[*The Pomegranate* 16.1 (2014) 109-111] ISSN 1528-0268 (print)
doi: 10.1558/pome.v16i1.20906 ISSN 1743-1735 (online)

Nevill Drury, *Stealing Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 356 pp., $105 (cloth), $31.95 (paper)

Nevill Drury was the rare Pagan studies writer who wrote for both a lay and an academic audience. *Stealing Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic* is in many ways a reflection of Drury; it's thorough enough to be taken seriously by scholars, and so thoroughly accessible that it should appeal to those without an academic background. *Stealing Fire* works on two different levels. Much of it is simply an introduction to many of the various Western magical traditions that have become popular over the last two hundred years. The second level of the book is focused on how those traditions perceive "deity."

The title of the book comes from a quote by English artist and occultist Austin Osman Spare who once said "the aim of magic is *to steal fire from heaven*." (3) Drury himself elaborates on that point in the book's introduction, telling the reader that his aim in *Stealing Fire* "is to show that, for many practitioners, the practice of magic has an essentially spiritual intent." (3) Drury doesn't always succeed in this task with every tradition he outlines, but when he does the results are enlightening.

Stealing Fire starts slowly with a history of medieval magical traditions including the Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and alchemy, before ending with the Tarot and figures such as Eliphas Levi and Gerald Encausse (Papus). Chapter 2 provides more historical overview, this time focusing on Freemasonry and the Order of the Rose Cross. It's in the third chapter entitled "New Light: The Rise of the Golden Dawn" that Drury finds his footing and begins writing about the "spiritual intent" found in many Western magical traditions.

In thirty pages Drury efficiently sums up the myriad spiritual practices of The Golden Dawn, all while leaving it to the reader to decide if the Golden Dawn was a spiritual order in addition to being a magical one. A long excerpt from a Tarot-based trance vision written down by Florence Farr Emery is especially enlightening in regards to the spirituality of at least one Golden Dawn member. Christian and Egyptian ideas blend together in Farr's vision from

1892. One portion attributed to the goddess Isis reads like a proto-version of later Wiccan "Charges" to the Goddess.

Drury follows up his chapter on the Golden Dawn with one on Aleister Crowley before splitting his fifth chapter up between Austin Spare, Dion Fortune, and Rosaleen Norton. Drury wrote extensively about Norton during his life, and much of what is written here repeats these earlier writings. My quibbles with the Norton section aside, his summaries of Spare and Fortune are well put together and his chapter on Crowley is a solid overview.

Sadly his chapter on Wicca ("The Rebirth of the Goddess") Is a bit of a disappointment. There's nothing new here, and much of it is material quoted from Janet and Stewart Farrar's *A Witches Bible*. Drury's focus is thus primarily British Traditional Wicca, with no discussion of its more eclectic cousins. A small section deals exclusively with feminism and Goddess spirituality, especially the importance of Starhawk (Miriam Simos) and Z. Budapest (Zsuzsanna Emese Mokcsay), but the topic would have been better served with its own entire chapter. On the whole, for those unfamiliar with Wicca the chapter serves as a decent (though limited) introduction.

Chapter 7, "Dark Forces: Contemporary Satanism and Black Magic," primarily focuses on Michael Aquino and his Temple of Set. The information on Setian practice is solid, but the emphasis on the Temple of Set comes at a price: all other forms of Satanism (with the exception of a few pages about Anton LaVey) are ignored. It would have been beneficial to read some material about Theistic Satanism.

Towards the end of the book Drury begins to meander from topic to topic, picking up bits and pieces of ideas that most certainly could have used more than four page summaries. He moves quickly from Michael Harner-style neoshamanism to Norse *seidrs* and Chaos Magic. It's nice to see smaller traditions being written about, but it all often reads like an all too brief sketch. Drury does manage to capture some of the spiritualities behind those traditions, but as a reader I was left wanting more, and better flow from topic to topic.

The book's final chapter, "Archetypes and Cyberspace: Magic in the Twenty-First Century" felt dated when I first read it back in 2011 and even more so now. Some of the information presented (especially on Terrance McKenna) would have been better served in other sections of the book. A final bit on H. R. Giger feels like it was included because simply because Drury was able to interview the artist.

Stealing Fire From Heaven is enjoyable as a history of some esoteric practices, and in a few chapters Drury does a fine job of articulating

some of the underlying spiritual intent within those practices. What keeps *Stealing Fire* from being a great book are the missed opportunities. There are too many sections that just feel rushed, and some of the traditions missing from the book (such as modern Druidry) had me confused as to why they were left out. There's a lot to like in *Stealing Fire*, especially for the novice, but also a lot left unsaid.

Jason Mankey
Sunnyvale, Calif.