

The Serpent Rises in the West

Positive Orientalism and Reinterpretation of Tantra in the Western Left-Hand Path

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In the last century or so, Tantra has gone from being an extremely polemic and detested subject to achieving immense popularity in Western spirituality. As Hugh Urban has shown, the process has involved drastic reinterpretations of the subject matter, which have changed perceptions of Tantra in both the West and its South Asian origins.¹ In the West, Tantra is commonly represented as “sacred sex”, and consequently other, arguably more central characteristics, are all but neglected. In essence, Western Tantra has very little to do with its South Asian forefather. This is, however, not an article on Tantra in the West per se, nor is it an examination of the reinterpretation of Tantra in the larger esoteric milieu in the West. This article is an examination of how Tantra is being appropriated in a specific current of contemporary Western esoteric magic – the so called Left-Hand Path. In this milieu the interpretation of Tantra differs quite drastically from what could be termed more “New Age” appropriations of the same. Instead of the sexual aspects, more focus is placed on the attainment of power and the antinomian possibilities that Tantra provides. In effect, the Western Left-Hand Path appropriations of Tantra are an example of a positive orientalism through which certain disliked characteristics of Western cultural and religious traditions can be critically scrutinized and discarded in seemingly legitimate ways.

I will start by discussing Western² esotericism and the significance of “exotic others” in the formation of esoteric identities and worldviews. I

1 HUGH B. URBAN, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

2 The qualifier “Western” is problematic, particularly in the study of the esoteric under the influence of globalization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. See KENNET

will then treat the dubious connections between Western sex magic and South Asian Tantra. Finally, I will discuss the Western Left-Hand Path in more detail, along with its connections to and appropriation of Tantric discourse.

Western Esotericism and the Primacy of the Exotic Other

As this article deals with reinterpretations of Tantra in Western esoteric contexts, in an anthology otherwise largely devoted to Tantra in non-Western locations, a discussion of Western esotericism is in order. There are many different takes on the subject. Here I will forgo the sociological discussions and definitions presented by scholars such as Edward Tiryakian³ and Marcello Truzzi,⁴ and instead move directly to the more historically focused approaches of Antoine Faivre, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Kocku von Stuckrad.

In 1992, Antoine Faivre formulated a characterization of Western esotericism which has become very popular among scholars of esotericism. It can even be regarded as one of the central factors leading to the study of esotericism becoming a discipline in its own right. Faivre defines Western esotericism as “an ensemble of spiritual currents in modern and contemporary Western history which share a certain *air de famille*, as well as the form of thought which is its common denominator.”⁵ This collection of spiritual currents is furthermore characterized by four intrinsic and two extrinsic features. The intrinsic characteristics consist of the idea of correspondences – that everything in existence is connected in some way and that affecting these connections is possible; the idea of living nature – that nature is permeated by divine forces, in essence being the body of God; the primacy of mediation of knowledge by “higher beings” and the human being’s imaginatory faculties in achieving spiritual insight; and the

GRANHOLM, “Locating the West: Problematizing the *Western* in Western Esotericism and Occultism,” in *Occultism in Global Perspective*, ed. HENRIK BOGDAN & GORDAN DJURJEVIC (London: Equinox, forthcoming).

3 See e.g. EDWARD A. TIRYAKIAN, “Towards the Sociology of Esoteric Culture,” in *On the Margins of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult*, ed. EDWARD A. TIRYAKIAN (New York, N. Y.: John Wiley & Sons).

4 See e.g. MARCELLO TRUZZI, “Definition and Dimensions of the Occult: Towards a Sociological Perspective,” in *On the Margins of the Visible: Sociology, the Esoteric, and the Occult*, ed. EDWARD A. TIRYAKIAN (New York, N. Y.: John Wiley & Sons).

