliefs and activities, resulting in changes of policy and teaching with every change of leadership. For instance, Tingley differed from Judge by promoting above all other Theosophical teachings the concept of "Universal Brotherhood," which is the idea that humanitarian acts can move the neophyte toward spiritual enlightenment by arousing recognition of a divine connection that exists among all human beings. Tingley held Universal Brotherhood in such high regard that she changed the name of The Theosophical Society to the "Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society in America" (UBTS) after she succeeded Judge as leader of the organization. Tingley explained Universal Brotherhood to an investigative reporter named Ray Stannard Baker as work done to eradicate "the evils caused by the barriers of race, creed, caste, or color, which have so long impeded human progress,"[8] and the concept inspired her to pursue humanitarian causes, including war relief for veterans and war orphans, relief for starving people, the providing of housing for destitute women, and educating children in need. President McKinley commended Tingley for her war-relief work for American veterans

of the Spanish-American War[104] and Emilio Bacardí, the mayor of Santiago, officially thanked Tingley in 1899 for her relief work in Cuba after the same conflict.[105] Tingley's theatrical productions also supported the philanthropic ideals of Universal Brotherhood, for Tingley frequently donated all of the proceeds from these presentations to humanitarian activities associated with the UBTS and other philanthropic organizations.

Tingley initiated many projects to promote Universal Brotherhood within the UBTS, including the establishment of a school for teaching esoteric wisdom to students of all ages. On February 23, 1897, Tingley oversaw a highly publicized ceremony at Lomaland, during which she dedicated the cornerstone of what she called the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity (SRLMA). A photograph shows a moment from the SRLMA cornerstone ceremony during which Tingley anointed the cornerstone under a large banner reading "THERE IS NO RELIGION HIGHER THAN TRUTH" (see figure 2) The slogan on the banner above Tingley succinctly communicates the idea of the Secret Doctrine.

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[104] William McKinely to Katherine Tingley, 24 September 1898, Theosophical Society Archives, Altadena, California.

[105] "Universal Brotherhood Congress," (program, a congress held at Lomaland, Point Loma, CA, 13 April 1899), p. 4, Theosophical Society Archives.

Fig. 2 Ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone of the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquities, Point Loma, CA, February 23, 1897.

Fig. 3 Cornerstone of the S.R.L.M.A. which is currently located on the grounds of the Theosophical Headquarters in Altadena, CA. Photograph by author, 2004.

At no point did Tingley authorize the construction of a building to house the SRMLA, because Tingley and her followers believed (and still believe) that that the importance of the SRLMA lay in its purpose to teach esoteric knowledge, rather than a physical structure. J.H. Fussell, who was both a follower of Tingley and the Vice President of the Aryan[106] Theosophical Society of New York, spoke about the many aspects of the SRLMA in a 1916 address delivered at the Isis Theatre in San Diego entitled "The School of Antiquity: Its Meaning, Purpose, and Scope":

> As to the scope of the School of Antiquity, it includes science, philosophy, religion (in its true meaning), and the arts; in fact, all departments of knowledge and achievement with special reference to their bearing on human life and development, and also with particular regard to the teachings and achievements of the ancients. Special attention is therefore paid to archaeological research and a study of ancient records, monuments, traditions, and myths. Of the arts, particular mention should be made of music and drama, though all the fine arts and handicrafts have an important place in the curriculum of the School, for the reason, to quote Hebert Spencer again, that its aim is to prepare "for complete living." To this end all faculties must be developed, not alone of mind, but of soul and

[106] Regarding the term "Aryan," Grace Knoche informs us that the UBTS (as well as The Theosophical Society of today) traces this word from the Sanskrit *arya* which means "noble" and originally referred to the Indo-European peoples who migrated from Central Asia to Europe, the Mediterranean basin, Persia, and the Indian Peninsula. Knoche also writes that "in Theosophic usage, the Aryan or fifth race more generally denotes the present human evolutionary cycle which comprises, like the fourth race, 'almost a countless number of races and nations.'" Quoted from Grace F. Knoche, *The Mystery Schools* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1999), 17.

> body. Hence, hand and eye, ear, and voice must be cultivated. Only so can the character be completely rounded out, only so can life in all its fullness and richness be made possible. And particularly are music and drama, if rightly studied, factors in the development of soul qualities, in character building, and in the gaining of self-control. [107]

Tingley and Fussell agreed about the value of drama and theatre in the spiritual education of the human being, and for this reason Tingley founded the Isis League of Music and Drama in 1898 "to accentuate the importance of music and the drama as vital educative factors" and "to educate people to a knowledge of the true philosophy of life by means of dramatic presentations of a high standard and the influence of the grander harmonies of music."[108]

In 1900, Tingley officially relocated the Theosophical Society headquarters from New York City to Point Loma, California, an area just outside of San Diego. With its palm trees and rugged cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the geography of Lomaland, as residents referred to the Point Loma UBTS settlement, provided an idyllic setting for the unique architectural structures that would be built there, including the Aryan Memorial Temple, which housed many indoor performances, and the *Raja Yoga* Academy, where many students who would perform in Tingley's plays were educated (see figures 4-5).

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[107] J.H. Fussell, "The School of Antiquity: Its Meaning, Purpose, and Scope," *Sunrise* 47 (April/May 1998): 139.

[108] "The Eumenides" (program, a performance of *The Eumenides* that took place at the Music Hall Buffalo in Buffalo, NY, 3 December 1898), n. pag., Theosophical Society Archives.

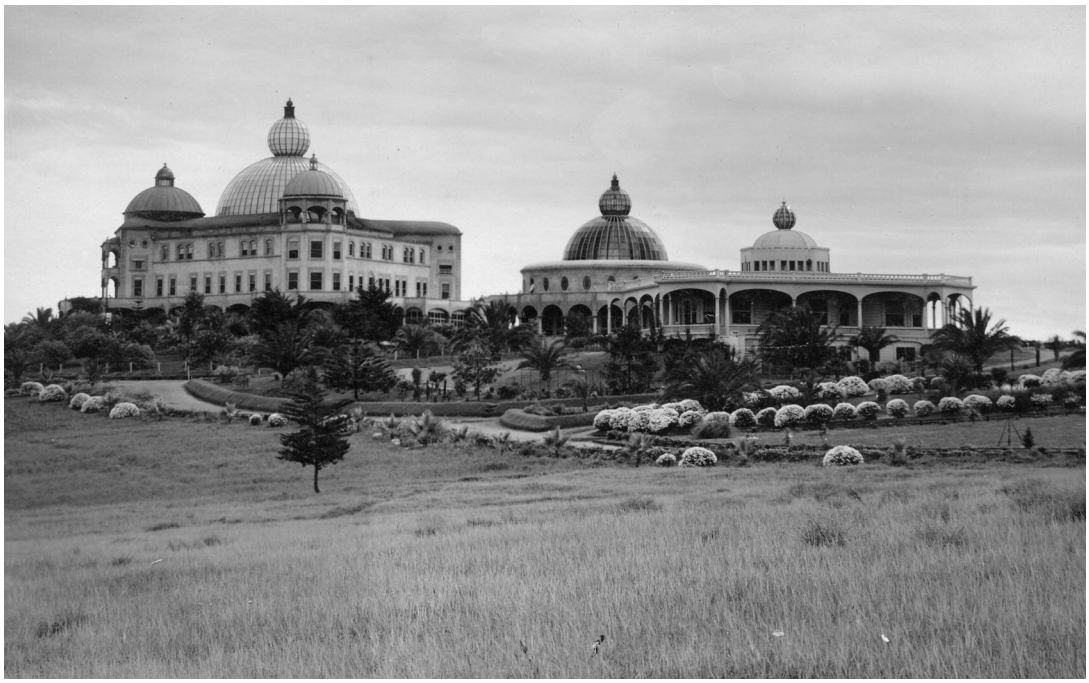

Fig. 4 Point Loma grounds; *left,* Raja-Yoga Academy; *middle*, Aryan Memorial Temple; *right*, the Spalding residence.

Fig. 5 The Spalding residence, which now stands on the campus of Point Loma Nazarene University. Photograph by author, 2004.

Raja Yoga was the name of the educational system employed at Lomaland schools, and Tingley gave drama a central place in this system of education. Even before

the *Raja Yoga* schools were established in 1900, Tingley recognized the effectiveness of drama and theatre as an educational tool. In 1897 she sent an official communication to the International Brotherhood League Children's Department establishing drama as an essential part of educating children between the ages of three and five. In the communication she explained that future educational work would be executed "largely by means of symbolism and allegorical plays" designed to teach the children that "they are immortal souls, not divorced from nature but indeed and in truth a part of it."[109] Drama and theatre maintained its central role in the educational programs of Lomaland, which at the community's height included a preschool, primary and secondary schools, a university, a scientific research department, a school of music supporting a full orchestra (see figure 6), a string quartet, choral groups, and a program of drama.[110]

Fig. 6 Point Loma Orchestra

[109] "Katherine Tingley to Children's Department," n.p., 13 September 1897, 1-2, Theosophical Society Archives.

[110] Bernard Parsons, "The Raja-Yoga Schools of Point Loma," *Sunrise* 47 (April-May 1998): 148.

The seriousness with which Tingley took drama and theatre is evinced by the effort and money she spent to build and acquire ideal places to perform her dramas. In 1901, Tingley completed the construction of the Greek Theatre that seats twenty-*500* people. Some theatre scholars, including Sheldon Cheney, believe Tingley's was the first reconstruction of a Greek Theatre in the U.S. (figures 7-9).[111] In the same year, Tingley purchased the Fisher Opera House in San Diego for $65,000. Renamed the Isis Theatre, Tingley's newly acquired opera house had a seating capacity of 1400, with 72 boxes, 500 seats in the lower floor, 500 in the balcony, and 400 in the gallery (figures 10-11).[112] With the Greek theatre and the the Isis Theatre, Tingley had established stable settings for the theatrical work that she would produce at Point Loma and in San Diego until 1929.

Fig. 7 Greek Open-air theatre, Point Loma, n.d.

[111] Sheldon Cheney, *The Open-Air Theatre*, (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1918), 36.

[112] Unidentified clipping, n.d., n. pag., Theosophical Society Archives.

Fig. 8 Greek Open-air theatre, Point Loma, n.d.

Fig. 9 Greek Open-air theatre, Point Loma, n.d.

Fig. 10 Interior of the Isis Theatre, 1910.

Fig. 11 Interior of the Isis Theatre, 1910.

UBTS THEATRE: PRACTICE AND PURPOSE

The inhabitants of Lomaland believed that they had a responsibility to continue a mystery drama tradition that had existed for thousands of years, and Tingley spoke openly about mystery dramas and her belief in their power to help the spectator gain spiritual insight:

> The virtues will not grow in the nature until the heart is touched, and the mystery-drama is the teacher's magic wand. For all dramas which give us

> a true picture of the soul's experiences and a true interpretation of the Higher Law and of life's diviner aspects are mystery-dramas, whether written by Aeschylus, Shakespeare, or by some unknown dramatist past or to come. Life is the great Mystery, and in unveiling it, in the light of knowledge, the true drama has ever been, and ever will be, man's greatest instructor.[113]

For Tingley, the mystery dramas were a means by which enlightened playwrights revealed information about the Secret Doctrine to the public, and the performance of such dramas was therefore an important part of the Wisdom Tradition.

Since the performance of mystery dramas was so important, all Lomaland inhabitants shared the burden producing them. The Point Loma Woman's Exchange and Mart created the costumes, the orchestra played the music, and the Aryan Press designed and printed the advertising and programs.[114] In a 1907 article published in *The American Magazine*, Ray Stannard Baker wrote about his surprise upon discovering that the labor provided by the inhabitants of Lomaland was donated free of charge. He had assumed that that the construction and maintenance of Point Loma must have cost a fortune in labor expenses.[115]

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[113] "As You Like It," (program, performance of *As You Like It* that took place on 24 January 1916), p. 2, Theosophical Society Archives.

[114] Emmett A. Greenwalt, *The Point Loma Community in California 1897-1942: A Theosophical Experiment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 101.

[115] Ray Stannard Baker, "An Extraordinary Experiment in Brotherhood: The Theosophical Institution at Point Loma, California," *The American Magazine* 36 (January 1907): 232.

The raw materials out of which the Lomaland settlement was constructed, however, were not free, nor was the cost of advertising in newspapers or the materials needed for printing posters and programs. Fortunately for Tingley, she had wealthy supporters backing the activities at Point Loma, among whom were:

> A.G. Spalding, the famous sporting goods manufacturer; W. C. Temple, wealthy Pittsburgh manufacturer; Clark Thurston, former president American Screw Co.; F.M. Pierce, of the Pierce Engineering Co. of New York; W. Ross White, prominent Georgia manufacturer; W.F. Hanson, Georgia inventor of cotton weaving machine; R. Machele, English artist; Miss Herbert, sister of the former British minister to the United States.[116]

Coupled with the free labor provided by the residents of Lomaland, the financial support of these people, as well as from other members of the UBTS, enabled Tingley to realize her theatrical goals.

The extent of Tingley's spending matched the loftiness of her goal to re-establish the mystery drama tradition for her contemporaries, which she attempted to do through a variety of methods. She sponsored lectures about Wagner and directed and produced plays by Aeschylus and Shakespeare. She also directed original plays written by members of the Lomaland literary department and staged theatrical pro-peace demonstrations in San Diego. All of her performances promoted the ethics associated with Universal Brotherhood.

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[116] Ibid.

The lectures about Wagner that Tingley promoted were designed to educate people about her conceptualization of the mystery drama tradition. As early as 1897, Tingley authorized Mrs. Alice L. Cleather and Mr. Basil Crump to speak publicly about the connections between Richard Wagner, Theosophical beliefs, and mystery dramas. Cleather's and Crump's lectures usually included recitals of Wagner's music. One published program from a "Musical Recital at National Rifles' Armory" that took place on 10 May 1897, lists a group of topics that Cleather and Crump covered, including: "Theosophy as a Universal Key"; "Evolution of Music and Speech"; "Greek Tragedy: A Teacher of the People"; "Revival by Wagner of the Greek Tragedy and True Reunion of Music and Poetry," "Wagner's prose works and the Theosophy taught therein."[117]

At another event titled "The Art of Richard Wagner," Cleather and Crump designed an interesting multimedia event described as a "Lecture with Musical and Lantern Illustrations." Here, Cleather spoke on a variety of topics relevant to Tingley's theatrical ideas, including: "Modern Opera and the Re-Birth of True Drama"; "Art-Work of the Future"; "a Great Brotherhood of the Arts"; "Music: A Universal Language—The Drama an expression of the highest and noblest Feeling of Humanity"; "the Spoken Tone and old-time blending of Song and Speech"; "Ancient Greek Tragedy: a dramatic rendering of the Soul-Life of the People"; "From Aeschylus to Sophocles to Shakespeare, Beethoven and Wagner"; "stages in the growth of the Music Drama, and its great power for good"; "Man's Divine Nature and Destiny"; "Growth of the Soul and the Great Moral Law"; "the Brotherhood of Man, and of Arts and Religions"; "Work of the Mystery

[117] "Musical Recital at National Rifles' Armory," (program, musical recital that took place on 10 May 1897), n. pag., Theosophical Society Archives.

Play"; and, finally, "Ancient Schools of the Mysteries and their modern Revival at Point Loma, California."[118]

The topics that Cleather and Crump spoke about suggest the existence of an ongoing tradition of mystery drama and indicate that Tingley viewed the theatrical work that she planned for Point Loma as part of that tradition. An anonymous letter dated 1898 written by someone who attended one of these lectures indicates how these speakers used Wagner to connect Tingley to the mystery drama tradition. The letter states that Cleather "spoke of Wagner as Poet, Musician, Dramatist and Mystic," rating Wagner as no mere writer of operas but "an epic Poet, to be placed in line with Aeschylus, Goethe, and Shakespeare." According to the letter, Wagner's dramas are "a revival of the Greek symbolical tragedy with the addition of fully developed music" and Wagner is a mystic who stands in agreement with Tingley on the issues of the essential divinity of the human being and of reincarnation.[119]

Cleather directly connects Wagner's work to Tingley's by way of the mystery drama tradition:

> Wagner's dramas were a revival of the ancient Mystery Plays which were performed under the direction of Mystics who taught in the Schools of the Mysteries. It is stated that Aeschylus was initiated into the Mysteries. Prof. Henry Morley says, "Aeschylus was born among the Mysteries and felt God's presence in the very earth he trod." [sic] Originally pure, these

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[118] "The Art of Richard Wagner: His Life Aim and the inner meaning of his Dramas," (program, n. d.), n. pag., Theosophical Society Archives.

[119] Letter, 1898, p. 1-2, Pasadena Theosophical Society Archives.

> mysteries degenerated with the fall of the race into Materialism. They will be revived in their pristine purity at the "School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity [*sic*] founded at Point Loma, California by Mrs. Katherine A. Tingley.[120]

This letter was written three years before Tingley had the outdoor Greek Theatre built at Point Loma, and it is highly possible that the Wagner lectures were part of an effort to raise money and support for the Lomaland theatre project. However, the Wagner lectures were more than a fundraising effort; they also sought to establish Tingley's theatrical work as part of the ancient mystery drama tradition by which insights into the Secret Doctrine are presented to the spectator.

By utilizing a Wagnerian approach to theatre in the 1890s, Tingley took part in the innovative practices that were more characteristic of the avant-garde theatre scene of France centered in Paris than of the U.S. theatre scene. In *Symbolist Theatre: The Formation of an Avant-Garde*, Frantisek Deak writes about French theatre artists who interpreted Wagner's works as occult texts, explaining that his later works were enthusiastically embraced by mystics, occultists, Theosophists, and modern Rosicrucians.[121] Deak states that Joséphin Péladan (1859-1918), the French symbolist director and playwright who would form his own Theatre of Initiation, became a disciple of Wagner's by adopting Wagner's principles of dramatic composition and music in his own work and also by taking on the role of "redeemer of French culture." [122] Tingley

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[120] Ibid., 2.

[121] Deak, *Symbolist Theatre*, 117.

[122] Ibid., 118-19.

agreed with Péladan that Wagner's works were examples of modern efforts to reform the drama so that it might become "one of the great redemptive forces of the age."[123] Tingley's Wagnerian tendencies predate the Little Theatre movement of the U.S., which is generally assigned to the 1910s, and therefore proves that some U.S. theatre practitioners were making use of the theatrical innovations of the European avant-garde in the late nineteenth century.

After she educated her followers about how her theatrical projects related to the ancient mystery drama tradition, Tingley began her directorial work with Aeschylus's *The Eumenides*. She asserted that *The Eumenides* contains esoteric secrets that any earnest spiritual seeker "would go to the ends of the earth to find."[124] Indeed, Tingley believed that exposure to *The Eumenides* would edify the spectator and counteract what she perceived as the negative influence of the theatre of her time. In her essay, "The Drama," Tingley laments the loss of the "superb religious dramas" of the ancient Greeks and denounces the "trash that we meet nowadays" that does not raise "the minds of the youth to a higher contemplation of life" but rather "drag[s] them down, or at best merely entertain[s], or please[s] the fancy."[125] Although Tingley does not mention any of these undesirable productions by name, her words suggest an opposition to an array of popular theatrical forms of the late nineteenth century.

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[123] "Reception to the Southern California Editorial Association," a conference that took place at Lomaland, Point Loma, 21 June 1912, n. pag., Program, Theosophical Society Archives.

[124] Katherine Tingley, "Drama," in *The Voice of the Soul* (Covina, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1942), 220.

[125] Ibid., 217, 219.

When Tingley first directed *The Eumenides* at the Carnegie-Lyceum in New York City in 1898, her directorial vision for the production inspired her to create a physical representation of some of the esoteric knowledge that she believed was contained in the play. In notes about this production that Tingley prepared for a lecture to the Bridgeport Art Club, she discussed one of these secrets, which she attempted to reveal at the moment of the Furies' transformation at the end of the play. She interpreted the Furies as beings who transcend their spiritual limitations through their own free will, and the transformation of the Furies illustrates that human beings have "Higher Selves" capable of being touched by "the vibration of higher thought."[126] Although I could not find any photographs of the 1898 production in New York, a photograph of a 1922 production that took place at the Greek Theatre in Point Loma shows how Tingley used the element of costume to visually represent the awakening of the Furies' Higher Selves—at the moment of transformation the Furies dropped their darkly mysterious garb and emerged as beautiful young maidens clad in garlands and light colored gowns (figures 12-13)

Fig. 12 Furies menacing Orestes in Point Loma production of *The Eumenides*, 1922.

[126] Katherine Tingley's notes on *The Eumenides*, 8 November 1898, n. pag., Theosophical Library Center Archives.

Fig. 13 Furies transformed into the Eumenides, the "beneficient ones," in Point Loma production of *The Eumenides*, 1922.

In a 1922 article from *The Theosophical Path* entitled "'The Eumenides' of Aeschylus—A Mystery drama," Joseph H. Fussell interprets the moment of the Furies' transformation and reveals some of the meanings that this moment could produce for a Theosophists who agreed with Tingley's interpretation of the play:

> This lesson is contained in the transformation of the Erinyes, the Furies, into the Eumenides, the beneficent ones, from which the drama takes its name. It is the overcoming and transmuting of the evil, vengeful, and pursuing elemental powers of the lower nature, daughters of the dark night, into beneficent, helpful influences, good fairies, ministering angels, to be no longer a curse, but a blessing to Athena's city, the habitation of the soul.

Fussell interprets this moment of performance as an embodiment of the primary lesson of any neophyte entering into an education in esoteric wisdom—the recognition and "conquest of the lower passional nature."[127] Fussell hoped that Tingley's ongoing theatrical productions would make many people aware of the violence that the unchecked lower nature has wreaked upon humanity in the form of war, materialism, and cruelty, and that, by helping human beings to understand that when the lower nature is controlled by higher thought it can be used for good rather than destructive ends, Tingley's dramas would result in larger numbers of people working together for peace.[128] Indeed, the anticipated New Cycle of peace would not arrive until all human beings gained this insight, so, when viewed with this teaching in mind, the significance of *The Eumenides* to Theosophists becomes apparent.

Tingley, however, did not want only Theosophists to enjoy her productions; rather, she wanted everything she directed to be viewed as some of the finest theatre of her day. Her choice to produce *The Eumenides* at the Carnegie-Lyceum shows that she wanted her work to be viewed as serious theatre to be compared with other professional productions in New York City, and some highly qualified spectators voiced their appreciation of the high production values of Tingley's productions. For instance, Professor Fowler of Columbia Institute in New York saw *The Eumenides* at the Carnegie-Lyceum and wrote a letter shortly after the performance, in which he commended

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[127] Joseph H. Fussell, *"'The Eumenides'* of Aeschylus—A Mystery-Drama: A Theosophical Interpretation" *The Theosophical Path* 23 (November 1922): 19, Theosophical Society Archives.

[128] Ibid., 20-21.

Tingley for the appropriate and impressive costumes, tableaux, and stage settings as well as the music, which he described as "in harmony with the spirit of the drama."[129]

Tingley's attempt to stage *The Eumenides* in a manner that was relevant to her contemporaries makes her one of the early practitioners of Greek Revivalism—a U.S. theatre movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whose new modes of performance and production grew out of revivals and reinterpretations of the Greek tragedies and epics. Even new theatres were built based upon Greek models as part of Greek Revivalism. An exhibit that took place at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts between 15 October 2004 and 8 January 2005 entitled "Mirrors to the Past: Ancient Greece and Avant-Garde America" displayed musical scores, play scripts, costumes, and photographs relating to this movement, and listed many well-known artists who associated themselves with Greek Revivalism, including Walter Damrosch (who founded Carnegie Hall, composed music for Margaret Anglin's Greek productions between 1915 and 1921, and even visited Lomaland), [130] Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Harvey Granville Barker. [131]

No documents relating to Tingley or Lomaland were displayed at the "Mirrors to the Past" exhibition, because the bulk of material on the subject is located at the Theosophical Library Center Archives in Altadena, which The Theosophical Society has

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[129] Professor Fowler to Katherine Tingley, quoted in "The Revival of Ancient Drama As an Educative Factor in Modern Life," in '"The Aroma of Athens' Athenian Flower Festival," (program, performance of *The Aroma of Athens* that took place on 17 March 1911), n. pag., Theosophical Society Archive.

[130] Greenwalt, *The Point Loma Community in California*, 107.

[131] "Mirrors to the Past: Ancient Greece and Avant-Garde America," (program, exhibit held at the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts, 15 October 2004-8 January 2005), n. pag.

not made available to the public until now. However, in her own time Tingley was too visible to be overlooked by people interested in Greek theatre. In his 1918 book, *The Open-Air Theatre*, Sheldon Cheney wrote about an open-air theatre movement taking place in the U.S. that he characterizes as having a "spiritual aspect" and an "almost religious" quality.[132] Cheney surveyed every open-air theatre that he felt made a significant contribution to the open-air movement with innovations of architecture or performance, and he thought highly enough of Tingley's outdoor Greek theatre and her productions to include them in his survey. [133]

Frank A. Waugh also discussed Tingley's work in connection to the outdoor theatre movement of the U.S. in his 1917 book entitled *Outdoor Theaters.* Waugh, like Cheney, credits not only Tingley's theatre, but the open-air theatre movement in general as having the power to transform theatre and theatre-goers for the better. Waugh asserted a "direct relation to the redeeming of country and industrial districts through constructive leisure" and "the founding of outdoor theatre for the people," and he agreed with Tingley that the Greek model is perhaps the best mode of theatre to employ in an effort to "redeem" U.S. audiences.[134] So, in the 1910s, theatre scholars, as well as the leaders of NRMs, wrote about their belief that the theatre has the potential to spiritually transform the audience, and these theatre scholars felt that Tingley's theatrical project was not unique in its spirituality, but, rather, part of a larger U.S. theatre movement of the late 1890s that sought to create new forms of theatre which transcended the popular theatre

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[132] Cheney, *Open-Air Theatre*, 10.

[133] Ibid., vi, 1.

[134] Frank A. Waugh, *Outdoor Theaters: The Design, Construction and Use of the Open-Air Auditoriums* (Boston: Richard Badger, 1917), 5, 24.

producer's preoccupation with making a profit by producing plays for their entertainment value rather than their spiritual or philosophical value. Stripping theatre of its spiritual purpose, in Tingley's opinions, could be the potential death of the mystery drama tradition, which she sought to revive with *The Eumenides*.

Besides Aeschylus, Tingley revived the words of another playwright who she believed was one of the great playwright-teachers of the mystery drama tradition, namely, Shakespeare. The anonymous author of "At the Greek Theatre in Point Loma," an essay about the Lomaland's theatrical history, interprets Shakespeare's works as a dramatization of the war between the high/spiritual and low/material natures within the individual:

> Aeschylus and Shakespeare, in different eras, sounded the same note in the drama that Katherine Tingley has been re-sounding for the past thirty years in the study of man's DUAL NATURE, and the revelation that comes through this knowledge of himself, of his all-conquering DIVINITY. [135]

The author of this essay is not creating these connections between Shakespeare and Theosophy out of thin air; they were made during the lectures that Cleather and Crump gave in 1897 and 1898. For instance, one of their lecture topics made direct connections among Aeschylus, Wagner, and Shakespeare, thereby including all three of them in the mystery drama tradition.[136] Tingley interpreted Shakespeare's plays as occult documents

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[135] "At The Greek Theater Point Loma: 'Art is Beauty Energized,'" n.d., n.pag., Papers, Theosophical Society Archives.

[136] See note 20.

expounding the fundamental doctrines of the Wisdom Religion, including Universal Brotherhood, divine justice, the divinity of human beings, karma, and reincarnation, and she produced his plays often. Under Tingley, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* saw eight separate productions between 1907 and 1923, *As You Like It* seven between 1915 and 1924 (figure 14), *Twelfth Night* one at the Isis Theatre in 1916, and *The Tempest* one at the Greek Theatre in 1926 (figure 15).[137]

Fig. 14 *As You Like It*, staged in Newbury, MS, 1920.

Fig. 15 *The Tempest*, Open-air Greek Theatre (transformed into a cave), Point Loma, 1926.

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[137] "Katherine Tingley's Dramatic Work," n.d., n. pag., Theosophical Society Archives.

Tingley was just as concerned with the production value of her Shakespearean plays as she had been with *The Eumenides*, and California newspaper reviewers were often impressed with the physical aspects of these productions. After the 1907 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Los Angeles the *Los Angeles Examiner* and the *Los Angeles Herald* admired the costumes, scenery, and spectacle of the play:

> In rich garb of dazzling beauty, enhanced by the magic lighting effects, Lysander and Demetrius turned eyes upward to express their love for Hermia. She, a picture of classic beauty in lavender Grecian draperies, pointed her chin high in describing strong emotion and when she was sad let her head sink gracefully forward on her chest. She was a demi-blonde with chestnut hair.[138]

The *Los Angeles Examiner* described the world of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as "as pretty a stage picture as any audience could desire."[139]

Reviews of Tingley's actors were more mixed than those of the mise-en-scène. The *Herald* review of the 1907 performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* describes the voices of some of the Point Loma performers as unpleasant.[140] However, some reviewers spoke well of the Point Loma Shakespearean performers, including the reviewer from the *Los Angeles Examiner*, who saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1907:

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[138] *Los Angeles Herald* 26 April 1907.

[139] *Los Angeles Examiner*, 26 April 1907.

[140] *Los Angeles Herald* 26 April 1907.

> The acting of the elder participants was conscientiously performed, with both the grace and the faults of non-professionals, but evincing an earnestness and careful training that secured for them a respectful and sympathetic hearing.
>
> Looked at from the viewpoint I usually take in a theater, the lad who played Puck deserves sincere recognition as being thoroughly imbued with the fantastical spirit absolutely needed to give this delightful vagrant mood of the Bard a degree of verity. . . . I'll wager an astral dollar to the Mahatma of a dime that he will grow up to be a star actor. [141]

Although the *Examiner* critic was more complimentary about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than the *Herald* reviewer, he follows up on his favorable comments with a few jabs at Theosophical beliefs—mocking the concept of the spiritual teachers known as Mahatmas and the astral plane. This is only one example of the treatment that Tingley often received at the hands of skeptical members of the press who did not take seriously her claims that her theatrical work was associated with a mystery drama tradition or a Wisdom Religion.

Regardless of the skepticism of the press, Tingley and her followers took their role as perpetuators of the Wisdom Religion via the mystery drama seriously enough to write and produce new plays that they referred to as "symposia."[142] The Lomaland

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[141] *Los Angeles Examiner*, 26 April 1907.

[142] "At the Greek Theater Point Loma" lists "some fifteen presentations of *The Aroma of Athens*" and "the many presentations of the SERIES OF SYMPOSIA of which it formed the climax." The Theosophical archives in Altadena holds scripts for *The Aroma of Athens* and scripts from many other of the symposia. There is also a large collection of photographs of symposia. Finally, there are articles in San Diego newspapers, in the *New*

symposium generally depicted Greek philosophers having discussions about Theosophical teachings amidst grand spectacle. Tingley produced the first untitled symposium in 1899, and the form quickly became a standard dramatic form of the UBTS. In 1901, Tingley authorized the release of a statement identifying the publishing and performance of symposia as the most important activity in which the members of the UBTS could participate:

> for through it a world-wide work is being opened out. No limit can be put to the extension of this saving power, for by its means the minds of men are being gradually permeated by the fundamental ideas of Brotherhood.[143]

In *The Point Loma Community in California 1897-1942: A Theosophical Experiment*, Emmett A. Greenwalt explains that after this statement, Tingley arranged for the publication and distribution of official UBTS symposia to their lodges located in the U.S. and abroad. As a result, UBTS lodges all over the world began performing the symposia.[144]

A Promise, one of the official UBTS symposia, was first published and performed at Point Loma and at other UBTS Lodges in 1901. A program from a performance given on 13 December 1901 by the members of Universal Brotherhood Lodge No. 7 at the

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Century Path (the journal of the UBTS), and archived letters that describe many of the performances that Tingley directed. The documents that I gathered at the Theosophical Society Archives will give an idea of the performance style and themes of the symposia produced by the UB & TS.

[143] Greenwalt, *Point Loma Community,* 100.

[144] Ibid.

Universal Brotherhood Hall in San Francisco reads that *A Promise* "is one of the many entertainments now in progress over the whole world, arranged by Katherine Tingley, Leader and Official Head of the Universal Brotherhood, and sent out from Headquarters, Point Loma, California." Published by the Theosophical Publishing Company, the title page of *A Promise* reveals that an anonymous student of *Esotero*—a department of the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity in Point Loma—wrote *A Promise* and that Katherine Tingley approved of its distribution.[145] Approved by the leader of the UBTS and printed by a publishing company whose mission was to disseminate Theosophical ideas, *A Promise* was presented at the time of its publication as sanctioned Theosophical teaching, and this would be the case for the other authorized symposia distributed from the UBTS headquarters.

The Theosophical teachings contained in these symposia were communicated for the most part by well-known historical figures of Greek antiquity. In *A Promise,* Aeschylus speaks of the evolution of the soul through reincarnation, explaining that through this process the soul moves "from height to height until the stone becomes a plant, the plant an animal, the animal a man, and man a god, radiant, beautiful, divine" (*A Promise,* 8). Pythagoras speaks about the power of music to spiritually edify the spectator or listener:

> 'Tis music that lifts the restless mind to heights of peace,
>
> and with power superb it breaks the chain that holds it to the lower

[145] Anonymous, *A Promise: A Greek Symposium by a Student of Esotero, Issued by the Approval of Katherine Tingley, Official Head of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society* (Point Loma, CA: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1901), title page, Theosophical Library Center.

> self. Through music, passion may be stilled, anger curbed; jealousy, ambition, selfishness made impotent; disorder giving place to order, vice to virtue. Such the power of music to purify the life and awake the soul. (ibid., 10)

Aspasia extends the power that Pythagoras attributes to music to all other arts, as well:

> And if true music have such power, so too all true art ennobles and uplifts the soul, being the language of the soul by which it speaks to mortals and awakens in their natures that which is kindred to its source, making men divine, immortal as the gods. Thus is the end of art and philosophy the same. (ibid.)

