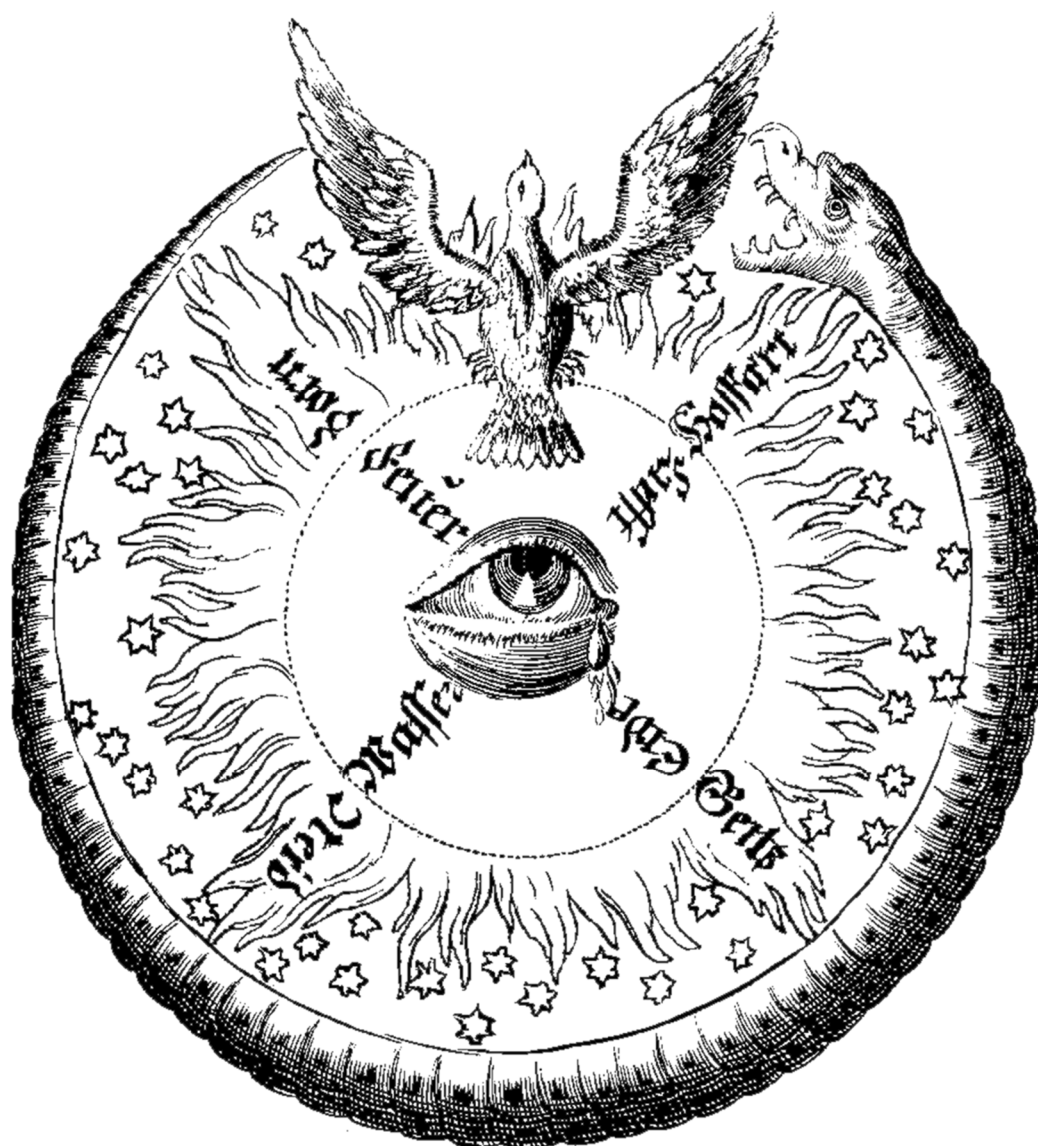


CONSCIOUSLY ILLICIT: TRANSGRESSION IN WESTERN ESOTERICISM



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

6-7 JUNE 2018 – BRNO - CZECH REPUBLIC



Anczyk, Adam

(Jesuit University Ignatianum in Kraków)