5 ANTOINE FAIVRE, “Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe,” in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. ANTOINE FAIVRE & WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 2.

goal of transmutation – the purification of the soul to the degree where it can approach the divine.⁶ Furthermore, Faivre determines that Western esotericism proper came into existence during the Renaissance, when different practices and traditions were unified in a common frame of reference.⁷ Faivre's approach is somewhat problematic as it can be read as a strict prescription where all the main characteristics need to be present in order for something to be "truly" esoteric.⁸ As the definition is based on historically limited source material, Renaissance phenomena will easily appear more esoteric than later (or earlier) expressions.

Wouter Hanegraaff has always stressed the scholarly constructed nature of Western esotericism – that the subject matter consists of a very diverse set of philosophies and practices lumped together under a common denominator for the sake of analysis – and has in recent times developed a conceptualization of esotericism which differs quite radically from Faivre's. In his earlier (and some of his later) work Hanegraaff builds on Faivre's notions and Gilles Quispel's idea of "gnosis" as a "third current of Western culture alongside reason and doctrinal faith."⁹ Later on, however, he has moved to analyze the esoteric, or more properly what is *today* studied under the banner of Western esotericism, through what he calls the "Grand Polemical Narrative."¹⁰ He builds on Egyptologist Jan Assmann's idea of mnemohistory as "collectively imagined history" and posits that the subject of the study of Western esotericism is Western religious phenomena that

6 ANTOINE FAIVRE, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10-15.

7 WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 386-388.

8 It should be noted that this is not the intent with Faivre's characterization. It is derived from a specific historical source material, and in a strict sense only applies to that specific material. The characteristics are thus a way of identifying core elements in the specific sources Faivre was examining, and not to be used in a "check-list" approach trying to determine if a certain phenomenon is esoteric or not. Nonetheless, Faivre's characterization easily lends itself to just such a check-list approach, and this is indeed how it has been used in many instances.

9 See WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, "Reason, Faith, and Gnosis: Potentials and Problematics of a Typological Construct," in *Clashes of Knowledge: Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Science and Religion*, ed. PETER MEUSBURGER, MICHAEL WELKER & EDGAR WUNDER (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2008), 138.

10 WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, "Contested Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research," in *Aries* 5:2 (2005): 225-254; WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, "The Trouble with Images: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Western Esotericism," in *Polemical Encounters: Esotericism and Its Others*, ed. OLAV HAMMER & KOCKU VON STUCKRAD (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 107-136.

have, at one time or another,¹¹ been regarded as contrary to established orthodox knowledge in the West, and subjected to polemic discourses where the phenomenon is presented as dangerous, immoral, irrational, or simply wrong. Hanegraaff sees this conflict as largely one between monotheism, where the divine is far removed from the human sphere, and cosmotheism, where the divine is immanent but hidden. While my presentation of Hanegraaff's ideas surely do not do the complexity of them justice, I do see some problems with his approach. One problem is that it runs the risk of broadening the scope of the field to the degree where it can essentially encompass almost anything. An example Hanegraaff himself provides is that of contemporary polemical depictions of Islam.¹² Surely there is some merit in keeping an analytical distance between mainstream, orthodox Islam and subjects such as astrology, alchemy, and magic? While the "Grand Polemical Narrative" deals not with the esoteric per se, but instead with processes where certain phenomena have been "esotericized," Hanegraaff still is engaged in dealing with the esoteric/occult as a "waste basket of knowledge" in much the same way he has earlier criticized sociologist Marcello Truzzi for.¹³ The approach is problematic as it defines its subject by negation; the esoteric is that which has been marginalized in Western culture.

In 2005, Kocku von Stuckrad suggested a discursive approach, using the term esoteric for a "structural element of Western culture"¹⁴ where the focus lies on "claims of higher knowledge and ways of accessing this knowledge."¹⁵ Two particularly prominent ways of accessing "higher knowledge" are mediated by higher beings and personal experience of the divine, and esoteric worldviews are often based on ontological monism.¹⁶ A further constitutive element of esoteric discourse is secrecy, not as pertaining to knowledge that is actually unattainable for the general popula-

11 This is an important detail, as Hanegraaff stresses that his focus is largely on post-Enlightenment discourses, where many previously accepted phenomena such as alchemy and astrology are a posteriori defined in polemic ways.