These dramatized discussions enabled Tingley to present the basic teachings of Theosophy, such as reincarnation, karma, and Universal Brotherhood, more directly than she could in her Theosophical interpretations of plays by Aeschylus and Shakespeare. Indeed, the symposia were tools by which Tingley could encourage the Theosophical spectator to contemplate not only Theosophical philosophy and teachings, but also the goals of the institutions that Tingley founded. For instance, at the end of *A Promise* the Priestess of Apollo prophecies that the ancient mysteries will disappear for centuries, only to reappear during a new Golden Age, when a Great Master will call to the world from "the hills of ancient Lomaland" (ibid., 11-12).

Tingley also used the language in symposia to respond to current events that were significant to her and her followers. This seems to have been the case with *The Wisdom of Hypatia*, a symposium based upon the story of Hypatia, a female philosopher and mathematician of the Neoplatonic School in the fourth century C.E. who was murdered in

a church because she was perceived as politically dangerous and anti-Christian. In her dissertation, "Domesticating Universal Brotherhood," Penny Brown Waterstone argues that behind *The Wisdom of Hypatia* was an effort to draw parallels between the besieged philosopher and Tingley as the controversial female leaders against whom conservative Christians stood in opposition.

Waterstone points out that *The Wisdom of Hypatia* was published shortly after Tingley had successfully sued the *Los Angeles Times* for a slanderous article which claimed that "Tingley's 'spookery' [the Point Loma Headquarters] held insane ceremonies, kept wives away from husbands and mothers from their children, made women work in the fields, and encouraged the practice of gross immoralities."[146] Like Hypatia, Tingley was considered dangerous because her ideas contradicted the theology of conservative Christianity, her influence over powerful men was interpreted as sinister, and she assumed a conspicuous public role as the leader and teacher of many people. Moreover, hostile Christian enemies opposed both Tingley and Hypatia.[147] Mr. Shortridge, the defense attorney working for the *Los Angeles Times,* tried to convince the court that halting Tingley's activities at Lomaland would be an act performed "in the name of the Savior of Nazareth who upon Calvary shed his blood that we might live."[148]

Waterstone believes that *Hypatia* was a way for Tingley to represent herself positively after these negative events, and certain aspects of the play do resemble

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[146] Penny Brown Waterstone, *Domesticating Universal Brotherhood: Feminine Values and the Construction of Utopia, Point Loma Homestead, 1897-1920*, PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1995 (Ann Arbor: UMI Microform, 1995), 156.

[147] Ibid., 174-75.

[148] Ibid., 157.

Tingley's battle with the *Los Angeles Times.* For instance, Scene Two opens in Hypatia's lecture room, where Solarion, a prominent citizen, openly questions her wisdom and the appropriateness of her status as a teacher of men:

> I have nothing to say against Philosophy. But, look you: all this talk of love and Brotherhood [capitalized in the script], it wearies me, and then, between ourselves, this adulation of Hypatia. This following of a Leader—is this freedom? Is this the independence which alone can make a man respect himself? (*The Wisdom of Hypatia*, 5)

Solarion's complaints would sound familiar to anyone who had heard or read about Shrotridge's attacks on Tingley's male followers, whose intelligence he questioned because they were willing to "surrender themselves to the dictation of a woman such as this [Tingley]."[149] Solarion also mentions that Hypatia talks about "Brotherhood," a word that would have carried powerful connotations for the members of the UBTS and would have made it virtually impossible not to draw comparisons between Tingley and Hypatia as spiritual teachers who were unjustly attacked for following their convictions.

Although Tingley used the symposia to promulgate specific Theosophical teachings and to respond to actual events that shook the UBTS, one did not need to be a UBTS member to enjoy symposia, as is demonstrated by a *San Diego Union* review of performance of *A Promise* that took place at the Isis Theatre on 8 April 1901:

> They meet in the underworld clad in the garments of classic Greece. The mysteries of life and death, reincarnation, immortality and the

[149] Ibid., 158.

> future of Mankind, form the themes of a lengthy symposium which is broken by shifting lights, exquisite music and choruses that awaken visions of the days when men still believe that Zeus wasn [*sic*] lord of the universe, and Pluto ruled in his hells below. Pythagoras, Plato, Phidias, Diotama, [*sic*] Athene [*sic*], Pericles, Socrates, and Aspasia hold philosophical discourse, and when one asks shall the earth ever again have a golden age, there is a glorious prophecy that the ancient mysteries shall once more be studied and a god-like race of men and women shall illuminate the world from the high summit of our own beautiful Loma Land. As the prophecy is uttered, Athene [*sic*], attended by white robed children and a train of maidens and women, come upon the scene. The ancient hymn to Apollo is sung, and the mystic drama closes with a tableau of surpassing beauty.[150]

Amidst the complimentary descriptions of scenery, tableaux, and lights, the reviewer mentions that the play culminates in a priestess's announcement that a new race of human beings will appear at Lomaland to enlighten the world. For a Theosophist, this is what Lomaland is preparing for—the New Cycle of peace and spiritual insight. However, it is clear that the reviewer was intrigued by these references to the glorious future that the priestess saw in store for Lomaland. Thus, specific references such as these seem to have made the performance more engaging for both Theosophists and non-Theosophists.

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[150] "*The Conquest of Death*: The Play at Fisher Opera House" *San Diego Union,* 9 April 1901.

In addition to its usefulness as a tool for sending specific messages and presenting allegories to the spectator, Tingley wanted her symposia to be as stunningly beautiful and exciting in performance as possible, and the most elaborately staged and well received of Tingley's symposia was *The Aroma of Athens*, which premiered at the Isis Theatre in San Diego on 17 March 1911 (figure 16). This highly successful symposium played in a several venues between 1911 and 1923, including the Greek Theatre in Point Loma, the Spreckels Theatre in San Diego, the President's Theatre in Washington, D.C., and in Visingsö, Sweden.[151] *The Aroma of Athens* included songs, dances, and children who played games that were said to have originated in ancient Greece, and journalists described it as a magnificent and educational spectacle. The child performers in the play were reportedly outstanding and the costumes were rated perfect.[152]

[151] "Internationella Teosofiska FredsKongres Sen Pa Visingsö," (program, performance of procession of the Seven kings that took place in Visingsö, Sweden on 23 June 1913), n. pag., Theosophical Society Archives.

[152] *San Diego Union*, 18 March 1911.

Fig. 16 *The Aroma of Athens*, performed at Greek Theatre, Point Loma, 1922.

One of the most visually striking aspects of *The Aroma of Athens* seems to have been Tingley's incorporation of sequences of mass ritual or ceremonial action into the production, such as the final moment of the play, which was described by a *San Diego Union* reviewer:

> One of the most effective bits of the evening was the torch procession, which was indescribably weird, bringing out the possibilities of the wonderful setting. Far down the canyon climbed the procession of votaries, clad in blood red, bearing flambeaux, filing up through the tortuous paths from that murky canyon depth where the sea was murmuring a continuous undertone to the performance, and, as they approached, chanting a weirdly martial song. This was the climax and

the closing of the festival.[153]

Although praising the quality of the production, this reviewer's description of the procession belies a dark interpretation of the moment, and perhaps indicates that he suspected that some sort of sinister meaning lay underneath it. Another sign of the tense relationship that existed between certain members of the press and Tingley, this description brings to mind the investigative reporter, Ray Stannard Baker, who humorously wrote about local newspaper reporters who surreptitiously watched performances of *The Eumenides* in the Greek theatre from afar and took parts of the performance to be secret rituals. According to Baker, these reporters wrote "fervid accounts of the mystic and occult rites and ceremonies of the people of Point Loma."[154] NRMs frequently undergo such demonizing at the hands of hostile members of the society on the fringe of which they exist.

Tingley used research into ancient Greek songs, music, and games to add authenticity to *The Aroma of Athens*, such as the inclusion of an ancient hymn to Apollo that was found in 1893 by the French Archeological School on the walls of Apollo's Temple at Delphi. She also dressed children in Greek clothing and had them play ancient Greek games as part of the performance. One such game was "Drop the Handkerchief" in which two children run around a circle of other children, racing for an empty place in response to a handkerchief being dropped; as the two children run around the circle, the ones forming the circle recite a chant in Greek that means, "Where are my roses, where

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[153] *San Diego Union*, 18 April, 1911.

[154] Ray Stannard Baker, "An Extraordinary Experiment in Brotherhood: The Theosophical Institution at Point Loma, California," *The American Magazine* 63 (January 1907): 235.

are my violets, where my fine parsley?" After the running children finish chanting, "Here are your roses, here your violets, and here your fine parsley," one of them victoriously acquires an open spot in the circle. The one left out of the circle must choose another child from the group who will leave his or her spot, and race around the circle while chanting.[155]

Tingley was an ambitious director and producer, and she wanted her work to be comparable to that of the best known theatres in the world. In an effort to encourage the public to draw such comparisons, the UBTS arranged for an associated correspondent to write about *The Aroma of Athens* in a 1911 edition of *The San Diego Union* under the pseudonym "Horatio." Horatio lauded the accuracy of the reproductions of Athenian costumes and scenery as "more consummate than that of Henry Irving." Horatio establishes his/her authority in this matter by explaining that he actually saw Irving perform in his theatre in London. Horatio also lived in Paris for nearly two years and became acquainted with the French symbolism while residing there. He/she explains that the symbolism of *The Aroma of Athens* is so complex that its analysis is "worthy of the pen of a Maeterlinck." Thus, Tingley was quite aware of French symbolism and its major writers before the incorporation of their ideas in the U.S. become more common in the U.S. during heyday of the Little Theatre movement.

Some symposia were written for casts comprised exclusively of children. The three-to-five-year-old students of the *Raja Yoga* preschool performed *The Little Philosophers*, a symposium written by Tingley. The child actors wore false beards and

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[155] *The Aroma of Athens: Athenian Flower Festival* (n.p., 1913), 28, Theosophical Society
Archives.

togas while they portrayed ancient philosophers who called all men, "rich and poor, wise and ignorant, selfish men and good, and children" to be "warriors." These warriors were not to fight physical battles; rather, they would remove from humanity's path "stumbling blocks" such as ignorance, selfishness, jealousy, careless teaching and education (which teaches human beings that they are not "Souls divine"), uncontrolled appetite, cruelty to animals, indifference, and, finally, "preaching and not doing." The little philosophers encourage us to confront "the evil in our natures" and to embrace the teaching of Theosophy by replacing fear with love.[156]

The peaceful message of *The Little Philosophers* was presented at Point Loma during a Reception and Entertainment to the Veterans of the Civil War on 7 May 1914,[157] and this production anticipates Tingley's peace work that she continued during the years of World War I. This propagation of the principle of anti-violence demonstrates that UBTS theatre was not simply a matter of producing spiritually insightful plays and giving the proceeds to humanitarian causes. Sometimes, Tingley created performances to point out policies and practices that she considered to be unjust or inhumane.

Prior to World War I on 3 March 1913 Tingley established The Parliament of Peace and Universal Brotherhood as an "international permanent organization for the promotion of peace and Universal Brotherhood." In 1915, Tingley held a Congress of the Parliament that many prominent people either attended or were represented at, among whom were Prof. Osvald Sirén, professor of History of Art at the University of

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[156] *The Little Philosophers*, n.p., n.d., 4-8. Theosophical Society Archives.

[157] "Reception and Entertainment to the Veterans of the Civil War: 47th Annual Encampment of the Departments of California and Nevada, Grand Army of the Republic, Katherine Tingley, Hostess," (program, reception that took place at Point Loma, CA, 7 May 1914), Theosophical Society Archives.

Stockholm, Mrs. Josephine Page Wright, President of the San Diego Woman's Press Club, Hon. Geo. W.P. Hunt, Governor of Arizona (represented), Hon. James E. Ferguson, Governor of Texas (represented), and Rev. Howard B. Bard of the First Unitarian Church of San Diego. Representatives of the Swiss International Bureau of Peace, the Swedish Peace and Defense Society, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the American Humane Association, and the New York Anti-Vivisection Society presented addresses at this function.

The 1915 congress featured diverse theatrical events, including a Grand International Pageant that included music, the procession of international flags and anti-war banners, a Peace Symposium performed by students of the *Raja Yoga* College and Academy, and performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Aroma of Athens.* One of the most heavily photographed of the Parliament of Peace and Universal Brotherhood was the pageant of the Seven Kings, a theatrical anti-war demonstration based on a Swedish legend of world peace. The primary banner of the pageant of the Seven Kings, carried by students of the *Raja Yoga* College, tells a brief version of the legend:

> A PROPHECY OF PERMANENT PEACE—VADSTENA'S LEGEND OF THE SEVEN KINGS: SEVEN BEECH TREES WILL GROW FROM ONE ROOT; SEVEN KINGS WILL COME FROM SEVEN KINGDOMS. UNDER THE TREES THEY WILL ESTABLISH PERMANENT PEACE. THIS WILL BE AT THE END OF THE PRESENT AGE.

Other banners in this procession bore slogans such as "Universal Peace—A Protest Against War," "Win Peace By the Sword of Knowledge," "Universal Brotherhood is the

Lost Chord in Human Life," and "Helping and Sharing is what Brotherhood Means."[158] The portrayers of the Seven Kings marched through the streets of San Diego (figure 17), followed by the *Raja Yoga* students with their banners. They entered the Lomaland grounds on horseback through a large entry gate from an adjoining boulevard, where they came together under several trees and signed a contract of peace.

Fig. 17 The Pageant of the Seven Kings, San Diego, 1915.

The goal of the Pageant of the Seven Kings was to contemplate and dramatize the possibility of permanent world peace, which Tingley believed could not be achieved without the understanding that, as human beings, "our responsibilities are not for ourselves alone, not for our own countries alone":

> but for the whole human family. Territory and trade may be much, national honor may be much, but the general salvation of human society here in this world—that is *all* [Tingley's emphasis].[159]

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[158] "Parliament of Peace and Universal Brotherhood," (program, congress that took place at Point Loma, CA, 22-25 June 1915), n.pag., Theosophical Society Archives.

[159] Katherine Tingley, "The Gods Await" *Sunrise* 47 (April-May 1998): 209.

The image of the Seven Kings urged spectators to re-assess their cultural differences and national identities by embracing a larger kinship that transcends such boundaries and connects all living things via their collective receiving of life-giving power from the Divine Principle. Tingley believed that when all human beings recognized this affinity Universal Brotherhood would result and the New Cycle would begin.

Until the New Cycle had begun in earnest and human nature changed, Tingley believed that war would continue to be a natural occurrence of the times in which she lived. Thus, although Tingley's peace work was carried on during the years of World War I, she did not condemn the soldiers fighting in the war or attempt to dissuade people from joining the armed services. In fact, she supported the military in her area by regularly inviting both officers and enlisted men to see Lomaland productions. Rather than criticizing America's involvement in World War I and turning a great deal of the public against her, Tingley encouraged all people to envision ways in which they could contribute to the development of a more peaceful world in the future.

After Tingley's death, her successor, Gottfried de Purucker, changed the name of the organization back to The Theosophical Society. In 1942, de Purucker relocated the headquarters to an area near Covina, California, and large-scale theatre production became a thing of the past for The Theosophical Society. However, during the more than thirty years that Tingley lead the UBTS, she made significant contributions to theatre in the U.S. She established herself as a pioneer of Greek Revivalism movement, and utilized Wagner to help her interpret classic plays as mystery dramas—a blend of theory and practice that was more characteristic of the avant-garde theatre scene of late nineteenth-century Europe than that of the U.S. Finally, she directed new Theosophical mystery

plays written by herself and other members of the UBTS to bring spiritual messages that she believed were relevant to her audiences.

Developed within the rich, dynamic, and diverse soil of the religious culture of the U.S. at the turn-of-the-century, Tingley's work is a conspicuous example of NRM theatre in Western culture. It has been for the most part overlooked, not because of an anti-NRM theatre prejudice in theatre studies, but because the information about her theatrical writings and performances have been held in the private holdings of The Theosophical Society. It is no surprise that theatre such Tingley's, which deal with karma, reincarnation, and the Wisdom Religion, should have grown out of the UBTS. The Theosophical movement in general is often recognized as playing a major part in an increasing openness to such ideas among Westerners, and Tingley's theatre contributed to this broadening of spiritual thought in Western culture. In classic U.S. style, hers was a theatrical experiment with a practical purpose: the resuscitation of the lost mysteries of antiquity and the awakening of the divine element in the modern human being.

Chapter Three:

Anthroposophical Theatre and Performance

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) began producing original Mystery Dramas in 1910 (three years before he founded the Anthroposophical Society), and Anthroposophists continue performing Steiner's four Mystery Dramas, as well as uncut versions of Goethe's *Faust*, to this day at the Anthroposophical headquarters in Dornach, Switzerland, known as the *Goetheanum*. For example, Goethe's *Faust* played in Dornach in June 2004,[160] and the four Mystery Dramas were performed there in December 2004 as part of the *Weihnachten 2004* conference.[161]

Like Katherine Tingley, Steiner developed mystery dramas that he believed contained spiritual insights that were relevant to people living in his era. Unlike Tingley, he did not draw aesthetic inspiration from scholarship about the ancient Greek theatre. Steiner's theatre resembles the symbolist theatre of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in France rather than the Greek Revivalist movement of the U.S. Both Steiner and Marie Steiner-von Sivers (1867-1948), Steiner's wife and theatrical collaborator, had connections to the French symbolist movement centered in Paris. In the late 1890s Steiner co-directed a production of Maeterlinck's *The Intruder* with Otto Erich Hartleben for a "free Dramatic Society" in Germany, which was an independent

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[160] Eva Behrendt, "Die letzten Goetheaner," Theater*heute* (June 2004).

[161] Goetheanum, "Goetheanum Bühne," http://www.goetheanum-buehne.ch/72.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

theatre dedicated to producing "misunderstood" plays.[162] Steiner also directed two plays by Edouard Schuré,[163] and Steiner-von Sivers studied artistic recitation in Paris, where she became friends with Schuré, whose works she translated and through whom she learned about Blavatsky and Theosophy.[164] Schuré spoke of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Joséphin Péladan, and Maurice Maeterlinck as playwrights who, like himself, strove to create a *Théâtre de l'Âme*.[165] Ruth Pusch, the wife of Hans Pusch—a performer who worked under the direction of Steiner-von Sivers at the Goetheanum and on many tours—writes that Steiner-von Sivers used her education in the arts of speech and drama by adding her own "unique gifts and experience" to Steiner's efforts to introduce Anthroposophy to the world.[166] In a foreword to *A New Kind of Actor*, Dr. Virginia Sease, current director of the Goetheanum in Dornach, describes Steiner-von Sivers as a "decisive force" in the development of Anthroposophical performance technique—

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[162] Rudolf Steiner, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1928), "chap. 15," http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_index.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

[163] David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

[164] Maria Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 94.

[165] Edouard Schuré, "Le Théâtre de l'Âme," in *Les Enfants de Lucifer & La Soeur Gardienne* (Paris: Librairie Académique, 1922), xv.

[166] Ruth Pusch, Foreward to *A New Kind of Actor: Letters About Steiner-von Sivers Steiner and Her Work With the Actors on the Goetheanum Stage in the 30s"* (New York: Mercury Press, 1998), 2.

especially in vocal techniques—who worked "side by side with Steiner to bring to life artistically the great spiritual insights which he imparted."[167]

Although Anthroposophical theatre draws from the theatrical practices of French symbolism, it can be differentiated from most symbolist drama and theatre by its dramatization of specific Anthroposophical tenets. The unique relationship between the goals and the theatre of Anthroposophy is the subject of this chapter, which is divided into three sections. In the first, I give a brief overview of the history and teachings of Anthroposophy. In the second section, I examine the development of Anthroposophical performance and theatre theory, and, in the third, I discuss present-day manifestations of Anthroposophical theory, drama, and performance. This chapter will show that Anthroposophical theatre is not only an important instance of NRM theatre, but also a valuable resource to theatre scholars who study European avant-garde theatre of the turn-of-the-century.

Anthroposophy: Beliefs and Practices

Maria Carlson describes Anthroposophy as "a refinement and redirection" of Theosophy.[168] This is because the Anthroposophical Society developed as a result of doctrinal disagreement between Annie Besant (1847-1933)—who became the leader of the International Theosophical Society in 1907—and Steiner's German chapter of the Theosophical Society. Steiner believed that Besant's proclamation of the young Hindu,

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[167] Dr. Virginia Sease, Foreword, in *A New Kind of Actor: Letters About Steiner-von Sivers Steiner and Her Work with the Actors on the Goetheanum Stage in the 30's* (New York: Mercury Press, 1998), viii.

[168] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth,"* 11.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986), as "an avatar of the Christ"[169] was "a critical misreading of spiritual reality" and a "'deterioration to a fearsome degree' of the parent Society's integrity." The integrity of the Theosophical Society had already been challenged when the more than six thousand members of the American Section broke away in 1895 under the leadership of W. Q. Judge, who was succeeded in 1896 by Katherine Tingley.[170] On 2 February 1913 Besant withdrew the Charter of the German Section and "almost three thousand Theosophists—more than half the entire German Section—seceded with Steiner to form the Anthroposophical Society."[171]

In *What is Anthroposophy*, Anthroposophist Otto Fränk-Lundborg discusses the meaning of Anthroposophy:

> One may encounter the word Anthroposophy in the most varied relationships of cultural life without being able to form the right idea of what it means. An attempt at clarification is being made herein. Actually, three aspects are to be understood by the word Anthroposophy:
>
> 1. The exact scientific method of research into the supersensible world founded by Steiner Steiner (1861-1925).
>
> 2. The results of this research. These are also known as "Spiritual Science" and are the necessary complement to Natural Science. They are the science of the supersensible constitution of man, of the spiritual beings in nature and in the cosmos, and they are also

[169] Ibid., 97.

[170] Ibid., 60 & 97.

[171] Ibid., 33.

> the extension of historical and other sciences, e.g., a scientific answer to the question: who was and is the Christ?
>
> 3. The application of the results gained through Spiritual Science in the practical life of the individual or of the community, for example, in education, medicine, curative education, pharmacy, agriculture, sociology, as well as the diverse branches of the arts.[172]

The question about the Christ above indicates what Edouard Schuré took to be "the essential difference between Indian Theosophy and Anthroposophy"—namely, "the supreme role attributed by Anthroposophy to the Christ in human evolution and also in its connection with the Rosicrucian tradition."[173]

Maria Carlson argues that the disagreement between Theosophy and Anthroposophy was more a matter of means and method than of ultimate goal, and she points out many similarities between the two belief systems, while simultaneously acknowledging their differences:

> Both movements sought to achieve clairvoyance through the use of intellect and reason; both sought to overcome materialism and return the spiritual dimension to human life; both desired to heal the rift between religion and science; both represented a modern gnosis.

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[172] Otto Fränkl-Jundborg, *What is Anthroposophy?* (1925; reprint, Fair Oaks, CA: Steiner Steiner College Press, 1977), 9.

[173] Edouard Schuré, preface to *An Esoteric Cosmology* by Steiner Steiner (Blauvelt, NY: Spiritual Science Library, 1987), 5.

> While Theosophy emphasized the oriental, intuitive, passive principle as the means toward occult ends, Anthroposophy focused on the occidental, rational, active principle. Steiner avoided the Theosophists' excessive dependence on oriental vocabulary and sought to present religious and occult concepts using Western terms. . . .
>
> Steiner's major appeal was therefore to those who felt drawn to the basic concept of Theosophy, but who felt uncomfortable with its alien Buddhism. For them Steiner had a Western vocabulary, based on Western European occult, religious, and philosophical traditions to which they could relate.[174]

Carlson explains that Steiner "clearly differentiated the Eastern soul, mind, and body from the Western," characterizing "the Eastern initiation as passive, achieved while the initiate was in a trance or sleep state" and the "Western, or Rosicrucian initiation" as one in which the initiate worked "actively and consciously through mind, reason, and intellect to achieve enlightenment."[175]

In the spirit of the Rosicrucian tradition, a syncretic tradition of Esoteric Christianity with "deeper roots in Western medieval Gnostic and Hermetic Philosophies,"[176] Steiner drew from material both inside and outside of the Christian tradition in the development of his worldview. For instance, Steiner places Ahriman, the "Hostile Spirit" of Zoroastrianism destined eventually to be "overcome" by Ohrmazd,

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[174] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher,"* 33.

[175] Ibid., 131.

[176] Ibid.

"the creator God" and "Wise Lord," [177] next to Lucifer, and depicts them not as inherently evil entities, but, rather, as natural forces of the universe with the potential to be either destructive or beneficient. Ahriman is "the lawful ruler of the ordering of death," who also "controls human thought," whereas Lucifer is "the power of Will that tears human beings away from the world of the senses and helps them be creative, imaginative, and artistic." Ahriman and Lucifer transmit "Ahrimanic" and "Luciferian" impulses, and, according to Steiner, the great struggle of the human being is to balance these. If either impulse dominates the life of an individual the psyche of the individual experiences this imbalance as "the Devil." An overdeveloped Luciferian impulse causes an individual to become controlled by passions, emotions, desires, and impulses; a predominant Ahrimanic impulse leads to obsessive materialism and a blind faith in the "exclusively mechanistic aspect of modern science."[178]

Early Anthroposophical Performance and Theory

Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers believed that the mystery drama is capable of awakening the human being's latent ability to perceive the supersensible world and counteract the tendency toward materialism in Europe of the early twentieth century. Steiner's four Mystery Dramas, which were first performed at Theosophical conventions in Munich between 1910 and 1913,[179] were their early attempts to develop a tradition of mystery drama with such powers.

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[177] Ninian Smart, *The Word's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (1989; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 215-216

[178] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth,"* 134-135.

[179] Robb Creese, "Anthroposophical Performance," in *TDR* no. 2 (June 1978): 46.

Steiner's four Mystery Dramas are entitled *Die Pforte der Einweihung* (*The Portal of Initiation*, premiered 15 August 1910, at the Shauspielhaus in Munich), *Die Prufung der Seele* (*The Soul's Probation*, 17 August 1911, Theater am Gärtnerplatz), *Der Hüter der Schwelle* (*The Guardian of the Threshold*, 24 August 24 1912, Theater am Gärtnerplatz), and *Der Seelen Erwachen* (*The Soul's Awakening*, 22 August 1913, Volkstheater). Steiner wrote the plays only when he knew that that they were about to go into rehearsal in Munich, and each received about two months of rehearsal. Each play was revived at the Theosophical conventions between 1910 and 1913, and 1913 was the first year in which all four plays were performed as part of one convention.

Steiner took advantage of the experience that he gained directing plays at the free Dramatic Society in the late nineteenth century, as he directed, designed, and supervised the production of all four Mystery Dramas. Rehearsals took place during the day, and Steiner wrote additional scenes during the evening. Between rehearsals, Steiner led and supervised the carpentry, painting, modeling, sewing, and embroidery workshops to make sure that the work matched his vision for the scenery, props, and costumes.[180] Of course, Steiner did not do all of this work alone; he depended heavily upon his valued collaborator, Steiner-von Sivers, to help him organize the many details of producing the Mystery Dramas in Munich, and he would continue to depend upon her help for all of his future productions.

Not only did Steiner want to develop a mystery drama, but he also sought to create a theatre designed specifically to house the performances of these dramas. In *Eternal Drama,* Richard Rosenheim explains that a friend offered Steiner a site in

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[180] Ibid.

Dornach when "the fanatics of nationalism and clericalism finally resolved to resort to certain testproof tactics for preventing the erection of a worthy building in Munich."[181] In fact, two different *Goetheanums* were constructed in Dornach because the first was burned down on New Year's Eve of 1922-1923 before the Mystery Dramas could be performed upon its stage "by a match struck in hatred and envy."[182] The foundation of the ill-fated first Goetheanum, which had a seating capacity of nine hundred spectators[183] and was topped with several large domes, was laid on 20 September 1913.[184] The second Goetheanum was erected in 1928, three years after Steiner's death in 1925 (sadly, he never got to see his Mystery Dramas performed in either building).[185] The second Goetheanum is a colossal yet sinuous edifice made of fireproof reinforced concrete and seating 1100 people.[186] Its organic, fanciful curves are reminiscent of a large piece of modernist sculpture.

In 1928, the second Goetheanum opened to the public. Ruth Pusch describes the triumphant event:

> It was the festive opening of the Second Goetheanum, with a double program of lectures, eurythmy performances, and the momentous

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[181] Richard Rosenheim, *The Eternal Drama: A Comprehensive Treatise on the Synergenetic History of Humanity, Dramatics, and Theatre* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), 269.

[182] Ruth Pusch, Introduction, in *A New Kind of Actor*, 2.

[183] Rex Raab, Arne Kingborn, & Ake Fant, *Eloquent Concrete: How Steiner Steiner Employed Reinforced Concrete* (London: Steiner Steiner Press, 1979), n. pag.

[184] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth,"* 101.

[185] Creese, "Anthroposophical Performance," 49.

[186] Rex Raab, et. al., 60.

> bringing to the stage of the first two Mystery Dramas in their entirety. Marie Steiner had been working with her actors for two years, developing also the speech chorus, since the founding of Thespis's Cart [the *Goetheanum* performance group]. The whole world seemed to be represented in Dornach, rejoicing particularly at the new life forces at work on the splendid new stage, with its gigantic dimensions and highly elaborate lighting system. Much had still to be done on the building itself—and on the acting group, too, that was finding and forming its home there.[187]

Ruth Pusch's reference to the preparatory training of the members of Thespis's Cart indicates that the Anthroposophical performance tradition had changed by 1928. In 1910, when Steiner produced the first of the Mystery Dramas, *The Portal of Initiation*, "there was not yet any special training for the amateur performers in the plays, save in rehearsal periods."[188] By 1928, the members of Thespis's Cart needed to be trained under Steiner-von Sivers for two years, because by this time Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers had developed two Anthroposophical forms of performance—*Eurythmie* and *Sprachgestaltung.*

Eurythmie, which Steiner-von Sivers named in 1912, involves physical movement and oral recitation[189]; Steiner conceived of *Eurythmie* as a "*wirkliche*

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[187] Ruth Pusch, Introduction, in *A New Kind of Actor,* 9.

[188] Creese, "Anthroposophical Performance," 46.

[189] Ibid., 60.

Sprache" of movement which is not at all the same as dance, mimicry, or pure gesture.[190] Comparing *Eurythmie* to poetic language—a manner of artistically forming the "*unkünstlerische Element*" of thought into words—Steiner describes the eurythmist as one who artistically forms the "*Seelisch-Geistige"* with movement.[191] Steiner also credits the vocal technique of *Sprachgestaltung* with the ability to signify the *"Seelische-Geistige."*[192]

Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers consider the combination of *Sprachgestaltung* and *Eurythmie* to be an essential part of creating "spiritually realistic"[193] theatre, which means theatre that contains accurate representations of spiritual events. Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers were opposed to using naturalistic vocal or movement techniques to represent such things, because "in naturalism the supersensible world is only a shadow."[194] For this reason, *Sprachgestaltung* does not resemble everyday speech, and the texts that its practitioners interpret are written in verse. Likewise, the gliding footwork and floating movements of the arms in *Eurythmie* do not resemble everyday gestures.

As Hans Pusch's description demonstrates, combining *Eurythmie* and *Sprachgestaltung* is no easy matter:

> It's true, however, most eurythmists exist in a totally different kind

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[190] Rudolf Steiner, *Was ist und will die neue Bewegungskunst Eurythmie?* (Dornach: Steiner Steiner Verlag, 1979), 9.

[191] Ibid..

[192] Rudolf Steiner, "Weiteres über den Kursus «Sprachgestaltung und dramatische Darstellungskunst» am Goetheanum: Das Bühnenbild und die Regiekunst," in *Marie Steiner Ihr Weg zur Erneuerung der Bühnenkunst durch die Anthroposophie: Ein Dokumentation* (Dornach: Steiner Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1973), 114.

[193] Hans Pusch to Ruth Pusch, 2 February 1931, in *A New Kind of Actor*, 57.

[194] Creese, "Anthroposophical Performance," 54.

> of consciousness from that of the speaker: much more within themselves, they find it difficult to emerge out of themselves and usually hover way up above the situation. Mona and Sonya did a Danish poem together and it was amusing to see how each was moving so completely inside her own small circle….Frau Doctor [another form of address for Steiner-von Sivers] was dissatisfied, both with the reciting and with the eurythmy. I do believe there will be more and more problems with this "togetherness" in the future. Your idea of silent eurythymy is perhaps going to become then a necessary solution.[195]

It is impossible to know whether Hans was in earnest or not when he contemplated silent *Eurythmie*, since variations were entertained and sometimes adopted. For instance, it was not until 1923 that the first attempts were made to train men to be eurythmists. Although I have not found any writings explaining why the Steiners were hesitant to train men in eurythmy, Rudolf Steiner's concern that eurtythmy be perceived as a serious spiritual endeavor may have something to do with this.[196]

Before writing the Mystery Dramas and creating *Eurythmie* and *Sprachgestaltung*, Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers produced the works of Theosophist, playwright, and theatre theorist Edouard Schuré. In May 1907 Steiner produced and directed Steiner-von Sivers's translation of Schuré's *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis,* which Steiner "put into free verse for performance at the [Theosophical] Congress…in Munich"

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[195] Hans Pusch to Ruth Pusch, 18 April 1931, in *A New Kind of Actor*, 85.

[196] Rudolf Steiner and Marie Steiner-von Sivers, *Correspondence and Documents 1901-1925*, translated by Christian and Ingrid von Arnim (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1988), 177, 295 n.

and in which Steiner-von Sivers played the leading role.[197] In August 1909, Steiner directed the premiere of Schuré's *Les Enfants de Lucifer* at the Munich playhouse on 22 August 1909. [198] Schuré's works remained important to Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers throughout their lives. When Steiner-von Sivers became the director of Thespis's Cart after Steiner's death in 1925, she and her performers "specialized in plays denoting the state of the spirit," and *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* and *Les Enfants de Lucifer* were among the plays that suited their mission.[199]

Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers also valued Schuré's theosophical writings about the spiritual evolution of human beings and of theatre. In 1936 the New York Anthroposophic Press published Fred Rothwell's English translation of Schuré's *The Genesis of Tragedy* and *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* in one volume.[200] In 1989, Steinerbooks reprinted *The Great Initiates*, and it is frequently stocked at the Anthroposophical bookstore in New York City, indicating that there is still an interest in Schuré's writings in Anthroposophical circles.

Schuré shared ideas about theatre and spirituality with Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers. Among these is a link between the evolution of theatre and the spiritual evolution of humanity that Schuré speaks about in *The Genesis of Tragedy*:

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[197] Ibid., 282-283 n.

[198] Ibid., 283 n.

