



Kenneth Grant: Marriage between the West and the East

by Henrik Bogdan

The following text is an edited extract from Henrik Bogdan's essay 'Challenging the Morals of Western Society: The Use of Ritualised Sex in Contemporary Occultism' first published in *The Pomegranate* 8.2, Equinox Publishing, 2006

In 1949, one of Crowley's former disciples Gerald J. Yorke (1901-1983) published a short article called 'Tantric Hedonism' in *The Occult Observer* in which it was stated that certain sexual techniques used by Tantric yogis to make an Elixir were known by the O.T.O.:

Tantric yogis who follow this path insist that physical processes are involved. For them semen (*bindhu*) is the gross form of a subtle essence called ojas which is the White Eagle of the Alchemists. *Amrita* is not normally present in the human body, but is produced by the marriage of the White and Red Eagles; yet its production is essential for that sublimation of the subtle body without which the final body of the soul or rather spirit (*atma*) with God (*Atman*) is impossible. Two methods are taught for making this Elixir, one by the three *oli mudras* of the Hathayogins, which are unknown to western tradition, the other in the *Kaula* circle of the Bhairavi Diksha, when the Suvacini dances naked. This latter technique is known in the west and is the treasured secret of an Hermetic Order known as the O.T.O. (1)

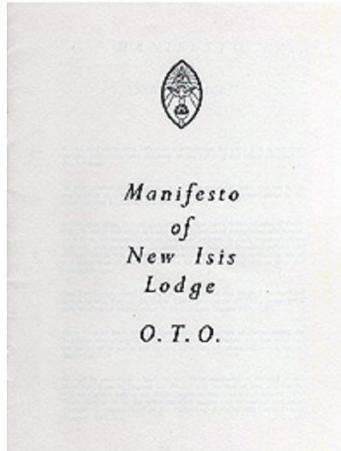
Yorke was not alone in trying to connect the O.T.O. with Hindu Tantra at this time. In fact, one year previously, in 1948, Kenneth Grant had published a *Manifesto of the British Branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis* in which he claimed that, among other things, the Order promulgated the essential teachings of the Indian Shakta Tantra Shastra:

In the O.T.O. are promulgated the essential teachings of the Draconian Tradition of Ancient Egypt; the teachings of the Indian Shakta Tantra Shastra; the teachings of the pre-Christian Gnosis; the Initiated Western Tradition as enshrined in the mysteries of the Holy Qabalah, and the Alchemical Mystical and Magical Formulae of the Arcane Schools of the agelong past, as well as the mode of applying practically the essential principles underlying the Spagyric or Hermetic Sciences, the Orphic Mysteries and the use of the Ophidian Current. (2)



Grant met Crowley for the first time on 10 December 1944, at a boarding house where Crowley was staying at the time, and he soon became Crowley's secretary as well as a member of the O.T.O. A year after Crowley's death, Grant was formally acknowledged as a Ninth degree member by Karl J. Germer (1885-1962), who had succeeded Crowley as international head of the O.T.O., and on 5 March 1951 Germer issued a charter to Grant to open a camp of the order in London. As the New Isis Lodge was the only chartered O.T.O. body in England at the time, it appears that Grant interpreted the charter as making him the head of the 'Order in Britain', (3) although New Isis Lodge actually 'did not get underway until 1955'. (4) However, on 20 July 1955 Germer formally revoked the charter and expelled Grant from the O.T.O. because of a manifesto that Grant had issued the same year. (5)

The manifesto in question was an eight-page pamphlet entitled *Manifesto of New Isis Lodge O.T.O.*, in which Grant, through his O.T.O. name Frater Aossic IX°, was identified as the Inner Head of the New Isis Lodge and the O.T.O. (British Branch), using the name The Master Nodens X° for this function. Grant apparently thought little of Germer's letter of expulsion and continued to operate the New Isis Lodge until 1962 on the basis of 'inner Plane' powers. (6) It was also at this time that Grant immersed himself in Hindu philosophy and religion, and during the period 1953-1961 he wrote a number of articles on Advaita Vedanta for Indian journals such as *The Call Divine*, published in Bombay. (7) It appears that at this time Grant became a follower of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), known as the Sage of Arunachala.