12 HANEGRAAFF, "Forbidden Knowledge," 227.

13 WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, "On the Construction of 'Esoteric Traditions'," in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. ANTOINE FAIVRE & WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 40-42.

14 KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35 (2005), 80. See also KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), 9-11; KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

15 VON STUCKRAD, "Western Esotericism," 88.

16 *Ibid.*, 91-93.

tion but as “the dialectic of the hidden and revealed;”¹⁷ “the rhetoric of a hidden truth”¹⁸ which can be accessed by the individual who uses the right methods to acquire it. A considerable benefit of von Stuckrad’s approach is that it is not restricted to a set body of sources or a specific historical period, thus broadening the field of study and opening it up for new perspectives. However, there is a downside to this broadening; “the esoteric” can easily become an all too inclusive term to be of greater analytical value.

Both Hanegraaff and von Stuckrad are shifting the focus to issues of legitimacy and power, but they do so in different and at times conflicting ways. They both note “othering” as a key theme when studying the esoteric. However, I do not feel that they give it enough importance as an integral element of esoteric worldviews. I want to argue that the creation of and focus on a positive other is at the very centre of esoteric spirituality. True, in the European context (and Europe’s eventual offshoots in e.g. North America) the creation of exotic others through which self-understandings and self-identities can be constructed is commonplace. However, the exotic other has generally been regarded in the negative – representing everything one does *not* want to be. In contrast, the esoteric exotic other is primarily a positive one – having access to superior wisdom that does not exist in the West, at least not presently. We see numerous examples of this in the history of the esoteric in the West. In the Renaissance the focus lay on the Greece of Antiquity and its philosophers. Later on, as the Greek sources became too familiar, Egypt came to be regarded as the cradle of esoteric knowledge. Eventually this was no longer enough, and the gaze was turned to India and the “mystic orient” as the “true abode of ancient wisdom.” Of course, imaginary esoteric centers such as Agharti in Tibet and the lost continents of Atlantis and Lemuria also represent the exotic and esoteric other. In the twentieth century various indigenous and pre-Christian pagan religions, arguably also representing exotic and esoteric subjects, have become increasingly important.¹⁹ An important point is that

17 Ibid, 89.

18 VON STUCKRAD, *Western Esotericism*, 10.

19 When looking at the function of exotic others for the esoteric, the example of Traditionalism is an enlightening one. This is an esoteric current, originating in the writings of René Guénon in early twentieth-century France, where the modern West (and modernity in itself) is regarded as spiritually dead and the focus is shifted to “authentic traditions” such as Islam (particularly Sufism) and Orthodox Christianity. See MARK SEDGWICK, *Against the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) for the definitive work on Traditionalism.

East and West are primarily emic categories in the world of the esoteric, and should not be regarded as definite categories in a scholarly, etic sense.²⁰

It is precisely due to this positive orientalism and exoticization that Tantra has become an important element in contemporary esoteric teachings in the West. The Gnostics, Rosicrucians, and the Knights Templar of European history and their imagined sexual rituals were not exotic enough as the world shrunk in processes of globalization, and the gaze was increasingly turned outside the West. Tantra became the preferred “origin” of sex magical practices, and it is for this reason more than any other that we find more references to Tantra than to e.g. Paschal Beverly Randolph²¹ in discussions of sex magic in the context of groups such as the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.) and Dragon Rouge, and writers such as Kenneth Grant and Zeena and Nicholas Schreck. The exotic is simply more esoteric, not to mention more erotic!

The Left-Hand Path

The current²² of contemporary esotericism called the Left-Hand Path has received very little attention in academia. Scholars such as Richard Sutcliffe and Graham Harvey have discussed it briefly, and others such as Dave Evans and I provide lengthier treatments.²³ However, beside some of

20 See GRANHOLM, “Locating the West”.

21 See John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist* (Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997).