[199] Creese, "Anthroposophical Performance," 50.

[200] Edouard Schuré, *The Genesis of Tragedy and The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1936).

> an evolution of the theatre must correspond with this religious and philosophical evolution of humanity, wherein were manifested the spiritual powers that gave it direction.[201]

Schuré wanted humanity to regain contact with these spiritual powers through drama, and he believed that in ancient Greece the combination of tragedy with the ritual drama of Eleusis was an example of a form of theatre that awakened human beings to the potential of these powers. Because Schuré wanted to re-establish this combination in his own era, he was interested in reconstructing the ritual drama of Eleusis, and *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* was an attempt to create such a reconstruction.

Schuré writes that the "Eleusian idea" is the "realization of the divine in the other life [as opposed to 'life on earth'] through the deliverance of the soul which has reached perfection."[202] He explains that Greek tragedy contains the "Promethean idea" of the "realization of the divine in the life on earth"[203] and asserts that a modern initiatory theatre would be possible if:

> its founders and organizers seriously intend to bring about an harmonious synthesis and a new blending between the Promethean idea and the Eleusian idea which were embodied separately by the Greeks in tragedy and in the drama of Eleusis. Manifestly this pre-supposes an organic conception of the Cosmos and a clear idea of the transcendent destiny of mankind,—a conception in which the individual soul, having recovered all its powers, would evolve freely in the three worlds.[204]

According to Schuré, it is only through experiencing the earthly and sub-earthly realms that a purification of the occult initiate's inmost being, a "rising to ethereal spheres, [and]

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[201] Ibid., 14.

[202] Ibid., 251.

[203] Ibid., 261.

[204] Ibid., 262-263.

a marvelous sense of harmony with the Cosmos" becomes possible.[205] *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* dramatizes these three worlds (earthly/mortal, lower/Hades, celestial/Mount Olympus).[206]

With *Les Enfants de Lucifer,* Schuré moved away from reconstructions of ancient forms and strove to create "*le théâtre de l'avenir*."[207] Schuré classifies *Les Enfants de Lucifer* as one of many "*tentatives isolées*" by a new breed of playwright to develop a "*Théâtre du Rêve*" or "*Théâtre de l'Âme*," which will be "*hautement et profondément religieux*" and will attempt to reunite "*l'humain au divin*."

Les Enfants de Lucifer is set in the fourth century CE, and it concerns the fate of a city in Asia Minor named Dionysia, the local deity of which is Dionysus. The town is on the verge of a change, as Caesar takes over the village ostensibly to defend it "*contre ses ennemis*."[208] When it becomes apparent that the Roman Empire and the Church are determined to repress the worship of Dionysus, heroic characters reject Christianity. Cléonice leaves the retreat of the virgins of the desert and the Christian guidance of *Le Père du Désert* after she sees a vision of Lucifer on the altar "*à la place du Christ*" (Edouard Schuré, *Les Enfants de Lucifer*, 72):

> Le Pére: Lucifer!
>
> Cléonice: Oui, Lucifer . . . avec son flambeau et ses ailes! . . . Non, il n'etait pas horrible comme tu le dépeins. Il etait rayonnant et beau comme

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[205] Ibid., 258.

[206] Ibid., 267.

[207] Edouard Schuré, "Le Théâtre de l'Ame," in *Les Enfants de Lucifer & La Soeur Gardienne* (Paris: Librarie Académique, 1922), xiii.

[208] Edouard Schuré's, *Les Enfants de Lucifer*, in *Les Enfants de Lucifer & La Soeur Gardienne*, 16.

le Sauveur, mais plus sombre et plus triste. (ibid., 73)

The representation of Lucifer as a potentially beneficial being resembles both Lucifer's role in Steiner's cosmology and Steiner's own depiction of Lucifer in his Mystery Dramas, which I will discuss later.

Schuré never suggests that *Le Enfants de Lucifer* or *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* constitutes the successful creation of an initiatory theatre. Rather, he declares this to be "the task of the future creator of the idealist theatre,"[209] and Schuré believed Steiner would bring the world closer to that theatre. After seeing the first performance of the *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis*, Schuré wrote that Steiner "recognized and confirmed" what he had "seen and represented unconsciously," and he stated that "it is one of those very cherished moments in the creative life of the artist when he meets someone who recognizes and knows that he is drawing what he says from spiritual vision."[210] Judging by their tendency to explicate the spiritual basis of the theatre that they created and their preference for representing phenomena that they perceived as spiritually real, it would seem that Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers drew a great deal of inspiration from Schuré's writings.

Geothe's works helped Steiner develop and communicate his own cosmology. Steiner became an expert on Goethe's writings on "botany, zoology, geology, and the theory of color,"[211] and between 1890 and 1897 he edited Goethe's scientific writings at

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[209] Schuré, *Genesis of Tragedy & The Sacred Drama of Eleusis*, 263.

[210] Edouard Schuré, quoted in "Edourd Schuré and *The Great Initiates*," by Paul M. Allen, in *The Great Initiates* (1961; reprint, Hudson, NY: Steinerbooks, 1989), 11.

[211] Rudolf Steiner, Introduction, in *Correspondence and Documents*, 10-11.

the Goethe Archive in Weimar.[212] Steiner believed that a deep familiarity with Goethe's writings would lend him credibility as a teacher of Anthroposophy, for he wanted no one to "be able to say that this esotericist speaks of the spiritual world because he is ignorant of the philosophical and scientific developments of our time."[213] For Steiner, Goethe represented his commitment to pursuing spiritual interests with science in mind, and his debt to Goethe for his own worldview was so powerful that he named the *Goetheanum* to acknowledge "the identity he felt between his and Goethe's spiritual-scientific work" and "the importance of "*Goetheanism*" as a concept in . . . [his] own thought."[214]

Steiner was not only inspired by Goethe's scientific writings; he also drew inspiration from Goethe's fiction and dramatic literature. *Geisteswissenschaftliche Erläuterungen zu Goethe's «Faust»* is a two-volume collection of lectures on Goethe's *Faust* in which Steiner relates *Faust* to Anthroposophical tenets. Volume one contains a lecture given in Dornach on 11 September 1916, entitled "*Goethes Aufsuchen der Tiefen des Werdens und der Weltgeheimnisse in seinem «Faust». Die luziferische und die ahrimanische Verführung.*" Steiner gave this lecture after a eurythmic presentation of the "*Mitternacht*" and "*Grablegung*" scenes from *Faust Part II*.[215] Here Steiner examined

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[212] *Correspondence and Documents*, 268 n.

[213] Steiner, Introduction, in *Correspondence and Documents*, 14.

[214] Carlson, *"No Religion Higher Than Truth,"* 101.

[215] Rudolf Steiner, "Goethes Aufsuchen der Tiefen des Werdens und der Weltgeheimnisse in seinem «Faust». Die luziferische und die ahrimanische Verführung," in *Geisteswissenschaftlische Erläuterungen zu Goethe's «Faust»*, vol. 1 (1931; reprint, Dornach: Verlag der Steiner Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1967), 298.

Faust not as a simple dramatic epic, but as a text that penetrates the "*tiefste menschliche Geheimnisse*."[216]

In this lecture, Steiner viewed the conflicts facing the characters as manifestations of the "Luziferische" and "Ahrimanische" impulses, and he interpreted Faust as a human being in whom the Luciferian and the Ahrimanic becomes balanced. Indeed, Steiner asserted that Goethe developed a cosmology that was in agreement with that of Anthroposophy, and he read *Faust* as a depiction of the "Erstarkung, Erkraftung der Persönlichkeit"[217] through Arhimanic confrontations that are a necessary trial of the soul leading to spiritual enlightenment. To clarify the connections that he perceived between *Faust* and his own Anthroposophical worldview, Steiner connected the spiritual characters in *Faust* to the spiritual entities of Anthroposophy.

For instance, in his lecture, Steiner refers to Mephistopheles as "Mephistopheles-Ahriman," and interprets the blindness with which Sorge strikes Faust as an example of the way that both Ahriman and Lucifer interact in the lives of people. Steiner interprets Faust's verbal reaction to blindness in the "*Mitternacht*" scene of *Faust II* as representative of the process by which the human being gains supersensible, as opposed to physical, vision. Upon experiencing loss of vision, Faust says "*Allein im Innern leuchtet helles Licht*,"[218] and Steiner suggests that this means Faust has acquired clairvoyance. Steiner says that by paralyzing the Ahrimanic impulse in Faust and

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[216] Ibid., 304.

[217] Ibid., 312.

[218] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust II*, in *Sämtliche Werke: Letzte Jahre, 1827-1832*, vol. 18.1, eds. Gisela Henckmann & Dorothea Hölscher-Lohmeyer (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1997), 351.

removing his ability to perceive the physical world, *Sorge* renders Faust highly sensitive to the spiritual, non-physical Luciferian impulse. The result is a sudden image of his inner spiritual state and the spiritual beings that interact with him. In Steiner's opinion, the physical blindness benefits Faust because it stirs his powers to perceive the supersensible.

The Mystery Dramas contain a scene in which the relationships between Ahriman and human beings are presented via the theme of blindness. In Scene Eight of *The Guardian of the Threshold,* during which several characters walk about aimlessly in Ahriman's domain, Steiner's stage directions specify:

> All the persons who at the beginning of the play were assembled in the ante-room of the mystic league now appear on the scene. . . . The words they speak live in their souls, but they know nothing of them. They are experiencing during sleep unconscious dreams which are audible in Ahriman's kingdom.[219]

According to H. Collison, who attended and assisted in the first performances of the Mystery Dramas in Munich,[220] the actors who played the unconscious characters in this scene were "blindfolded to show their ignorance of the fact that they [were] in Ahriman's kingdom."[221] Unlike Faust at the end of *Faust*, these characters are not yet capable of

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[219] Rudolf Steiner, *The Guardian of the Threshold*, in *Four Mystery Dramas*, trans. H. Collison, S.M.K. Gandell, and R.T. Gladstone, vol. 2 (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1920), 102.

[220] H. Collison, Introduction to *Four Mystery Dramas* vol. 1, vi.

[221] Collison, addition to stage directions in his translation of *The Guardian of the Threshhold* (based upon what he saw in a performance), in *Four Mystery Dramas vol. 2*, 102.

perceiving every aspect of the supersensible realm and are therefore unaware of the influence that Ahriman exerts in their lives.

Goethe's *Das Märchen* had a more direct impact upon the Mystery Dramas than his *Faust*. In his 1899 essay "The Character of Goethe's Spirit as Shown in the Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily," Steiner asserts that Goethe wrote *Das Märchen* to explore two spiritual insights: (1) the connection between "the events of . . . life that cannot be explained by the laws of the physical world; (2) the capacity of the human soul to free itself "from the ideas which come only from the perceptions of the senses and of grasping a supersensory world in a purely spiritual contemplation."[222] Steiner thereby suggested that Goethe was an occultist capable of perceiving the supersensible realm and that *Das Märchen* is an occult text containing representations of spiritual beings that are more than symbols or allegories:

> Goethe is moving with the personalities of his story, not in the realm of abstract concepts, but among *supersensory* [Steiner's emphasis] perceptions. What is to be said here about these figures and their experiences is not intended as if it were asserting: This or that has this or that *meaning*. Any such inclination toward a symbolic explanation is utterly remote from these studies.[223]

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[222] Rudolf Steiner, "The Character of Goethe's Spirit as Shown in the Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily," trans. Adam Bittleston, in *The Time is at Hand!: The Rosicrucian Nature of Goethe's Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily and the Mystery Dramas of Steiner Steiner*, (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1995), 103, 160-61.

[223] Ibid., 161-162.

Steiner stressed the need for the reader to acquire "the organs through which the student can share in the same air that Goethe breathed spiritually when he wrote the story," and he asserted that the characters who appear in *Das Märchen* are not "philosophical ideas," but, rather, real spiritual forces and beings which existed in Goethe's soul.[224] Steiner's claims for the characters in *Das Märchen* are similar to those he made for the spiritual beings appearing in the Mystery Dramas. Like Goethe's characters, Steiner asserted that the spiritual beings represented in his plays were not allegories or symbols, but, rather, entities that are as real for anyone capable of perceiving "the spiritual world as reality" as are physical beings in the "sense-world."[225]

Some scholarly evidence contradicts Steiner's assertion about Goethe's spiritual intentions and perceptions when he wrote *Das Märchen*. In his 1972 translation and adaptation of *Das Märchen*, Waltraud Bartscht states that, "as much as Goethe delighted in hearing or telling such stories [fairy tales], he did not take them very seriously."[226] However, the accuracy of Steiner's assertions about Goethe are less relevant here than the reasons that he made them—to promulgate the existence of a supersensible realm and to argue that art was an effective means of realistically representing these perceptions. Establishing these ideas was important for Steiner, whose authority as a spiritual teacher was based in large part upon the assertion that he could perceive the supersensible realm. For people to believe that his Mystery Dramas are realistic pictures of the supersensible

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[224] Ibid., 162.

[225] Rudolf Steiner, *The Guardian of the Threshold,* in *Four Mystery Plays*, trans. H. Collison, S.M.K. Gandell, and R.T. Gladstone vol. 2 (New York, Knickerbocker Press, 1920), 6.

[226] Waltraud Bartscht, *Goethe's "Das Marchen": Translation and Analysis* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 38.

realm, they first must believe that such a realm exists and that art can effectively reveal aspects of that realm.

Since he argued that Goethe and he shared an insight into the same supersensible world, it is not surprising that Steiner modeled his first Mystery Drama, *The Portal of Initiation*, upon *Das Märchen.* In "The Character of Goethe's Spirit" Steiner defines what he believes to be the inner essence of each character in *Das Märchen.* He states that the old Man with the Lamp "is the one upon whose guidance and leadership everything depends," because he knows all the secrets and mysteries that will affect the other characters in the story. Steiner associates the Green Snake with the sensory realm and Lilie with the supersensory realm. The Young Man is viewed as "the aspiration toward the condition really worthy of humanity"[227]—a condition made possible by the correct relationship between the sensory and the supersensory that results in a "soul that is free." Finally, the Will-o'-the-Wisps possessed a wisdom that was detached from the sensory world and "wandering in superstition or confused thought."[228]

A quick glance over the character list contained in an early draft of *The Portal of Initiation* illuminates connections between Steiner's Mystery Dramas and *Das Märchen*. Although the characters in this earlier draft are the same ones who appear in the final version, in the early draft Steiner gives several of the characters two names. The first name appears in the final version of the play, and the second is lifted from the character names in *Das Märchen*:

Johannes Thomasius

Mensch

[227] Steiner, "Goethe's Spirit," 163.

[228] Ibid., 162, 170.

Maria

Lilie

. . . . . .

Professor Capesius

Erstes Irrlicht

Doktor Strader

Zweites Irrlicht

Felix Balde . . .

Der Mann mit der Lampe

. . . . . .

Die Andre Maria . . .

Schlange[229]

If one is familiar with the characters listed above, the action of the Mystery Dramas, and Steiner's interpretation of the characters from *Das Märchen*, one can gain a deeper understanding of the Mystery Dramas. For example, because Johannes is also called "*Mensch*" by Steiner, we know that, according to Steiner's interpretation of the Young Man in *Das Märchen*, Johannes is trying to develop a balance between the sensory and

[229] Steiner Steiner, *Entwürfe zu dem Rosenkreuzermysterium: Die Pforte der Einweihung* (Dornach: Steiner Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1954), 11-12.

the supersensory in order to free his soul.[230] Maria's connection to Lilie in *Das Märchen* is shown in Maria's effect on Johannes, which is similar to the effect that Lilie has on the Young Man in *Das Märchen,* who complains of Lilie's influence over him:

> Is it not much sadder and more frightful to be paralyzed by her presence than to perish by her hand? . . . I am just as naked and needy as any mortal, for so fatal is the influence of her beautiful blue eyes that they take away the strength from every living creature; and those who are not killed by the touch of her hand feel reduced to the condition of living shadows.[231]

Similarly, in the early draft of *The Portal of Initiation*, Johannes (*Mensch*) laments the simultaneously draining and alluring effect of Maria's presence:

> *Mensch [Johannes]*. So leider ist es.
>
> Ich fühle wie hinweggezaubert
> Der Seele frühres Feuer.
> Und stumpf nur schaut mein Auge
> Den Glanz der Dinge und der Wesen,
> Den Sonnenlicht verbreitet über sie.[232]

Johannes is drained of his life energy and simultaneously engrossed in Maria in the same way that Lilie affects the Young Man in *Das Märchen*.

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[230] Steiner, "Goethe's Spirit," 162.

[231] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Das Märchen*, in *Goethe's "Das Marchen": Translation and Analysis*, 89-90.

[232] Steiner, *Entwürfe*, 20-22.

The characters named Strader and Capesius in Steiner's play are referred to as *Irrlicht*, showing that they are analogous with Goethe's Will-o'-the-Wisps. Capesius and Strader wander about in a state of confused thought, intentionally detaching themselves from the sensory world, which is behavior that Steiner attributed to the Will-o'-the-Wisps.[233] Like *Der Mann mit der Lampe*, Felix Balde is a person who understands many mysteries and upon whom everyone depends for guidance and leadership.[234] The snake of *Das Märchen* proclaims her wish: "to sacrifice myself before I shall be sacrificed."[235] For Steiner, this serpent is connected to the sensory realm and life experiences that must be sacrificed if one is to perceive the supersensory world.[236] After sacrificing itself, the snake is transformed into "a beautiful circle of luminous gems";[237] Steiner adapts this sacrifice in *The Portal of Initiation* through the actions of the character known as "The Other Maria," a character that is the counterpart to Maria's supersensory nature and who sacrifices herself so that Maria can enter the supersensory realm. H. Collison writes that during the 1910 production of *The Portal of Initiation* in Munich, The Other Maria emerged "from the rocks, covered with precious stones"[238] after sacrificing herself; this is in direct relation to the transformation of Goethe's snake.

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[233] Steiner, "Goethe's Spirit," 170.

[234] Ibid., 163.

[235] Goethe, *Das Märchen,* 99.

[236] Steiner, "Goethe's Spirit," 164.

[237] Goethe, *Das Märchen*, 100.

[238] H. Collison, addition to stage directions to *The Portal of Initiation*, in *Four Mystery Dramas*, 74.

The connections between *Das Märchen* and the Mystery Dramas are so significant that Anthroposophists continue to write and lecture about them. In the 1995 book *The Time is at Hand!: The Rosicrucian Nature of Goethe's Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily and the Mystery Dramas of Steiner Steiner*, Paul Marshall Allen and Joan Deris Allen encourage readers of Steiner's Mystery Dramas to familiarize themselves with *Das Märchen* and Steiner's interpretation of it, because "penetration into the essence of Goethe's Fairy Tale . . . led Steiner to write his first drama, *The Portal of Initiation.*"[239] The Allens believe that that the study of these writings will show that the Mystery Dramas possess a "profound, even transforming effect on those who willingly open themselves to them."[240]

Comparing all who encounter the Mystery Dramas to Goethe's characters in *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, who are told by an old clergyman that *Das Märchen* will remind them of "everything or of nothing," Allen and Allen ask:

> In short, do we not resemble some of those who listened to the old clergyman's tale that evening long ago? Gradually it becomes clear to us that all depends upon each one's stage of *inner maturity* [the Allens' emphasis], if what is read or seen in the Goethe Fairy Tale or in the Mystery Dramas will become "everything" or will remain "nothing" to us.
>
> Today's civilization, because of its denial of the reality of the spiritual world, weakens and finally blocks the recognition of the spirit's working in each human soul. On the other hand, if this recognition exists

[239] Paul Marshall Allen & Joan Deris Allen, "From the Goethe Fairy Tale to the Mystery Dramas of Steiner Steiner," in *The Time is at Hand!*, 111.

[240] Ibid., 114.

> within one as a living, operative power, this in turn eliminates the "nothing" and makes way for the "everything," as the morning sunlight disperses the mists of night's darkness.[241]

The passage above implies that, if *Das Märchen* and the Mystery Dramas mean "nothing" to the reader/spectator, then the spectator exists in a state of inner immaturity. As the Allens' essay indicates, some Anthroposophists feel that the reception of these works by Steiner and Goethe give insight into the spiritual development of the reader, and literary and dramatic analysis are used as a tool for spiritual self-examination in Anthroposophical circles.

The Mystery Dramas in Performance Today

At the time of my visit to the Goetheanum during the *Weihnachten 2000* Conference, subtitled "Reinkarnation und Individualität," I had the opportunity to view the performance of all four of Steiner Steiner's Mystery Dramas within the space that had been specifically designed for these plays. The design of the *Goetheanum* reinforces the representations of spiritual forces in the Mystery Dramas. Following in the tradition of the ill-fated first *Goetheanum*, the second *Goetheanum* is designed to physically complement the Mystery Plays, *Eurythmie*, and *Sprachgestaltung*. Steiner asserted that the ideal theatre for the Mystery Dramas would contain walls that would "give their assent" and paintings that "add their approval" to presentations of *Eurythmie* or the

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[241] Ibid., 115-116.

Mystery Dramas.[242] These principles were realized in the design of the new *Goetheanum,* with its curvilinear walls, monochromatic stained-glass windows, and the painted murals on the ceiling that contain figures who appear on stage during the Mystery Dramas. In particular, Lucifer and Arhriman are present in the window, murals, and Mystery Drama performances of the *Goetheanum*.

The brilliant hues of the stained-glass windows match the colors of the spiritual realms, which frequently invade the less spectacular physical realm of the dramatic world of the Mystery Dramas. For instance, the prelude to *The Portal of Initiation* was set in a living room with a sofa, a couch, and other items that would normally be found in such an environment. However, the walls of the living room did not match the height of the proscenium, leaving several feet of exposed space between the top of the living room wall and the peak of the proscenium opening. In this exposed area was a cyclorama decorated with esoteric symbols that resembled symbols on the stained-glass windows. Throughout the four dramas, domestic settings were often placed in front of backdrops decorated with esoteric symbols, and this contrast of the mundane and the cosmic suggested an immense, unfathomable macrocosm silently enveloping and influencing the physical microcosm.

In the Mystery Dramas, scenes set in the physical world are relatively static and usually depict conversations about revelations that the students of the occult experience while meditating or viewing something taking place in the supersensory realm. Scenes taking place in supersensory regions involve more dynamic movement, dialogue, and

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[242] Rudolf Steiner, *The Architectural Conception of the Goetheanum*, cited in Rex Raab, Arne Klingborn, and Ake Fant, *Eloquent Concrete* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1979), 32.

scenery than those taking place on the physical plane of existence. In Scene Five of *The Soul's Awakening*, for instance, Steiner calls for a colorful and visually striking mise en scène:

> The spirit realm. The scene is set in floods of significant color, reddish deepening fiery red above, blue merging into dark blue and violet blue below. In the lower part there is an earth-globe which has the effect of being a symbol. The figures that appear seem to blend blend into a complete whole with the colours. On the left of the stage the group of gnomes as in Scene 2, in front of them, Hilary, and in the immediate foreground the soul-forces.[243]

The hierophant Benedictus's connection to the spirit realm is demonstrated by his costume, which reproduces "in miniature the configuration of the entire scenery." Maria's spiritual elevation and disconnection from concerns of material existence are demonstrated by her wings and the intentional use of the scenery to conceal her feet (Steiner, *The Soul's Probation*, 221-222). Thus, a complex interrelationship between the colors, costumes, scenery, and concealment of body parts represents the spiritual development of each character. Steiner called for such conventions in all of the Mystery Dramas, prescribing different types of costume and scenery for each alternate plane of existence and each different incarnation.

Many of the scene designs for all of the Mystery Plays that I saw bore a strong visual similarity to the photographs of past productions at the *Goetheanum* published in

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[243] Rudolf Steiner, *The Soul's Awakening*, in *Four Mystery Plays*, 215.

books and journals.[244] The Anthroposophical scene designers adhere to an Anthroposophical visual style—just as the actors, eurythmists, and vocal performers adhere to Anthroposophical performance style. The costume designers also followed the original Anthroposophical vision of Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers, for the actors portraying Lucifer and Ahriman resembled the figures in the stained-glass windows of the *Goetheanum* auditorium. Although Lucifer appears as a woman in the Mystery Dramas and as a man in the green window at the south of the auditorium, these two figures had a similar visual relationship to the environment in which they lived. On stage, Lucifer fit seamlessly into her environment by way of a red, flowing robe with flame-like patterns cut into it that blended into the fiery scenery. In the green stained-glass window, Lucifer is depicted in much the same way, blending into his environment by way of a flowing "robe" of fire that surrounds his body. The actor playing Ahriman was little more than a reconstruction of the form of Ahriman in the green stained-glass window at the north of the auditorium. Like the shade of the window, the actor playing Ahriman wore green makeup, and his head, ears, and chin were unnaturally lengthened with latex extensions, making him nearly identical to the figure of Ahriman in the window.

The music that contemporary Anthroposophical composer Jürgen Schriefer wrote for the *Weihnachten 2000* performances indicated supersensible beings and events. In the *Weihnachten 2000* program Heinz Bähler, conductor of the *Goetheanum* orchestra, asserted that Schriefer's music grew out of the composer's "*Leben mit den Dramen und*

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[244] See *Marie Steiner Ihr Weg zur Erneuerung der Bühnenkunst durch die Anthroposophie: Eine Dokumentation* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1973); *Mysteriendramen am Goetheanum: Rudolf Steiner und die Neue Bühnenkunst* (Dornach: Philsophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1973); Creese, "Anthroposophical Performance," *TDR*.

der Anthroposophie" and offered insight into why specific moments were accompanied by music.[245] Bähler explained that not every scene of the Mystery Dramas should begin and end with music and cited specific points in the performances to illustrate his point. For example, Bähler mentioned Scene One of *The Soul's Probation*, in which spiritual beings appear to Capesius. This scene opened without music as Capesius perused a book in his library, and Bähler explains that the beginning contained no music because it took place solely in the physical sphere of existence. According to Bähler, music functioned in a purely "*übersinnlichen*" capacity in these performances, by musically preparing and materializing spiritual events in the play.[246]

Sprachgestaltung also added to the spiritual atmosphere of the *Weihnachten 2000* productions. The extremity of vocal stylization differed according to the type of character speaking, the character's state of consciousness, and the realm in which the character was discovered. Generally, human characters who entered a trance state while inhabiting the physical realm spoke slowly, drawing out their vowels. This ghostly tone gave the impression that the character's psyche was caught somewhere between the sensory and the supersensory realm. For example, in Scene One of *The Portal of Initiation* Theodora receives a communication from the spiritual sphere and, deep in a trance, delivers it to a group of listeners in an extremely slow tone. Human characters also spoke with exaggerated slowness and extremely crisp enunciation when discovered in other alternative spheres of existence. When solidly grounded in the physical plane,

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[245] Heinz Bähler, "Die Musik Jürgen Schriefers zu den Mysteriendramen," in "Die Vier Mysteriendramen" (program, performances of Rudolf Steiner's four Mystery Dramas between 24 December 2000 and 1 January 2001), n.pag.

[246] Ibid.

human characters spoke with more natural rhythms and tones, although their clear, crisp, and melodic pronunciation was far from naturalistic.

Non-human characters such as Lucifer and Ahriman always expressed themselves with exaggerated vocal techniques that were far more dynamic in rhythm, tone, and pitch than the trance-like rhythms of the human characters. Lucifer's melodious, shifting tones and her extraordinary volume could be justifiably described as operatic. Ahriman also proved a vocal dynamo, with a gruff and sinister tone that perfectly suited the demonic character.

Of course, *Sprachgestaltung* was blended with *Eurythmy* at *Weihnachten 2000*. Elsemarie ten Brink, the eurythmist who portrayed the character named Philia, mentions that three female characters (Philia, Astrid and Luna), who appear in Scene One of *The Portal of Initiation* as physical beings, were played by eurythmists who reappear in Scene Seven as spiritual beings who aid in the "*Verbindung der menschlichen Seelenkräften mit dem Kosmos*."[247] This transformation from physical beings into spiritual beings was achieved in the following manner: (a) in the opening scenes the eurythmists spoke their own lines, dressed in conventional clothing; (b) in Scene Seven, the eurythmists appeared in wind-resistant, flowing gowns covered with a layer of transparent silk and a circular headpiece resembling an aura. They performed movements in silence while *Sprachgestaltung* artists recited their lines from the side of the stage apron, wearing neutral, gray clothing. The grey clothing that the vocal performers wore prevented them from distracting the audience from the eurythmists. The almost weightless material that the eurythmists wore moved slowly through the air, enhanced their flowing arm

[247] ElseSteiner-von Sivers ten Brink, "Über die Arbeit an den Seelenkräften die neue Eurhythmie in den Mysteriendramen," in "Die Vier Mysteriendramen" (program), n. pag.

movements, and gave the impression of a trace of light following closely behind the moving arm's trajectory. The seemingly weightless movements of the eurythmists' arms, coupled with the airiness of the costume, suggested a non-physical being, unhindered by earthly gravity.

In his 1978 *TDR* article, "Anthroposophical Performance," Robb Creese writes that the Mystery Dramas "were never intended for entertainment of society."[248] Indeed, Steiner had no intention of inviting the audience to passively "take in" a show when he produced his Mystery Dramas. Whether they were viewing an Anthroposophical lecture or theatrical presentation, Steiner encouraged his audience to encounter the presentation in a heightened state of consciousness. Andrei Bely's comments about Steiner's recommendation to those who came to hear his lectures offers insight into the demands that Steiner made of his audiences when it came to presentations of the tenets of Anthroposophy:

> He [Steiner] demanded that people gather in silence some time before the beginning of his lectures; here he addressed higher faculties; he spoke as higher self to higher self. To arrive at the lecture straight from the everyday rush meant the same to him as to arrive too late for communion, to push through the crowd in haste and rush up to the chalice.[249]

At the very least, Steiner desired that his audience be prepared for serious contemplation before they heard a lecture. He probably would have desired as much from the audience members who came to see the Mystery Dramas, a *Eurythmie* performance, or

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[248] Creese, "Anthroposophical Performance," 52.

[249] Belyi, 56.

Sprachgestaltung recital, because he considered all of these to be communications to the higher self.

Richard Rosenheim suggests that there is a specific state of mind that people must be in, if they are to be spiritually edified by the Mystery Dramas, writing that, in order to "appreciate the specific character and designation of these plays, one first has to seek for a right interpretation of what in the esoteric language of all times and zones was known as meditation."[250] Indeed, Steiner hoped that the spectator would strive for "complete identification with the chosen object"[251] when watching the Mystery Dramas—the chosen objects, in the case of these plays, are the initiates struggling to achieve supersensory comprehension of existence and the supernatural forces and entities that they encounter along the way. Steiner lectured that the spectator must *be* the character in order to experience the initiation process by watching his plays.[252]

Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers sometimes interpreted applause as a sign that the audience did not receive Anthroposophical performance in a sufficiently serious state of mind. In a letter that Steiner-von Sivers wrote to Steiner on 9 October 1924, she wonders if the abundance of applause at a performance in Hanover indicated that the audience was absorbed or largely composed of "opponents."[253] The audience of the *Weihnachten 2000* performances of the Mystery Dramas refrained from applause until the end of the fourth dramas given on the final day of the conference.

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[250] Rosenheim, *The Eternal Drama,* 269.

[251] Ibid., 270.

[252] Steiner, *Über die Mysteriendramen*, 21.

[253] Steiner-von Sivers Steiner to Steiner Steiner, 9 October 1924, in *Correspondence and Documents*, 227.

Anthroposophical Theatre and Symbolist Theatre

I have demonstrated that the theatre artists who produced the *Weihnachten 2000* performances of the Mystery Dramas stayed as true as possible to Steiner's and Steiner-von Sivers's prescriptions for the appropriate design and performance style for the Mystery Dramas. Likewise, they continue the performance traditions of *Eurythmie* and *Sprachgestaltung* in accordance with the ideas of the two founders of Anthroposophical performance. Their faithfulness to the aesthetics of these performance forms has resulted in the preservation of avant-garde theatre techniques of the late nineteenth-and early twentieth century. These similarities, which I discovered by gathering information about Steiner and Steiner-von Sivers's theatrical work, examining the text of the Mystery Dramas, reading descriptions of symbolist theatre in France, and, finally, by seeing the Mystery Dramas performed, suggest that the Anthroposophical performances in Dornach are a valuable research tool for theatre scholars who study turn-of-the-century avant-garde performance in France, because they may give insight into what symbolist theatre of late nineteenth-century France looked like in performance.

Frantisek Deak lists various theatrical practices that were associated with symbolist theatre in the late nineteenth century in Paris that bear an affinity to the performances that I witnessed at the *Goetheanum*. Among these practices are "verbal orchestration," "a recitational acting style" that was "a constant principle of staging . . . in symbolist acting in general," "slow movements," "ritualistic behavior," a resemblance between iconography in the visual arts and the actors on stage, an "emphasis on imagination, inner life, hidden reality, and spiritual aspiration," and, finally, the

representation of the "ideas of mysticism" to an "initiated audience."[254] All of the above characteristics of symbolist theatre were present in performances that I saw at *Weihnachten 2000*. Verbal orchestration was central to the Speech Choir that performed *Sprachgestaltung* at a *Eurythmie* performance. The methods of *Sprachgestaltung* that underlie the vocal style of the actors in the play rendered the Anthroposophical acting style recitational. Both the actors and the eurythmists moved more slowly than would actors in naturalistic theatre who were imitating everyday behavior. The scenes depicting initiation rituals incorporated ritualized behavior into the action. The relationship between the images of Ahriman and Lucifer in the stained glass windows and the actors who portrayed them on stage suggests the symbolist tendency to create resemblances between actors and figures in visual art. Finally, Steiner's demand that the audience come to the performance prepared for meditative contemplation shows that he longed for initiated audience members.

Another affinity between Steiner's theatrical tradition and that of the European symbolist movement is his tendency toward medievalism. The qualities of medievalism are present in his Mystery Dramas. For instance, Scenes Six through Nine of *The Soul's Probation* depict a past incarnation that is based upon the legend of the Knights Templar, and Steiner's description of all of his Mystery Dramas as Rosicrucian dramas also evinces his tendencies toward medievalism. Steiner participated in the "cult of retrospection" that led symbolists back to medieval plays.[255] By 1917, Steiner had

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[254] Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 171-177.

