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Peter Levenda, *The Dark Lord: H. P. Lovecraft, Kenneth Grant, and the Typhonian Tradition in Magic* (Lake Worth, Fl.: Ibis Press, 2013), 352 pp., $35 (hardcover).

Henrik Bogdan, ed., *Servants of the Star & the Snake: Essays in Honour of Kenneth and Steffi Grant (*London: Starfire Publishing, 2018), 360 pp, photographs, £25 (hardcover).

If occultism may be defined as "rejected knowledge," as James Webb argued in *The Occult Establishment* (1976), then this is doubly true of the writings of Kenneth Grant (1924–2011). A prolific writer of occultism, fiction, and poetry best known for his Typhonian Trilogies—nine books released between 1972 and 2002—his ideas defy conventional analysis. His thinking is rooted in Aleister Crowley's system of Thelema: for a time, Grant served as secretary in the later years of Crowley's life, and subsequently as a typist for Crowley's chief archivist Gerald Yorke, posthumously transcribing the Beast's letters and diaries. This gave Grant unrivaled access to the man and his work. But Grant interpreted Crowley through the kaleidoscope of his own unconventional mind, augmented over the years by his interests which included Tantra, UFO lore, and cosmic horror. He also absorbed the work of modern occultists, many of whom were obscure until Grant brought attention to them. These range from contemporaries like Charles Stansfeld Jones (Frater Achad) and Austin Osman Spare, to voices emerging since the 1970s such as Michael Bertiaux and Maggie Ingalls (Nema).

The result is a surreal synthesis, blending diverse sources into a web of connections through metaphor, implication, poetry, numerology, and dream-logic. If Crowley's magick was the method of science, then Grant's was the stuff of imagination. As an example: To Grant, the word "secret" suggested not only that which is concealed, but something that is *secreted*. Similarly, "secretion" referred not only to a biological discharge, but also—as is inherent in its very name—an occult secret: a secret *ion* (a word that takes on deeper significance in Grant's oeuvre). His parsing of words to reveal hidden meanings grew toward blurring the line between fact and fiction in his quasi-autobiographical writings.

The darkness of the human imagination called to Grant, who concluded that it reflected praeterhuman entities impinging on our consciousness. In the nightmarish fiction of H. P. Lovecraft—often inspired by dreams—Grant saw metaphors revealing a primordial secret tradition of occultism. He explored the *qlippoth*, *kelipo*t, or "nightside" Kabbalistic Tree of Life whose impure forces represent a sort of opposite version of its better-known sibling. He was fascinated by voodoo, much-maligned in Western culture, particularly the peculiar teachings of the voodoo-gnostic *La Couleuvre Noire* ("The Black Snake"). As a result, the occult world of Kenneth Grant embraces with Aghori-like passion those symbols that conventionally stir revulsion.

His books included artwork from his wife Steffi, his friend Austin Spare, and various new artists on the scene. Their relevance to the text was not always apparent. But they represented the occult's modern visual culture, and mirrored the hallucinogenic experience of reading Grant's text.

The first book in Grant's Typhonian Trilogies, *The Magical Revival* (1972), entered an uncrowded field. Very few books at the time discussed Crowley's magick, let alone reinvented it as Grant did. He introduced readers to the notion of a dark perennial tradition that stretched back to the dawn of history in honor of frightening gods and rejected knowledge. According to Levenda's *The Dark Lord*, Grant's underlying premise is that "all religions … have their origin in a single cult … that has its origins not on earth but in the stars" (p. 21). Filling a literary void, Grant's books thus had a tremendous influence on modern occult thought, and are rightly the subject of academic study in Western esotericism.

All of this makes Grant notoriously difficult to summarize. Peter Levenda's *The Dark Lord* takes up the challenge of assembling the jigsaw of ideas scattered throughout the Typhonian Trilogies, with an emphasis on the putative connection between Crowley's creed of *Thelema* and Lovecraft's fictional *Necronomicon*. Just as authors such as Asenath Mason have done, Levanda proceeds from Grant's assumption of the Cthulhu mythos and its Necronomicon as a gnostic reality and thus seeks to map that reality. As Levenda puts it, "The purpose of this book is to deconstruct and decode the works of Kenneth Grant as much as possible, at least insofar as the Necronomicon Gnosis, and the Typhonian Current are concerned.… What we will do … is try to understand how the Necronomicon Gnosis fits in with the Thelemic Current, and how both of these

together inform Grant's Typhonian hypothesis" (p. 21). This may initially pose a challenge for those familiar with the authors under discussion. For many readers of Lovecraft, his well-documented xenophobia and racism are sufficient to explain the horrific metaphors of the Cthulhu mythos; these themes permeate the acclaimed HBO series "Lovecraft Country." But as gnostic revelation Levenda sees a need for scriptural exegesis. Levenda's presumption of his readers' familiarity with these two writers relieves him from documenting the mundane facts of their biographies, allowing him instead to present that exegesis through the lens of Grant's peculiar imagination.