No Sympathy for the Devil?: Isaac Bonewits's Satanic Adventure and Other Stories from the Life of a Reformed Druid

Born in Royal Oak, Michigan („The perfect place – as he liked to joke – for a future Archdruid”), Isaac Bonewits (1949-2010) was one of the prominent figures in the history of contemporary Druidry. Bonewits was himself much more interested in religions than his peers at an early age (e.g. he attained a Catholic high school, which he soon left). In 1966, aged seventeen, he enrolled in the University of California, where he became a member of the Church of Satan for about eight months. Bonewits spoke of this episode in his life as of an adventure of an immature teenager, searching for his place among the alternative spiritualities, and he also became very keen on investigating psychomanipulative character of some groups (which led to framing the Advanced Bonewits' Cult Danger Evaluation Frame, 1979). In 1969 he became a Reformed Druid, and in 1983 he founded Ár nDraíocht Féin (registered 1990), the largest Neo-Pagan Druidry group in the USA up to date. During the presentation, I will discuss selected biographical data of this Pagan leader, being an exemplification of a (rocky) road of becoming a follower of a given new religious movement, so in psychological terms – a history of both conversion and deconversion.

Brach, Jean-Pierre

(Sorbonne University)

Illicit Christianity: Guillaume Postel, Kabbalah, and a Transgender Messiah

One of the foremost Christian kabbalists of the XVIth century, Guillaume Postel (1510-1581) liked to present himself as a pillar of orthodoxy, although he tended naturally (like so many others) to consider rather his own personal views as the embodiment of orthodoxy. A prominent linguist, scientist and mystical philosopher, Postel sought all his life an official recognition he denied himself by the outrageousness of some of his spiritual claims. The aim of this lecture will be to try and show how and to what extent Postel was being consciously (or not) transgressive when he openly promoted such tenets as Christ come again as a feminine messiah, of himself being the « son of his/her substance » and of the future of Christianity being shaped according to the features of Jewish Kabbalah. The impact on these theories of Postel's sometimes quite literal understanding of Scripture will also be examined, as an important aspect of « esotericism » and of its manifold practical outcome.



Daffern, Thomas

(International Institute of Peace Studies and Global Philosophy)

Comparative Diabology, Western Esotericism, and Conscious Illicitude

The author will explore Comparative Diabology within Western esotericism. The image of the Devil has long been a part of Western thought, and this paper will sketch out something of the terrain involved in mapping the history of the Devil in Paganism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Manicheism, and Gnosticism, and then ask: who is being consciously illicit here?

Dluhoš, Marek

(Charles University)

The Czech Esoteric Nationalism and the Power of the National Egregor

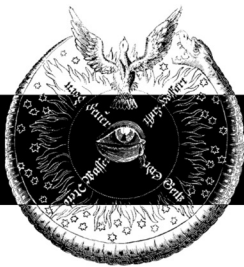
The Czech state population in its battles for independence from foreign – whether German (Nazism) or Communist (the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) – influence felt under pressure from powers which appeared impossible to physically resist (this was also the reason for capitulating without fight surrendering national independence in 1938 as in 1968). During the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938) which saw the largest growth of independent spirituality on Czech territory for thousands of years because of the great democracy of the establishment of the time, its largest organised and state registered group of Hermeticists Universalia worked under the leadership of Charles University's Doctor Jan Kefer (1906-1941), a nationalist and patriot. He developed ideas of ancient theurgy and modern Kabbalah into the concept of so-called Kabbalistic theurgy which was meant to ensure the continued existence of the state even under unfavorable foreign policy conditions. Jan Kefer, the chair of the most important Hermetic association, Universalia found a link between Western Esotericism (Kabbalah and theurgy), nationalism and national Egregore and that his teachings as Kabbalah theurgy became an important part of modern Czech Hermeticism. From his teachings was developed the idea of strengthening and boosting Czech national identity through esoteric traditions, and especially Hermeticism. Egregors are also associated with the angels and other forces of the astral world at the metaphysical level.