[255] Daniel Gerould, "The Art of Symbolist Drama: A Re-Assessment," in *Doubles, Demons, and Dreamers: An International Collection of Symbolist Drama* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1985), 10.

sanctioned a Paradise Play, a Shepherds Play, and a Kings Play, which he believed to have been written during the medieval period, as appropriate for performance in Dornach.[256] In the 1840s, Steiner's teacher, Karl Julius Schröer, collected these plays from various families living on the island of Oberufer, which is on the Danube near Pressburg and close to the borders of Austria and Hungary. According to A.C. Harwood, who translated the plays into English in 1944, German-speaking migrants brought the plays, which they had received from their ancestors, to Oberufer during the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. When Schröer collected the plays, no complete manuscript existed; rather, various families owned manuscripts containing portions of the play. Harwood asserts that, since the German settlers of Oberufer were surrounded by "people of a different nation and speaking a different language," they "preserved unaltered, in a way found in no other similar German plays, both the text itself and the tradition of acting."[257] The Oberufer plays are currently performed at Waldorf schools, which are associated with the Anthroposophical Society and employ Steiner's methods of education. I saw the Paradise Play and the Shepherds Play performed at the Rudolf Steiner School on 79th Street in New York City on 15 December 2004.

Steiner's acquaintance with medieval drama should come as no surprise, since he employed characters in his Mystery Dramas who are frequently found in medieval cycle dramas and passion plays. For instance, Lucifer's appearance as a female temptress in

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[256] Hélène Jacquet, "Editor's Preface," in *Christmas Plays from Oberufer*: *The Paradise Play, The Shepherds Play, The Kings Play*, trans. A.C. Harwood (Bristol: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1993), 11.

[257] A.C. Harwood, "Translator's Preface," in *Christmas Plays from Oberufer* (1944; reprint, 1993), 7.

Steiner's plays is reminiscent of the dramatic device used in the Cornish *Creacion*, wherein Lucifer enters the body of a maiden-faced serpent in order to trick Eve with an alluring visage. H. Collison's enlightening descriptions of the performances of the Mystery Dramas that he wrote after Steiner allowed him "to attend the rehearsals and assist in the performances of the plays" [258] reveal that Ahriman underwent a metamorphosis much like that of Lucifer in the Cornish *Creacion* when *Der Seelen Erwachen* was first produced in Munich. When Collison describes Scene Twelve of the final drama, *The Soul's Awakening*, he writes that Ahriman grew a claw and a cloven hoof to "show the audience that his identity as the Devil was being discovered" [259] by the initiates. As Paula Neuss says of Lucifer in *Creacion*—who becomes ugly after he is expelled from heaven—Ahriman "reduces his stature in the eyes of the audience" through a "process of degeneration." [260] Lucifer's degenerative metamorphosis also appears frequently in medieval paintings of the Temptation.

Philia, Astrid, and Luna, who appear in all four of Steiner's plays, also exhibit medieval dramatic characteristics. In the Scene Thirteen of *The Soul's Probation*, these three "spiritual beings" lead Strader—a struggling initiate—into "The Temple of the Sun." [261] Philia, Astrid, and Luna describe the cosmic forces that are conducted through them and the way in which these forces will benefit Strader's spiritual growth. Philia,

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[99] H. Collison, Introduction to *Four Mystery Dramas* vol. 1, vi.

[259] Collison, addition to the stage directions of *The Soul's Awakening*, in *Four Mystery Dramas*, vol.2, 271.

[101] Paula Neuss, ed. & trans., introduction to *The Creacion of the World: A Critical Edition and Translation* (New York & London: Garland, 1983), xxv-xxvi.

[102] Rudolf Steiner, *The Soul's Probation*, in *Four Mystery Plays*, vol. 1, 266.

filled with "faith's clear power" will channel the spiritual light in order to awaken Strader's soul to the spiritual world. Astrid offers "rays of hope," the power of which will support Strader's soul. Finally, Luna generates "the power of love" by which Strader can set free his soul's "love of light" (Steiner, *The Soul's Probation,* 258). As sources of faith, hope, and love, Philia, Astrid, and Luna resemble the personified virtues that sometimes appear in medieval morality plays.

Liliane Brion-Gufrry argues that Steiner employed a medieval conception referred to as "nécéssité enveloppée" when he designed the first *Goetheanum.*[262] Like a cathedral, the exterior form of the first *Goetheanum* allowed "une évocation mentale immédiate" of the spiritual essence of the building.[263] In *A Short History of Western Performance Space*, David Wiles asserts that Steiner's designs for both *Goetheanums* evinced his interest in "the rich decoration of medieval cathedrals that represented a community endeavor."[264] Thus, even in the architectural ideas that he employed in the construction of his theatre-temple, Steiner proved a medievalist.

Although I have argued Steiner's connection to both symbolist and medieval theatrical practices, in *The Arts and Their Mission* Steiner describes both symbolism and allegory as "inartistic" and asserts that "we must become artists, not symbolists and allegorists, by rising, through spiritual knowledge, more and more into the spiritual world."[265] Steiner did not intend for his theatrical efforts to be viewed as examples of

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[103] Liliane Brion-Gufrry, "La Premiere Goetheanum: Forme Utopique ou Forme Exemplaire?" (n.p., n.d.), 459-460.

[104] Ibid., 460

[105] Wiles, 56.

[106] Steiner, *The Arts and Their Mission,* 112.

symbolist theatre. Rather, he viewed them as "a weak attempt" to create accurate representations of people as they are when "higher spiritual impulses play between them" and when they "are crossed by paths of . . . karma, active through millennia in repeated lives."[266]

Regardless of the distance that Steiner places between himself and symbolist theatre, it is in part because Steiner's followers have religiously kept the performance of the Mystery Dramas as true as possible to Steiner's and Steiner-von Sivers's original vision that the similarities between Anthroposophical theatre and French symbolist theatre have been maintained until the present. Maintaining this vision is important to Steiner's followers, because they accept his claims of possessing the skill of clairvoyance and feel that that skill gave him the knowledge required to create spiritually realistic dramatic representations. To deviate from Steiner's vision might lead to a misrepresentation of the supersensible world and undermine the purpose of the Mystery Dramas.

Rudolf Steiner's Successor

Although the Mystery Dramas and *Faust* are the most frequently performed works at the *Goetheanum*, there is one other writer of original Anthroposophical plays whose works have appeared there, too. This is Albert Steffen (1884-1963), whose works were included in the repertoire of the *Goetheanum* performance group during the 1930s while Steiner-von Sivers was still in charge.[267] Steffen was the editor of the *Goetheanum*

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[107] Ibid., 111.

[108] Hans Pusch to Ruth Pusch, 19 April 1931, *A New Kind of Actor, 87*.

Weekly from 1921 until his death, as well as a poet, novelist, and essayist. In 1925 he became Steiner's successor as President of the Anthroposophical Society.[268]

In 1952, Richard Rosenheim praised Steffen as "the greatest living dramatist and poet of Switzerland"—although Rosenheim's enthusiasm seems connected to his belief in Steffen's mission as playwright to "teach humanity, by word and action, how to live according to the fundamental truths that were revealed to his susceptive mind by Rudolf Steiner." Writing about Steffen's output as a playwright, Rosenheim states:

> In fourteen marvelous dramas he has composed the Iliad and Odyssey of Man, by showing mankind's fighting and suffering for the idea of freedom on the twisted paths of secret and recorded history. Four of these dramas (*The Exodus from Egypt, The Manicheans, Hiram and Solomon, The Death-Experience of Manes*) point to a distant past; six others (*The Four Beasts of the Apocalypse, The Chief of Staff, The Tragedy of Peace, Voyage to Another Land, Pestalozzi, Caroline Guenderrode*) deal with great personalities and problems of that age which died in 1918; four more (*The Downfall of the Anti-Christ, Adonis-Play, Call from the Abyss, The Martyrs*) are devoted to man's future ways of destiny. [269]

Describing Steffen as a poet and seer who uses his "clairvoyant 'moral phantasy' and inspired diction" to write his dramas, Rosenheim asserts that when *Barrabas*—another of Steffen's plays—was first performed in Dornach "its messianic message seized the

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[109] *A NewKind of Actor,* n. 291.

[110] Rosenheim, *The Eternal Drama*, 282.

audience with that powerful impact of purifying awe and pity we recognized … as the unfailing recognition-mark of every genuine Mystery."[270]

Conclusion

After Albert Steffen, no new Anthroposophical mystery dramas were written for performance in the Goetheanum. However, Anthroposophists continue to produce Steiner's Mystery Dramas in Dornach during annual conferences dedicated to teaching and contemplating Steiner's teachings. At these conferences, the Mystery Dramas are accompanied by lectures and presentations in which the plays' central themes are examined and discussed. At the *Weihnachten 2004* conference, the Mystery Dramas were performed and viewed as the "Entwickslungsdrama des modernen Menschen."[271] Thus, Anthroposophists continue to value the performance, analysis, and contemplation of Steiner's Mystery Dramas as tools for spiritual development.

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[111] Ibid.

[112] Goetheanum, "Die Mysteriendramen als Entwickslungdramen des modernen Menschen," http://www.goetheanum-buehne.ch/72.html, (accessed 30 August 2005).

Chapter Four:
Aleister Crowley's *Thelemic* Theatre

Aleister Crowley was one of the most influential occultists of the twentieth century, and his influence is still strong in the twenty-first century. His teachings on ceremonial magic have been incorporated into the programs of many occult organizations. In New York City alone, societies and groups connected to Crowley include the *Astrum Argenteum*, which is the ceremonial magic society that Crowley founded in England in 1909;[272] the Holy Order of Rahoorkhuit; the Order of the Thelemic Golden Dawn; Ordo Sunyata Vajra; the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), a German society founded in 1895 whose leader appointed Crowley head of its English-speaking Lodges in 1912; and the Enchantments Pagan Way Grove, whose members combine Crowley's magical philosophy with pagan ritual.[273]

Crowley differs from the other occult leaders discussed in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, in that he has become an icon in pop-culture, a hero of the counter-culture, and a demonized villain in the tabloid press. For instance, on 24 March 1923 the tabloid periodical *John Bull*, which Keith Richmond described as "the self-appointed moral guardian . . . and . . . chief purveyor of cheap titillation to the British Public" in his writings about Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis*,[274] bestowed upon Crowley the title "The

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[272] Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 194.

[273] Scott Harney, *Esoteric Guide to New York* (New York: Esoteric Guides, 2003), 117-20, 130-36.

[274] Keith Richmond, Introduction, in *The Rites of Eleusis* (Thame and Oxon, Mandrake Press, 1990), 42

Wickedest Man in the World."[275] Not only journalists but also fiction writers created representations of Crowley in their work. W. Somerset Maugham lent many of Crowley's characteristics to the diabolical Oliver Haddo in his 1906 novel, *The Magician*, and Paul Wegener portrayed Haddo in the 1926 silent film version of Maugham's novel.[276] James Branch Cabell, Dion Fortune, Christopher Isherwood, M.R. James, Anthony Powell, H.R. Wakefield, Dennis Wheatley, Colin Wilson, and Robert Anton Wilson have also modeled characters upon Crowley. Rock musicians have referenced Crowley in their work. A photograph of Crowley appears on the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album (1967), and Crowley has been incorporated into songs by the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, David Bowie, Sting, Ozzy Ozbourne, the Clash, and the Cure.[277]

Crowley wrote plays and produced theatre during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Sometimes he ventured into purely commercial theatrical production, as when he produced a follies review called *The Ragged Ragtime Girls* in 1913.[278] He viewed the rituals of ceremonial magic that he taught to his students as plays, and he spoke about the rehearsal process and the composition of these rituals in theatrical and dramatic terms. Crowley also used plays and prefaces to plays to propagate his ideas.

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[275] "The Wickedest Man in the World," *John Bull,* (24 March, 1923; Lashtal.com, 2004), http://www.lashtal.com/nuke/index.php?module=subjects&func=viewpage&pageid=18, 13 June 2005.

[276] Rex Ingram, *The Magician*, MGM, 1926; 71 minutes.; 35 mm. Shown at the Walter Reade Theatre, NYC, 11 May 2005.

[277] Sutin, 3.

[278] Ibid., 232.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how and to what end Crowley used theatre to promote his spiritual beliefs and to demonstrate some of the ways that his tradition of spiritual theatre continues into the present. I divide this chapter into five sections. In the first section, I give an overview of the development of Crowley's spiritual teachings and practices. The second section is the major section of the paper, in which I show how Crowley used theatre and drama to express his beliefs. In the third section, I discuss how Crowley included theatre into his conception of ceremonial magic ritual. I discuss the practices of a currently active Lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis that continues Crowley's theatrical tradition today in the fourth section. In the fifth section, I show connections between Crowley's theatre and the European symbolist movement and demonstrate how the dramatic tradition that he initiated has brought modernist avant-garde techniques into the present day occult theatre.

History, Beliefs, and Practices of *Thelema*

Aleister Crowley called his spiritual *worldview* "*Thelema*," which is Greek for "Will,"[279] and Crowley presents *Thelema* as an alternative to Christianity—especially the literalist and fundamentalist brand of the Plymouth Brethren, the strict denomination in which his parents raised him. As Israel Regardie, Crowley's secretary and friend, observed, Crowley's "hatred of Christianity was not a blind unreasoned prejudicial emotion" but a response that was "indelibly rooted in his own personal experience" and "added to by extensive study and research all throughout his adult years."[280] The leadership of the Plymouth Brethren in Warwickshire convinced his father, Edward

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[279] Ibid., 3, 410.

[280] Israel Regardie, introduction, *The World's Tragedy*, vii.

Crowley, not to have a necessary operation to cure cancer of the tongue—a decision that proved fatal.[281] After his father's death, twelve-year-old Crowley was sent to a school founded for the Sons of Brethren, where in his first year he was falsely accused of having been drunk at home during the Christmas break and was subjected to severe corporal and psychological punishment, including paddling, a diet of bread and water, and isolation from his fellow students for "a term and a half." This punishment resulted in trauma to his kidneys, and he had to leave school for two years in order to recuperate.[282]

In his early adulthood Crowley began a lifelong pursuit of magic and the occult. In 1898, he was admitted into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in London by the head of the organization, MacGregor Mathers. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was an initiatory society of Western magic whose members were trained in tarot card divination, astrology, Rosicrucian legend, and the Cabbala. One of the most well-known magical secret societies of its time, membership in the Golden Dawn was sought after by highly creative individuals, including William Butler Yeats, Annie Horniman (the patron of the Abbey Theatre), author Arthur Machen, and Dion Fortune and A.E. Waite, both of whom were renowned experts on the occult in their own time.[283] I will give examples of the impact of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in more detail later.

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[281] Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography* (1969; reprint; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 52-53.

[282] Aleister Crowley, preface, *The World's Tragedy* (1910; reprint, Scottsdale, AZ: New Falcon Publications, 1991), xvi-xvii.

[283] Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn: A Complete Course in Practical Ceremonial Magic* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1995), xvii-xxx, 1-25, rear cover; Sutin, 23.

Crowley's domineering personality, which earned him many enemies throughout his life, led to his eventual break with the Golden Dawn. Among Crowley's fellow order members was William Butler Yeats, who would later become one of Crowley's foes.[284] In *Yeats's Ghosts*, Brenda Maddox writes of a confrontation that took place between Yeats and Crowley in 1900 when Crowley tried to obtain documents on behalf of Mathers, who was residing in Paris. The confrontation occurred because Yeats and other members of the order determined to take over operations of the organization after deciding that they did not trust Mather's authority to be the leader of the Golden Dawn. The details of the event are colorful:

> One internecine fight within the Golden Dawn has become legendary as "The Battle of Blythe Road." For several days in late April 1900, Yeats stood watch at the London temple of the Second Order of the Golden Dawn. The temple was located upstairs in a dingy three-story premises. . . . Yeats, with a fellow member who was an amateur boxer, lay in wait to block the expected forced entry of the flamboyant mystic and magician Aleister Crowley. Crowley, whom the order had rejected as an initiate, was intent on taking possession of the temple's secret rituals. In due course the invader arrived, suitably dressed for the adventure in a black mask, a MacGregor tartan kilt, a gilt pectoral cross, and a dagger at his knee. But Yeats and his companion repelled him—apparently by throwing him down the stairs.[285]

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[284] Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 165-66.

[285] Brenda Maddox, *Yeats's Ghosts: The Secret Life of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Perennial, 1999), 12.

The Second Order of the Golden Dawn was the inner order of the Golden Dawn into which only advanced adepts were admitted, and by being denied initiation into this group, Crowley felt that he was wrongly deprived of a right that he had earned by quickly rising through the ranks of the Outer Order of the Golden Dawn. These events resulted in Crowley's permanent break with the Golden Dawn.

However, Crowley continued his study of ceremonial magic and the occult and digested a huge body of writings from the Western esoteric tradition, including the legends of King Solomon and Hermes Trismegistus and numerous works associated with Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Alchemy, Rosicrucianism, and Freemasonry.[286] The most decisive event in Crowley's career occurred between 8 and 10 April 1904, when he received a message in the form of a book dictated to him by Aiwass, a being that Crowley believed was "superior to any of the human race" and "so entitled to speak with authority."[287] The work that Aiwass dictated to Crowley was entitled *The Book of the Law*, and it contained the central teachings of "The Law of *Thelema,*"[288] which Crowley taught to his contemporaries and which remain significant to his current followers.

Crowley's pronouncement of *Thelema* as the watchword of the new aeon was inspired by Rabelais's depiction of an ideal community named *Theleme* in *Gargantua* (1534), and Crowley argued that Rabelais had predicted his own rise to power as a spiritual leader

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[286] Sutin, 5.

[287] Aleister Crowley, Introduction, *The Book of the Law* (1938; reprint, USA: Capital City Press, 1989), 5.

[288] Ibid., 9.

when he wrote *Gargantua*.[289] For Crowley, *Thelema* was not only philosophy but also a law of the universe by which seekers of occult wisdom were obligated to abide. In revealing this law to humanity, *The Book of the Law* made available to the masses the slogan that helped establish Crowley's popularity with the members of many counter-cultural movements and his unpopularity with advocates of conservative Christian morality:

> "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law."
>
> "Love is the Law. Love under Will."
>
> "There is no law other than Do what thou Wilt."[290]

Crowley tried to clarify the extent of the freedom that is implied in the phrase, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." In the introduction to *The Book of the Law,* he writes that human beings, or "stars," have a "true orbit."[291] Crowley states that the magician seeks to discover and live according to his or her "True Will," the nature of which is determined by the "order of the Universe."[292] As long as one is guided by the True Will, two principles remain in effect. The first principle is that, in theory, all actions performed in agreement with the Will are "equally lawful" and necessary. The second principle is that, "in practice, only one act is lawful for each one of us at any given moment." Crowley concludes that the duty of the followers of the Law of *Thelema*—or

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[289] Sutin, 126.

[290] Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 9.

[291] Ibid.

[292] Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1976), xiv-xiv.

Thelemites—is to determine the right action from moment to moment[293] by discovering and living in accordance to their True Will.[294] The official website of the O.T.O. argues that the law of *Thelema* is "not to be interpreted as a license to indulge every passing whim, but rather as the mandate to discover one's True Will and accomplish it, leaving others to do the same in their own unique ways."[295]

The Book of the Law teaches that the "technical methods" for connecting with the True Will are to be learned in the practice of "Magick."[296] Crowley chose his unusual spelling of the word "Magick" to distinguish it from the connotations of the word "magic," which he believed was not taken seriously in the modern, scientific West.

In *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Crowley defined Magick as "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" [Crowley's capitalization] and he asserted that "a man who is doing his True Will has the inertia of the Universe to assist him" and that every intentional act performed by a human being who has "established himself in his right relation with the Universe" is a "magical act."[297] Thus, the results of magical operations indicate whether a person is being guided by his or her Will or not, for, with the forces of the universe behind his or her work, a magician will succeed in magical endeavors.

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[293] Crowley, Introduction, *The Book of the Law,* 9.

[294] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice,* xxi.

[295] Ordo Templi Orientis, "About OTO.," US Grand Lodge, Ordo Templi Orientis, http://www.oto-usa.org/about_oto.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

[296] Crowley, Introduction, *The Book of the Law*, 10.

[297] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, xii-xiii, xv, xix.

Crowley viewed everyday activities as potential acts of Magick, and as he makes clear in *Magick in Theory and Practice*:

> Illustration: It is my Will to inform the World of certain facts within my knowledge. I therefore take "magical weapons", [*sic*] pen, ink, and paper; I write "incantations"—these sentences—in the "magical language" i.e. that which is understood by the people I wish to instruct; I call forth "spirits", [*sic*] such as printers, publishers, booksellers, and so forth, and constrain them to convey my message to those people. The composition and distribution of this book is thus an act of
>
> **MAGICK**
>
> by which I cause Changes to take place in conformity with my Will [*sic*][298]

Crowley offered his system of Magick to men and women from all walks of life, and he expressed his hope that "the banker, the pugilist, the biologist, the poet, the navvy, the grocer, the factory girl, the mathematician, the stenographer, the golfer, the wife, the consul, and all the rest" should use Magick "to fulfill themselves perfectly."[299]

Of course, Crowley also viewed Magick as a supernatural activity, and he promised his followers that his methods would allow them to invoke gods and evoke spirits.[300] One ritual that Crowley wrote in 1921 entitled *Liber Samekh* was designed to enable the student to establish contact with his or her Holy Guardian Angel. Crowley

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[298] Ibid., xiii.

[299] Ibid., xi.

[300] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 15.

considered *Liber Samekh* to be "the most powerful and exalted" of all of his magical instructions, because he believed that living in agreement with one's True Will and the possibility for spiritual advancement are only attained through communication with one's Holy Guardian Angel.[301]

Not all of the magical operations that Crowley created and endorsed for his students involved the calling forth of heavenly beings. In Crowley's system of Magick, power must also be demonstrated over a person's darker nature, which is aroused by evoking demons. Lon Milo DuQuette, a follower of Crowley and an expert in the practice of Magick, explains that, although the magician must be in contact with the divine force of his or her Holy Guardian Angel, he or she must also "transmit that same grace to the world beneath" him or her:

> If you fail to redeem, control, and train the menagerie of your lower nature, those "demons" will resurface as soon as the glow of the Angel's presence has faded, and literally "play Hell" with you.[302]

DuQuette mentions that Crowley's incorporation of the names of demons in his rituals—especially his incorporation of phrases such as "Satan, my lord!"—have inspired members of the anti-cult movement and television talk shows to pronounce Crowley a dangerous Satanist.[303] However, Crowley denied that he was a Satanist, and DuQuette informs us in *The Magick of Thelema* that Crowley viewed the term "Satan" as one of

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[301] Lon Milo DuQuette, *Magick of Thelema*, (York Beach, MA: Samuel Weiser, 1993), 134, 136-37.

[302] Ibid., 135-36.

[303] Ibid., 139.

many names of gods that "imply the qualities of courage, frankness, energy, pride, power, and triumph" and that "express the creative and paternal will."[304]

Not only did Crowley encourage his followers to contact demons as part of their process of self-discovery, he also presented himself as the prophet of a new spiritual system designed to overthrow Christianity, which he felt had affected humanity negatively for centuries. Crowley called himself "the Beast 666," thus playing the part of the archrival of Christianity,[305] and wrote that he would become the "Savior of the Earth" by destroying Christianity in a new eon of unparalleled freedom.[306] Because Crowley presented Christianity as an enslaving force that humans need to overcome, his identification of the beast described in chapter thirteen of Revelation inverts the biblical narrative, in which the beast blasphemes and leads people away from righteousness. Although his criticism of Christianity was often reasonable and his purpose for contacting demons was not to worship them but to end their evil influence, Crowley developed a reputation in the popular press of England and among conservative Christians as a Satanist.

Not only did Crowley expect his followers to practice Magick, but he also expected them to read. In the "General Reading" list that he that he recommended to the members of his magical order, the *Astrum Argenteum*, he includes Eastern writings, such as *The Upanishads* and *The Bhagavad-Gita*, *The Equinox* (the official journal of the *Astrum Argenteum*), works of the Western tradition of esotericism (including books on

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[304] Ibid., 141.

[305] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, xi.

[306] Aleister Crowley, preface, *The World's Tragedy* (1910; reprint, Scottsdale, AZ: New Falcon Publications, 1991), xxxi, xxxiv.

Hermeticism, alchemy, and Rosicrucianism), and anthropological texts such as J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Crowley also recommended certain fictional works that he believed revealed occult knowledge, including books by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Lewis Carroll.

The General Reading list also includes Crowley's play entitled *Tannhäuser* that he described as "an allegorical drama concerning the Progress of the Soul."[307] Like Tingley and Steiner, Crowley believed that the drama could be an effective tool for communicating occult insights and giving a transformational experience to audiences. He therefore wrote plays promoting his spiritual *worldview*, and he created performance practices designed to affect the audience and performers spiritually in a manner that he believed was similar to the effect that the ancient *Eleusinian* mystery dramas had on the Eleusinian initiates.

Crowley's Plays and Prefaces

Between 1905 and 1907 Crowley used a portion of the money from his inheritance of £40,000 to create a publishing house and publish a three-volume collection of his own plays, poems, and essays that contained many occult teachings. Crowley named his publishing house the Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth; it was located in the Scottish town of Foyers, near Boleskine Manor, a house on the south-east side of Loch Ness that Crowley purchased in 1899 as the site for a long and intense magical operation designed to put him in touch with his Holy Guardian Angel.[308] In his autobiographical book, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, which he describes as an

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[307] Ibid., 209-213.

[308] Aleister Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 184.

"autohagiography," Crowley writest that his "activities as a publisher were in themselves a sort of practical joke" and, in part, an effort to amuse himself by shocking and bewildering people, he also explains that, during the years in which his collected works were published, his "occult life" was the only thing that he took seriously.[309]

Although Crowley says he was only joking and trying to shock his audiences, I argue that the plays that he published through the Society for the Propagation of Religious are a serious effort to spread his ideas. Other writers have taken Crowley's efforts to create a religion seriously, even though his own words and actions strongly suggest that he had ulterior motives, as well. Lawrence Sutin, for example, described Crowley as "one of the rare human beings of this or any age to dare to prophesy a distinctive new creed and to devote himself . . . to the promulgation of that creed," and labeled him "the primary fount of that diverse, fertile, and occasionally ridiculous range of movements loosely termed 'New Age.'"[310]

In *The Occult*, Colin Wilson argues that, although many critics are justified for interpreting Crowley as a mountebank, "he deserves serious consideration"; although Crowley's "character was flawed and complex . . . his career followed the parabolic course of rise and downfall that seems typical of magicians."[311] In *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy Wize Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus*, Georg Feuerstein acknowledges that Crowley earned notoriety through his "voracious, promiscuous sexuality, his liberal advocacy of drugs, and his declared antinomian (Tantra-like) philosophy," while simultaneously arguing that Crowley should

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[309] Ibid., 416.

[310] Sutin, 5.

[311] Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 349.

be grouped with "the most advanced magi to emerge in the West," including Count Cagliostro, Count Saint-Germaine, Éliphas Lévi, and Madame Blavatsky.[312] Even Crowley's most hostile biographer, John Symonds, took Crowley's spiritual work seriously, for in *The Great Beast: The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley* he wrote, "Crowley's own task was to bring Oriental wisdom to Europe and to restore paganism in a purer form."[313]

In his well-documented history of modern paganism entitled *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (1999) and published by Oxford University Press, Ronald Hutton argues that Crowley has "only recently begun receive the scholarly attention he deserves," because the "lurid aspects of his popular reputation" and "a cluster of problems resulting from his literary personality"—including "laboured, torturous, and obscure" sentences, his capacity for jocular irreverence, and a dependency upon "ecstatic and enraptured poesy rather than a reasoned argument" to support his "pronouncements on the divine"—have prevented many academics from taking him seriously or wanting to deal with his work. However, when it comes to Crowley's work as a magician, Hutton argues that Crowley deserves scholarly attention.[314] I also argue that Crowley was serious about becoming a spiritual teacher and propagating his ideas,

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[312] Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy Wize Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus* (New York: Arkana, 1990), 59.

[313] John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley* (1971; reprint, Frogmore, St. Albans: Mayflower Books, 1973), 13.

[314] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 171-73.

including those contained in the plays, essays, and poems published in *The Works of Aleister Crowley*.[315]

I shall examine several of the prefaces and plays in *The Works of Aleister Crowley* to show how these dramas were designed to inform the reader about the spiritual insights he had attained while studying the occult with the Golden Dawn and how his views about the occult changed after breaking with that order. Some of the plays in *The Works of Aleister Crowley* were written during the two years that Crowley spent in the Golden Dawn, and they subsequently make direct reference to the order. Crowley acknowledges the debt that he owes to the Golden Dawn in a note that is contained in his play *Jephthah* (1899), a tragedy based upon Judges 11, which tells the story of Jephthah, who was a warrior driven out from the Israelites because his mother was a prostitute and who comes to Israel's aid as a leader of the army to save them from the invading tribe of Ammon. Because of a vow that Jephthah made to God, Jephthah is forced to sacrifice his daughter, Abdulah. In response to hearing about this fate, Abdulah declares:

> My father, O my father! I am passing
> Into the night. Remember me as drawn
> Into the night toward the golden dawn[316]

In a footnote in the text of the play, Crowley explains that he was still an active member when he wrote *Jephthah* and that, at this time, the term "Golden Dawn" meant to him what "Christ" means to an evangelical Christian. The note also explains that all the

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[315] Aleister Crowley, *The Works of Aleister Crowley*, 3 vols. (Foyers: Society for the Propagation of Religious Truth, 1905-07; reprint, Yogi Publication Society, n.d.).

[316] Aleister Crowley, *Jephthah*, in *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 1, 88.

references to the Golden Dawn in *The Works of Aleister Crowley* suggest "a rescuing force" (Crowley, *Jephthah*, 88n).

The plays in the first volume of *The Works of Aleister Crowley* contain language, imagery, and stage directions that reference the esoteric teachings that William Wynn Westcott and Samuel Liddell Mathers utilized when they founded the Golden Dawn in March of 1888. [317] Hutton lists many of the traditions and documents from which Westcott and Mathers drew their teachings in *Triumph of the Moon,* and they include Rosicrucian manifestos, rituals of Freemasonry and Masonry, cabbalistic literature, the writings of the Elizabethan astrologer, John Dee, a Greco-Egyptian papyrus from which Mathers developed a ritual by which his followers could call upon their "Higher Genius or Holy Guardian Angel" (which, as already demonstrated, became a central tenet in Crowley's teachings), Christian symbolism and imagery, powerful traditions and images of "female divinity," including Isis and various female figures already existing in Christian and sub-Christian legend, and, finally, "the Goat of Mendes," which is a horned deity representing a blend of Pan, an Egyptian god form, and "the idol allegedly venerated by the medieval Knights Templar." The Goat of Mendes was developed by Éliphas Lévi, the French magician of the mid-nineteenth century who coined the term "occultism" and was highly influential in the worldwide development of modern occult practices.[318]

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[317] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 75.

[318] Ibid., 70-80.

Aspects of Golden Dawn teachings are also found in Crowley's play *The Fatal Force* (1899),[319] which deals with the power of female divinity in relation to the human mother, who is capable of both creating and destroying life. Set in ancient Egypt, *The Fatal Force* dramatizes the attempts of Ratoum, the Queen of Egypt, to create an offspring who has all of her own powers by having a child first with her son and then with the grandson born to her by her son. At the beginning of the play, Ratoum has already accomplished the first part of her plan. She has divorced her husband, who is a leper, and had a child from their son, Khomso, who she killed after conceiving. Now Ratoum seeks to repeat the act with S'Afi, the child that she bore from Khomso. Ratoum identifies S'Afi with Horus, and prepares the instruments needed for the ritual; one instrument is a coffin from which S'Afi is intended to arise in the role of Osiris being resurrected. The ritual goes awry, however, when the leper emerges from the coffin, instead of S'Afi. S'Afi, who was disguised as a masked attendant during the ritual, reveals himself and kills Ratoum with a dagger. Ratoum's delirious and demonic behavior dramatizes the power of female divinity that the members of the Golden Dawn revered, and the Egyptian names and imagery contained in *The Fatal Force* are reminiscent of the Greco-Egyptian traditions upon which many of the Golden Dawn rituals were based.

In his preface to *Tannhäuser* (1901), Crowley adheres to the Golden Dawn tenet that "all the main religious and mystical traditions of the globe" reflect a single "primal wisdom."[320] In this preface Crowley states that he blends Hebrew and Egypto-Christian

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[319] Aleister Crowley, *The Fatal Force*, in *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 1.

[320] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 79.

symbolism in his works to familiarize his readers with the "one thing of any importance," which is, the "Origin of Religions."[321] Crowley explains in his preface that, in his version of the story, Tannhäuser is presented as one of the original Rosicrucians,[322] thereby drawing from the Rosicrucian tradition of the Golden Dawn. He also weaves language from multiple religious and esoteric traditions into the play by incorporating a lesson on the cabalistic teachings into a dialogue that takes place between Tannhäuser and his "true self"[323] in the form of a character named the Unknown Minstrel, and by invoking Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, and Christian religions with names such as Isis, Venus, Our Lady of the Smitten Heart, and David, the "King and Priest of Israel."[324]

With the plays in the second and third volume of *The Works of Aleister Crowley*, Crowley formulates dramas that represent Christianity—in Nietzschean fashion—as a religion designed to enslave human beings.[325] Crowley's anti-Christian *worldview* marks a separation from the teachings of the Golden Dawn, which accepted Christianity, along with all major worldviews, as a religion containing insights into ultimate spiritual truth. Indeed, the Golden Dawn rituals contained a great deal of Christian imagery, and some of the members of the order were devout Christians, including a clergyman named Adolphus F. A. Woodward and the scholar Arthur Edward Waite.[326] By distancing

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[321] Aleister Crowley, preface, *Tannhäuser*, *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 1, 224.

[322] Ibid.

[323] Ibid., 225.

[324] Crowley, *Tannhäuser*, in *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 1, 230, 240, 242, 254, 262.

[325] Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 539.

[326] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 79.

himself from Christianity, Crowley was distancing himself from the Golden Dawn and laying the groundwork for *Thelema* as an alternative to Christianity.

Crowley was so determined that he be viewed as an opponent of Christianity that he wrote an apology for employing Christian symbolism in his literary works. In a 1907 essay entitled "Eleusis," he explained that he used Christian symbolism because it was "the lowest" form of spiritual symbolism and, therefore, "the best," being easily understandable to Western spiritual seekers raised in the Christian tradition. With Christian symbolism Crowley believed he could more easily teach complicated spiritual concepts to neophytes, and he asserted that forms of spiritual symbolism from other religions—especially from Hinduism and Buddhism—contain "metaphysical speculations only proper to those who are already Adepts."[327] Thus, Crowley assured his readers that his use of Christian symbolism did not contradict his opposition to Christianity.