Grant would later become instrumental in the revival of Aleister Crowley through the editing (often together with John Symonds) and introduction of a number of Crowley's books, including *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* (1969), *The Magical Record of the Beast 666* (1972), *The Diary of a Drug Fiend* (1972), *Moonchild* (1972), *Magick* (1973), *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on the Book of the Law* (1974), *The Complete Astrological Writings* (1974), and by writing an introduction to *The Heart of the Master* (1973). It was also during this period that Grant began to publish his three so-called Typhonian Trilogies commencing with *The Magical Revival* in 1972, which were completed twenty years later with *The Ninth Arch* (2002). (8) The early seventies also saw the commencement of, what is usually referred to as, the Typhonian O.T.O. under the leadership of Grant, with its first official announcement published around 1973. While the degree system basically was the same as the one used by Crowley, Grant discarded the use of rituals of initiation and instead conferred degrees on the basis of personal development of its members. The development was apparently checked by Grant himself, and it was expected that the members should send him the records or diaries covering their magical practices on a regular basis. As with Crowley, sexual magic was confined to the Eighth, Ninth and Eleventh degrees, but the nature of it differed.

By his own account, Grant had in 1944-1945 written a number of papers on Crowley's suggestion, and one of them was on the subject of sexual magic. Crowley was apparently enough impressed by it to admit Grant to the IX°. (9) This initiation was later complemented with secret Tantric instructions from David Curwen (who had become a IX° in 1945). By studying these documents Grant came to realize that Crowley's knowledge of sexual Tantra was limited, if not even wrong. According to Grant, these documents were the same as the ones that Curwen had lent Crowley in 1945, which are described by Grant as a Comment on the Anandalahari. (10) Curwen seems to have had a lasting effect on Grant, and it was through him that Grant claimed to have received 'full initiation into a highly recondite formula of the Tantric *vama marg*' (i.e. left-hand path). (11) After Crowley's death, Grant took it upon himself to rework the sexual magic of the O.T.O. along what he considered to be Tantric principles, while at the same time trying to

reorganize the entire system of the Order. The reorganization basically consisted of the merging of the O.T.O with another of Crowley's Orders, the A.A. but according to Grant himself this failed, and soon the intimations of a new lodge overshadowed all his plans, the New Isis Lodge. (12)

The New Isis Lodge of the O.T.O. in London was founded by Grant in 1955 and was active until 1962, and it was in this lodge that Indian Tantra was connected to the sexual magic of the O.T.O. for the first time in a systematic manner. (13) The magical experiments carried out by the New Isis Lodge seem to have had a lasting effect on Grant, who later on would largely base his so-called Typhonian Trilogies on his time with the Lodge. It was during this period that two key texts in the magical system of Kenneth Grant were received as results from rituals performed in New Isis Lodge: *Wisdom of S'lba* (14) and OKBISH, or *The Book of the Spider*. (15) It is interesting to note that Grant apparently interpreted certain passages of *The Book of the Spider* as referring to David Curwen, and that he considered Curwen to have been an important factor in his initiation. In the Typhonian Trilogies, moreover, Grant writes extensively on his system of sexual magic, particularly in *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (1973) and *Cults of the Shadow* (1975). As with Crowley, the Eighth degree deals with masturbation and the Ninth degree with heterosexual sex while the Eleventh degree, in contrast with Crowley's system, does not deal with anal sex, but with heterosexual sex during which the woman is menstruating. According to Grant, Crowley was not aware of the Tantric theories on the importance of the female sexual fluids, which Grant calls *kalas*. Grant describes the *kalas* as psycho-sexual secretions of the Tantric *suvasini*, and goes on to state that there are 16 different *kalas* that practitioners of sexual magic deal with and that these form the bases, together with the male fluids, of the Elixir. The *kalas* refers in the Tantras 'specifically to the vaginal vibrations brought on by an intensification of ritual procedure during the performance of the Kaula rites'. (16) As mentioned, Grant dismissed anal sexual practices as pertaining to the Eleventh degree, and instead attributed the Eleventh degree to sexual magic in connection with menstruation, in which woman is connected to the twenty-eight day lunar cycle:

