

Lehrich, for example, has amply demonstrated the highly subtle and complex nature of Agrippa's understanding of language in his 2003 study *The Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy*. Similarly, Gunn's position ignores the influence of Cabala and Christian Cabala on the linguistic philosophy of authors like Agrippa and Dee (which Deborah Harkness carefully uncovers in her consideration of issues of language surrounding Dee's work in her *John Dee's Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy and the End of Nature*). Consequently, the generative contradiction of Gunn's occult poetics is based upon an initial premise (that the occult tradition sees spiritual truth as ineffable) that is neither well argued for nor convincing. Secondly, the word "tradition" itself comes in for its fair share of analysis in *Modern Occult Rhetoric*, particularly in Gunn's brief presentation of the "occult origin narrative," yet there is little attention paid to the construction of this narrative or the forces acting upon that construction, and in the end Gunn tends to resort to distinguishing between the occult tradition and the artifacts of a modern, mass-mediated occultic (and no amount of surrounding ironic quote marks can prevent us from understanding that he is using the word "tradition" in a quite traditional way). Thirdly, for a book that is ostensibly focused on the twentieth century, Gunn severely limits his sampling of the modern occult—no examination of Wicca, paganism, chaos magic, etc., all of which might well provide evidence that works against his thesis. Each of these problem areas stem from the fact that there is almost no engagement with modern scholarship on the occult. In a move that seems to openly acknowledge this weakness, Gunn includes an eleven-page appendix entitled "Scholarship on Occultism" which neglects to mention the work of Antoine Faivre, Wouter Hanegraaff, Michael York, Joscelyn Godwin, Arthur Versluis, Graham Harvey, or any of the studies, journals, presses, or university programs they are associated with. What we do get are summaries of the work of Marcello Truzzi, Edward Tiryakian, and Tanya Luhrmann—definitely canonical but hardly representative of the very wide range of current thinking on the occult and the esoteric.

As an example of the many enlightening and productive perspectives that the discipline of rhetoric can bring to the study of occult discourse, Joshua Gunn's *Modern Occult Rhetoric* is an extremely well-written, inspiring model. As a thoroughly convincing presentation of an occult poetics that is as applicable to Agrippa or Dee as it is to Crowley and that is fully engaged with the current state of the academic study of the esoteric, Gunn's book must be considered only a partial success.

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Marco Pasi, *Aleister Crowley und die Versuchung der Politik*, trans. Ferdinand Leopold (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2006). 335 pp., EUR 24.90 (cloth).

Since the 1990s, Aleister Crowley—the occultist, magician, artist, and founder of the religion of *Thelema*—has received much scholarly attention. Several biographies have been written, and numerous articles explore the complexities of his life and work, as well as his impact within the cultural context of the early twentieth century. Many scholars agree that this influence goes far beyond the limited circles of the Order of the Golden Dawn and the orders that have resulted from its activities; Crowley's

influence is also felt in the intellectual and religious history of the twentieth century, which makes him an important representative of modern forms of religious expression.

It has often been argued that Crowley's religion and philosophy of *Thelema*, based on the revelatory book of *Liber AL Vel Legis*, represent not only a libertarian, hedonistic, and anti-Christian ideology, but also a Nietzschean political ideology that borders on the totalitarian. Consequently, Crowley's political agenda and his concrete influence on the political development during the first decades of the twentieth century have been a matter of much speculation. Marco Pasi has written the first detailed scholarly analysis of Crowley's links to politics, and thanks to this effort, we can now distinguish myth from reality in many aspects of Crowley's enigmatic life and work.

Aleister Crowley und die Versuchung der Politik is a translation from a revised, updated, and enlarged version of Pasi's Italian doctoral dissertation, published as *Aleister Crowley e la tentazione della politica* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1999). Hans Thomas Hakl, historian of occultism, has provided a preface and an epilog to the German edition. Since his Italian dissertation, Pasi has become known as one of the best experts worldwide on the history of British and French occultism, and particularly on the person of Aleister Crowley. His writing combines an excellent knowledge of the primary sources—often very difficult to obtain—with a sympathetic but neutral description and contextualization of Aleister Crowley.