Jedličková, Anna

(Masaryk University)

Construction of the Identity of a Learned Magician in Arbatel (1575) and Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy (1559) and Its Relation to Demonology

During fourteen and fifteen centuries in increasing amount originated manuscripts devoted to ritual magic with focus on getting into contact with variety of spiritual beings. In sixteenth century were published several newly emerged anonymous printed books on ritual magic influenced by medieval manuscripts such as Arbatel: Of the Magic of the Ancients and apocryphal Fourth Book of Occult



Philosophy. Both texts were part of learned culture similarly to medieval magical manuscripts. During late medieval period were manuscripts on ritual magic spread in learned and mostly clerical environment of universities. Analysis of both texts suggests that this environment had in sixteenth-century widened and that it also included scholars who did not necessarily need to have university education. This shift corresponds to increasing influence of patronage during renaissance period under which were employed scholars or experts who could gain their knowledge from tutors or schools for craftsmen independent from universities. Another change concerns shift from late medieval emphasis on inherent power of Christian ritual to emphasis on inherent power of citations from Bible in sixteenth-century with lesser emphasis on other parts of Christian worship. Those shifts can be viewed as preconditions of independent western esoteric identity.

Kalač, Petr

(Documentary Centre of the Czech Hermeticism)

Documentary Centre of the Czech Hermeticism (DCČH): Project to Preserve Czech Esoteric Heritage

Exploring the theme of the Czech esoteric activities of the past was very difficult task at the end of the 20th century. Mostly because this specific area of research stood beside the main interest of professional historians. Documentary centre of the Czech Hermeticism fights this deficiency since 2001, led by its spiritus rector Mr. Petr Kalač. In almost 20 years, DCČH managed to bring the Czech esoteric heritage back to universities and greatly supported mass media interest in the subject. Furthermore, the centre mapped the broad field of modern esoteric activities and catalogued it for complex international research. Results of this work can be found at www.dcch.grimoar.cz.

Kapcár, Andrej

(Masaryk University)

Portrait of the Unknown: Occult Tendencies in Modern and Postmodern Visual Art Movements

Sometimes a 5-pointed star is just a 5-pointed star. Visual art, as well as art in general has been always closely connected to most of the religions. But can the creation of art also be considered as part of a ritual? The early 20-century avant-garde movements were trying to prove for it to be the case. The surrealists, later futurists, or suprematists practiced techniques better known in spirituality, they aimed to transcend the borders of reality, not to mention many of the artists being active members of several occult groups. This paper is aimed at the understanding of the occult praxis and ritual participation of the artist by the creation of his art.



Mac Gillavry, David William

(Masaryk University)

United we Fall; on the Pro-Social Effects of Communal Transgressions of Social Norms, and their Implications for the Study of Western Esotericism

Although not integral to Western Esotericism, the transgression of taboo frequently forms a dominant aspect of esoteric philosophies and practices. Performing acts which are aimed at consciously breaking social norms with others, seems to serve several functions amongst which the confirmation of in-group identity (we are different, have different values, etc.), the reinvention of personal identity (through challenging previously held beliefs) and the demonstration of loyalty towards the group by individual members. Little quantitative research has however been done into conscious communal transgressions of the social norms which are widely held within the larger socio-cultural context within which they take place. In this paper I present the results of a pilot study which addresses the effects of conscious acts of communal transgressions of social norms on in-group cohesion and discuss how these results may shed light on the specific case of rule transgression in Western Esotericism.

Marrone, Tancredi

(University of Groningen; Masaryk University)

Magic, Transgression and Self-development

This paper will identify the relation between transgression in spiritual practices for self-divinization and its relation to magical practices. Within the context of contemporary magic, emphasis is placed by specific groups or individuals on the intentional violation of perceived taboos concerning society and conventional spiritual practices. Examples of these regard the international Swedish based order of the Dragon Rouge, which concentrates on the pursuit of a “dark spirituality” associated to the Left-Hand path in opposition to mainstream “light spirituality” defined as Right-Hand path. Secondly, Thelema traditionally incorporated practices such as sex magic, drug use and violation of religious norms within specific historical contexts for the purpose of ceremonial practices and personal liberation. Thirdly, the practice of Chaos Magic and related pop cultural environment which aspires to the subversion of order whether social spiritual or cultural. Finally, groups which, although controversial in the research field are, however, culturally relevant and incorporate criminal activity as part of self-development in contrast to a perceived weak society such as in the case Order of Nine Angles. Although these four cases incorporate transgression in their ideals and practices on different levels they nevertheless are oriented towards personal transformation either identified with becoming independent, acquiring divine status or of transmutation into an ideal version of oneself. The latter is more commonly translated into terms of freeing oneself from the shackles of an oppressive normality and taking control of one’s reality. I will thus analyze the similarities and differences in the intention behind the various magical or spiritual practices performed by these groups to understand whether, through varying levels and expressions of transgression, there is a common thread that unites transgression, magical practice and spiritual development.