22 In my take on esoteric currents I diverge from Antoine Faivre, who defines them as “schools, movements, or traditions”, see FAIVRE, “Questions of Terminology,” 3. I conceive currents as “discourse complexes”, i.e. specific combinations of specific ways of understanding and communicating one’s understanding of the world, that structure the more general discourses of “higher knowledge” and “ways of accessing higher knowledge” as per Kocku von Stuckrad’s approach to the esoteric. See KENNETH GRANHOLM, “Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes,” *Religion – special issue on discourse analysis in the study of religion* (forthcoming).

23 RICHARD SUTCLIFFE, “Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick,” in *Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. CHARLOTTE HARDMAN & GRAHAM HARVEY (London: Thorsons, 1996), 109-137; GRAHAM HARVEY, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 97-99; DAVE EVANS, *The History of British Magick after Crowley: Kenneth Grant, Amado Crowley, Chaos Magic, Satanism, Lovecraft, the Left-Hand Path, Blasphemy and Magical Morality* (London: Hidden Publishing, 2007); KENNETH GRANHOLM, *Embracing the Dark: The Magic Order of Dragon Rouge – Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2005).

my own later work,²⁴ no thorough discussion of what actually defines this current has been provided. All of the abovementioned scholars do identify antinomianism as a central ingredient in Left-Hand Path spiritualities, and discuss the aim of Left-Hand Path magic to transcend the boundary between the dualisms of “black” and “white” magic, and good and evil. However, more substance is needed in a definition of the Left-Hand Path.

Drawing from emic self-understandings, I propose an etic definition of the Left-Hand Path as a distinct development of contemporary Western esoteric magic, which is distinguished by the following discursive components:

The *ideology of individualism*, where the individual and his/her spiritual development is the primary concern. Left-Hand Path organizations are typically likened to schools where the individual magician can acquire the tools necessary for his/her magical progress, rather than as communities. The individual is positioned in opposition to the collective, and this often results in a form of elitism, which posits the magician as an elect individual.²⁵ It could be argued that most or all esoteric philosophies throughout history have been individualistic in character. However, the distinction with Left-Hand Path spiritualities is that individualism is raised to the level of explicit ideology.

The *goal of self-deification*, where the aim of the practitioner is to become a creator, or a god, through initiatory processes. The nature of this self-deification is interpreted in various ways by different individuals (as groups rarely define it in a singular fashion). On the one side of the continuum we find psychological interpretations in which self-deification signifies assuming total control over one’s own personal existential universe. On the other side we find purely metaphysical interpretations in which the practitioner is regarded to become an actual god.

An *antinomian* stance, in which collective religious and cultural norms are questioned in the pursuit of individualized ethics²⁶ and spiritual evolu-

24 See e.g. KENNET GRANHOLM, “‘The Prince of Darkness on the Move’: Transnationality and Translocality in Left-Hand Path Magic,” (Torino: CESNUR, 2007) URL: http://www.cesnur.org/pa_granhholm.htm; KENNET GRANHOLM, “Left-Hand Path Magic and Animal Rights,” *Nova Religio* 12:4 (2009); KENNET GRANHOLM, “Embracing Others Than Satan: The Multiple Princes of Darkness in the Left-Hand Path Milieu,” in *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. JESPER AAGAARD PETERSEN (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

25 I have earlier termed this condition “uniqueism” as the term elitism is rather pejorative and the common understanding of it does not really capture the essence of the phenomenon. See GRANHOLM, *Embracing the Dark*, 129–131.

26 KENNET GRANHOLM, “Den vänstra handens väg: Moral, etik och synen på ondska i en mörkmagisk orden,” in *Hotbilder – våld, aggression och religion*, ed. MARIA LEPPÄKARI &

tion. This is often realized in ritualistic fashion in spiritual practices where the magician breaks religious, cultural, and personal taboos (most often on a purely mental level).²⁷ The idea is that this will grant the magician a level of freedom and separation in his individualization and self-deification. Part of Left-Hand Path antinomianism is that any particular Left-Hand Path exists in an antithetical relation to what it perceives to be “the Right-Hand Path.” This includes religious (and often political, ideological etc.) groups that are “mainstream” and conform to established norms, as well as many forms of alternative spirituality that are regarded as being essentially collective in character, and/or conforming in ideology and practice (including esoteric spiritualities such as “New Age” and neopaganism). A particular Left-Hand Path thus defines itself in opposition to this “Right-Hand Path,” and becomes what this “mainstream” spirituality is not.²⁸ Part of this antinomian stance is the preference of symbols and rhetoric that is commonly regarded as “satanic,” e.g. the inverted pentagram, talk of “The Prince of Darkness,” and terms such as black magic.