The sun and the moon are the basis of these 16 emanations. In the human organism they are the male and the female. Their energization and polarization produce *kalas* that flow from the female genital outlet at specific stages of the dual lunation which constitutes the 28 day cycle of the lunar month. (17)

The importance of Tantra and the mysteries of the *kalas* to Grant's form of sexual magic cannot be overstated. According to Grant, the sole object of his Typhonian Trilogies is in fact 'to present the arcane science of the *kalas* in terms of the Western Mystery Tradition'. (18) With that, the development of the sexual magic of the Typhonian O.T.O., as expressed in the works of Kenneth Grant, comes full circle with the earliest references to sexual magic published in the *Jubilaums-Ausgabe Der Oriflamme* (1912): the Eastern origins of the O.T.O.'s sexual magic hinted at in *Der Oriflamme* (although these origins must be considered to be spurious) become a fact in the sense that the secret instructions in sexual magic are combined with Tantric teachings. That way, the sexual magic of Kenneth Grant is an illustrative example of Neo-Tantra.

If you have found this extract interesting, we would recommend Henrik Bogdan's new book: [*Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*, SUNY, 2007.](#)

Notes

1. Gerald Yorke, 'Tantric Hedonism', *The Occult Observer* 3 (1949):178-179.
2. Kenneth Grant, *Manifesto of the British Branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis* (London, 1948), 1. The manifesto is not dated, but Grant confirmed to the present author that it was circulated around 1948, after he had been acknowledged a IX by Karl J. Germer. Kenneth Grant to Henrik Bogdan, 15 November 2001.
3. Kenneth Grant to Austin Osman Spare, 18 April 1952, reprinted in Kenneth Grant and Steffi Grant, *Zos Speaks! Encounters with Austin Osman Spare* (London: Fulgur 1998), 79.
4. Grant and Grant, *Zos Speaks!*, 283 n. 92.
5. Karl Germer to Kenneth Grant, 20 July 1955.
6. Kenneth Grant to Bill Heidrick, 28 January 1984.
7. These articles have been collected, together with a few later articles, and published as Kenneth Grant, *At the Feet of the Guru* (London: Starfire, 2006).
8. For a bibliography of Grant, see Henrik Bogdan, *Kenneth Grant: A Bibliography – from 1948* (Gothenburg: Academia Esoterica Press, 2003).
9. Kenneth Grant to Bill Heidrick, 28 January 1984.
10. Grant, *Beyond the Mauve Zone*, 101.
11. Grant, *Remembering Aleister Crowley*, 49. Incidentally, Kenneth Grant has dedicated this book to David Curwen.
12. Kenneth Grant to Henrik Bogdan, 24 August 2004
13. See Kenneth Grant, *Manifesto of New Isis Lodge O.T.O.* (London, 1955) for further information about this lodge. See 'The Pyramid of Power' by Steffi Grant for the New Isis Lodge's degree system together with corresponding esoteric subjects. Significantly, Tantra is here connected to alchemy. Kenneth Grant, *Hecate's Fountain* (London: Skoob Books, 1992), 37. 'The Pyramid of Power' was originally printed in *Key to the Pyramid* (London, privately printed, 1952) by Kenneth Grant, i.e. three years prior to the formation of New Isis Lodge.
14. Kenneth Grant, *Outer Gateways* (London: Skoob Books, 1994), 166-81.
15. Kenneth Grant, *The Ninth Arch* (London: Starfire, 2002), 1-49.
16. Kenneth Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (London: Skoob Books, 1992 [1972]), 211-12.
17. Kenneth Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time* (London: Frederick Muller, 1980), 26. It should be noted that Crowley also experimented with elixirs composed while the female partner was menstruating-the elixir was in this case referred to as Elixir Rubaeus, i.e. Red Elixir-but this form of sexual magic was seen as a variant of the ninth degree.
18. Kenneth Grant, *Nightside of Eden* (London: Frederick Muller, 1977), 135.