Although it focuses on the magician's political views and contacts, the reader will learn a lot about the biography of Aleister Crowley, too. The book opens with a concise and well-argued account of what we know about Crowley's life, before Pasi addresses the main interest of his study, "magical politics" (pp. 48-137). When we read that, "although Crowley was indeed interested in politics, his interest was always subordinated to his magical and metaphysical concerns" (p. 48), it becomes clear why Pasi chose the expression "political temptation" in the title of his book. Crowley's actual political agenda and the role this agenda played in his writings and activities remain vague and ambivalent. As Pasi notes, "Of course, it is possible to find political opinions or political expression in Crowley that he remained true to from his early youth to old age, but we should not be surprised to come across elements that are in opposition to these orientations" (p. 60). This is both a benefit and a problem of Pasi's study; while his analysis is nuanced and thus avoids over-simplifications that so often dominate the literature on Crowley, the author does not give a clear answer to his original question and remains as ambivalent as Crowley himself.

The chapter on "magical politics" provides a good and reliable description of Crowley's political agenda, positioning it between the magician's ideas about mysticism and religion. When it comes to political and intellectual contexts, however, Pasi could have gone much deeper into his analysis than he actually does. Although he mentions the socialist enthusiasm for societal reforms (p. 83), the intellectual flirting with a "Romantic charm" (p. 83), Crowley's relation to German National Socialism and his opinion about Hitler himself (pp. 113-27), and also his education in a Christian milieu of Darbyist millennialism (p. 128), for all these aspects a detailed political and cultural analysis is missing. For instance, one would like to learn more about the apocalyptic frame of thought that Crowley had absorbed in his youth (and which underlies his religion of *Thelema*, as well); one wonders how Crowley was received in Germany, both in fascist political circles but also in intellectual circles that were heavily involved in a German *Kulturkampf*; and what does it mean for Crowley's political positions that "colonial imperialism" was "particularly powerful" (p. 88) at the end of the nineteenth

century in Britain? Pasi restricts his account on a description of the various contacts and writings of Crowley himself, which renders a highly ambivalent impression; he does not apply political theory – for instance, theories of fascism and totalitarianism – in his analysis.

Much more illuminating is the next chapter, in which Pasi addresses “Dangerous Friendships” (pp. 139-92). Analyzing Crowley’s relation with J.F.C. Fuller, Tom Driberg, Walter Duranty, Gerald Hamilton, and Maxwell Knight, the author engages a network of intellectual friendships that shaped Crowley’s political interests. Highly relevant and brilliantly argued is the following chapter, “Jaws of Hell” (pp. 193-234), with a detailed analysis of Crowley’s relation with the political mysticism of Fernando Pessoa. This is actually the best in-depth study of Pessoa’s influence on Crowley that has been published so far.

The last chapter turns to “Counter-Initiation and Conspiracy” (pp. 235-70). Pasi rightly observes that the conspiracy theories in Europe and the religious and political implications of Traditionalism are an important background of Crowley’s own work (gone largely unnoticed in most scholarly publications), but even more so of his evaluation in subsequent generations. The book ends with a few concluding remarks and an appendix with a number of relevant documents, including parts of the correspondence between Crowley and Pessoa, published for the first time in Pasi’s Italian original book.

Aleister Crowley und die Versuchung der Politik is an important contribution to the scholarly discussion about this enigmatic magician. Marco Pasi has written a detailed account on a topic that is both under-researched and difficult to access. The author is incredibly versed in historical detail and presents his analysis in a clearly argued and nuanced way. That from a perspective of cultural history or political science some aspects of his analysis could have been fleshed out in more depth does not diminish the value of this study for subsequent research. Scholars from these disciplines can find in Pasi’s study a very good starting point.

The worst thing to be said about this book lies outside the responsibility of the author. Unfortunately, the Austrian publishing house has published the book without proof-reading and copy-editing. The translator submitted a text that is full of idiomatic mistakes and weird constructions; it is a pity that Pasi’s book has been mutilated in such a way. Let us hope that the forthcoming English translation will be more carefully edited!

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Oss Tales, DVD, directed by John Bishop and Sabina Magliocco (Portland, OR: Media-Generation, 2007). US \$24.95.

Describing the development of his views on the evolution of contemporary Paganism, Ronald Hutton writes in the “Living with Witchcraft” chapter of *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* how he came to realize that “[M]odern Pagan witchcraft represented not a marginal, isolated and thoroughly eccentric creed, arguably produced by one rather odd ex-colonial [Gerald Gardner], but an extreme distillation and combination of important cultural currents within mainstream British society which had been developed or been imported during the previous two hundred years.” Likewise the hobby horse (“Oss”) procession in Padstow, Cornwall. For when you watch the oldest