The origin of the term Left-Hand Path can be traced back to nineteenth-century Western reinterpretations of Indian religious sources, particularly perceptions of Tantra. While many Tantric texts name seven or more “paths,”²⁹ the notion of two juxtaposed paths – *Dakṣiṇācāra* (also *Dakṣiṇamārga*, roughly translatable as “right way”) and *Vāmācāra* (also *Vāmamārga*, roughly translatable as “left way”) – was the one propagated in the Western occultist milieu. The idea that Tantra could easily be divided into the two main traditions resonated with the already established division into black and white magic. Notions of “left” and “right” had of course been part of the occultist milieu for a long while, based already on Biblical tradition, but it was Helena Petrovna Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society who popularized the Indian and Tantric connections.³⁰

The evolution of the Left-Hand Path cannot be discussed without mentioning the most (in)famous occultist of the twentieth century;

JONATHAN PESTE (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2006).

27 SUTCLIFFE, “The Left Hand Path”; Granholm, *Embracing the Dark*, 137-138.

28 GRANHOLM, *Embracing the Dark*, 138, footnote 43; see also Granholm, “The Prince of Darkness on the Move”.

29 See DAVID KINSLEY, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvīdyās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 48. See also the *Kulārṇava Tantra* 2: 4-9, quoted in Urban, *Tantra*, 33, where *Vāmācāra* is listed as one path along with Vedic worship, Vaiṣṇava worship, Śaiva worship, *Dakṣiṇācāra*, *Siddhānta*, and *Kaula*.

30 See e.g. HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY, *The Secret Doctrine. Volume 1: Cosmogony* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Ltd, 1888), 192; HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY, *The Secret Doctrine. Volume 2: Anthropogony* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Ltd, 1888), 579.

Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). While Crowley did not use the term Left-Hand Path as a self-designation, his magical philosophy and practice has been extremely influential on the later Left-Hand Path milieu.³¹ Crowley received his initial training in magic and occultism in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (founded in 1888), and came to develop his own magical religion, Thelema, from 1904 onwards. In 1912 Crowley became involved with the German-originated magic order Ordo Templi Orientis (O. T. O.), which is the main organization expounding Crowley's teachings today.³² Crowley's use of sex as an initiatory tool, his antinomian stance towards traditional society and religion, his focus on the Will as the main instrument of the magician, and his uncompromising attitude to spiritual progress have all influenced Left-Hand Path spiritualities.

From the early 1970s onwards, a positive re-evaluation of the term Left-hand Path can be found in the works of British magician and author Kenneth Grant (1924-2011). Grant was the personal secretary of Crowley for a short period in 1945, and further developed the Thelemic system of his mentor. A few years after Crowley's death Grant made an attempt to take over the O. T. O., and although this ultimately failed he has maintained his own branch of the order, commonly identified as the Typhonian O. T. O.³³ Even though Grant's O. T. O. has never had more than a handful of members, his writings are well known within the occult milieu. The most central of these are the three Typhonian Trilogies, published between 1972 and 2002.³⁴ Grant's *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (1973) contains one of the first positive appraisals of the term Left-Hand Path,

31 Aleister Crowley's influence is apparent in most contemporary esotericism, for example on Neo-Pagan witchcraft and Wicca, see e.g. HENRIK BOGDAN, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2007), 147-155. However, it is not uncommon that this heritage goes unmentioned, as the perception of Crowley is still rather negative.