In *The God-Eater* (1903), Crowley used jokes and blasphemous language to attack Christianity, a dramaturgical approach that he would continue to employ in later plays. Crowley set a jocular tone in the opening statement to *The God-Eater*:

> The idea of this obscure and fantastic play is as follows:— [*sic*]
>
> By a glorious act human misery is secured (History of Christianity).
>
> Hence, appreciation of the personality of Jesus is no excuse for being a Christian.
>
> Inversely, by a vile and irrational series of acts human happiness is

[327] Crowley, "Eleusis," in *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 3, 220.

secured (Story of the play).[328]

The act by which human happiness is secured is a simple inversion of the resurrection story. As opposed to the Christ situation, in which a human being dies, is resurrected, and thereby proven divine, in *The Fatal Force* a human victim is killed, mummified, displayed, and revered as a god by her followers. The occult ceremony during which the un-resurrected victim is revealed at the end of the play seems to be designed to negate the effect of Jesus's alleged resurrection in the Gospels.

Why Jesus Wept (1905) is caustic comedy that attacks Christianity more harshly than any of Crowley's previous plays. The play is preceded by a "Dedicatio Extraordinaria," which is a response to G.K. Chesterton, the noted literary critic, mystery writer, economic and political analyst, social commentator, orator, humorist, poet, and promoter of orthodox Christianity, who wrote mixed criticism about a collection of poetry that Crowley published in 1901, entitled *The Soul of Osiris*. Although Chesterton proclaimed Crowley to be a gifted poet, he lamented Crowley's status as a Decadent poet who, like so many other Decadent poets, sought "alternative forms of spirituality" and "import[ed] religions." Chesterton proposed that "Crowley is a strong and genuine poet," predicted hopefully that he would "work up from his appreciation of the Temple of Osiris to that loftier and wider work of the human imagination, the Brixton chapel," which was a Baptist church in London.[329]

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[328] Crowley, *The God-Eater*, in *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 2, 130.

[329] G.K. Chesterton, book review, *London Daily News*, 18 June 1901, quoted in Sutin, 88.

For Crowley, no image could be less representative of himself than that of the wayward Christian who would one day return to Christ. Thus, in the "Dedicatio Extraordinaria" Crowley wrote:

> Dear Mr. Chesterton,
>
> Alone among the puerile apologists of your detestable religion you hold a reasonably mystic head above the tides of criticism. You are the last champion of God . . .
>
> The occasion of this letter is the insertion of a scene equivalent to an "appreciation of the Brixton Chapel" in my masterpiece "Why Jesus Wept." You asked me for it; I promised it; and I hope you will like it. Can I do more than make your Brixton my deus ex machinâ? . . . [330]

Crowley finishes the "Dedicatio Extraordinaria" by announcing himself the "young warrior" of a "new religion" whose "number is the number of a man."[331]

In the "Dedicatio Maxima" Crowley reveals his hope that those who study *Why Jesus Wept* will learn "to choose the evil and avoid the good—i.e. as judged by Western, or 'Christian' standards."[332] The play appropriately depicts the activities of several characters struggling either to maintain or to subvert traditional Christian morality. For instance, in Scene Six Sir Percy Percivale encounters the young and lovely Molly Tyson,

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[330] Aleister Crowley, "Dedicatio Extraordinaria," in *Why Jesus Wept*, *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 3, 21.

[331] Ibid.

[332] Aleister Crowley, "Dedicatio Maxima," in *Why Jesus Wept*, *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 3, 21.

and they fall in love instantly. However, Lady Angela Baird, the sixty-three-year-old temptress who hates Percy and Molly for their innocence, quickly ends their budding romance by offering Sir Percy immediate sexual gratification as an alternative to Molly's virginal love. Percy chooses fornication over chaste love, explaining why his relationship to Lady Baird is superior any that he might have had with Molly:

> Ay, my lord, were it true, your liar's lore,
> (Oh blasphemy!) were my young love an
> whore,
> An hag of sixty; I were greater so.
> He who doth not know
> And fears and hates,
> Is not as he who cares not, but creates
> A royal crown from an old bonnet string,
> A maiden from a strumpet: that is to be
> like God,
> who from all chaos, from the husks of
> matter,
> Crusts shed off putrefaction, shakes a wing
> And flies; bids flowers spring from the dull
> black sod.[333]

[333] Aleister Crowley, *Why Jesus Wept*, in *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 3, 40.

Percy views his romance with Lady Baird as a chance to create his own virtues, rather than passively accepting the virtues of Christianity (Crowley, *Why Jesus Wept*, 40).

Even after Lady Baird dismisses Percy as her lover, he continues to reject Christian values, for when Percy meets Molly later in the play, he refuses to marry her when she explains that she is pregnant and her honor is at stake. Instead, Percy begins a morphine habit and wanders about town trying to find a chemist to refill his prescription. Molly becomes a prostitute, and seeks clients amongst the people leaving the theatres at night.

In the final scene of *Why Jesus Wept*, Crowley brings in conservative Christianity as a dubious *deus ex machinâ*, as he promised to do in the "Dedicatio Extraordinaria." In the final moments of the play Percy and Molly have been transformed to their previous healthy state by the divine power of the contemporary Christian god. However, Crowley does not present this turn of events as more desirable than the lives they lived before their conversions. A character named "The Poet" speaks as Crowley at the end of the play and describes Percy's habit as a means of escape from England's conservative Christianity, and, therefore, "something to be envied of ye all" (ibid., 49). The Poet shakes Britain's dust from the soles of his feet, depicting Crowley as a proselytizer who has chosen Percy's path by turning his back on England and following the procedure that Jesus prescribed to his disciples when they leave a town that has offered them no hospitality.

The footnotes that Crowley placed in the texts of the plays in *The Works of Aleister Crowley* guide the reader along Crowley's path of spiritual development between 1898 (when the first play was written) and 1907. As mentioned earlier, for example, Crowley states in a footnote to *Jephthah* that he was still a devoted member of the

Golden Dawn when he wrote the play in 1899 and that he still viewed the order as a redemptive force at this time. The footnote reveals that by 1905, when the first volume of the series was published, Crowley no longer held the Golden Dawn in such high esteem. In the preface to his lyrical poem, *Orpheus* (1901-1904), entitled "Warning," which precedes his lyrical poem, *Orpheus*, written between 1901 and 1904, Crowley speaks about the Crowley who wrote *Orpheus* as a separate human being struggling with spiritual puzzles that the Crowley of the present has solved:

> I am literally not the man who wrote it, and, despise him as I may, I have no right to interfere with his work.
>
> But I will not be haunted by the ghost of a Banquo that another man has failed to lay; and this kind of ghost knows but one exorcism.
>
> One should bury him in fine fat type, and erect nice boards over him, and collect the criticisms of an enlightened press, and inscribe them on the tomb.
>
> Then he is buried beyond resurrection; oblivion takes him, and he will never haunt the author or anybody else again.[334]

In "Warning," Crowley describes the spiritual path of this Crowley of the past. In 1901 he went from being "a Qabalist, deeply involved in ceremonial magic, with a Pantheon of Egypto-Christian color," to an avid reader of Theosophical writings with a burning desire to write a "big book" of his own on esoteric matters, to a student of Buddhist law. However, by 1902, Crowley lost interest in Buddhism, as well as in his ambition to make

[334] Aleister Crowley, "Warning," in *Orpheus*, *Works of Aleister Crowley*, vol. 3, 127.

Orpheus his "big book" of the esoteric.[335] In 1904, after *Orpheus* was completed, Crowley would write *The Book of the Law* and formulate his *Thelemic worldview*.

In "Eleusis," Crowley declares *The Works of Aleister Crowley* to be part of an effort to make human beings alert to their connection to God, and he claims that the insights that he has passed on to the reader in these three volumes are not to be confused with the sort of revelations that are to be acquired within the walls of Christian churches. His points out that he received his revelations sitting under the stars and drunk from drinking "the dew of the moon." Crowley encourages his readers to seek inspiration in nature rather than the architectural structures of civilization, and he promises to remain in the wilderness until he has "seen God face to face" and "read within those eternal eyes the secret that shall make you free."[336] Crowley predicts a time when he will choose disciples and instruct them in the "Mysteries of Eleusis" so that they also can see God.[337]

Crowley's connection of God to nature in "Eleusis" does not resemble the religion of the *Eleusinian* mystery religion of ancient Greece about which we know so little, so much as it does the language and imagery of German and English romanticists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century who depicted God as a creative and incomprehensible being with limitless authority who is made manifest by nature and cannot be fashioned or invoked by the creations of rational humanity.[338] And Crowley experienced the wonders of nature in ways that are not possible for most human beings.

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[335] Ibid., 126-27.

[336] Crowley, "Eleusis," *Works of Aleister Crowley*, 230.

[337] Ibid.

[338] Hutton, 21-22.

Crowley's inheritance gave him the means to travel all over the world, and he was an accomplished mountain climber. Some of his mountain climbing excursions took place in India and Mexico; Crowley climbed Izataccihuatl in Mexico in 1901 and made a determined but aborted attempt to climb K2 in 1902.[339] For Crowley, mountain climbing was combined with spirituality, for he practiced it with Oscar Eckenstein, a friend who became both Crowley's climbing and spiritual mentor during the first decade of the twentieth century. For instance, when Crowley went to Mexico City in 1901 to prepare to climb Izataccihuatl, he was with Eckenstein, who "told Crowley frankly that his magical efforts were flawed because he had not yet undergone a fundamental training in the control of the powers of his mind" and gave him a series of *Raja Yoga* exercises. These were visualization exercises designed to bring about spiritual transformation in the practitioner.[340] Crowley, therefore, did connect the divine to nature in practice, as he suggests in "Eleusis," however, his conception of the *Eleusinian* is colored by Romanticism and his own personal experience rather than any in-depth knowledge of the *Eleusinian* mystery religion.

Qualities of early twentieth-century English neo-paganism more than those of German and English Romanticism are apparent in the depiction of the relationship between spiritual beings, nature, and man that Crowley creates in his play *The World's Tragedy* (1910), because, in depicting a battle between the worship of Pan and a Christ-figure named "Issa" in the play, Crowley represents Pan not only as a challenger of English Christian mores but also as a promoter and protector of alternative sexual

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[339] Sutin, 51.

[340] Ibid., 85.

practices. In *The Triumph of the Moon*, Hutton lists various manifestations of Pan in literature from ancient times to the present, noting the different characteristics that exist among these manifestations. Hutton notes that Pan increased in significance as history progressed. In ancient times he was little more than a "little country god" kept under control by the Olympians. Christian writers of the early medieval period increased Pan's significance by proclaiming him to be a god of all that exists. Servius and Isidore of Seville, for instance, used the "apparent coincidence between his [Pan's] name and the Greek word to signify 'everything' [and] to make him into a universal deity of the natural world."[341]

In the early nineteenth century, a literary Pan cult emerged in the writings of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, where the faun figured as the "personification and guardian of the English countryside" and "the deity of shady nooks in which humans could lie in the heat of the day." Between 1895 and 1914, Pan reached the height of his popularity with the English, and was perceived as "the one fashionable subject upon which every minor poet thought that he could turn out a ditty." Thus, the nineteenth-century English "made the god the expression of all the aspects with which the Romantics had invested the natural world: sublime, mysterious and awe inspiring, benevolent, comforting, and redemptive."[342]

Regarding Pan's redemptive powers, Hutton speaks of his as the "Green Jesus," a divine and redemptive figure associated with nature as Christianity was associated with civilization. Pan first appeared as the Green Jesus in Maurice Hewlett's 1899 novel, *Pan*

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[341] Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 43-44; see also Merivale, *Pan the Goat God* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), 9-10, 238 nn 25-26.

[342] Ibid., 44.

and the Young Shepherd, in which Pan is the god of all creatures except humans, because they deny his existence. Alternatively, in other late nineteenth-century English manifestations Pan was viewed as capable of turning civilized human beings into animals, thereby taking them into his domain and enabling them to find their true natures.[343]

At the turn-of-the-century, Pan also emerged as a bold challenger of English mores of sexuality and "the liberator of those types of sexuality that were either repressed or forbidden by convention." Hutton places the female libido into the category of repressed sexuality and homosexuality into that of the forbidden, and lists Eleanor Farjeon, Forrest Reid, Hector Munro, and Victor Neuburg as authors who depict Pan as a god who sanctions alternative sexual practices.[344]

In 1910, Victor Neuburg wrote two poems in which Pan is a homosexual "dream-lover"— "The Triumph of Pan" and "The Lost Shepherd." Hutton explains that, at this point in Neuburg's life, his lover was Aleister Crowley, and that Crowley wrote a poem in response, entitled "Hymn to Pan," in which Pan is depicted as a champion of bisexuality. Crowley's "Hymn to Pan" is a magical invocation, by which "Crowley actually combines with Pan in the moment of coupling and so takes on his nature, becoming an epitome of ravenous and omnivorous libido."[345]

In the same year that Crowley wrote "Hymn to Pan," he also wrote *The World's Tragedy*, which utilizes the symbolism of the English cult of Pan in its dramatization of

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[343] Ibid., 45

[344] Ibid., 48

[345] Ibid., 48-49.

the *Thelemic worldview*. In the preface to *The World's Tragedy* Crowley explains that he wrote the play in four nights during which Pan "abode" in him, much as he abides within the character speaking in "Hymn to Pan." Crowley describes this play, written "in Pan," as a charter of freedom that he offers to "the boys and girls of England."[346]

The themes in the preface to *The World's Tragedy* are similar to the themes of the English Pan cult as described by Hutton in *Triumph of the Moon*. In the preface, Crowley speaks at great length about his childhood within the Plymouth Brethen, the abuse he suffered while a student at the school for the Sons of Brethren, and his rejection of Christianity. He describes himself as an anti-Christ in need of an army of followers to overthrow the old regime. He defends pornographic literature, arguing that writers such as Shakespeare, Sterne, Swift, and Rabelais have all been considered pornographic and that their work nevertheless survives because it is composed with passion, in which there is "nothing impure." Sodomy, Crowley declares, is "an aristocratic virtue, which our middle class had better imitate if they wish to be smart."[347] Crowley has strong words for Christianity:

> I therefore hold the legendary Jesus in no wise responsible for the trouble: it began with Luther, perhaps, and went on with Wesley; but no matter!— [*sic*] what I am trying to get at is the religion which makes England to-day [*sic*] a hell for any man who cares at all for freedom. That religion they call Christianity; the devil they honour they call God. I

[346] Crowley, preface, *The World's Tragedy*, (Scottsdale, AZ: New Falcon Press, 1991), xxiii.

[347] Ibid., xxiv-xxviii.

> accept these definitions, as a poet must do, if he is to be at all intelligible to his age, and it is their God and their religion that I hate and will destroy.

Crowley ends the preface by explaining that Alexander, who is Pan's champion in *The World's Tragedy*, prophesies at the end of the play that Aleister Crowley will arrive in two thousand years as the "Savior of the Earth" who will free humanity from the curse of Christianity.[348] Like the English Pan cult, Crowley's *Thelema* stands in opposition to Christianity. Just as Pan is described as a being who will help the worshipper find his or her true self through union with the deity, so *Thelemic* practice requires a search for the True Self in relationship to nature and the universe. Like Pan, Crowley defends sexual practices that are considered deviant by many people.

These themes also arise in the text of *The World's Tragedy*. The play begins with a prologue that is set in the garden of Eros, where we find an assortment of satyrs, nymphs, girls, young boys, men, fauns, and hermaphrodites enjoying a sexual romp involving homosexuality, bestiality, and pedophilia. These acts are not presented as perverse, and they do not take place in a sordid environment. Rather, it is sacred, natural and beautiful:

> See, in a glade of green moss, watered by a spring, a merry company languidly playing. Flutes, and harps, and panpipes are there; and on wonderful chased silver, figured with the loves of the gods, are cups of beaded wine, and fruits, and honey, and cakes of divers sort. . . . Around

[348] Ibid., xxxi-xxxii.

> the glade are many trees; the ground is a mass of flowers, and gathered roses cover the white limbs of many of the players.[349]

Even though they are confounding the sexual norms of middle-class England, these characters are not sinning with their bodies. They are paying honor to the divinity of nature and basking in the sexual power of Pan. The wooded grove is a sacred place in which human beings may commune with nature and surrender to their natural instincts.

Crowley represents the conflict between the religion of Pan and Christianity by placing a conspicuously out-of-place vulture in the scene, who watches the worshippers of Pan "in silence, but with intense envy and disgust" (Crowley, *The World's Tragedy*, 3) from the branches of a tree. The vulture is a god named Yaugh Waugh (a blasphemous parody of Yahweh), and he loathes Pan's followers because they are joyful and pure in spirit and body. Yaugh Waugh, on the other hand, is miserable and wallows in filthy, putrid matter. Unlike the refined verse that the pagan characters' use, Yaugh Waugh's language consists of irregular, staccato verse peppered with involuntary belches and squawks. Combined with the filth of the matter with which he creates abominations of life, Yaugh Waugh's process of creation is a repulsive and cacophonous display:

> *Vulture.* Coagulated yolk of the addled egg
>
> Of chaos! Hatch it out! . . .
>
> Ga! Ga! I've got a son:
>
> What will it be?
>
> O heaven—a lamb! . . .

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[349] Aleister Crowley, *The World's Tragedy*, 3.

> Uck! Uck! The morning's carrion
> Bubbles in my paunch . . .
> For the windy vomit of me
> Shapes itself into a sorry
> And bedraggled pigeon. (ibid., 17)

The lamb, who enters the realm of human beings as a Christ-figure named Issa, is formed from rotten egg yolk, and the pigeon, who is the holy spirit, emerges from the vulture's vomit. This vulture, pigeon and lamb form an unholy trinity that inhabits a heaven filled with oozing fluids and bile.

Crowley's depiction of Yaugh Waugh shows that he blended modern Gnosticism with the concepts of the English Pan cult to present Pan as divine and Yaugh Waugh as infernal. In *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Jane Goodall discusses Gnosticism in relation to Antonin Artaud's work. She explains that the second-century Gnostic theologian, Valentinus, argued that all "Platonic and Biblical accounts of creation always came in on the second act" and that the creator of the physical world is "not the original God." The original God does not work in matter and exists in a non-physical realm of being named Pleroma that is characterized by fullness. On the other hand, the "god" who created this world is an "abhorrent, excessive manifestation of form" whose physical creations are contaminated by the passions that arise from the lack of fullness with which it creates—among these corrupt qualities are anguish, terror, bewilderment, and ignorance. The corrupt god of matter warns his creations to accept him as the ultimate origin of the universe and to avoid looking for any other possible creation stories, declaring itself "a jealous god" and insisting that "there is no other god beside me."

Gnosticism teaches that it was the original (non-physical) God who breathed into Adam and endowed him with "luminous wisdom or the intuition of the divine."[350] For this reason, the Gnostic seeks to become closer to the infinite original God and to escape the trappings of physical existence. Yaugh Waugh is presented as this corrupt God in *The World's Tragedy*, and the dove and the lamb are presented as his agents. Unlike Yaugh Waugh and his compatriots, Pan is never seen in the play, much as the original God of Gnostic creation is invisible.

Unlike Artaud's work, which, although it contains "key areas of Gnostic thematics," contains no direct references to Gnosticism or provides any solid evidence of specific Gnostic sources that influenced Artaud's ideas,[351] Crowley incorporated Gnostic writings into *Thelema*, [352] and he wrote a Gnostic Mass, which "like the Roman or Orthodox Mass . . . serves to bring the *Thelemic* community together to affirm a common creed, and provides an opportunity for all to participate directly in the magical formulae of the Age."[353] Members of the O.T.O continue to perform Crowley's Gnostic Mass regularly.

In the episode insert in *The World's Tragedy* entitled "The White Wind," Crowley depicts Yaugh Waugh's corruption of sex. In this episode, Miriam, who is destined to become the mother of Issa, sneaks about the outskirts of her squalid village near a stagnant lake (Crowley, *The World's Tragedy,* 49). Simultaneously obsessed with and

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[350] Jane Goodall, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994), 8-11.

[351] Ibid., 6-8.

[352] Sutin, 5.

[353] Lon Milo DuQuette, *Magick of Aleister Crowley,* (1993; Boston: Samuel Weiser, 2003), 221.

repulsed by sex, Miriam finds the sacred transcendent sex of Pan's followers impossible. Thus, she is a perfect vessel for Yaugh Waugh's plan to render sex unpleasant, so that humanity will not see beyond physical reality and thereby find their way back to the original god, Pan. Yaugh Waugh sends a group of personifications to rape Miriam. Among them are Fear, Piety, Hypocrisy, Pity, Charity, Bigotry, Chastity, and Cunning, and these characters resemble the previously mentioned qualities of anguish, terror, bewilderment, and ignorance that accompany the creations of the corrupt god of Gnosticism.

Not only does Crowley depict an inverted version of the moment of divine conception in *The World's Tragedy*, but he also re-shapes various stories from the Gospels, including the nativity and the crucifixion as perverse, rather than divine. Thus, *The World's Tragedy* is a blasphemous parody of the life of Christ. In the nativity scene, the three wise men bring the infant messiah gifts that will help him to enslave mankind, such as gold, with which he can buy the souls of priests. Rather than the painless birth that Mary frequently experiences in medieval nativity scenes, Miriam feels as if her insides are being ripped to shreds, and frogs swarm out of her womb before Issa is born. Issa is a spoiled brat who expects immediate gratification for his every desire.

In the final moment of the play, while Issa is dying on the cross, Alexander causes Issa to have a vision of the pain that Yaugh Waugh's religion will cause humanity. However, Alexander predicts that "a lion shall rise and swallow thee" and free the world from this suffering (ibid., 99-100, 114). This prediction, of course, leads back to the prologue of the play, wherein Crowley states that Alexander's prophesy refers to none

other than himself and his own teachings, which will enable the students of Magick to live according to their True Will.

Alexander's final moments at Issa's crucifixion also refer once again to Pan, for Alexander is a representative of the goat-god. When he makes his final exit, Alexander says that he is going to hide in "the secret place of Pan" underneath "the fallen groves of Arcady" (ibid., 102). By mocking the pseudo-Christ on the cross, Alexander seems to become a Satan-Pan or devil-Pan and, at the same time, a Christ-Pan determined to save the world from a sinister plan to enslave humanity. In her 1969 book, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times,* Patricia Merivale argued that Pan frequently plays the role of either the devil or messiah of Christian mythology in modern literature.[354] However, Crowley's depiction of Pan as being both Christ and Devil at the same time empowers Pan with the ability to play two diametrically opposed roles at the same time. In his 1894 short story, *The Great God Pan*, Arthur Machen also noted the blend of opposites that exist within Pan as he described an unfortunate woman whose body was physically united with the goat-god's powers, and therefore subject to horrifying transformations at the moment of her death:

> I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beast whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being.[355]

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[354] Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), vii.

[355] Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan* and *The Inmost Light* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1894), p. 100.

The dying woman's transformations embodied the collection of opposites that comprises Pan's essence. The painter Dorothy Brett also depicts Pan as a creature of spiritual contradictions, much as Crowley does with the character of Alexander at the end of *The World's Tragedy.* As John Boardman points out in his 1997 book, *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image*, Brett's oil on wood painting entitled *The Man Who Died* (1963) contains two caricatures of D.H. Lawrence, who is seen both hanging on a cross as Jesus and as Pan, who stands on the hill and gestures toward his crucified double.[356] Brett's painting alludes to a short story of the same title that Lawrence wrote in 1929, in which Christ survives his crucifixion, turns his back on his Father's divine plan, and finds peace in the temple of Isis.[357] Like Crowley, Lawrence exhibited hostility toward Christianity; he interpreted the Book of Revelations as a representation of the initiation into a pagan mystery religion that had been altered by Hebrew and Christian scribes. He even made efforts to restore the Book of Revelation to what he thought was its original form by depicting the Whore of Babylon as the "great Mother of the cosmos" and the Beast as the divine power of nature.[358] Lawrence's ideas about Christ and the Book of Revelation are so similar to Crowley's that Hutton labels him the most obvious literary figure of Crowley's own generation with whom he shared "important preoccupations."[359]

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[356] John Boardman, *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 22, 47 n 22.

[357] D.H. Lawrence, *The Man Who Died* (London: M. Secker, 1931); see also, Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon,* 160.

[358] Hutton, 160; see also D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (London: Heinemann, 1931).

[359] Hutton, 171.

The World's Tragedy contains many jokes and comic elements, and this might tempt the reader to think that Crowley did not view the play as a serious occult text. Israel Regardie warns against such a an assumption in his introduction to *The World's Tragedy*:

> One of the major characteristics of Crowley as a person was his magnificent sense of humor which bubbled and overflowed almost without cessation. For the newcomer to his manifold literary output his humor was slightly disconcerting. Even in the midst of a colloquy on philosophy or religion or mysticism a joke or two, sometimes thoroughly ribald, would disrupt the continuity of his theme. It led some critics to believe that he was merely a jokester and therefore not to be taken seriously. Never was a greater mistake made.[360]

Regardie's comments suggest that Crowley felt that comedy was an appropriate vehicle for propagating *Thelemic* values. In this way, Crowley's approach to playwriting is markedly different from the dramaturgical style of the plays by Rudolf Steiner, Edouard Schuré, Albert Steffen, and Katherine Tingley and her followers.

Crowley's syncretism—the manner in which he blends spiritual ideas in his plays—is also distinguishable from the work of Steiner, Schuré, Steffen, and the authors of the Tingley's Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society, because it excludes the theology of Christianity and denies that the Christian religion contains any spiritual truths to the human spiritual condition. Although Crowley does include Christian theology in his plays, it is usually depicted as a social disease or part of a plan by an evil

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[360] Israel Regardie, introduction, *The World's Tragedy*, x.

god to make humanity miserable. Crowley juxtaposes Christian elements to aspects of the Western occult tradition, Gnosticism, paganism, and Eastern mysticism, in order to present Christianity as a spiritual system that is proven banal when it is compared to other religious and spiritual ideas. Unlike the Theosophical and Anthroposophical playwrights discussed in the previous chapters, who sought religious truth within all religions (Christianity included), Crowley used religious syncretism in his plays as part of a campaign to discredit and damage Christianity in Western culture.

Dramatic Rituals in Theory and Practice

In Chapter One of *Magick in Theory and Practice*, entitled "The Principles of Ritual," Crowley listed three "methods of invoking any deity." The first method is devotion to the deity, the second method is "straightforward ceremonial invocation," which involves the execution of various required actions, including the exaltation "of the mind by repeated prayers or conjurations to the highest conception of the God" until "in one sense or another" it "appears to us and floods our consciousness."[361]

The third method of invocation is "the Dramatic." Crowley considers the dramatic method, in which the celebrant achieves complete identity with the deity by losing "himself completely in the subject of a play," to be "the most attractive of all." Among the works that Crowley considers to be dramatic invocations are the Catholic Mass, Euripides' *The Bacchae*, and "many of the degrees [rituals of advancement] in Freemasonry." Crowley explains that, in order to perform a dramatic invocation, the magician must arrange a ceremony in which he takes the part of the lead character [i.e. the invoked deity], undergoes all his or her trials, and emerges triumphant. The result of a

[361] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 12-13.

successful dramatic invocation, Crowley argues, is that the magician becomes aware of his or her True Will, and this is the primary goal of the *Thelemite*. Crowley argues that, for those who are capable of losing their sense of self-consciousness, the dramatic method of invocation is "unquestionably the best."[362]

Crowley wrote about the place of the audience, the performers, and the author in the process of creating a dramatic invocation:

> One of the great advantages of them [dramatic invocations] is that a large number of persons may take part, so that there is consequently more force available; but it is important that they should all be initiates of the same mysteries, bound by the same oaths, and filled with the same aspirations. They should be associated only for this one purpose.
>
> Such a company being prepared, the story of the God should be dramatised by a well-skilled poet accustomed to this form of composition. Lengthy speeches and invocations should be avoided, but action should be very full. Such ceremonies should be carefully rehearsed; but in rehearsals care should be taken to omit the climax, which should be studied by the principal character in private. The play should be so arranged that this climax depends on him alone. By this means one prevents the ceremony from becoming mechanical or hackneyed, and the element of surprise assists the lesser characters to get out of themselves at the supreme moment. Following the climax there should always be an unrehearsed ceremony, an impromptu. The most satisfactory form of this

[362] Ibid., 13-15.

> is the dance. In such ceremonies appropriate libations may be freely used.[363]

Crowley wrote *Magick in Theory and Practice* in 1929 after working with dramatic ritual magic that he performed both for public and private audiences, and his experience in producing these rituals led him to come to the above conclusions regarding the ideal methods of dramatic invocation.

Crowley was not the first occultist to perform public occult rituals. His occult guru, S. L. Macgregor Mathers, and Mathers's wife Moina of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn had experimented with a ritual called *The Rite of Isis*, which was performed at the *Théâtre Bodinière* in Paris in 1899.[364] The theatre was located on the Rue Saint-Lazare, and helped Mathers and Moina earn a living after Annie Horniman stopped financially supporting Mathers due to a disagreement that arose between them.[365] Before producing any public rites, Crowley developed ritual performance techniques in 1910 that incorporated music, dance, and the recitation of verse at the homes of his followers. His first public performance of an invocation, entitled *The Rite of Artemis*, which took place in the offices of the *Equinox*—the journal of the *Astrum Argenteum*—in August 1910. Although the exact details of *The Rite of Artemis* are lost, it was in this production that he determined the core performers and performance form that would be

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[363] Ibid., 177-78.

[364] Keith Richmond, introduction, *The Rites of Eleusis*, 20.

[365] George Knowles, "S.L. MacGregor Mathers (1854-1918) and 'The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn,'" Sybelline Order. http://sibyllinewicca.org/voices/bio-mathers.htm (accessed 13 June 2005).

employed in his more elaborate production entitled *The Rites of Eleusis.*[366] The performers were Crowley, Victor Neuburg, and Leila Waddell, and the performance took the form of a blend of poetry recitation, dance, music, and drugs.

The Rites of Eleusis is Crowley's best-known theatrical production. In a 1978 article in *The Drama Review*, J.F. Brown examined *The Rites of Eleusis*, drawing from positive and negative accounts of the original performances to provide insight into the performance, mise-en-scène, and audience interaction of the production. Brown explains that the *The Rites of Eleusis* was performed in Caxton Hall in London on seven Wednesdays at nine in the evening between 19 October and 30 November. Each separate ritual was an invocation of a deity using the dramatic method that Crowley would later speak about in *Magick in Theory and Practice.* The beings evoked in *The Rites of Eleusis* were Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Venus, Mercury, and Luna. In the advertisements that Crowley placed in *The Occult Review,* he specified the ideal color and material of clothing that audience members should wear to each of the rites, explaining that these colors were a "keynote" of each performance. He urged the audience to observe etiquette similar to "that of the most solemn religious ceremonies" and he emphasized that silence is used in the performances to obtain effects. [367]

Crowley describes the plot of *The Rites of Eleusis* in his autohagiography:

> The plot, briefly summarized, is this:

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[366] J.F. Brown, "Aleister Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis*," *The Drama Review* 22 (June 1978), 6-7.

[367] Ibid., 5-6.

Man, unable to solve the Riddle of Existence, takes counsel of Saturn, extreme old age. Such answer as he can get is the one word 'Despair'. [*sic*]

Is there more hope in the dignity and wisdom of Jupiter? No; for the noble senior lacks the vigour of Mars the warrior. Counsel is in vain without determination to carry it out.

Mars, invoked, is indeed capable of victory: but he has already lost the controlled wisdom of age; in a moment of conquest he wastes the fruits of it, in the arms of luxury.

It is through this weakness that the perfected man, the Sun, is of dual nature, and his evil twin slays him in his glory. So the triumphant Lord of Heaven, the beloved of Apollo and the Muses is brought down into the dust, and who shall mourn him but his Mother Nature, Venus, the lady of love and sorrow? Well is it if she bears within her the Secret of Resurrection!

But even Venus owes all her charm to the swift messenger of the gods, Mercury, the joyous and ambiguous boy whose tricks first scandalize and then delight Olympus.

But Mercury, too, is found wanting. Now in him alone is the secret cure for all the woe of the human race. Swift as ever, he passes, and gives place to the youngest of the gods, to the Virginal Moon.

Behold her, Madonna-like, throned and crowned, veiled, silent, awaiting the promise of the future.

> She is Isis and Mary, Istar and Bhavani, Artemis and Diana.
>
> But Artemis is still barren of hope until the spirit of the Infinite All, great Pan, tears asunder the veil and displays the hope of humanity, the Crowned Child of the Future.[368]

DuQuette explains that Crowley's format for the order of *The Rites of Eleusis* was based upon the "seven planets of the ancients" and that he arranged them in such a way that they represent the downfall of each planetary god. Each rite is a single act of "one master drama," which is "the story of the descent of spirit (deity) into matter (humanity)" and "the secret to our return to Godhead."[369]

Unlike Edouard Schuré, who wrote *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* as a reconstruction of the original sacred drama of the *Eleusinian* mystery religion, what Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis* theoretically have in common with the original *Eleusinian* dramatic rituals is, according to DuQuette, "the simple fact that they (like the original ceremonies) [DuQuette's parenthetical statement] were written and performed in order to evoke a specific variety of ecstasy in the participants and the audience."[370]

As he did in *The Rite of Artemis*, Crowley employed poetry, dance, music, and drugs in *The Rites of Eleusis* in order to produce this ecstasy. Brown notes that Crowley incorporated Swinburne's poetry into each rite. For instance, Crowley included

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[368] Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 635-36.

[369] DuQuette, *The Magick of Aleister Crowley*, 195.

[370] Ibid., 194.

Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon" into his *Rite of Sol*.[371] Brown argues the choice to feature Swinburne's work is significant because Crowley was interested in Swinburne's belief that verse could "induce in the reader a visionary state that opens the mind to the realms of symbolist mystery."[372] As the primary orator of *The Rites of Eleusis*, Crowley learned hundreds of lines of verse every week during the run of the production.[373]

Victor Neuburg, Crowley's lover and student, was the principal dancer in *The Rites of Eleusis*. Neuburg was capable of dancing with extreme abandon, and he made a powerful effect upon the audience:

> He [Victor Neuburg] possessed extraordinary powers. He gave the impression that he did not touch the ground at all, and he would go round the circle at a pace so great that one constantly expected him to be shot off tangentially. In the absence of accurate measurements, one does not like to suggest that there was some unknown force at work, and yet I have seen so many undeniable magical phenomena take place in his presence that I feel quite sure in my own mind that he was generating energies of a very curious kind. The idea of his dance was, as a rule, to exhaust himself completely. The climax was his flopping on the floor unconscious. Sometimes he failed to lose himself, in which case, of course, nothing happened; but when he succeeded the effect was superb. It was

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[371] Aleister Crowley, *The Rite of Sol*, in *The Magick of Aleister Crowley*, p. 197-99.

[372] Brown, 16.

[373] Crowley, *Confessions*, 636.

> astounding to see his body suddenly collapse and shoot across the polished floor like a curling-stone.[374]

Brown explains that the purpose of Neuburg's dance was to manifest the forces being invoked with his body. In other words, he was expected to enter a trance of possession.[375]

The musical instrumentation of *The Rites of Eleusis* included both tom-toms, which accompanied Neuburg's dancing, and the music that violinist Leila Waddell provided. Crowley had a student of ritual magic named G.M. Marston—an English naval officer—who pursued, as a subject of study, the effects of the tom-tom upon married Englishwomen. Marston claimed that his experiments proved that, when played in a certain manner, the tom-tom could drive married Englishwomen into a state of uncontrolled sexual frenzy.[376] Marston's ideas about the tom-tom impressed Crowley, and Crowley even dedicated *The Rites of Eleusis* to Marston, because Marston's suggestions had helped him determine the final form of the seven rites.[377] In "The Rite of Luna," the last of *The Rites of Eleusis,* the sexual god, Pan, carries a tom-tom. Thus, Crowley identified the tom-tom's sexual influence with that of Pan.[378]

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[374] Ibid.

[375] Brown, 17.

[376] Ibid., 20.

[377] Crowley, *Rites of Eleusis* (Thame & Oxon: Mandrake Press, 1990), 66.

[378] Aleister Crowley, *The Rite of Luna*, in *The Rites of Eleusis*, 183.

Leila Waddell, the violinist, was, like Neuburg, a magical student and lover of Crowley's.[379] Most likely born in Australia or New Zealand, Waddell began learning to play the violin at the age of seven from the local barber, who was an accomplished violinist. After her first tutor died several years later, her new tutor discovered that she knew nothing about the theory of music, could not locate notes on the instrument, and could not read a score—she head learned everything she knew through observation and imitation. Although Waddell's new tutor taught her how to read music, her ability to play from memory proved quite valuable in *The Rites of Eleusis,* because she often had to play in semi-darkness.[380] Although Waddell composed many of the pieces for these productions, she and Crowley selected other well-known compositions that they thought were appropriate for the performances. Brown asserts that the critics received Waddell's playing favorably, explaining that even journals that responded with hostility to *The Rites of Eleusis* had positive comments about Waddell's skills as a violinist.[381]

Another means by which Crowley attempted to arouse ecstasy within the audience was the administration of intoxicating drugs and plants. The occult concept of correspondences proposes that every microcosm is a miniature replica of the macrocosm, and the drugs and plants chosen by Crowley for each ritual corresponded to the nature of the deity invoked. Brown provides a chart listing these correspondences in his *TDR* article, which shows that opium corresponded to Saturn, a lotus-based narcotic to Jupiter, strychnine to Mars, rose to Venus, anhalonium (peyote) to Mercury, and mandrake and

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[379] DuQuette, *The Magick of Aleister Crowley*, 193.

[380] Keith Richmond, in *The Rites of Eleusis*, 292-293 n. 6.

[381] Brown, 19, 21.

yohimbine (an alkaloid aphrodisiac) to Luna.[382] The nature of the way that the drug administered and corresponded to the deity evoked is demonstrated in the last ritual, *The Rite of Luna*, in which Pan frees humanity. The aphrodisiac yohimbine is used, in order to arouse sexual energy within the spectators. This sexual energy complements Pan's nature.

The extent to which audiences of *The Rites of Eleusis* were informed about the controlled substances in the beverages is unclear. DuQuette writes that Crowley's mixture of what was probably "herbs, alcohol, fruit juice, and mescal buttons" was perfectly legal in 1910 in England, and he argues that the initiates of the original *Eleusinian* mysteries may have received psychedelic substances to eat or drink in order assist in the achievement of a transformative effect during the ancient rites.[383] Richmond reminds us that Native-Americans used *anhalonium* in the form of mescal and peyote for centuries "as an inspirational adjunct to religious ceremonies," and that the only remarkable thing about Crowley's employment of it is that he may have been the person who introduced it to Europe—at least for the purpose of enhancing ecstatic religious ceremonies.[384] In any case, Ethel Archer's claim that the ecstasy experienced by members of the audience at *The Rite of Artemis* was probably due to chemical as well as aesthetic effects can be reasonably applied to the performances of *The Rites of Eleusis*.

Publicity photographs of *The Rites of Eleusis* show a mise-en-scène designed according to the aesthetics of the modern Western occult and ceremonial magic

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[382] Ibid., 13.

[383] DuQuette, *The Magick of Aleister Crowley*, 193-94.

[384] Richmond, introduction, *The Rites of Eleusis*, 26.

tradition.[385] All of the participants wore robes of various colors. As with the drugs and plants, the color of the robes corresponded to the nature of the deity being evoked. Black corresponded to Saturn, blue to Jupiter, red to Mars, Whitegold (leopard skin) to Sol, green to Venus, iridescent violet or mixed colors to Mercury, and silver to Luna.[386] Some of the robes had hoods that could be adjusted to either reveal or conceal the face of the performer. The robes were also decorated with symbols of the occult such as the rose and cross, the Star of David, or the pentagram. In one photograph, LeilaWaddell leans over the body of Aleister Crowley, which is stretched out upon an altar that has been painted with cabalistic numbers and a circle within a triangle. Behind them is a curtain, referred to as a veil in the texts of *The Rites of Eleusis*, which two hooded figures with concealed faces are pulling open.[387] The altar is just one of the instruments of the ceremonial magician that appears in the photographs; the other magical objects are the wand, cup, sword, and disk. Crowley recommended all of these objects to his students as tools of magic.[388]

Crowley made large demands of the audience of *The Rites of Eleusis*. A ticket to all seven performances cost five guineas—a sum that is equal to several hundred pounds in today's terms.[389] It seems that he sought an affluent audience, and he attempted to reach this audience by running an extensive publicity campaign. Crowley published an

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[385] See Brown, "Aleister Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis*"; Crowley, *The Rites of Eleusis*.

[386] Brown, 13.

[387] Crowley, *The Rites of Eleusis*, n. pag.

[388] Aleister Crowley, *Book 4* (1980; reprint, York Beach. MA: Samuel Weiser, 1996), 60, 70.

[389] Richmond, introduction, *Rites of Eleusis*, 33.

article advertising T*he Rites of Eleusis* in the September issue of *The Occult Review*, complete with publicity photos. Later in September Crowley sent a copy of a booklet explaining *The Rites of Eleusis* to the members of the *Astrum Argenteum* with whom he was not in regular contact. The booklet contained a letter, explaining that the members of his order would receive a complimentary ticket and were expected to attend, appropriately robed, and to "assist the Great Officer" in their performance. Moreover, Crowley asked the members of his order to "make the rites known among [their] friends" and to "induce them to take tickets." Crowley then reminded the order members that *The Equinox* was sold at cost for no profit and that the upcoming productions were a necessary means of obtaining "fresh funds." Crowley also held preliminary private performances of the *Rites* for the members of his order, which allowed him not only to work out problems of performance and revise the ritual texts, but also to take more publicity photos, which appeared in a journal called *The Bystander* on 12 October 1910—one week before the official premiere.[390]

Crowley's *The Rites of Eleusis* were received to mixed reviews, ranging from mild appreciation to venomous attacks not only against the performance itself but also against Crowley's character. The first major review of *The Rites Of Eleusis* appeared one week after *The Rite of Saturn* kicked off the entire series on 19 October. The review, entitled "The Elusive Rites of Eleusis: The Rite of Saturn," appeared in a journal called *The Sketch* with a synopsis of *The Rite of Saturn* and an outline of the rest of the series. The primary complaint of the *Sketch* reviewer was that the auditorium was too dark to see

[390] Ibid., 34-35.

clearly. Richmond notes that smaller reviews appearing shortly thereafter either "took the Rites seriously" or "treated the performance as an occasion for mild whimsy."[391]

It was not long, however, before the scathing reviews and personal attacks began to appear. The first of these was an article in *The Looking Glass* entitled "An Amazing Sect," in which the author suggests that Crowley and his followers were "a blasphemous sect whose proceedings conceivably lend themselves to immorality of the most revolting character" and advised that "young girls and married women" should not be allowed to attend "such performances under the guise of the cult of a new religion."[392] On 5 November 1910, the *P.I.P.* attacked the performances with an article entitled "The Black Mass Idea," which suggests that Crowley's point in producing *The Rites of Eleusis* was to provide pornographic pleasure by giving audiences the opportunity to leer at "flappers in queer garments."[393] Most damaging was an article in the *John Bull* from 5 November in which the tabloid claimed to have planted a female undercover journalist in the audience to observe *The Rite of Saturn*. The journalist described the performance as a patchwork of "barbaric dances [and] sensational interludes of melodrama, blasphemy, and erotic suggestion." Although similar descriptions had been offered by the other hostile journals, the *John Bull* journalist offered "proof" that the *Rites* were immoral by claiming that at one point while the auditorium was plunged in darkness someone put his arm around her and kissed her.[394] Unfortunately, the *John Bull* even made a personal attack against one

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[391] Ibid., 37-38.

[392] "An Amazing Sect," *The Looking Glass*, 29 October 1910, quoted in Richmond, 40.

[393] "The Black Mass Idea," *P.I.P.*, 5 November 1910, quoted in Richmond, 41.

[394] "Is A New Smyth-Pigott Among Us," *John Bull* 5 November 1910, quoted in Richmond, 42.

of Crowley's friends, George Cecil Jones, who was also a member of the *Astrum Argenteum*. Although Crowley chose not respond to this attack, George Cecil Jones sued *The Looking Glass* for defamation of character. The British Court of Law determined two things: (1) Jones had been defamed but not damaged by the defamation; (2) Crowley was a "loathsome and abominable creature." The lamentable result of all this scandal was that both J.F.C. Fuller and Jones chose to sever their ties with Crowley, and the credibility of the *Astrum Argenteum* was severely damaged by this. In fact, there was a serious drop in new members in Crowley's organization following these events.[395]

Richmond suggests that one of the problematic aspects of *The Rites of Eleusis* was that they were magical ceremonies and, therefore, "essentially a private undertaking," that were presented to a public audience that was not initiated and unable to view the performances with "total support and understanding."[396] Had the audience been full of initiates, rather than hostile journalists, the damaging attacks against *The Rites of Eleusis* would most likely not have appeared.

In spite of the difficulties that Crowley experienced with *The Rites of Eleusis*, they are still performed by his followers today. Lon Milo DuQuette and his wife, Constance, have produced *The Rites of Eleusis* in their entirety many times over the last twenty-five years. DuQuette is not alone in his re-staging of *The Rites of Eleusis*; many bodies of the O.T.O. continue to produce them "in numerous locations all over the world." DuQuette differentiates *The Rites of Eleusis* from other magical ceremonies, explaining that they are dramas, and, as such, the "oldest form of Magick." Regarding

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[395] Richmond, 44-46, 50.

[396] Ibid., 17.

the experiences he and his wife have had with these public magical rituals, DuQuette writes:

> We discovered first hand that these little collections of poetry, music, and dance are more than plays with a magical theme. In the purest tradition of the *Eleusinian* mysteries, they really are initiatory experiences in which both cast and audience are treated to highly personalized change of consciousness.[397]

Thus, Crowley has passed on to his followers an awareness of the "magical potential of drama."[398]

Thelemic Theatrical Innovations Today

Crowley's propagation of drama as Magick, along with the theatrical activities of leading *Thelemic* teachers, such as DuQuette, has inspired other O.T.O. Lodges not only to produce *The Rites of Eleusis*, but also to create new dramatic rituals and occult dramas. The Scarlet Woman Lodge of Austin, Texas, is a local body of the O.T.O. under charter from the US Grand Lodge that has begun a tradition of creating original *Thelemic* works. The Scarlet Woman Lodge is described on its official website as a "fraternal, initiatory organization—similar to Freemasonry and the ancient mystery schools—that has accepted the Law of Thelema as revealed in *The Book of the Law*."[399] On another area of the website, the following passage appears under the banner "Ritual Theatre":

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[397] DuQuette, *The Magick of Aleister Crowley*, 191, 196

[398] Ibid., 192.

[399] "About Us," Scarlet Woman Lodge Ordo Templi Orientis. http://www.scarletwoman.org/aboutus.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

> Scarlet Woman Lodge has hosted full productions of Ritual Theatre every season since 1995. A revival of Aleister Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis* composed the first seven seasons, where we staged seven different plays, one every five days, moving through an entire cycle of planetary energies in a single month. We have now moved into our next phase, where we are concentrating our efforts on original pieces. We will continue to explore this exciting theatrical medium in the coming years.[400]

A timeline contained on the website showing the performance history of the Scarlet Woman Lodge reveals that the final production of *The Rites of Eleusis* was given in 2001, after which point its members produced only original rites and plays.[401]

However, even before they stopped producing *The Rites of Eleusis*, the Scarlet Woman Lodge experimenting with original works. In 1997, the Scarlet Woman Lodge produced *The Rite of Pluto* (1996), which is a comedy written by Omega Baphomet (the Scarlet Woman Lodge members do not use their birth names, but take on new names to maintain confidentiality). Omega took over the mastership of the lodge in 2003, and brought to that position his interest in original theatrical productions.[402] Omega kindly provided me with the script of *The Rite of Pluto*, as well as two more of his plays that were performed by the members of the Scarlet Woman Lodge—*The Pharmakon* (2001) and *Schopenhauer in Hell* (2003). A brief examination of these plays will reveal that

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[400] "About Us Events and Projects." Scarlet Woman Lodge Ordo Templi Orientis http://www.scarletwoman.org/aboutus_events.html, (accessed 30 August 2005).

[401] Ibid.

[402] "About Us Lodge Timeline," Scarlet Woman Lodge Ordo Templi Orientis, http://www.scarletwoman.org/aboutus_timeline.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

Omega's work promotes the teachings of *Thelema* and that his dramatic work shares certain characteristics with Crowley's.

In *The Pharmakon*,[403] Omega Baphomet depicts the relationship between Plato and Socrates through an occult lens. In this play, Socrates meets with Daphne, who is the Priestess of the God of Delphi, and with Meno, who is a student of Gorgias the Rhetor, on the eve of his own death to arrange for Plato to be escorted immediately out of Greece and into Egypt, so that the young philosopher can be initiated into the Egyptian Mysteries of Light. The dramatic action of the play is revealed in a series of visions that Plato has while participating in the initiation rituals of the Egyptian Mysteries of Light. The initiation rites that cause Plato to have the visions involve drinking intoxicating beverages. In the first act, Plato must choose between two bowls, one said to contain a poison and the other Kykeon, which is a sacred potion consisting of wine mixed with soporific (Omega Baphomet, *The Pharmakon*, 3). In the second act, Plato must pass a more difficult test; he must choose one of three bowls. One of the bowls contains wine, the other two are said to contain a Pharmakon, a deadly mixture of wine and poison (ibid., 17).

Omega uses the visions that Plato has under the influence of these beverages to reveal the events leading up to Plato's initiation. (As it turns out, the Egyptian Priest benevolently deceived Plato, for all of the bowls offered to Plato contained wine and not poison.) In Plato's first vision he sees how Socrates arranged for him to go to Egypt for his occult initiation. Socrates explains to Daphne and Meno that Plato is a brilliant student, but that he needs to learn occult insight. Socrates has determined that Plato's

[403] Omega Baphomet, "The Pharmakon" (computer printout of play, 2 May 2005).

"fixation on binary oppositions and ideal forms" clouds his "powers of judgment." It is Socrates's hope that by becoming an occult initiate, Plato will soften the rigidity of his *worldview* by contemplating "the interpenetration of opposites" (ibid., 5). The second act portrays Plato's decision to go to Egypt for his initiation, even thought he must leave Daphne, with whom he has fallen in love. When Daphne removes her hood at the end of the Egyptian initiation ceremony, Plato discovers that his lover has participated in his initiation from the beginning.

Details from Crowley's life and teachings appear in *The Pharmakon*. At the beginning of the play, for instance, the Egyptian Priest warns Plato of the danger involved in facing all of the tests that an initiate of the Egyptian Mysteries of Light must endure. In response to this warning, Plato says, "My Will is to persevere until the end" (ibid., 3). The capitalized "w" in "Will" tells us that Plato is referring to the True Will that connects the human being to the forces of the universe, which Crowley refers to in the *Book of the Law* and in *Magick and Theory and Practice.* Furthermore, the phrase "persevere to the end," references "*Perdurabo*," a motto that Crowley swore to when he entered the Golden Dawn that means "I will endure to the end."[404]

Omega Baphomet's other two plays, *The Rite of Pluto* and *Schopenhauer in Hell*, are comedies, and it seems that Omega shares Crowley's penchant for blending occult concepts with humor in his drama. *The Rite of Pluto* premiered on 31 December 1996 for public audiences at the cost of five dollars a ticket at the Bodhi Yoga and Massage Center—a yoga school located at 2905 San Gabriel St.in Austin, Texas. N.V. Continuity

[404] Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley,* 927 n. 42.

P., who was the master of the Scarlet Woman Lodge at that time of the performance, directed the production.[405]

The cast of characters in *The Rite of Pluto* brings Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis* to mind, for they include Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Venus, Mercury, and Luna—all of whom are depicted as falling from their celestial states in Crowley's *The Rites of Eleusis*. In *The Rite of Pluto* these characters find their way back to the celestial realm. Another character from Crowley's *The Rites of Eleusis* who appears in *The Rite of Pluto* is Pan, who cleverly manages to convince Pluto to allow him to lead the other gods out of the underworld.

The ridiculous lamentations of the gods who are condemned to live in misery in the underworld provide much of the comedy in *The Rite of Pluto*. In the play the gods sing a "mournful dirge begging for release" that is riddled with humor:

> *(Each god one woe.)* Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe!
>
> *(Same.)* Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe!
>
> *(One more time.)* Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe!
>
> *(And all together.)* Woe![406]

The ridiculous lamentation ends with the gods singing in unison:

> Sing sad! Sing sadly! Sing sadlier! (Omega Baphomet, *The Rite of Pluto*,

[405] Omega Baphomet, "The Rite of Pluto," (flyer for production of play that took place on computer printout, 2 May 2005); Scarlet Woman Lodge, http://www.scarletwoman.org/aboutus_timeline.html, 19 May 2005.; Bodhi Yoga, "Summer Schedule," http://www.bodhiyoga.com/ (accessed 30 August 2005).

[406] Omega Baphomet, *The Rite of Pluto* (computer printout, 2 May 2005), 4.

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Of course, Pluto has no mercy on these "souls of dead gods" (ibid.), feeling that they are right where they belong in the underworld.

After their cries for mercy fail to move Pluto, Luna bows down toward the East, in accordance with an O.T.O. ritual titled *Liber VII* (ibid., 6), and prays to Pan to save her with a monologue that includes the phrase "Io Pan" (ibid.), which is a quotation from Aleister Crowley's "Hymn to Pan."[407] Pan appears in response to Luna's call for help and begins to harass Pluto, who is greatly upset because Pan, unlike all of the other gods in his domain, is not dead. When Pan explains to Pluto that no more people will die because, in fact, all life on earth has died, Pluto becomes very upset, saying that "death itself is stricken in grief" since "there shall be no more death" (ibid., 7.).

Pluto's frustration increases when Pan calls out the souls of nymphs, who proceed to frolic joyfully with him, ruining the heavy atmosphere of the underworld. Before long, the souls of the seven dead gods are dancing as well. Pluto screams for the revelry to stop, but Pan pays him no heed. Pluto reaches the end of his patience when Pan strikes the Rock of Despair with a sword and causes water to spring forth from it. He orders Pan to leave, and Pan demands that all of the gods be allowed to come with him—otherwise he would rather remain in the underworld with them, since there is nothing living to pass the time with on the face of the earth. In the end, Pluto relents, and Pan and the gods leave to the beat of the drums, while inciting "the audience to go drum and dance and frolic" (ibid., 12).

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[407] Aleister Crowley, "Hymn to Pan," in *Magick in Theory and Practice*, v.

By bringing in Pan to resurrect the deities that Crowley doomed to destruction in his *Rites of Eleusis* in *Rite of Pluto*, Omega Baphomet dramatizes a teaching about death and resurrection that Crowley associated with Pan. Crowley described Pan as the "all-devourer and all-begetter," and Crowley associated Pan with his conception of the Fool card of the Tarot deck. Crowley describes the fool as a "gay, careless youth with a sack full of follies and illusions" who is unaware that destructive forces are perched on all sides, eager to destroy him. However, Crowley also states that even if the Fool is destroyed by these forces, he can always return again in his original form to "repeat the whole process from the beginning."[408]

Schopenhauer in Hell features Aleister Crowley as the lead character. In this play, Crowley is trapped in the astral realm in 1909 by a character named Lucifera, who offers him the opportunity to rule with her in hell and also offers to provide him the Philosopher's Stone of alchemical legend as well as the "Thing-in-itself" that is "reality as it really is," in order to make her offer more tempting. Although Crowley does not think it would be pleasant to turn his back on the pleasures of the earthly realm, he longs for the powers and knowledge that would come with the Philosopher's Stone and the "Thing-in-itself."[409]

At this point, Friedrich Nietzsche appears and tells Crowley to put off his decision until he has seen what has happened to Schopenhauer since he accepted the same offer from Lucifera. Nietzsche shows Crowley a vision of Schopenhauer's tragic loss of freedom to Lucifera. The process of Schopenhauer's demise is connected to events in his

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[408] Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Thoth: A Short Essay on the Tarot of the Egyptians* (1944; reprint, New York, Samuel Weiser, 1975), 63.

[409] Omega Baphomet, "Schopenhauer in Hell," (computer printout, 2 May 2005), 3-4.

life on earth, which are presented in a comic mode. Omega dramatizes Schopenhauer's loss of students to Hegel while attempting to lecture in philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1820. Several students walk into Schopenhauer's lecture hall on the first day of class, thinking they are going into Hegel's class, and Schopenhauer is repeatedly forced to direct them to Professor Hegel's lecture hall. Tired of being rated second best, Schopenhauer desires "fame and fortune and to be surrounded . . . by loving, beautiful admirers" (Omega Baphomet, *Schopenhauer in Hell*, 11). Lucifera's offer seems designed to provide just that; so Schopenhauer agrees to rule in hell with her, only to discover that he has become her slave for eternity. Rather than obtaining the "Thing-in-itself," Schopenhauer obtained his own "Hell-in-Itself" and an eternity of lashings from Lucifera's whip (ibid.). Although the vision convinces Crowley that Lucifera has deceived Schopenhauer, he still longs for the Philosopher's Stone and the Thing-In-Itself. The play ends with Crowley gazing into the audience, seeking guidance as he continues to struggle with his decision.

All three of Omega's plays continue Crowley's tradition of allowing his new initiates, or "probationers," to participate in *The Rites of Eleusis*. In *The Rite of Pluto*, the god party is played by probationers (*Rite of Pluto,* 1), while, in *Schopenhauer in Hell*, probationers play small parts, such as when one brings drinks to the actors portraying Nietzsche, Crowley, and Lucifera while they sit in a tavern (*Schopenhauer in Hell*, 9). Like Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis*, all three of Omega Baphomet's plays incorporate the tools and clothing of practical magic, for all three plays involve ceremonial robes and magical objects. Thus, Crowley's mode of production has been effectively passed on to newer practitioners of *Thelemic* theatre.

Thelemic Theatre and Avant-Garde Theatre

The tradition of dramaturgy and performance that Crowley has passed down to members of the Scarlet Woman Lodge bears similarities to the European symbolist theatre. Crowley spent a great deal of time in Paris between during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,[410] and his reference to symbolist authors reveals his interest in and respect for symbolist theatre. For instance, in *Magick in Theory and Practice* he offers a dramatic ritual whose structure was based upon the dance and beheading scenes of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* as an example of a successful magical invocation of the dramatic sort.[411] Regarding the portion of *The Rites of Eleusis* entitled *The Rite of Saturn*, Crowley wrote that "nothing of Maeterlinck's ever produced so overpowering an oppression as this invocation of the dark spirit of Time,"[412] which implies that he may have seen a performance of one of Maeterlinck's plays. Of course, Crowley knew Yeats's work, although he never wrote a complimentary word about it. For instance, writing under the pseudonym A. Quiller, Jr. Crowley wrote a harsh review of *The Shadowy Waters* entitled, "The Shadowy Dill-Waters; or Mr. Smudge the Medium," in which Crowley condemns Yeats's style as monotonous.[413]

Crowley's and Omega Baphomet's plays have many of the characteristics of symbolist drama. They depict the interaction of human beings with invisible forces. They make reference to occult traditions such as Rosicrucianism and Cabbala. Crowley's

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[410] See Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 954.

[411] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 178 n. 2.

[412] Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 636.

[413] Aleister Crowley [A. Quiller, Jr., pseud.] , "The Shadowy Dill-Waters; or Mr. Smudge the Medium," in *Gems from the Equinox*, 869-72.

plays exhibit traits of medievalism, such as the medieval dramatic structure that Crowley employs in *The World's Tragedy* and his use of characters from medieval romance such as Sir Percivale. Crowley's and Omega Baphomet's plays contain ritualized action, and they incorporate the actual tools of magic (i.e. altars, robes, swords, etc.). In this way, Crowley's dramatic tradition has carried something of turn-of-the-century symbolist theatre into the present.

Conclusion

After producing *The Rites of Eleusis* in 1910 and experiencing the abuse of the tabloids, Crowley dabbled in commercial theatre, as when, in 1913, he established a performance group called *The Ragged Ragtime Girls,* which specialized in music and dance and featured Leila Waddell's violin playing.[414] However, Crowley did not produce any more experiments in commercial theatre after this. He also never produced another public performance of ceremonial magic after *The Rites of Eleusis*, giving only private performances for audiences that were, in theory, sympathetic to the principles of *Thelemic* Magick. It is quite possible that the hostile response of the tabloids had something to do with Crowley's decision to cease giving public rituals, because he advised other would-be producers of dramatic rituals in later years to present their works only in front of an audience full of like-minded individuals who had been initiated into the same mysteries.[415]

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[414] Crowley, *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 690.

[415] Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, 177.

Aleister Crowley's teachings continue to influence people today. The O.T.O. has more than four thousand members worldwide,[416] exclusive of the several other organizations that follow the law of *Thelema*. The official website of the O.T.O. U.S. Grand Lodge states that one of the common practices of local bodies of the O.T.O. is the "performance of group rituals."[417] Crowley's teachings about theatre and drama are being passed down along with his other teachings on the occult, Magick, and *Thelema*.

[416] US Grand Lodge Ordo Templi Orientis, "OTO Membership," http://www.oto-usa.org/member.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

[417] US Grand Lodge Ordo Templi Orientis, "About Us," http://www.oto-usa.org/about_oto.html. (30 August 2005).

Chapter Five:
Neo-Pagan Theatrical Forms

The theatrical forms examined in this chapter are associated with Neo-Paganism, an esoteric spiritual movement that has existed since the mid-twentieth century. Neo-Pagans tend to practice rituals in small groups, and most of them are middle-class people from Western cultures. Many of them are well-educated, skilled individuals; scientists, educators, politicians, and media figures can be counted among the world's Neo-Pagan population.[418] There are thousands of Neo-Pagans worldwide, although it is difficult to arrive at an accurate estimation, because many Neo-Pagans are not initiated into official groups and are therefore difficult to count. In his 1991 book, *Crafting the Art of Magic*, Aidan Kelly estimated that there were 200,000 Neo-Pagans in the United States.[419] Ronald Hutton suggests that there are thousands of Neo-Pagans in Canada and Australia, and that "most European countries have [Neo-Pagan] populations ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand."[420] Shahrukh Husain asserts that there were only 100,000 Neo-Pagans in the US in the early 1990s and that in 1996 the *Wiccan* Church of the United Kingdom—just one branch of Neo-Paganism—had almost twelve thousand members. Husain mentions a "vast international network of modern pagans" and "International Pagan groups," with members from Latin America, India, Africa, and

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[418] Shahrukh Husain, *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality, and the Feminine Divine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 151.

[419] Aidan Kelly, *Crafting the Art of Magic* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1991), ix.

[420] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 400.

Europe, that assist in the organization of major festivals such as the first Pagan Festival of Europe, which was held in West Germany in 1988.[421]

Neo-Paganism became highly visible to the public when Gerald Gardner introduced the witchcraft religion known as *Wicca* to the public through novels, literature, and interviews with the press during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Today *Wicca* is not the only form of Neo-Paganism, and reconstructions of ancient Egyptian or Greek religion, Druidism, various modes of witchcraft, and ceremonial magic organizations, as well as others, can be counted among Neo-Pagan organizations.[422] Although there are a large variety of Neo-Pagan groups, there are certain beliefs and characteristics that unite them. These include Goddess worship, a belief in "the interdependence of all elements of the cosmic organism,"[423] and the "ecology" of the human being's relation to nature and to the various parts of himself/herself.[424] Another characteristic that most Neo-Pagan groups share is an interest in the performance of ritual, as Robert S. Ellwood explains:

> These Neo-Pagan groups have in common a particular emphasis on . . . the "practical"—rite, gesture, ceremonial act. It is through corporate "work" that the magical cosmos is evoked; it is "made" by ritual

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[421] Husain, 151.

[422] Robert S. Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 187.

[423] Husain, 150.

[424] Ellwood, 188.

> actions that demarcate and celebrate it, and by acts done as if it were present.[425]

The importance of ritual among Neo-Pagans has resulted in the creation of numerous rites and ceremonies, some of which are conceived of as "theatre" or "theatrical."

In this chapter I examine Neo-Pagan rituals whose creators describe them with theatrical language. In this chapter, for instance, the Neo-Pagan groups that I introduce either describe their rituals or performance techniques as "theatre" or describe identify their group as a "theatre" group. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I provide an overview of the history, beliefs, and practices of Neo-Paganism. In the second, I survey specific examples of Neo-Pagan theatre. Finally, I explore some connections between Neo-Pagan theatre and the traditions of avant-garde experimental theatre.

Unlike the preceding chapters, which treated the theatrical activities of one organization, such as The Theosophical Society or the Anthroposophical Society, in this chapter I provide three examples of Neo-Pagan theatre. These organizations and individuals are Serpentessa the "Snake Priestess," the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre, and the Alchemical Fire Circle Work of the Vegas Vortex, because all of these groups conceive of their work or groups as theatrical. Each paradigm of Neo-Pagan theatre that I discuss has unique characteristics that reflect the specific aspects of Neo-Pagan thought and practice that they emphasize in their work. Far from an exhaustive treatment, this survey is designed to illustrate the unique qualities of the various individuals and theatre groups and the unifying principles that they share as creators of Neo-Pagan theatre.

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[425] Ibid., 189.

History, Beliefs, and Practices of Neo-Paganism

In order to recognize unifying Neo-Pagan principles in diverse theatrical forms, we must become acquainted with a certain amount of Neo-Pagan history, thought, and ritual. Some aspects of Neo-Paganism are connected to the beginnings of the Western occult and esoteric tradition. For instance, many Neo-Pagans adhere to the doctrine of reincarnation and karma, as do Anthroposophists, Theosophists, and many Thelemites. Like many nineteenth-century occult organizations, some Neo-Pagan groups are secret societies whose members may attain higher degrees of wisdom via initiatory rituals. Furthermore, Neo-Pagans explore many of the same philosophies, legends, and practices that Western occultists and mystics have explored for centuries, such as the Cabala, interpretation of tarot cards, invocation and evocation, the Knights Templar, the Holy Grail, the ancient mystery religions of Greece and Egypt, and the magical and spiritual practices of indigenous and non-Western cultures.

However, contemporary Neo-paganism has certain characteristics by which it can be distinguished from the esoteric trends that predate it. These characteristics will be the subject of this section.

One of the earliest and most influential figures to emerge in connection with the development of Neo-Paganism is Gerald Brosseau Gardner (1884-1964). Gardner, who worked on tea and rubber tree plantations in Ceylon, North Borneo, and Malaya between 1900 and 1923, was a man with a thirst for knowledge who taught himself to read and write. With a strong interest in history, folklore, and archeology, Gardner had a passion for self-education and experiential learning—especially regarding the occult and magic—and he gained experience in Freemasonry, Buddhism, spiritualism, and tribal magic. As

a result of his work, he became "an author of respected monographs" in the fields of "Malay archeology, numismatics, maritime history, and folklore."[426]

After retiring from his work as a plantation overseer in 1936, Gardner moved to London, where he joined the national Folklore Society, the Druid Order (a group practicing a form of philosophical Freemasonry), the Co-Masons (a branch of the Masons that welcomes female members), and an esoteric society called the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Crotona. Gardner pursued his occult work in London with a woman he met in the Rosicrucian Fellowhip whom he referred to as "Dafo." Dafo was the leading lady and stage director of a Rosicrucian Theatre in Christchurch, England, a city on the southern coast.

The Rosicrucian Theatre was founded by an actor named G. A. Sullivan and by Mabel Besant-Scott, who the daughter of Annie Besant, the leader of the Theosophical Society who severed her relationship with Rudolf Steiner's German charter of the Theosophical Society. The theatre was established to educate "the public in mysticism through drama," but the venture only lasted for one season, from July to September 1938—the time when Gardner says he began working with the members of the Rosicrucian theatre. [427] Gardner depicts the time that he spent with the members of the Rosicrucian Theatre as a turning point in his life, for he asserts that the members of the Rosicrucian Theatre introduced him to a witch named Dorothy Clutterbock—Gardner called her "Old Dorothy"—who presided over a coven. Old Dorothy initiated Gardner

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[426] Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon*, 205.