Levenda's focus on the Necronomicon Gnosis makes sense given his connection to the most famous publication claiming to be the actual *Necronomicon*. Known variously as the "Simon" *Necronomicon* (after the author of its pseudonymous introduction) or the "Schlangekraft recension" (after the original publisher), the 1977 book claimed to be a translation of an ancient magical grimoire handed over by an unnamed monk. Evidence aplenty contests its authenticity: On the surface, the book is obviously a modern text, drawing material from other contemporary sources. Prior to Lovecraft inventing the title, there is no historical mention of a *Necronomicon*. The ancient source manuscript for the Simon edition has never been examined, let alone seen. Finally, the U.S. copyright registration identifies Simon as the pseudonym of Peter Levenda. Thus, *The Dark Lord* is unusual in that the author offers an exposition on the significance of a book widely considered to be a hoax, and of which he is presumed to be the author. The result is a meta-narrative or an example of modern myth-making. The question of its authorship notwithstanding, the Simon *Necronomicon* is no more or less "authentic" than the Rosicrucian *Fama Fraternitatis*, the Golden Dawn's cipher manuscript, or any other pseudepigraphical occult text such as *The Grimoire of Pope Honorius* or *The Book of Saint Cyprian*. Echoing the Crowley-Lovecraft parallels first pointed out in Grant's *Magical Revival* (1972), the Simon *Necronomicon* may owe more to Grant than Grant does to Simon. However, Grant would go on to cite Simon in his later books, making it relevant to a discussion of Grant's oeuvre even if Levenda emphases the *Necronomicon* to a greater degree than Grant himself did.

The Dark Lord's expository style makes its argument—much like Grant—through coincidence, tangents, metaphor, and non-linear thought. This is not a criticism. Levenda's approach, while less

cryptic, actually captures the intoxicating challenge to reason that makes Grant's work appealing and provocative for so many.

For instance, Levenda presents readers with tantalizing word-choice coincidences between Crowley and Lovecraft. One of Lovecraft's juvenile short stories, "The Beast in the Cave," was written in 1904. This was the same year that Crowley received via spirit communication *The Book of the Law*, which refers to its scribe as the Beast. Levenda asks, "Could it be possible that Lovecraft … 'picked up' the events of Cairo that were taking place at the very same time he was composing and writing his story about a Beast who was really a man?" (p. 13). Logically, we might say, "There are many other terms in *The Book of the Law* that don't appear in 'The Beast in the Cave,' and vice versa." Or "Crowley identified with The Beast prior to 1904." Yet Levenda invites us to wonder, "Could it be possible?"

Similarly, "Liber VII," one of Crowley's Holy Books received in 1907, contains the passage "Olalám! Imál! Tutúlu! as it is written in the ancient book" (VII:6). Levenda focuses on the third word's similarity to Cthulhu, as "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926) was partially set in 1907. Consequently, a word of minor prominence in Crowley's oeuvre takes on outsized importance through its similarity to one of Lovecraft's eldritch gods, even as the other words (Olalám and Imál) are not considered. Grant notably devotes an entire chapter to the word Tutulu in *Outer Gateways* (1994).

Numerous other coincidences accumulate: Both Crowley and Lovecraft used the term "aeon," albeit in different ways. Lovecraft's mythos says the Old Ones will return "when the stars are aright," while the third verse of *The Book of the Law* says "Every man and every woman is a star": are Lovecraft and Crowley referring to the same stars? Crowley became head of the Order of Oriental Templars, and the original Knights Templar participated in the Crusades in Jerusalem (i.e., the Middle East), while—coincidentally—the *Necronomicon* was written by the mad Arab, Abdul al-Hazred. Ockham's Razor might say it is natural for us to hearken back to the Cradle of Civilization, but Levenda presents these and other coincidences as evidence of an inexplicable link (or perhaps gnostic teleology?) connecting the two authors.