Miklas-Frankowski, Jan

(University of Gdańsk)

The Transgressive Messiah: Jakub Frank and his Followers in Olga Tokarczuk's Novel 'The Book of Jacob'

Olga Tokarczuk, one of the best Polish novelist and the most often translated Polish author, wrote in 2014 'The Book of Jacob' based on the life of Jakub Frank. The novel in 2015 won the Nike Award, the most prestigious Polish literary award. The story is set in 1752. The mysterious newcomer from Smyrna begins to preach ideas that quickly introduce discord into the Jewish community. Jakub Lejbowicz Frank announces that he is the Messiah, which marks the birth of heresy within Judaism that later will be called Frankism. His messianic mission symbolically starts near the grave of Nathan of Gaza in Skopje. As the Messiah he taught his followers to disregard limitations of tradition, dogma and custom. In expectation of the great Messianic revolution they rejected the Torah and the Talmud in favor of Kabbalah and incorporated from Christianity the concept of Trinity and the Virgin. Later Frank proclaims himself as direct successor to Sabbatai Sevi and convert with his followers to Catholicism. My paper will be an attempt at representing literally vision of transgression of Frank heresy in Tokarczuk's 'The Book of Jacob'.

Mokrý, Matouš

(Charles University)

Animal Sacrifice in Chaos-Gnosticism: Return to Tradition?

Contemporary Left-Hand Path and Satanic milieu have almost entirely abandoned the use of animal sacrifice as an instrument of exercising magician's will and changing events in the material world. On the contrary, there is some evidence that points towards the presence of ideologies of animal rights and vegetarianism in respective communities and thought of individuals. The resurgence of animal sacrifice in Chaos-Gnosticism, Satanic esoteric current which emerged around the half of 1990's in close connection to Swedish black metal scene, thus contrasts major trends of darker forms of Western esotericism. Teachings of Chaos-Gnosticism advocate Gnostic ideas of false and restraining demiurgic creation of material cosmos out of which must those who attained gnosis free themselves via magical work that also serves as a means to destroy the material world. My paper will focus on the nature of Chaos-Gnostic animal sacrifice and its function within the current. Among other things, it will examine role of the sacrifice in re-enchantment of the world and in constructing and maintaining transgressive Satanic identities. By an analysis of the various Chaos-Gnostic magical literature (mostly The Book of Sitra Achra and Liber Falxifer I and II) and internet material it will show that the practice of animal sacrifice is a part of larger return to more traditional modes of magic which highlight external, non-subjective conception of magical reality and traditional principles and techniques at the expense of magician's free experimentation. Traditionalistic aspects of Chaos-Gnostic magical practices are partly at odds with individualism of contemporary Left-Hand Path and Satanic milieu (which could be seen as an amalgam of expressive and utilitarian self-ethics) and thus my paper will also deliberate



upon the interplay between utilitarian individualism, expressive individualism and tradition in the current.