[427] Ronald Hutton, "A Starting Point: Gerald Gardner's Life and Work," in *Witchcraft Today*, 161-63; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 213.

into this coven, and he soon began talking to the public about their practices, which Gardner asserted were part of an ancient religion.[428]

Gardner began publicly revealing the practices and beliefs of the allegedly ancient witch religion in a 1949 book entitled *High Magic's Aid*,[429] which Gardner claimed to contain information that he was given permission to disclose by a coven of practicing witches.[430] In 1951, the Witchcraft and Vagrancy Act was officially repealed in England, and at this time Gardner revealed more information to the public about the witch religion in a series of interviews. In his 1954 book, *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner wrote about witch religions once again, referring to its practitioners as "*Wica*," which he called a Celtic word meaning "wise people." According to Gardner, the *Wica* "generally work for good purposes and help those in trouble to the best of their ability."[431] "*Wica*" appears in the *Chambers Dictionary of Scots-English*, where it simply means "wise," but after the 1960s the word is usually spelled in modern witchcraft circles as "*Wicca*" and commonly refers to both the witch religion itself and its practitioners.[432]

The basic components of Gardner's *Wicca*—now referred to as "Gardnerian *Wicca*"—as he revealed it to the public in the early 1950s, included the practice of dance to promote fertility, the consumption of consecrated food and drink, the performance of magical rituals, the worship of a goddess and a horned-god, and the predominance of the

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[428] Ibid., 205-06.

[429] Gerald Gardner, *High Magick's Aid* (London: Michael Houghton, 1949).

[430] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon,* 206.

[431] Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (1954; reprint, New York: Citadel Press, 2004), 102-03.

[432] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 241.

goddess in summer and the god in winter. Ritual work was often performed in a circle drawn with a consecrated sword or knife by nude participants, in the ideal situation. The doctrine of reincarnation was accepted as true, and the witches performed magic to develop latent psychic powers,[433] which recalls Edouard Schuré's belief that the "Theatre of the Future" would be a tool by which the human soul could "recover all its powers" and be able to interact in both physical and spiritual realms.[434] Gardner's *Wicca* was organized into covens, each led by a high priestess and a high priest, and the members of the coven were subdivided into couples made up of one male and one female witch, for training and initiatory purposes.

Wiccans observed festivals at the four quarter days that open the seasons, and, initially, the solstices and equinoxes were not performed on the exact day of those natural occurrences, but on the nearest full moon that coincided with a coven meeting. Trance and ecstasy were important to rites of invocation, because the practitioner sought to feel as though he or she had become the invoked deity.[435] Gardnerian witches employed specific ritual tools, including altar, incense burner, scourge, wine cup, pentacle, wand, sword, dagger, cord, and aspergillum.[436]

The accuracy of Gardner's story of the witch religion is not confirmable, but Timothy Hutton argues that there is "nothing inherently implausible in Gardner's claim to

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[433] Ibid., 206.

[434] Edouard Schuré, *The Genesis of Tragedy and The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1936), 263.

[435] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 206, 248.

[436] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, n.pag.

have been initiated into an existing religion."[437] Such a religion would most likely have been an esoteric NRM of the sort that had been emerging in England since the nineteenth century—such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Gardner, like Crowley, was a member of various esoteric societies, so it would not have been out of character for him to join another one. At any rate, it is not only impossible to prove whether or not Gardner entered a truly ancient religion when he joined "Old Dorothy" and her followers but also to prove that such a group even existed. In *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans*, Jeffrey B. Russell argues that "there is no evidence that Dorothy ever existed,"[438] and although Hutton demonstrates that a woman of the name of Dorothy Clutterbuck did in fact live in Christchurch, he admits that there is no conclusive evidence that she was an associate of Gardner's or a witch.[439] To make matters murkier, even if Gardner did enter such a witch religion, there is no way to show that rituals that he described as central to this religion were practiced.

Without such proof, we can still try to learn as much as possible about the foundation upon which Gardner's witch religion is based, and we can draw some conclusions about its authenticity as an ancient religion. Gardner's assertion that an ancient witch religion existed was rooted in an anthropological report entitled *Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (1921) written by a professor of Egyptology at University College in London named Margaret Alice Murray. In that report Murray argues that the witchcraft for which thousands of people were condemned between the Middle Ages and the early

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[437] Ibid., 206-07.

[438] Jeffrey B. Russell, *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 153.

[439] Hutton, 209-12.

nineteenth century in Europe was a "definite religion with beliefs, ritual, and organizations as highly developed as that of any other cult in the world."[440] Later scholars cast serious doubt on Murray's thesis, and "no academic historian has ever taken seriously Gardner's claim to have discovered a genuine survival of ancient religion."[441] Russell explains that the rituals of Gardner's religion can be traced to a variety of modern literary and magical sources that Gardner may have used to "to invent—or reinvent—a religion."[442] Colin Wilson note in *The Occult* that Gardner's incorporation of flogging and bondage into *Wiccan* rites earned him a reputation as "a sado-masochist with both a taste for flagellation and marked voyeuristic tendencies."[443] Thus, there is a great deal of skepticism regarding the authenticity of Gardner's claims to have discovered an ancient religion. Regardless of the ancient heritage of *Wicca*, as a modern religion it has contributed to the development of many Neo-Pagan organizations that adhere to the "unifying theme" of the human being's "relation to nature and to the various parts" of himself/herself.[444]

Many of the central themes and practices of Garderian *Wicca* are found in Margaret Alice Murray's argument for the existence of an ancient witch religion that pre-dates Christianity. For instance, Murray writes that each ancient coven of witches was run by a male Chief, who dressed as the male horned-God during rituals, and a female

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[440] Margaret Anne Murray, *Witch Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921; reprint, Whitefish, MT, Kessinger, n.d.), 12.

[441] Hutton, 206-07.

[442] Russell, 153.

[443] Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 455.

[444] Ellwood, 188.

Chief, who was viewed as the "Mother-Goddess worshipped chiefly by women."[445] Although Murray names the witch religion the "Diane Cult," after what she claims to be the Western European name for the Mother-Goddess, she states that the worship of the male deity often "superseded that of the female" in the Diane Cult.[446] Perhaps using this assertion as a justification, Gardner sought to place the authority of the priest above the priestess in his version of *Wicca* in 1957 by producing a set of "Traditional Laws of the Craft" that contained clauses designed to limit the authority of the high priestess. In response to this, Doreen Valiente (1922-1999), another key figure in the development of *Wicca* who was initiated into Gardner's Hertfordshire coven in 1953,[447] abandoned Gardner to formulate a *Wicca* that did not restrict the power of female leaders.[448]

Although Gardner's attempt to control the power of women in his coven reveals that he had some conservative sensibilities, some of his practices and teachings were anything but conservative. For instance, Gardner taught that nudity was appropriate for *Wiccan* ritual performance:

> I have been shown a recipe for an anointing oil. This consisted of vervain, or mint crushed and steeped in olive oil or lard, left overnight, then squeezed through a cloth to remove the leaves. . . . It is said that if they [a coven of witches] lived in the country where they would not be seen, they would strip and rub the oil into their skin and go to the sabbat naked. . . .

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[445] Hutton, 13, 61, 68,

[446] Ibid., 12-13

[447] Doreen Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (1978; reprint, Blaine, WA: Pheonix Publishing, n.d.), 14.

[448] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 249.

> They went to the meetings naked because if they were raided they might not have time to dress and so would leave incriminating clothing behind. Another thing was that they found the soldiers would usually let a naked girl go, but would take a clothed one prisoner. The slippery oiled bodies also made them hard to catch hold of.[449]

Gardner's did sometimes perform rituals in the nude at the Hertfordshire coven,[450] and many of his disciples incorporated nudity into the rituals of their own covens. One such disciple-turned-high priestess, Patricia Crowthers, wrote a book with her husband, the high priest Arnold Crowthers, entitled *The Witches Speak* (1965), in which they advised that magical rituals should be performed in the nude and that robes of the sort that Crowley used in his ceremonial Magick were unrelated to *Wicca*.[451] The most common justification for ritual nudity given in *Wiccan* publications is that it helps to release magical power from the body—an assertion made first by Gardner and repeated by many other modern witches who appeared after him.[452] Doreen Valiente connected Gardner's incorporation of nudity into *Wicca* rites with his support of the modern "naturist movement"—also known as "nudist movement"—and says that Gardner's public support of this "scandalous movement took a great deal of moral courage."[453] By making this

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[449] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 55-56.

[450] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 263.

[451] Patricia and Arnold Crowther, *The Witches Speak* (Douglas: Athol, 1965), 15-16, 102-03, 148.

[452] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 20; see also Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 399, 469 n 15.

[453] Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow*, 14.

assertion, Valiente reveals yet another modern source that Gardner may have employed in the act of reconstructing what he presented as an ancient religion.

Gardner valued some non-European magical traditions, and he proposed a connection between these and the ancient religion of witchcraft. He argued, for example, that Voodoo might be a derivative of witchcraft and that it bore similarities to "the Greek mysteries of Dionysus, Zeus, Orpheus, Zagreus, and Eleusis."[454] By connecting Voodoo with the Eleusian mysteries, Gardner was claiming on its behalf the same heritage that occultists such as Lévi, Crowley, and Schuré claimed for European magic and the occult. Although some might detect cultural elitism in Gardner's resorting to the ideals of Western occultism in order to raise the status of Voodoo in the eyes of the English, his attitude was far more open than that of sensationalist writers such as Elliot O'Donnell, who in his 1934 book, *Strange Cults and Secret Societies of Modern London*, argued that the spiritual practices of Africans, Asians, and Southern Europeans were a contaminant to British culture.[455]

Wicca underwent changes almost immediately after Gerald introduced it to England. Doreen Valiente, a witch whom he initiated into his coven in the early 1950s, was a charismatic leader with a talent for writing poetry and creating rituals, and she greatly influenced the direction of *Wicca* by convincing Gardner to allow her to make revisions in the Book of Shadows, the sacred text of his witch religion that was supposed to be hand copied by initiates and contained all of the instructions and rituals for

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[454] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 34, 94-95

[455] Elliot O'Donnell, *Strange Cults and Secret Societies of Modern London* (London: Allan, 1934), 203-05, 213, 233-39; see also Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 258-59.

Gardnerian witches.[456] Valiente told Gardner that she was displeased with a recitation entitled "Leviter veslis" (the lifting of the veil) contained in the Book of Shadows. This recitation is the central spiritual expression for Gardnerian *Wicca* and it begins the seasonal rituals associated with the *Wiccan* Goddess. Valiente warned Gardner that, because much of "Leviter veslis" was attributable to Aleister Crowley, people who discovered this might negatively associate *Wicca* with the notorious magician's bad reputation. Gardner invited Valiente to re-write "Leviter veslis," and she did so, representing the goddess as the "soul of Nature in all its beauty from whom all things proceed and must return." In Valiente's version of the ritual, the goddess prescribes a religion of love and pleasure balanced by reverence and mirth, and proposes that the knowledge of herself [the goddess] lies within each individual.[457]

The cycle of seasonal rituals is another area of *Wicca* that Gardner revised. Initially, *Wiccans* had only four seasonal rituals that were performed on specific days and at specific times. These were the celebration of Halloween and February Eve, which involved the invocation of the *Wiccan* God by the high priest of the coven, and May and August Eves, which involved the invocation of the Goddess by the high priestess.[458] The solstices and the equinoxes, however, were not initially celebrated on the exact day of the event. In 1958, the members of the Hertfordshire coven told Gardner that they felt it was inappropriate that the main sabbats of the God and the Goddess were celebrated on the actual days, while the solstices and equinoxes were given a less significant status by

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[456] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 226.

[457] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 234, 247.

[458] Ibid., 234.

being performed not at the moment of the natural event, but on "at the nearest monthly meeting, which was pegged by the full moon." Gardner agreed that, from that time forward, the solstices and equinoxes would be celebrated on their exact days and times.[459] Since that time, many Neo-Pagans have adopted the same pattern of eight celebrations.

Not all of the new versions of modern witchcraft originated within the confines of Gardner's coven, for Gardner's form of *Wicca*, now referred to as "Gardnerian *Wicca*," was soon competing with alternate versions of witchcraft. In 1964, a man named Alex Sanders popularized a form of witchcraft that he claimed was authentic witchcraft, and he denounced Gardnerian *Wicca* as inaccurate. By 1967, Sanders and Maxine Morris, a beautiful witch whom he initiated into his coven, became public icons representing modern witchcraft in England. They revolutionized modern witchcraft by initiating an large number of young people into their tradition of witchcraft. Unlike Gardner, who wouldn't initiate anyone under twenty-one, Sanders and Morris initiated people who were eighteen. Sanders had a great sense for theatricality, and he allowed press photographers to document some of his rituals, which were frequently performed in the nude. This branch of *Wicca* has become known as Alexandrian.[460]

More new forms of witchcraft, including feminist witchcraft, occurred when England's modern witchcraft reached the United States in the 1960s. In 1968 a group called WITCH (Women's International Conspiracy from Hell) formed in New York, promoting the idea that the witch hunts of the early modern period had been a suppression of alternative cultures by the ruling elite and an attack against a feminist

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[459] Ibid., 248.

[460] Ibid., 324-326.

religion whose practitioners were brave and liberated.[461] In 1971, Zsuszana Budapest established the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1 in Hollywood. By 1980, Budapest changed the name of her system of witchcraft from "*Wicca"* to "Dianic" and claimed to have initiated 800 women into her tradition. Budapest felt that the spiritual liberation of women depended upon their willingness to "abide in an all-female energy environment, to read no male writers, to listen to no male voices, [and] to pray to no male gods."[462] Thus, the role of women as leaders in modern witchcraft increased in the United States, and, as Budapest's abandonment of "*Wicca*" in favor of "Dianic" indicates, the search for the Divine Feminine was becoming a central part of feminist witchcraft in the U.S.

Budapest's establishment of a exclusively female body that excludes men from their rituals bears a striking resemblance to the representations of Diana and her followers that the medieval author, Christine de Pizan, depicted in her 1400 work entitled *Epistre Othea.*[463] As Marylinn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn explain in their 2004 book, *Myth, Montage, & Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea*, Christine de Pizan emphasizes that the Goddess Diana demanded that her female followers live separately from men, and drove them from her company if they broke this regulation.[464]

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[461] Margaret Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 2nd edition (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 179; see also Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 345.

[462] Zsuzsana Budapest, *The Grandmother of Time* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 168.

[463] Marylinn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, *Myth, Montage, & Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture*: Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 3.

[464] Ibid., 118-31.

Miriam Simons, writing under the name Starhawk, offered a non-separatist version of feminist witchcraft in her 1979 book, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Religion of the Great Goddess*.[465] *The Spiral Dance* book re-shapes *Wicca*; although it retains many of the elements of Gardnerian *Wicca*, such as the eight seasonal holidays, the Goddess, and the Horned-god, Starhawk revises their significance. While she claims that the Goddess exists and gives her primacy, she defines her as a being that is experienced through interaction with nature. She writes that human beings connect with the Goddess by experiencing the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, trees, animals, other human beings, and themselves.[466] Starhawk's reverence for the Goddess as nature led her to acts of ecological activism, and in the 1980s she was "arrested and imprisoned for non-violent direct actions undertaken in protest against installations where nuclear weapons were made or stored."[467] Although she claimed that her beliefs could be dated back to the Neolithic period, the antiquity of her form of the Craft was less important to her than the spiritual and psychological benefits that she believed resulted from practicing it.[468]

By the 1980s, therefore, there were already many different traditions of modern witchcrafts, and newer versions and approaches have arisen since then. Into the 1990s Gardnerian and Alexandrian *Wicca* continued to be practiced by Neo-Pagans, and the modern witchcraft scene in Europe and America increased in diversity as new

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[465] Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

[466] Ibid., 22, 25, 91, 95, 109, 111.

[467] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 348.

[468] Ibid., 346.

practitioners developed their own brands of "the Craft" that they labeled as "traditional."[469] This diversity in form increased still further with the development of the "hedge witch,"[470] which refers to the solitary practitioner of witchcraft who develops his or her own Craft. With the hedge witch came new manuals, such as Marion Green's *A Witch Alone*, which established a position against prescribed rituals and offered materials with which the solitary practitioner could formulate his or her own version of witchcraft.[471]

Thus, by the 1990s a trend that I will refer to as "Personalized Spirituality," had materialized in Neo-Pagan literature. This trend had been developing since at least the time of Gerald Gardner (remember that he encouraged Doreen Valiente to re-write rituals to suit her taste), and it was also exemplified in the number of practitioners of spiritual systems that shared certain qualities with *Wicca*, yet who did not necessarily define themselves as either *Wiccans* or witches. Between 1988 and 1998, practitioners of spiritualities that are obviously attributable to the heritage of *Wicca* and modern witchcraft began to refer to themselves more frequently with the term "Pagan," rather than *"Wiccan"* or "witch." Similarly, in "public discourse" coven leaders increasingly referred to themselves with the label of "priest" and "high priest" as opposed to "witch."[472]

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[469] Ibid., 384.

[470] Rae Beth, *Hedge Witch: A Guide to Solitary Witchcraft* (London: Hale, 1990).

[471] Marian Green, *A Witch Alone* (London: Aquarian, 1991).

[472] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 388.

This trend of Personalized Spirituality contributed to a burst of new magical movements that incorporated many of the beliefs and practices that are attributable to the *Wicca* and other modern witchcraft traditions. This expanding body of magical traditions makes up the Neo-Pagan movement; so it is important to stress that many groups or individuals define themselves as Neo-Pagan and do not view themselves as *Wiccan* or witches. However, part of what makes these groups and individuals Neo-Pagan is that they frequently assert an affinity with practitioners of a variety of forms of *Wicca* and modern witchcraft.

Likewise, *Wiccans* and other witches also recognize that they share values and interests with these other Neo-Pagan groups. In the 2004 reprint of Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*, Gardenerian High Priestess Judy Harrow mentions a variety of Neo-Pagan groups, interests, ideals, and practices that are harmonious with those of Gardnerian *Wicca*. Among these are Druid reconstruction groups, practitioners of Sacred Circle Dance, which involves using "rhythmic bodily movement to alter consciousness," the "Goddess Movement," which Harrow describes as "the place where Neo-Paganism overlaps with feminist spirituality" and a recognition of "the sacredness of Earth," a general interest in Voodoo and Malaysian spirit shamanism, and, more generally, Shamanism, which denotes the practice of rendering service to "the People" by obtaining wisdom and healing power from dreams, trances, and explorations of "the Otherworld."[473]

[473] Judy Harrow, "Looking Forward: Gardner's Hunches," in *Witchcraft Today*, 177-183.

The diversity of Neo-Pagan organizations was, however, prevalent long before the 2004 reprint of *Witchcraft Today*, for by 1970 the Pagan Front had been founded in England. About this organization, Hutton writes:

> It was open to all who accepted the concepts of paired female and male divinity, of the Wiccan ethic 'do what you will as long as it harms none', [*sic*] of reincarnation with reward or punishment for behavior in life.[474]

Hutton explains that the Pagan Front was supported by three coven leaders—one dedicated to the Gardnerian form of *Wicca* and the other two to two different varieties of Traditional witchcraft. In 1981 the Pagan Front changed its name to the Pagan Federation to "reflect better the organization's nature as an affiliation of different groups." There was a great deal of crossover from one Neo-Pagan group to another. For instance, in the 1980s in England two former *Wiccan* high priests founded two new pagan Druid orders.[475] On the other hand, to be Pagan is not necessarily to be *Wiccan*—one can worship the Great Goddess or the horned God and not belong to a *Wiccan* coven. One can share some or all of the values of *Wicca* without choosing to claim that title.

I am not suggesting that new Neo-Pagan Groups take all of their inspiration from Garderian *Wicca*. Many of these groups employ magic and consciousness-altering practices from non-European cultures (the incorporation of techniques associated with Voodoo and Malaysian shamanism is a case in point), and the *Wiccan* community has

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[474] Timothy Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 371.

[475] Ibid., 372.

benefited from the teachings of such groups.[476] The ideas about heritage formed within newer Neo-Pagan organizations often differ from concepts of heritage associated with early *Wicca*; in recent years Neo-Pagans have identified less often with the victims of the early modern witch trials and have exhibited a tendency to "reclaim the heritage of" classical antiquity and Celtic and northern literatures.[477]

In spite of the different practices and source materials that Neo-Pagan organizations employ in the development of their beliefs and practices, that Neo-Pagan associations have been formed suggests that many of these groups share significant ideas. The Pagan Federation, for instance, lists beliefs "to which its members are expected to subscribe." These beliefs are: (1) the natural world is inherently divine and exists through no force other than its own; (2) there is no single divine law by which to govern human behavior, and an individual may pursue what he or she wishes within the limitation of avoiding bringing harm to others (which agrees with the ethics of the previously mentioned *Wiccan Rede*); (3) divinity can be either male or female.[478]

In the United States, the term "Neo-Pagan" is more commonly employed to refer to the sorts of groups that are member organizations of the Pagan Federation. A website dedicated to religious tolerance contains a list of characteristics associated with Neo-Pagan religions, including reconstruction of an ancient religion that had been "almost or completely wiped out," dualism and/or polytheism, solitary practice of ritual and magic, practice of ritual and magic in small groups (which may be referred to as call circles,

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[476] Ibid, 181-183.

[477] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 388.

[478] Ibid., 390.

covens, hearths, groves, garths, or kindreds), celebration of the equinoxes and solstices and four other days between these natural events, conducting rituals outdoors when practical, minimal or no hierarchical structure, pronounced concern for the environment and nature, and following a code that forbids any activities that cause harm to others.[479]

The most relevant aspect of Neo-Paganism, however, for the purpose of this chapter, is—as Hutton notes—that its "essence lies in the creative performance of ritual." Because many Neo-Pagans view rituals that they are taught by others "as starting-points for the development of their own practices," the Neo-Pagan movement has become fertile ground in which innovative new forms of esoteric theatre has flourished. Indeed, the techniques by which Neo-Pagans raise spiritual energy and conduct magical operations are frequently modes of performance, including dancing, drumming, chanting, singing, spiral dancing, and sacred drama.[480]

Because Neo-Pagan ritual frequently demands the skills of a performer, it should come as no surprise that such organizations frequently have members—especially leaders—with "vivid imaginations[s]," "high creative power," stability, stamina, skill in poetry, and an actor's ability to take on the attributes of a character.[481] This has been the case since the beginning of modern *Wicca*. Dafo, who was the leading lady of the Rosicrucian theatre that Gardner worked with, became one of the first Gardnerian *Wiccan* priestesses. Alex Sanders's displays of ritual for the English press caused Hutton to note

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[479] Religious Tolerance, "Descriptions of Neopagan religious traditions," http://www.religioustolerance.org/paga_des.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[480] Hutton, 397-98.

[481] Ibid., 403-04.

his "instinctual sense of theatre,"[482] and Doreen Valiente's keen ability to compose poetic rituals has already been noted.

Thus, theatrical skills have been a key part of the Neo-Pagan movement—at least since the 1950s. The specific ways that these skills are put to use in the performance of Neo-Pagan theatre is the subject of the next section.

Neo-Pagan Theatre

Serpentessa (Gretchen Brown), is also interested in non-Western performance forms. She is a belly-dancing "Snake Priestess" who has danced with snakes for twenty years, gives workshops and temple belly dance classes, and performs rituals and ritual theatre that focuses on "reclaiming the Sacred Feminine in mind, body, and soul."[483] One of her workshops is called Basic Snake Handling, and the participants are a mixture of men, women, and children.[484]A professional theatrical performer, Serpentessa performed in the off-Broadway production, *Goddessdance*, which ran during the summer of 2002 at the American Theatre of Actors at 314 54th Street in Manhattan. Jehan, who trained Serpentessa in the art of belly dancing, created *Goddessdance*.

The *Goddessdance* website describes the production as "a lavish Middle Eastern fantasy that celebrates women--their beauty and sensuality, and their changing roles in history." It is comprised of a series of vignettes, including a harem scene in which "a new concubine is befriended only to be murdered by the rival wives," Serpentessa dancing

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[482] Ibid., 213, 330.

[483] Gretchen Brown, "The Serpent & The Moon," Weed Wanderings, www.susunweed.com/herbal_ezine/april04/menopausal.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[484] Center for Symbolic Studies, "Dream Healing in Ancient and Modern Times: An Intensive Workshop in the Asklepian Tradition," http://www.symbolicstudies.org/dream.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

with a live python, and a sumptuous traditional belly dance by Jehan. Jehan composed and arranged the live music that blends traditional and modern and features such instruments as flute, didgeridoo, numerous Middle Eastern drums, and hand clappers.[485]

Serpentessa and the cast members of *Goddessdance* share with avant-garde and experimental theatre artists an interest in non-Western performance forms. Like Antonin Artaud, who found inspiration in Balinese dance, and Eugenio Barba, who drew from Aztec art, Balinese dance, Kabuki, and Indian Odissi dance in his efforts to find "shared common principles" of performance that transcend cultural barriers,[486] Serpentessa seeks non-Western performance forms that she believes to have a spiritual effect. And her interest in spiritual performance suited the professed purpose of *Goddessdance*, which was billed as a "transcendent theatrical experience" with the potential to "heal."[487]

The spirituality of *Goddessdance* did not escape the notice of *Village Voice* dance reviewer, Eva Yaa Asantewaa, who stated that Jehan's production "celebrated the primal spirituality of belly dancing and the atomic power of women's sexuality." With the exception of a performer named Thulani, whom Asantewaa deemed too serious to convey the humor contained in certain parts of the text, her review was positive. She praised

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[485] Goddessdance, "Press Reviews," http://www.goddessdance.org/about.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[486] Eugenio Barba, introduction to *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (1991; reprint, New York: Routledge, 1999), 8.

[487] Goddessdance, "Press Reviews," http://www.goddessdance.org/about.htm (accessed 30 August 2005); Goddessdance, http://www.goddessdance.org/, (accessed 30 August 2005).

Serpentessa for her "riveting wriggles with a snake that calmly, elegantly draped itself around her head and neck."[488]

Whether performing with the *Goddessdance* company or alone, Serpentessa asserts that her sacred theatre has the power to heal and that she experienced this healing power in her own life after she began dancing with snakes. Serpentessa needed healing, because from the onset of puberty she began experiencing incredibly painful menstrual cycles and, later in life, her struggle with endometriosis resulted in infertility and ovarian failure (immediate menopause).[489]

Serpentessa associated her suffering with the "Moon Goddess," which Shahrukh Husain speaks about in her 2003 book, *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality and the Feminine Divine*:

> In the mythology of a number of cultures and in modern pagan feminist thought, the Goddess represents three phases of the female lifespan, which correspond to the lunar cycle. The new moon is the virgin, the full moon is the sexually productive woman, usually described as either a mother or a whore, and the old moon is the crone. Goddess worshippers have given this threefold manifestation the title of triple Goddess.[490]

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[488] Eva Yaa Asantewaa, "Hot! Hot! Hot! Summer and Smoke in Alternative Spaces" *Village Voice* 26 August 2002.

[489] Brown, "The Serpent & the Moon," www.susunweed.com/herbal_ezine/april04/menopausal.htm.

[490] Husain, 108.

Hutton corroborates Husain's claim that the Triple-Goddess concept is adhered to by many Neo-Pagans.[491]

Serpentessa uses the Triple-Goddess concept to discuss her physical and emotional pain and the way she eventually overcame it. Initially, she viewed the influence of the Moon Goddess over her life as a tyrannical force. However, her interaction with the Moon Goddess began to change slowly after she received a gift—a red tailed boa constrictor that she named Sofia. She soon began doing improvisational dance with Sofia when alone in her home, being particularly fascinated by the animal's ability "to move into any shape." At one point, Sofia shed her skin, and Serpentessa viewed this process as "a metaphor of letting go and beginning anew"; this revelation led Serpentessa to view the moon "as a mirror influence for her monthly cycle." She then turned to the moon as a higher power that she was aligned with and began to offer prayers to and seek answers from it.

After this change of perspective, Serpentessa viewed her dances with snakes as a way of "healing her Triple Goddess nature" and "coming into her Crone through the death of Motherhood and the rebirth of [her] commitment to living." Her performances and workshops are a way of embracing her "Triple Goddess journey as Virgin, Woman, and Crone."[492]

Serpentessa's performance piece entitled *Shedding a Skin* was the "final catalyst" for her to "fully reunite and heal the Sacred Feminine" within herself. In this work, she performs in moonlight. She first appears as a bag lady named "Mad Hettie" who explains

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[491] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 36-7, 178-79, 188, 194.

[492] Brown, "The Serpent & The Moon."

that she has been "planting the seeds of renewal from the compost in [her] bag" for many centuries. She then enacts this renewal by performing a "humorous" and "erotic" striptease—a process by which, according to Serpentessa, the audience begins to perceive the "sacred theatre underlying the spectacle." Serpentessa then reveals Sofia, and, with the moon above them, Serpentessa asserts that "we dance, all three, as yet another incarnation of the Triple Goddess—Serpent, Moon, and Goddess energies."[493]

Serpentessa's dance is a physical representation of Neo-Pagan iconography. By beginning as the Crone and transforming herself into the seductive Goddess, she embodies two aspects of the Triple-Goddess concept. Her attainment of spiritual insight through rhythmic interaction with snakes shows that she, like many other Neo-Pagans, seeks divinity within nature and animals. And her blending of humor and sacred sexuality is characteristic of the alternation of "reverence and mirth" that characterizes much Neo-Pagan ritual.[494]

Serpentessa's efforts to invoke the Goddess resemble the work of turn-of-the-century avant-garde theatre artists who created alternative representations of God. In their article entitled "The Drama of the Unseen—Turn-of-the-Century Paradigms for Occult Drama," Daniel Gerould and Jadwiga Kosicka mention that this need for alternative representations of God emerged among occultist playwrights and artists who viewed God not as the Judge of humanity, but rather as the accused who was put on trial

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[493] Ibid.

[494] Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 399.

"for having created an unhappy and destructive race of men."[495] August Strindberg does this, for example, in his *Coram Populo!*, in which Lucifer is presented as a true divine guiding light leading humanity away from the false God of Christianity, who only wants to imprison humanity with illusion and falseness.[496]

The work of Serpentessa, in which Divine Femininity replaces the patriarchal God of conservative Christianity, demonstrates that the tendency to question and replace traditional conceptions of God still exists among the creators of occult theatre. In performance, these rituals often encourage participants to view the female body as a "likeness of the Goddess";[497] I demonstrated that Serpentessa promotes such a view of her own body when she dances with snakes. In this manner, Serpentessa participates in a tradition of formulating new concepts and images of the Divine that was equally important to the first avant-garde artists of Europe and America.

The Metamorphic Ritual Theatre, an Australian troupe founded in 1994, shares Serpentessa's interest in invoking the powers of the universe:

> Our aim is to find a medium between ritual and theatre, ie. public rather than private magickal rites which are a combination of pre-meditated/rehearsed and indeterminate spontaneous elements. We take 'theatre' beyond its usual bounds of 'pretending' into the realm of

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[495] Daniel Gerould and Jadwiga Kosicka, "The Drama of the Unseen—Turn-of-the-Century Paradigms for Occult Drama," in *The Occult in Language and Literature* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), 29.

[496] August Strindberg, *Coram Populo!*, in *Doubles, Demons, and Dreamers*: *An International Collection of Symbolist Drama* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1985.)

[497] Husain, 151.

> Becoming. We don't just act our characters, we Invoke them or related deities and/or archetypes.[498]

Under the direction of Orryelle Defenestrate-Bascule, Metamorphic Ritual theatre sometimes uses fully scripted plays, but usually their work is based upon a "basic premise, concept or plot" that the group develops. They frequently leave sections of the plays "open to spontaneous chaotic elements once the 'stage has been set' by the more structured sections."[499]

The Metamorphic Ritual Theatre enacts mythologies that have traditionally been significant to the Western occult theatre tradition, as exemplified by their production of *Parzival: The Fool's Journey*, a performance involving music, drama, ritual, and dance that took place at 7 pm in Glastonbury, UK, on 19 June 2005.[500] Limiting the audience of *Parzival* to fifty "initiates" who were charged £ 7 apiece, the members of MRT designed *Parzival* as a "mystic journey through the Tarot Major Arcana" that leads into the celebration of the Solstice on the next day at Stonehenge and Avebury.

The connection of *Parzival* to the Solstice is one indication the MRT's Neo-Pagan roots, as is the reverence for nature that they demonstrate when they describe the area which the performance took place as the "sacred landscape of Glastonbury."[501] Like

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[498] Metamorphic Ritual Theatre, http://www.crossroads.wild.net.au/morph.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[499] Ibid.

[500] Ibid.

[501] Metamorphic Ritual Theatre, "Parzifal: The Fool's Journey," http://www.crossroads.wild.net.au/parzival.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

other Neo-Pagan groups, the MRT performers are concerned with the reconstruction of "ancient practices."

One example of an MRT's dramatic reconstruction is a collaborative project created with three other organizations—The Dionysian Underground, The Art Organization, and Human Product Pscyhomorphic Mutant Theatre (the members of which specialize in balance, fire, angle-grinding, and stilt-walking)— called *The Wild Hunt*, which took place on 18 October 2002 at 491 Gallery Leytonstone in London. The event was an advance celebration of the Samhain sabbath, which traditionally takes place on October 31.[502]

In *The Wild Hunt*, the participants engaged in activities that Gerald Gardner, Margaret Alice Murray, and A.J. Clark associated with the "Witches Sabbat," and for which they claimed a pre-historic heritage. For instance, in *Witch Cult in Western Europe,* Murray writes about medieval witches who galloped through fields on broomsticks, rods, and "greased" staffs.[503] In an appendix included in *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, A.J. Clark, discusses "Flying Ointments," which are ointments containing plants, such as hemlock, which cause physiological responses in human beings. Clark suggests that rubbing Flying Ointments into the skin or scratches in the skin are common ways of applying the ointment and may have produced the sensation of flying or falling in the user.[504] In *Witchcraft Today*, Gardner argues that witches were frequently charged with "flying" on broomsticks during the Middle Ages and the Early

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[502] Husain, 158.

[503] Margaret Alice Murray, *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, 104.

[504] A.J. Clark, "Flying Ointments," in *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, 279-80.