Ultimately, *The Dark Lord* is more exegetical than academic. Yet everything described above is Grant writ large. Levenda's style conveys the feeling of reading Grant, and this is the book's greatest

strength. It succeeds as an apt entrée to the weird world of Kenneth Grant's Typhonian Trilogies.

For more academically-inclined readers, an alternative—or supplement—to *The Dark Lord* is *Servants of the Star & the Snake: Essays in Honour of Kenneth & Steffi Grant*. This collection is edited by Grant bibliographer Henrik Bogdan of the University of Gothenburg, and issued by Grant's publisher, Starfire. Whereas Levenda focuses on the Necronomicon Gnosis, the papers in Bogdan's volume examine Grant from various perspectives. These include memoir, biography, analysis, occult interpretation, and even a short story in which Grant features as a character. These papers cover not only the Typhonian Trilogies, but also Grant's fiction and poetry, his writings on Advaita, and his advocacy of artist Austin Osman Spare (whose resurgence as an important voice in both art and magic owes a debt to Grant). In addition, the art of Grant's wife Steffi is so prevalent throughout his publications—from her illustrations for the *Carfax Monographs* of the 1950s to those in his later books—that they are rightly viewed as collaborators; hence, although Kenneth garners more of the spotlight than Steffi, this volume honors them jointly. To this end, Bogdan's essay, "The Nuclear Art of Steffi Grant," dedicates itself to exploring the importance of her artistic work.

The volume leads off with Martin P. Starr's biographical memoir. Later we get Michael Staley's "Foundations of the Typhonian Trilogies," a literary biography of Grant prior to the aforementioned Trilogies, and Nema's "Kenneth Grant and Maat," a narrative of Grant's encounter in the 1970s with the emergence of Maat magick from the work of Cincinnati Chapter of the Crowned and Conquering Child, with Nema its figurehead and most vocal representative.

Other contributors examine Grant's interests in Advaita Vedanta and Tantra (Henrik Bogdan), Lord Kusum Haranath (Ruth Bauer), esoteric Egyptologist Gerald Massey (Christian Giudice), H. P. Lovecraft (Stephen Dziklewicz), and, as mentioned above, the art and magic of Austin Osman Spare (Michael Staley).

Grant's magical thought and practice are also explored in essays on so-called extraterrestrials (Kyle Fite), sexual magick (Jan Fries), his approach to Babalon and the Scarlet Woman (Manon Hedenborg White), his affinity for the darkest expressions of the human imagination (Vadge Moore), and how Crowley's gift to a young Grant of his drawing *The Way*—or *Lam*, as it better known today—later spawned a new area of Typhonian magical praxis (Michael Staley).

Ramsey Dukes tackles Grant's exegetical approach as *obscuris vera involvens*. Alistair Coombs delves into how Grant's quasi-biographical short stories served as vehicles to communicate his esoteric ideas, while Michael Bertiaux concludes the volume in meta fashion with a short story featuring a fictionalized Kenneth Grant.

This publication benefits from unprecedented access to the archives of Kenneth Grant, who was notoriously reclusive in his lifetime. Examples from the Grants' archives are reproduced as color photos. In the end, this book offers a satisfying mix of perspectives from scholars and practitioners alike—some of whom Grant himself had championed—so that one does not overwhelm the other. The quality of all contributions is uniformly excellent, which reflects the editor's stewardship of this project. In this sense, *Servants of the Star & the Snake* feels more balanced and approachable than *The Dark Lord*, which demands that the reader jump in, fully committed to the mind-bending journey that awaits. Each book takes a different approach to Grant: Levenda applies laser focus to the Necronomicon Gnosis to take readers on a deep dive down the rabbit hole, while Bogdan goes for broad and more wholistic picture of the life and work of Kenneth and Steffi Grant.

Those who want to explore further fortunately have a choice of recent (2020) publications by contributors to *Servants of the Star & the Snake*. Manon Hedenborg White's treatment of Grant is peppered throughout *The Eloquent Blood: The Goddess Babalon & the Construction of Feminities in Western Esotericism* (Oxford University Press, 2020). Furthermore, *The Incoming of the Aeon of Maat: Letters between Charles Stansfeld Jones, Gerald Yorke and Others, 1948–1949* (2020), edited by Michael Staley and released by Starfire, offers abundant primary source material on the ideas of Charles Stansfeld Jones, which were so influential on Grant (who transcribed the letters in Yorke's collection). Much as Grant brought the art of his departed friend Austin Osman Spare to a wider audience, so too is a new generation of writers doing the same by championing Kenneth Grant.

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