Nerger, Guido

(Free University of Berlin)

Dionysus and the Beast: Aleister Crowley's Dionysian Ecstasies and Magical Frenzies

Within modern English literature, just as within the Victorian society at all, the poet Edward Alexander 'Aleister' Crowley (1875–1947), with his modernist and therefore overall poetological imagination of 'magic' in the name of the ancient Greek god of ecstasy, Dionysus, took on the role of an agent provocateur. Crowley, who referred to himself as Τὸ Μέγα Θηρίον or "The Great Beast 666", through his aggressive agency in the context of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as an entrepreneur of transgression and as an antagonist of the Irish writer William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), not only earned early fame as a rebellious outsider, but by his writings, and not least his excessive lifestyle, he became one of the most notorious figures of heterodox religious and so-called 'magical' aspirations in the twentieth century. At least by the 1960s, he was to become the role model of the counterculture in general, of sexual liberation in particular, and of many other imaginable forms of radical transgressions of moralities par excellence. In Crowley's 'magical' quasi-religious system of θέλημα, which he developed in his first major work *The Book of the Law* (1909) and which forms the basis for the neo-religious movement called Church of Thelema, the god Dionysus occupies a central position. Referring to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Crowley saw the god Dionysus mutatis mutandis as the actual Christ, who could be ritually or 'magically' invoked by the "method of Dionysus": With the help of self-transforming ecstasies and provocations (such as through the use of intoxicants and diverse sexual practices) the adept of Thelema is to be placed in states that unravel his "higher-self". The paper shall emphasize Crowley's modern ritualized evocation of the god Dionysus (or of Nietzsche's "Dionysisches") by asking how and wherefore Crowley uses the god Dionysus in his imagination of 'magic'. Therefore, passages will be presented and discussed from *The Book of the Law*, the *Book Orpheus. A Lyrical Legend* (1905) and from the essay "Energized Enthusiasm. A Note on Theurgy" (1913).

Novotný, František

(Masaryk University)

Luciferianism: Past and Present Ideas, Fictitious and Factual Movements

On the scene of contemporary esotericism, antinomian Luciferianism belongs among the most controversial milieus, sometimes linked even to violent criminal acts. This paper builds on the finding, the phenomenon of a man supporting Lucifer in his war against the reign of God re-appeared multiple times throughout the European history, taking shapes of fictitious villains, romantic anti-heroes, solitaire thinkers or actual religious groups. It argues, that the sundry destiny of the Luciferian idea through time and space works as a valuable cultural indicator. Detailed mapping of its use, evaluation



and social acceptance importantly contributes to the exploration of possibilities and limits of religion transgression within the western tradition. Capabilities of this attitude will be discussed on the example of alleged Luciferian heresy of the 13th century and its cultural impact.

Ondrašínová, Michaela

(Masaryk University)

From a Housewife to a Woman-Goddess? Women Circles and a (Non)Transgression of the Gender Order

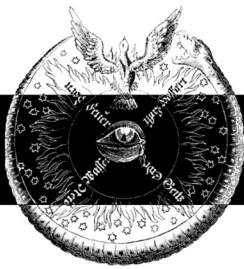
In my presentation, I will discuss a connection between certain currents of contemporary alternative spirituality (more specifically, women spirituality) and a transgression of the social/gender boundaries. As a basis for my discussion, the ethnographic data from Czech women circles will be used. In this field, it was possible to encounter the elements of the spiritual discourse such as looking for a “natural” or “awakened” femininity, a criticism of “patriarchal” society or concepts of a “woman-Goddess” and “divine femininity”. I will show that these concepts – although bearing a potential to lead to the disruptions in the established gender order – can be used in a way that rather contributes to a consolidation of this order. In this sense, my contribution can be related to the assertion made by Anna Fedele and Kim Knibbe (2013) that it is necessary to critically examine the claims of contemporary spiritualities about the emancipatory or liberating nature of their practices.

Pasi, Marco

(University of Amsterdam)

The Art of Esoteric Transgression, the Esoteric Transgression of Art

In recent years, the world of art has shown an increasing interest in the esoteric and the occult. There has been a significant number of large exhibitions in various countries devoted to these themes and more are forthcoming in the next years. This phenomenon concerns both a retrospective awareness of the influence of esotericism on art in the past (especially modern art), but also the production of new artworks in the context of contemporary art. This implies an important shift in the way in which art is understood and appreciated, both by professional critics and by the public at large. Until the mid-1980s, the prevailing historical narrative was based on formalist assumptions and posited a linear development in the history of modern art that tended to exclude irrational or mystical influences as being purely contingent or irrelevant. On the other hand, the world of contemporary art has been long perceived as a disenchanted, secular environment, where an interest in religious traditions is considered more as a peculiar oddity than as a fruitful, worthy line of artistic research. What we see today is a rather more complex picture, in which secular attitudes persist, but have to live together with the very visible presence of a fascination for the invisible. A fascination that is certainly not new, since it has been a significant factor in the art of the past as well. But what lies at the core of this fascination? How to explain this enduring, if sometimes troubled and controversial, relationship? As in all complex phenomena, there can be no monocausal explanation, and it seems evident that there are various