Modern period, when, in fact, they were leaping high as they straddled a pole or broomstick during a ritual of fertility magic. He then states that he owns a riding pole of this sort with a head that is "carved in the shape of a phallus to bring fertility."[505]

The Wild Hunt contained a blend of elements of the Witch's Sabbat with acoustic percussion and "electronica" to create a "modern magickal dance party." The MRT website reads:

> With the Sex Priestessses of the Bauwder [*sic*] Orryelle danced psychotropic plants and their spirits into the cauldron, producing some real flying ointment then distributed to the crowd, while we supposited this Vinum Sabbati with greased broomsticks as in the Sabbatic tradition.[506]

Photographs on the website show the actions described above taking place in the setting of a London art gallery. One photograph shows a participant straddling a broomstick and dancing in the nude, [507] like the fertility ritual that Gardner describes in *Witchcraft Today*. The images from *The Wild Hunt* not only bring the mythos behind *Wicca* to mind, but also the sexually explicit performances of Frank Wedekind[508] and Karen Finley.[509]

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[505] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 35.

[506] Metamorphic Ritual Theatre, "Metamorphic Ritual Theatre," http://www.crossroads.wild.net.au/morph.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[507] The Wild Hunt, "Samhain Full Moon Sabbat 18th October 2002, 491Gallery Leytonstone London," http://www.crossroads.wild.net.au/wildhunt.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[508] Bert Cardullo, "En Garde! The Theatrical Avant-Garde in Historical Avant-Garde in Historical, Intellectual, and Cultural Context," in *Theatre of the Avant-Garde 1890-1950: A Critical Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 38.

[509] Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 178.

The nudity in *The Wild Hunt* is just one example of eroticism in the work of MRT. Other photographs on their website reveal male and female nudity, suspension of bodies, and public piercing rituals. The piercing brings to mind Nicolas Evreinoff's essay, "The Erotic Theatre." In this article, he speaks of the elements of "theatrically erotic plays," including the body-altering technique of tattooing, as an example of methods by which to erotically charge the human body. In another passage, Evreinoff argues that carefully designed costumes are sometimes more sexually provocative than nudity.[510] MRT blends all of these techniques in the creation of their own erotic performances.

Although they make no official statement about such matters, MRT seems to design its work for audiences that are familiar with the occult and Neo-Paganism. By referring to their audience members as "initiates," MRT seems to credit them with pre-existing occult knowledge, because initiates are people who have been initiated into an esoteric tradition. On one occasion MRT performed what one reviewer described as a "brief but riveting take on Odin's self-sacrifice on the World Tree that found Orryle strung upside down from one of the trees in the building's gardens in the Hanged Man posture."[511] "The Hanged Man" is the seventh card of the Major Arcana of the standard tarot deck,[512] and the building that the reviewer is referring to is the Sallis Benney

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[510] Nicolas Evreinov, "The Erotic Theatre," in *The Theatre in Life* (London: George C. Harp & Company, 1927), 80-81.

[511] Gyrus, review of *Occulture 2003,* http://deramflesh.com/reviews/occulture2003/; accessed 7 August 2005.

[512] Arthur Edward Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (1920; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1995), 116-1.

Theatre—a 400 capacity theatre located on the grounds of the University of Brighton in England.[513] This was the location of an occult festival called *Occulture 2003*, which featured Colin Wilson as a guest speaker. Gyrus, who reviewed *Occulture 2003*, was clearly interested in the occult and esotericism. It follows that those who would attend such an event would also be interested in such things, and since the performance centered around a single card from a Tarot deck, it is likely that MRT expected their audiences to be familiar with the image to which their live performance alluded. Moreover, the specificity of the Neo-Pagan and occult symbolism that the MRT employs, their choice of sacred spots, such as Stonehenge, and their appearances at Neo-Pagan events suggests that they expect to have many Neo-Pagans and occultists in their audiences.

MRT associates "theatre" with performing publicly, and by attempting to "find a medium between ritual and theatre, i.e. public rather than private magickal rites"[514] MRT faces many of the same challenges that Aleister Crowley did when he produced *The Rites of Eleusis*. Furthermore, the evidence of their performances that they place online will certainly not be viewed sympathetically by every person who visits their website. Thus, digital representations of such performances allow curious people—both initiates and non-initiates—to learn about esoteric performances by lesser-known groups in distant places. For this reason, the Internet is a rich source for researching current and past Neo-Pagan performance and theatre.

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[513] University of Brighton & Sallis Benney Theatre, "Venue Hires Booking the Sallis Benney Theatre and Gallery," http://www.brighton.ac.uk/gallery-theatre/venuehires.html (accessed 30 August 2005).

[514] See note 78.

Not all Neo-Pagan theatre artists feel that "theatre" necessarily implies the act of performing rites that are traditionally kept secret in public. Lillith Avalon, who practices Alchemical Fire Circle Work with her husband, Jonathan Avalon, views "theatre" in terms of skills (i.e. chanting, dancing, costuming, designing space) and the instinct to know when and how to create a performance that is appropriate to the ritual of the Alchemical Fire Circle.

Lillith, a thrice-initiated *Wiccan* High Priestess, minored in theatre as an undergraduate, and she also participated in many Scarlet Woman Lodge performances as a director, technical worker, writer of original and adapted works, and an actor. In 2000, Lillith and John attended the first annual *FIREDANCE* festival in California—an event organized for the purpose of doing Alchemical Fire Circle Work that I shall discuss in more detail later. In 2001, Lillith and John left Austin, Texas, and moved to St. Johns, Arizona, where they now live on a 40-acre ranch. Since then she and Jonathan have continued to participate in Alchemical Fire Circles, which Lillith views as a highly organic and improvisational form of ritual theatre. Lillith and Jonathan practice this ritual, which lasts from sundown to sunrise, with the members of a Nevada-based group of "friends, artists, musicians, performers, and wisdom-keepers" called the Vegas Vortex.[515]

Jeff McBride, a professional magician who performs in Las Vegas, is the Grand Master of the Alchemical Fire Circles of the Vegas Vortex; he and his wife, Abigail McBride, have refined and documented the history of Alchemical Fire Circle Work. Much of the McBrides' documentation and performance analysis can be found at the

[515] Lillith Avalon, in discussion with the author, June 2005.

website for the previously mentioned festival, *FIREDANCE*, which is described as a "magical, transformative, healing celebration of music, dance, ritual theatre, percussion, environmental art, and song." *FIREDANCE* traditionally takes place in the redwood forests of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Conceived as a "multicultural spiritual gathering of innovative people devoted to personal development, community building, and global transformation through the sacred arts," *FIREDANCE* is an inclusive event, the participants of which include people from all walks of life and a variety of spiritual backgrounds.[516] Lillith was the general manager of *FIREDANCE* for four years, and participated in the organization of Alchemical Fire Circles that were constructed to accommodate gatherings of up to 500 people. However, Fire Circles are usually much smaller than this.[517]

In an article entitled "The Magic of the Fire Circle" contained on the *FIREDANCE* website, Jeff and Abigail McBride write that Alchemical Fire Circle Work has developed over a period of about fifteen years, and they liken the ritual to the Alchemical Magnum Opus—the creation of the Philosopher's Stone:

> We see the primary goal of staying up all night, drumming, dancing and singing at a fire circle as an alchemical process. Each one of us is involved, on some level, in the great work. We accelerate the processes of personal growth by accelerating the fire of Nature, which transforms the lead of our lives into the gold of Spirit. One of the basic ideas behind

[516] FIREDANCE, "FAQ," http://www.firedance.org/FAQ.php (accessed 30 August 2005).

[517] Lillith Avalon, in discussion with the author, June 2005.

> many alchemical traditions is that of transmuting or purifying one thing from a "lower" form into a "higher" form.[518]

The McBrides acknowledge that every Fire Circle is different due to the spontaneity and improvisation that takes place during the ritual, but they claim that what every Fire Circle has in common is that it follows a pattern that helps the participant "change and grow more fully into" his or her soul and accelerates the "fire of Nature" to "transform the lead of our lives into the gold of Spirit."[519]

The McBrides explain that the physical structure of the Fire Circle is based upon that of the traditional alchemical vessel, which was often sealed to prevent any foreign matter from corrupting the chemical process during the creation of the Philosopher's Stone. Similarly, a Fire Circle is designed as a hermetically sealed space, and anyone who enters it must do so in order to "do their magical work,"[520] bringing in nothing from the mundane world.

Lillith describes the Alchemical Fire Circle as a "stage" with boundaries, or "Planetary Rings." In a fire designed for *500* people, the rings range from seventy-eight feet to six feet in diameter—although, as has already been mentioned, Alchemical Fire Circles are usually much smaller than this. The Planetary Rings surround a fire in the center that is called "Sol"; Sol is the visual and spatial center of Alchemical Fire Circle Work, upon which the participants focus their concentration and around which they

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[518] Jeff Magnus McBride and Abigail Spinner McBride, "The Magic of the Fire Circle," FIREDANCE http://www.firedance.org/magicfirecircle/homepage.htm, (accessed 30 August 2005).

[519] Ibid.

[520] Ibid.

"orbit." Each Planetary ring is designated for specific types of performance and activities. The Venus and Mercury Rings are for dance and continuous "orbiting." In Venus three rows of dancers create, repeat, copy, and modify movements. The Mercury Ring is a fast movement area that is the closest to the fire; those in the Mercury Ring often gaze into the flames of Sol as they dance with great speed and energy. The Mars Ring accommodates a single row of people facing toward Sol who stand shoulder to shoulder and provide "sonic support" such as rattling; spoken word performance and chanting are frequently performed in the Mars and Venus Rings. The Jupiter Ring, which surrounds Mars, serves a similar purpose to the theatrical greenroom, because this is where participants can have a quick conversation, take a drink, or stand and watch the activities taking place in the inner Planetary Rings.[521]

Another part of the Fire Circle is the Gate, which lies between the Saturn Ring and the outermost Comet Ring. The Gate entrance, which provides access to the inner areas of the Fire Circle, is located at the east side of the circle. It is here that all participants enter the circle after being "smudged"; "smudging" is a ritual during which the person entering is fanned with smoke from burning white sage as both a purification ritual and a way to signify that the person entering the circle is moving from a mundane realm to a magical realm.[522]

An area on the north side of the circle located in the Saturn Ring, which surrounds the Jupiter Ring and lies immediately inside the Gate, the Well functions as a safe place for people who "pop." When someone "pops," they enter a state of consciousness or have

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[521] Lillith Avalon, in discussion with the author, June 2005.

[522] Ibid.

a reaction that renders them unable to operate in harmony with the rest of the people in the Fire Circle. Popping may include emotions that inhibit a person's ability to control themselves physically or deep trance states. When a person "pops," a "healer" will guide the "popper" to the Well, make them comfortable, and allow them to have their experience without hindering the flow and energy of the rest of the circle.[523]

Some of the Planetary Rings contain objects that are essential to the Fire Circle Ritual. There are benches for the drummers located in the south side in the Jupiter Ring, and these benches are where the percussive music is generated and coordinated. Four altars stand in each direction within the Jupiter Ring, and bales of hay in the Saturn Ring provide a place for those who need to rest. Firewood for Sol is stored in the northwest Saturn Ring. Other objects include standing torches in the Mars ring, prayer flags marking the outer border of the Fire Circle, and the "Orbital Pad," which is a one-inch thick pad of mulch or saw dust that is spread from the edge of Sol up to and including the Earth track. This area is where the most intense dancing takes place. Finally, art installations, such as the giant Phoenix in the photograph below, are also integrated into Fire Circles.[524]

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[523] ibid.

[524] Ibid.

Figure 2: Alchemical Fire Circle erected at *FIREDANCE* event in California. Photo Courtesy of Lillith Avalon.

In addition to the various activities that take place within the Fire Circle—such as drumming, dancing, smudging, feeding the fire, assisting those who have popped, and resting—participants engage in individual activities that draw focus from other people in the Fire Circle. I shall call such activities "theatrical moments." Jeff McBride, for example, sometimes creates theatrical moments with his skill as a professional magician. Lillith described one instance, for example, in which Jeff McBride created the illusion of a Phoenix rising out of the ashes of the fire. According to Lillith, if theatrical moments are well-executed and well-placed, they allow the participants to experience the "marvelous" and add to the atmosphere of sacredness and magic for which Alchemical Fire Circle workers strive. If poorly placed, theatrical moments have the potential to distract participants and detract from the sacred nature of the ritual.[525]

A theatrical moment can materialize in any form—an illusion, a sound, a shaman in a striking mask, a chanted story; however, one who chooses to create a theatrical

[525] Ibid.

moment, no matter what form it takes, should seek to do so at an appropriate time. To do this effectively one must sense a need for a shift in the overall energy of the circle. [526] Not all theatrical moments are successful, and there have been moments when participants damaged the atmosphere of the Fire Circle with inopportune comments and actions. The McBrides address this when they urge participants to consider carefully before they speak if what they are about to do or say is "an improvement over silence."[527]

The manner in which these theatrical moments arise within the Fire Circle bears an affinity to Christopher Innes's description of the action in Richard Schechner and the Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69* (1968) that is contained in *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant-Garde* (1981). Here Innes writes that the whole cast of *Dionysus in 69* formed the chorus, which was "the dominant element of the play." Sometimes scenes and characters emerged from this chorus which would eventually "dissolve[e] back into it."[528] Lillith's descriptions suggest a similar pattern within the Fire Circle, with characters emerging from the "choral" activity of the group, performing theatrical moments, and re-entering the collective activity of the group.

Experienced Alchemical Fire Circle workers sometimes approach the ritual with the eye of a costume designer. Sometimes these costumes relate to the three phases into which Jeff and Abigail McBride divide the Fire Circle ritual; these are the "*Nigredo*" phase, during which the participants "burn away . . . egos and agendas," the "*Albedo*"

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[526] Ibid.

[527] Jeff Magnus McBride and Abigail Spinner McBride, "The Magic of the Fire Circle Community Considerations," FIREDANCE, http://www.firedance.org/magicfirecircle/considerations.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[528] Christopher Innes, *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 182.

phase, during which trances and ecstasies are most likely to occur, and the "*Rubedo*" phase, which is accompanied by "solar adorations, holy silence, and grounding."[529] When three consecutive nights of Fire Circle Work takes place, some participants choose to wear a different costume that relates in color and design to one of these three phases of the ritual on each night of Fire Circle Work. Sometimes participants change costumes during the transition between night and dawn to signify that they have undergone a transformational experience; in such a case, the participant would wear two different costumes in one night. Costumes sometimes include bells or other rhythmic noise making elements to contribute to the music of the ritual.[530]

As the significance of musicality described above indicates, music is a central aspect of Alchemical Fire Circle Work. Lillith Avalan asserts that it is the drums and the "eerie and beautiful" variety of percussive sound that fuels the collective movement and the energy of the Fire Circle. Chanting is often begun in unison, with many people reciting the same words at the same time in similar tones. With time the chanting becomes more complex, as the performers incorporate improvisational rhythms, words, and harmonies into the ceremony.[531]

Alchemical Fire Circle Work is part of a tradition of making connections between theatre and alchemy. Bettina Knapp, for example, applies the terms *Nigredo, Albedo,* and *Rubedo* to her textual analysis of several plays in her 1980 book, *Theatre*

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[529] Jeff Magnus McBride and Abigail Spinner McBride, "The Magic of the Fire Circle The Laboratory Process Observing the Great Work," FIREDANCE http://www.firedance.org/magicfirecircle/observation.htm (accessed 30 August 2005).

[530] Lillith Avalon, interview with the author, 18 June 2005.

[531] Ibid.

and Alchemy.[532] The importance of alchemy in Alchemical Fire Circle Work and the form of the Fire Circle ritual is reminiscent of Artaud's concept of the "Alchemical Theatre." Like Artaud, who relates the Alchemical Theatre to the process of "fiery purification" by which molecules "ultimately become gold again,"[533] Jeff and Abigail McBride also view Alchemical Fire Circle Work as a process of purification by which the spiritual state of the participant is rarified and improved. Artaud explains that his Alchemical Theatre has "nothing to do with . . . realistic, social theatre"; rather, it is a theatre of archetypal symbolism (ie. the Phoenix rising from the ashes that Lillith spoke about) employing that which is "communicative and magnetic in the principles of all the arts." Artaud proposes a ritualistic theatre in which "shapes, sounds, music, and volumes evoke" an understanding of the chaos underlying everything. At the same time, the seemingly conflicting elements that create that chaos can be viewed as the result of "one Will" that exists "without conflict."[534] Artaud's words seem to resemble the themes and forms of Alchemical Fire Circle Work, which does not resemble realistic theatre and uses music, sound, shape, movement, and dance to create a challenging process through which the participants may at times sense chaos and, at other times, arrive at a sense of harmony.

Since she is a *Wiccan* High Priestess, it is not surprising that Lillith adheres to many Neo-Pagan values; she says that many Alchemical Fire Circle workers are also

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[532] Bettina Knapp, *Theatre and Alchemy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), vii.

[533] Antonin Artaud, "The Alchemical Theatre," in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1958; reprint, New York: Grove Press, 1985), 49-50.

[534] Ibid., 50-51.

practicing Neo-Pagans. Among the principles and skills that Alchemical Fire Circle workers share are an understanding of how to create sacred space, the practice of invoking elements, dance, singing, music, reverence for nature and natural cycles, a belief in the primacy of individual expression and freedom, and great appreciation of the individual's power to create change in his or her own life. A recognition of the sacred aspect of nature is also a value that Alchemical Fire Circle workers share with other Neo-Pagans; Alchemical Fire Circles are built in accordance with a "leave no trace" policy that dictates that the site be left in the same condition in which it was found at the end of the ritual.[535] Although some of the people who participate the Vegas Vortex Fire Circle community are not officially associated with Neo-Pagan bodies—for example, among them are a Catholic priest and a member of the Episcopalian church—these Neo-Pagan principles are essential to the practice of Alchemical Fire Circle Work. Indeed, it is not uncommon for people of various religious backgrounds to blend their traditional beliefs with those of Neo-Paganism; members of the Pagan Federation include people who practice Shinto, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Hinduism.

It is the shared principles of Neo-Paganism that bind together the various forms of Neo-Pagan performance that I have discussed in this section. Among these values are an interest in the Divine Feminine, the study of wisdom and art from indigenous cultures, a drive to reconstruct old myths and to create new myths, and, above all else, a passion for creating and performing innovative rituals. The three examples of Neo-Pagan theatre that I provide here only give an idea of the range of theatrical forms that exist. This area of

[535] Lillith Avalon, interview with the author, 18 June 2005.

study requires further research, in order to provide a deeper and broader understanding of the Neo-Pagan theatre tradition as a currently thriving theatrical tradition.

NEO-PAGAN, AVANT-GARDE, AND EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

Like the occult theatre forms discussed in previous chapters, Neo-Pagan theatre has attributes that are similar to European and America avant-garde theatre. Like the turn-of-the century symbolists in Europe, the Neo-Pagan theatre draws extensively from the symbolism of the Western occult tradition. For instance, the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre refers to Parzifal, thereby returning to the Wagnerian themes that were so important to avant-garde theatre artists of Europe and America. The basis of Alchemical Fire Circle Work in alchemical symbolism reveals tendencies toward medievalism. Furthermore, Serpentessa's use of music and dance forms from indigenous and non-western cultures resembles the interest in such things exhibited by European and American avant-garde and experimental artists between the late nineteenth century and the present.

The frequency with which Neo-Pagan theatre takes place outdoors is reminiscent of the outdoor community theatre movement that Frank A. Waugh and Sheldon Cheney discuss in *Outdoor Theaters* (1917) and *The Open-Air Theatre* (1918) respectively. The outdoor theatre movement and the Neo-Pagan movement seem to share a spiritual atmosphere; Waugh believed that the performances of the outdoor theatre movement had "redemptive" qualities and Cheney viewed the productions of the outdoor movement as "spiritual" and "almost religious" artworks that offered an alternative to popular

commercial theatre of the early twentieth century.[536] Neo-Pagan theatre shares its reliance upon the sublime beauty of the outdoors and nature with this outdoor community theatre movement, with which events such as Sarah Bernhardt's performance as Phèdre at the Berkeley Outdoor Greek Theatre in 1906 and the performances of *As You Like It* at Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachussets, in 1886 are associated.[537]

In particular, the performance space of the Alchemical Fire Circle seems to resemble the "nature theatres" or "garden theatres" that Sheldon Cheney described. Cheney wrote that "nature theatres" are usually "an open place in the woods or on a mountainside with an idyllic natural background" and an auditorium that is often "nothing more than an open hillside or sloping meadow," and he labels the Bohemia Grove Theatre in California as a good example of an American nature theatre.[538] Although the Alchemical Fire Circle is a space designed for full participation from everyone within the space and therefore has architectural characteristics that do not match Cheney's description of the nature theatre, as a structure built in harmony with the natural environment in which it exists, the Alchemical Fire Circle seems to be a relative of the nature theatre.

A development of Neo-Pagan theatre that reflects its development in the mid to late twentieth century is its incorporation of nudity in private ritual and public performance. As has already been demonstrated, Evreinoff expressed an interest in nude

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[536] Frank A. Waugh, *Outdoor Theaters: The Design, Construction and Use of the Open-Air Auditoriums* (Boston: Richard Badger, 1917), 5, 24; Sheldon Cheney, *The Open-Air Theatre*, (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1918), 10.

[537] Arthur Hornblow, *A History of the Theatre in America From Its Beginnings to the Present Time* vol. 2 (1919; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), 330.

[538] Cheney, 11.

performance in the early twentieth century. By 1968, the Living Theatre and the Performance Group had developed notoriety and artistic respect for their use of nudity in *Paradise Now* and *Dionysus in 69* respectively. In *Dionysus in 69: The Performance Group*, Richard Schechner writes that undressing for the birth ritual in this performance was a "sacred and surgical preparation" and that the ecstasy of the dance was both an ordeal and a celebration.[539] In this way, Schechner and his fellow performers used nudity to create a sense of the sacred and to contribute to the sense of ecstasy during dance sequences.[540] Schechner's grounds for using nudity in performance are similar to the reasons that Gerald Gardner endorsed nudity in ritual—namely, for the purpose of increasing magical power and inciting frenzy.[541]

Innes argues that in both *Dionysys in 69* and in *Paradise Now* nudity was a tool by which the performers were transformed into a community with a group identity that was somehow separate from the "modern society" in which these performances took place.[542] Similarly, the nudity employed in *The Great Hunt* performance of the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre establishes their collective identity as a group of Neo-Pagans enacting the details of a significant myth—much as the Performance Group did in *Dionysus in 69*—who were not bound by the sexual norms of modern London. In both cases, it seems that the naked body is being used as a symbol in both cases that heightens the power of the present moment and allows human beings to be seen as they have

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[539] Richard Schechner, ed. *Dionysus in 69: The Performance Group* (New York: Noonday Press, 1970), n. pag.

[540] Ibid.

[541] Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 20.

[542] Innes, 182.

appeared for thousands of years, before the establishment of modern, Western conventions of behavior and appearance. The nakedness of the performers also strips away cultural signifiers, so that the participants can avoid contemplating mundane meanings associated with clothing during the performance of ritual.

CONCLUSION

Neo-Pagan theatre is similar to the other esoteric forms that I have examined in this dissertation. The creators of Neo-Pagan theatre draw from many of the same esoteric and artistic interests and traditions that inspired the work of Crowley, Tingley, Schuré, Rudolf Steiner, and Marie Steiner—as well many European avant-garde theatre artists. Among these are allusions to Wagner and medieval romance, as in the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre's *Parzifal*, the reconstruction of allegedly ancient religious practices in performance, such as the enactment of the Witches' Sabbath in MRT's *The Wild Hunt*, the incorporation of indigenous and non-Western art forms in the work of Serpentessa, and the alchemical symbolism that is incorporated into Alchemical Fire Circle Work. The work of current Neo-Pagan theatre makers bears similarities to their predecessors; it is a continuation of the modern Western esoteric theatrical tradition whose characteristics developed out of interaction between occult practices and avant-garde arts.

However, Neo-Pagan theatre differs from pre-1950 occult theatre in that it embraces new notions of the occult and theatre that emerged in the last part of the twentieth century, including the techniques of experimental, intercultural, and ritual theatre and new conceptions of witches and the Divine Feminine. Influenced by postmodernist thought and culture, many members of the Neo-Pagan movement exhibit skepticism toward doctrines, over-arching narratives, and frameworks of thought. NRM

sociologist James Beckford describes Neo-Paganism as "post-modern" religion, and he notes a tendency among Neo-Pagans to doubt the existence of a "single criteria" for spiritual progress and to celebrate the fragmentation of Neo-Pagan religious thought and practice.[543] It is this quality that has lead to the development of methods for solitary occult initiation and the freedom to develop one's own form of magic.[544] It may also lead to the continued development of several diverse forms theatre created from a variety of Neo-Pagan perspectives.

[543] James A. Beckford, "Religion, Modernity, and Post-Modernity," in *Religion: Contemporary Issues*, ed. Bryan Wilson (London: Bellew, 1992), 11-23.

[544] Hutton, 384-85.

Conclusion

ESOTERIC NRMs

All of the theatrical forms that I have examined in the preceding chapters of this thesis were developed within NRMs that are founded upon the Western esoteric tradition. They share currents emanating from numerous esoteric traditions, including alchemy, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Cabala, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, cartomancy, geomancy, astrology, herbalism, and magic.[545] From chapter to chapter we have seen that theatre is a flexible tool for creating representations in words, gestures, and images of esoteric concepts. At the same time, I have shown that, in the process of creating new forms of theatre, the creators of esoteric NRM theatre did not isolate themselves from the theatrical and artistic trends of the eras in which they lived. Rather, theatrical artists associated with NRMs continue to relate their work to the world in which they lived—either through new interpretations of old works (as Anthroposophists do at Dornach when they present Steiner's Mystery Dramas in the context of a conference with a theme that relates the dramas to current world problems) or by incorporating newer trends into their creation of theatre (such as the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre, which combines techno music with traditional images of the European witch). Furthermore, as I have demonstrated, there is an evident relationship that exists between the development of esoteric NRM theatre and avant-garde and experimental theatre in Europe and America.

Thus, esoteric NRM theatre has maintained connections to avant-garde and experimental theatre at least from the nineteenth century to the present, and the manner in

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[545] Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

which these religious and theatrical movements have interacted in that time period provides insight into the nature of the relationship between theatre and religion.

Consider, for example, the tradition of Anthroposophical performance that began when Rudolf Steiner first presented his Mystery Dramas at Theosophical conventions in Munich between 1910 and 1913 and which continues today at the *Goetheanum* in Dornach, Switzerland. There the theatre and eurhythmy ensembles attempt to adhere to aesthetic and spiritual principles of performance that Rudolf and Marie Steiner established in the early twentieth century. The appearance of scene designs, costumes, and characters are based on the images contained in the monochromatic stained-glass windows, for which Rudolf Steiner created the initial designs. The method of vocal recitation employed by the actors is rooted in Marie Steiner's teachings, which have been shaped by the training she received as an dramatic interpreter of poetic texts in Paris during the height of French symbolism.

In his article, "Religion," in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, John Bowker notes that the word "religious" sometimes refers to extreme attention to detail in the performance of a ritual.[546] Such attention to detail has resulted in the perpetuation of numerous religious traditions throughout the history of the world. It seems that, in this sense of the word, the performers, directors, and producers at the *Goetheanum* exhibit a "religious" attention to detail. For when I compare photographs of performances of the Mystery Dramas produced at the *Goetheanum* over the last seventy years to the performances that I saw produced there during the Christmas season of 2000-2001, I note

[546] John Bowker, "Religion," in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xv

many resemblances in visual style in the areas of scene design and costume.[547] The religious attention to detail that the Anthroposophical theatre artists take in creating their performances is one example of the way in which the relationship between religion and theatre interact. In this case, the combination of religion and theatre has resulted in the preservation of performance techniques that resemble descriptions of late-nineteenth-century French symbolist theatre.

The religious attention to detail noted by Bowker also seems to describe aptly the urge of a theatre artist like Katherine Tingley to reconstruct ancient mystery dramas in as historically accurate a manner as possible in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Of course, reconstruction projects such as this were not unique to the realm of spiritual theatre. The drive to create visually striking, historically accurate reconstructions on the theatrical stage prevalent in nineteenth-century theatre stagecraft and the Greek Revivalism movement of the US served to explain the lavishness of Tingley's productions of *The Eumenides* in New York and Point Loma, California, which were discussed in Chapter Two.

However, it was not only a fascination with spectacular scenery and costumes but also Tingley's spiritual interpretation of Aeschylus's *Eumenides* as a mystery drama containing spiritual insights prized by Theosophists that led her to scrutinize every detail of her productions. Because she wanted the audience to take seriously these productions as important esoteric texts, she used what she considered to be historically accurate and

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[547] *Marie Steiner: Ihr Weg zur Erneuerung der Bühnenkunst durch die Anthroposophie* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung, 1973); Edmund B. Lingan, "Reincarnation and Individuality: Rudolf Steiner's 'Mystery Dramas' in the New Millenium," *Western European Stages* 13 (Spring 2001): 73-78.

lavish costumes and replicas of sacred objects that she associated with the practice of religion in ancient Greece.

Hutton describes the drive to reconstruct ancient practices as a defining characteristic of many Neo-Pagan groups; he rejects the label of "New Religious Movement" for Neo-Paganism, which he calls a "revival religion."[548] The religion of revival is apparent in the Metamorphic Ritual Theatre's *Wild Ride*, in which performers meticulously re-enact rituals associated with descriptions of the ancient witch religion that Margaret Alice Murray, Gerald Gardner, and many other Neo-Pagans claim have existed from the dawn of humanity to the present.

However, Hutton also points out that Neo-Pagan groups use "ancient images and ideas" to fulfill "contemporary needs."[549] Such a blending of old and new ideas is not limited to Neo-Pagan esoteric organizations. All of the esoteric NRMs discussed in this chapter blend old and new ideas to formulate beliefs and practices meaningful in their own time. Katherine Tingley created a Greek theatre to house original Theosophical mystery dramas, or symposia, that spoke to the spiritual interests of her followers. Aleister Crowley's *Rites of Eleusis* was not a reconstruction of the original ancient rites, but a blend of modernism and esotericism intended to invoke ecstasy in the participants. Even Edouard Schuré's *Sacred Drama of Eleusis*, which was based on research he had done on the actual Eleusian rituals, was not intended to be a museum piece, but another step toward a Theatre of the Future that would spiritually transform modern humanity. Finally, Rudolf Steiner's eclectic Mystery Dramas, although they contained elements of

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[548] Ronald Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 415.

[549] Ibid.

medievalism and a variety of very old esoteric concepts, were designed to speak to the people of his own generation. Thus, the creators of esoteric NRM theatre rarely reconstruct ancient religion strictly out of a sense of historical interest or a love of spectacle. Rather, they formulate new concepts and images of the Divine, such as the Triple-Goddess of Serpentessa and the sacredness of dance that is evident in the practice of Alchemical Fire Circle Work.

BROADER NRM THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Many new religious movements that developed in the last two hundred years and are not part of the Western esoteric tradition have also created moments of theatre. The theatre that these NRMs have created merits in-depth study as well; they also illustrate the ways in which theatre and religion interact. For instance, the Trinity Assembly of God Church in Cedar Hill, Texas, whose beliefs are derived from the religious currents of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement of the U.S. that arose at the beginning of the twentieth century,[550] has gained public attention for its annual *Hell House.* *Hell House* is built upon the model of the interactive haunted house, with an all-important difference: the spectators walking through the house see sinners mocked and tortured by the denizens of the Christian hell, instead of the witches, ghouls, and monsters associated with Halloween.[551] The subject of George Ratliff's 2002 documentary of the same title,[552]

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[550] Massimo Introvigne, "Christian New Religious Movements: A Roman Catholic Perspective," in *New Religions and New Religiosity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2001), 253; http://www.christian-faith.com/revival/pentecostal.html, accessed 8 August 2005.

[551] Trinity Ministeries, "Hell House XIV," http://trinityministries.org/hh/ (accessed 30 August 2005).

[552] George Ratliff, *Hell House*, Cantina, 2002, 85 min.; motion picture.

Trinity Assembly of God Church's *Hell House* is viewed as an alternative to the traditional trappings of Halloween by "some conservative Christians," who view exposure to the typical ghosts and goblins of the season as an "unholy window into the occult."[553] This opposition to the occult demonstrates that some NRMs not only do not incorporate esoteric principles into their own teachings, but also actively oppose the occult and esotericism as harmful. Thus, two opposed positions about the benefits and dangers of occult beliefs and practices are currently being played out through performance techniques in the US.

The diversity of NRM theatre and performance is so great that we may reach the same conclusion that Eileen Barker draws in talking of NRMs in general: "the only thing they all have in common is that they have been put into the single category of new religion, cult, sect, or what-have-you, and whatever generalization one may attempt to make is almost bound to be refuted by one of their number."[554]

This diversity is evident in the small group of esoteric NRMs that I have examined here. The Mystery Dramas of Rudolf Steiner, set in the curvilinear world of the *Goetheanum* in Dornach, stand in contrast to the classical lines and symmetry of Katherine Tingley's productions of *The Eumenides*. The inclusive atmosphere of Alchemical Fire Circles, with both Neo-Pagan and Christian participants, does not resemble the Anti-Christian stance that Aleister Crowley assumes in *The World's Tragedy*. If so many differences in form and principle exist among the various esoteric

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[553] Jeffrey Weiss, "*Hellhouse!* Pokes Fun at Fundamentalists' Horror Shows," *Dallas Morning News* Saturday, 4 September 2004.

[554] Eileen Barker, "New Religions and New Religiosity," in *New Religions and New Religiosity*, 18.

NRMs that create theatre, one can expect to find even greater differences in the theatrical traditions of NRMs that do not share even vaguely similar beliefs and practices.

However, if social scientists like Barker have found it beneficial to look for "more or less systematic patterns and regularities" in the NRMs they study,[555] it is equally useful for theatre and performance scholars to analyze critically and historically NRM theatre and performance. From this analysis, new approaches to research on the beliefs, practices, and publicity methods of NRMs will emerge, making it possible to locate even the most ephemeral performances. For instance, if researchers know that Neo-Pagan organizations celebrate the equinoxes and solstices, they will know how to discover esoteric performances as these times draw near. If researchers have learned the importance of word-of-mouth communication and esoteric bookstores as means of communication, they will know to seek verbal information and flyers in such locations.

Increased knowledge of NRM theatre and performance will cause the growth and diversification of areas of theatre and performance studies concerned with the relationship among theatre, performance, religion, and spirituality. This line of research will facilitate a more detailed understanding of how religion and theatre interact and reveal a realm of creative activity in which religious and spiritual ideals of the past are blended with those of the present to produce new modes performance unpredictable in form, content, and significance.

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[555] Ibid., 19.

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