possible elements that play a role in this story. However, I would argue that a very important element is the tendency towards “transgression”, which art and esotericism share with each other. Western Esotericism has been described as “rejected knowledge”, and this concept can be interpreted as a dialectical process of marginalisation in the history of Western culture. Esotericism often transgresses mainstream norms and values and is perceived as a challenge – if not even as a threat – to the well-ordered functioning of a community. It is therefore no wonder that, in situations of tight social control, such as in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, it has been consistently repressed and persecuted. On the other hand, modern and contemporary art are impregnated with the romantic myths of originality and the artistic genius, which lead to understanding the creative process as based on a constant transgression of existing canons and norms. This can certainly help us to understand the persistent flirting of art and esotericism. In my lecture I will substantiate and illustrate this interpretation of the role of transgression by referring to a number of exemplary cases taken from modern and contemporary art.

Redwood, William

(Independent Scholar)

Totalising Transgression? Authenticity and Ambivalence in Esoteric Identities

This paper draws on anthropology and sociology to examine why esotericists strive to transgress and how they maintain and sustain transgressive identities; focus is on transgression by active agents as social strategy. Why do they do it? How do they do it (correctly and conversely, incorrectly)? Ideas of transgression (of one kind and another) have been fairly fundamental to social science and so various key works and theoretical schools will initially be surveyed - and a number of ‘traditional’ case-studies will be examined - by way of introduction. Subsequently, the data drawn on will be that of the author’s own PhD research which was based on fieldwork carried out within London’s esoteric community; it is explained that (for the purpose of this paper) this can be treated as representative of the thinking of the esoteric (sub)culture in general. The three main inter-related issues then addressed are: the links between transgression and notions of authenticity; questions of transgression as performative and transgression as symbolic capital; and finally, the importance of ambiguity within the transgressive act or within the transgressive individual. The paper will conclude by attempting to outline a typology of transgressions and answer the question of what social ‘logic’ or ‘grammar’ might lie behind them. However, the paper finishes with the suggestion that perhaps paradoxically, seeking any absolute conclusion is possibly to miss the point: all too often, transgression is not just a subjective matter (although it certainly is subjective); also, transgression is never fixed nor ever finished, but it remains very much a work-in-progress; moreover, transgression is a necessarily ambiguous business which is not to be understood or ‘read’ simply or singularly. It is ultimately concluded that the ‘dark side’ of esotericism is necessarily nebulous: its ambivalence allows it an especial semiotic functionality, making it the symbolic currency with which esoteric identities are continually (re)negotiated.



Schöfrova, Ivona

(Masaryk University)

Transgression in William Blake's Art

The main aim of the conference contribution is to focus on textual and pictorial works of William Blake, a generally known and recognised English poet of the Romantic Age. The recognized difficulty inherent to those works—a difficulty that has often resulted in scholarly disagreements as well as numerous mistreatments, manipulations, and re-interpretations cluster around Blake's unusually provocative explorations of transgressive sensual experience, explorations that appeared provocative during Blake's own time and often remain so today. The paper comments on Blake's First Book of Urizen in the wider context of Blake's Prophetic Writings which can be seen as radiating an anti-Christian ethos. Blake's Prophetic Books, apart from providing its readers with social criticism, offer a unique and distinguished spiritual mythology that is also a fully-developed philosophy dealing with conflicts that are seen to exist between reason and experience, the secular and the sacred, vision and the senses - conflicts that, for Blake, are evident in the spiritual experiences embedded in various traditional religions, as well as in diverse forms of de-traditionalised religiosity.

Valtrová, Jana

(Masaryk University)

Between Esoteric Practice and Scholarly Research: Alexandra David-Neel and her Impact in Czech Oriental Studies

The paper explores the impact of a French traveler and writer Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969) on the discourses of Tibetan Buddhism in Czech Oriental studies during the twentieth-century. Her writings about Tibet and its 'esoteric wisdom', which she claimed to have mastered, invoked curiosity and fascination, not only among the adherents of various esoteric streams, but also among scholars of Oriental studies. The paper focuses on her role as a mediator of knowledge about Tibetan Buddhism to the Western audience and points out her, still little acknowledged, contribution to the pivotal change of Western discourse on this topic.

Vencálek, Matouš

(Masaryk University)

Western Esotericism and Modern Paganism in the Czech Republic

There are many commonalities between Modern Paganism and Western Esotericism. In the Czech Republic, in its modern forms, both of these currents developed and evolved in a very close interconnection, the communities often overlapped and cooperated quite closely. This paper explores both the common roots of MP and WE in the Czech Republic and the current state of affairs – how do



the adherents of both these currents view themselves and each other now? How do they reflect on their on common history? Do they still cooperate? And if so, what are the means of this cooperation?

Vozár, Zdenko

(University Paris; Charles University; Masaryk University)

Besting the Medieval Theology: Nigromancy and Alchemy

In the corpus of the universal scholastic curriculum, theology is at least nominally regarded as the summit of all humanistic disciplines. From this perspective it was almost unattainable, especially for the disciplines of marginal and unsure status. Beside illicit motives, provocative rituals and innovative interpretations, nigromancy, astral and natural magic, as well as alchemy and divination, have spurred curious lines of thought. In my paper, I will present two important transformative rituals of nigromancy and alchemy, along with examples of their broader consequences. Their aspects have cast into doubt some of the principles of the otherwise solid scholastic building of the universe. But was this thought really conscious and illicit?

Vrzal, Miroslav

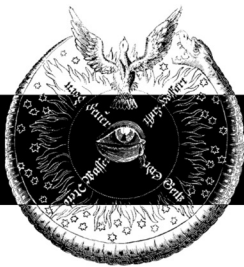
(Masaryk University)

Occult Turn in Czech Black Metal?

The last two decades brought the trend that a lot of metal – and especially black metal – bands are proclaiming serious interest in occult matters. Members of these bands are explicitly talking about the spiritual dimension of their music while sometimes arranging their live performances as occult rituals (with altars, candles and other related components) which they interpret as a channeling of dark gods and forces. In reference to Marcus Moberg we can label this approach as a form of dark alternative spirituality. Behind this expression – often using satanic elements – are moreover, sometimes some very transgressive, anti-Christian and antisocial ideologies aimed at the corruption of Christianity, society or the entire contemporary world. Relevant examples can be found in bands such as Watain, Dissection, Ofermod to name a few. Kennet Granholm designated this trend as “occult turn” by part of the metal scene and uses the term “ritual black” metal for these kinds of bands which are characterized by explicit, systematic, and sustained involvement with the occult. The aim of this contribution is to discover whether this trend is also present in the current Czech black metal environment. It will focus especially on selected Czech black metal bands which have begun to use similar ritualistic aspects and occult imagery over the past few years (for example Inferno or Cult of Fire). I will explore their interpretation of black metal music and artistic activity in (possible) connection to “dark spirituality”.

Wheeler, Graham John

(Independent Scholar)



“Do What Thou Wilt”: Transgression and Domestication in Twentieth-Century Esoteric Religion

The most notoriously transgressive figure in modern Western esotericism is Aleister Crowley, and his best-known precept is “Do what thou wilt”. This precept arrived in Crowley's work with deeply subversive overtones, from sexual excess (Pierre Louÿs) to proto-fascism (Nietzsche), although its roots lie in the mainstream of Western culture (Augustine, Rabelais). This paper will show how the precept was domesticated in the course of the twentieth-century, largely through its adoption by Gerald Gardner and the Wiccan movement as part of the “Wiccan Rede”: “An it harm none, do what ye will”. The precept has evolved into an unthreatening truism: an essentially uncontroversial statement of classical liberal ethics (corresponding to J.S. Mill's “harm principle”). This in turn reflects the mainstreaming that esoteric religion experienced in the twentieth-century, as it moved from the Crowleyan periphery to something approaching suburban respectability.