32 MARCO PASI, "Ordo Templi Orientis," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. WOUTER J. HANEGRAFF with JEAN-PIERRE BRACH, ROELOF VAN DEN BROEK & ANTOINE FAIVRE (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 898-906. It should be noted that there are conflicting views regarding whether O. T. O. existed as an actual order before the involvement of Crowley or not. Even if the order may have existed before Crowley, he certainly had a decisive impact on it.

33 PETER R. KOENIG, "Introduction," in ALEISTER CROWLEY & THEODOR REUSS, *O. T. O. Rituals and Sex Magick*. Edited and Compiled by A. R. NAYLOR (Thame: Essex House, 1999), 25-26. Grant's group was reorganized as the Typhonian Order in the late 2000s, see *Starfire, A Journal of the New Aeon: The Official Organ of the Typhonian Order*. Volume III, Number 3 (London: Starfire Publishing Ltd, 2008).

34 The first trilogy consists of *The Magical Revival* (1972), *Aleister Crowley & the Hidden God* (1973), and *Cults of the Shadow* (1975), the second trilogy consists of *Nightside of Eden* (1977), *Outside the Circles of Time* (1980), and *Hecate's Fountain* (1992), while the

with increasing treatment in subsequent books. For example, in *Cults of the Shadow* Grant writes “It is the almost universal failure to understand the proper function of the Left Hand Path that has led to its denigration...”,³⁵ and this sentiment is expressed in *Nightside of Eden* as well.³⁶ Grant identifies the Left-Hand Path as a genuine and important spiritual path, and considers it to be as valid as the more common “right-hand path.”

If the term Left-Hand Path is not directly used as a self-designate by Kenneth Grant, it is used so by Anton Szandor LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan (1966) and “father of modern Satanism.” For example, in *The Satanic Bible* the following sentence is included as part of an incantation: “Strengthen with fire the marrow of our friend and companion, our comrade on the Left-Hand Path.”³⁷ Also discussed is the “Right-Hand Path,” portrayed as representing religions of ignorance and fear.³⁸ It is interesting to note that this “Right-Hand Path” is treated a lot more thoroughly than the Left-Hand Path. This is an example of the importance of a negative other for Left-Hand Path spiritualities.

Some other representatives of the milieu are the Temple of Set, founded in California, USA, in 1975, the Texan author Michael W. Ford and his Order of Phosphorus, and the Swedish originated Dragon Rouge,³⁹ founded in 1990 and currently the largest Left-Hand Path order with its approximately 400 members worldwide. Of these groups and individuals Dragon Rouge is of most significance in the present context, as it incorporates a particular interpretation of Tantra into its very foundations – in an eclectic synthesis with Kabbalah, alchemy, and Old Norse rune mysticism.

Sexual Mysticism, Sex Magic, and Tantra in Western Esoteric Contexts

While Indian Tantric practice is not automatically sexual in nature, in the Western imagination it has certainly become highly sexualized. Sexuality and sexual mysticism has always played a part in Western esotericism. Examples of this are e.g. the treatment of the feminine aspect of the

third and last trilogy consists of *Outer Gateways* (1994), *Beyond the Mauve Zone* (1999), and *The Ninth Arch* (2002).

35 KENNETH GRANT, *Cults of the Shadow* (London: Skoob Books, 1994 [1975]), 1.

36 KENNETH GRANT, *Nightside of Eden*, (London: Skoob Books, 1994 [1977]), 52.

37 ANTON SZANDOR LAVEY, *The Satanic Bible* (New York, N.Y.: Avon Books, 2005 [1969]), 151.

38 E.g. LAVEY, *The Satanic Bible*, 42.

39 See GRANHOLM, *Embracing the Dark*, for a thorough study of the order.

godhead in Kabbalah, the Shekhinah, and the mystical union of it with the masculine aspect of God;⁴⁰ and discussions by such important Renaissance esotericists such as Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno, who regarded sensual desire as central to spiritual attainment.⁴¹ It was, however, not before the mid to late nineteenth century before sexual techniques were systematically incorporated into Western esoteric teachings.

Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875) is generally considered the first in the history of Western esotericism to develop a system of sex magical practice.⁴² Randolph was born in New York, an illegitimate child to a black woman and a white man – a mixed heritage that consistently troubled him. From about the early 1850s to the early 1860s he was deeply involved in spiritualist circles, as well as active in women's rights and anti-slavery movements. By the late 1850s he had started to become disillusioned with spiritualism. After having come into contact with older esoteric currents – e.g. Rosicrucianism and magic – on his travels in Europe he started developing a system which focused on the use of sexual intercourse as a spiritual practice. He died by his own hand at age forty-nine, having difficulties managing his feelings of jealousy towards his wife. Randolph's teachings were picked up by the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor⁴³ – probably founded by Max Théon (Louis Maximilian Bimstein, 1848-1927) in 1884. The order marketed itself as an alternative to the Theosophical Society and its (as some felt) overly Eastern focus.⁴⁴ The order more or less ceased to exist after a financial scandal in late 1885, but even with its short existence the impact of the Brotherhood on the esoteric milieu was considerable. It is mainly through the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor that Randolph's sex magical teachings have spread.

Aleister Crowley, mentioned above, and the O.T.O.⁴⁵ are commonly regarded as the most important progenitors of sex magic in the West. Crowley engaged in sexual experimentation already in his teens, published

40 GERSHOM SCHOLEM, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1991), 140-196.

41 WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, "Under the Mantle of Love: The Mystical Eroticism of Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno," in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF & JEFFREY J. KRIPAL (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 175-207.

42 HUGH B. URBAN, *Magia Sexualis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 55; see DEVENEY, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, for the definitive work on Randolph.

43 See CHRISTIAN CHANEL, JOHN PATRICK DEVENEY & JOSCELYN GODWIN, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (New York, N.Y.: Samuel Weiser, 1995).

44 DEVENEY, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 246.

45 See PASI, "Ordo Templi Orientis," for more information on the order.

a collection of erotic poems called *White Stains* in 1898 – the same year he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and worked with sexual techniques in his magic since at least the early 1900s. However, it was not until 1912 when he came into contact with Theodor Reuss of O.T.O. that Crowley seriously began to develop a sex magical system. The O.T.O. was founded on paper in the early 1900s, but it is doubtful if the order was operational before Crowley's involvement with it. According to its own origin myths the order was founded in cooperation by Carl Kellner (1851-1905) – who had travelled in the East and probably come into contact with Tantric practices – and Theodor Reuss – an entrepreneur in the occult world who managed several fringe masonry groups. While it seems that both Kellner and Reuss had some familiarity with Tantra, it is not likely that their knowledge was particularly extensive.⁴⁶ As the order's activities probably commenced well after Kellner's death his potential knowledge of Tantra cannot be considered to have had much of an impact. What is known is that after Crowley become affiliated with the O.T.O. he produced the ritual material and aligned the order to his vision of Thelema.⁴⁷

Crowley is often regarded one of the most important persons in synthesizing Tantra and Western esotericism. In his foreword to Crowley's autobiography John Symmonds writes: "His greatest merit, perhaps, was to make the bridge between Tantrism and the Western esoteric tradition, and thus bring together Western and Eastern magical traditions."⁴⁸ Kenneth Grant also emphasizes the connections between Crowley's system and Tantra.⁴⁹ According to Hugh Urban, however, this interpretation is largely erroneous. While Crowley might have come into contact with Tantric practices on his travels,⁵⁰ and was very knowledgeable about different forms of Yoga, his knowledge of Tantra was severely limited.⁵¹ Similarly, the O.T.O. is often given a certain Tantric pedigree on rather dubious grounds. It

46 HUGH B. URBAN, "Unleashing the Beast: Aleister Crowley, Tantra and Sex Magic in Late Victorian England," *Esoterica* 5 (2003): 148.

47 See MARCO PASI, "Crowley, Aleister," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF with JEAN-PIERRE BRACH, ROELOF VAN DEN BROEK & ANTOINE FAIVRE (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 281-287.

48 JOHN SYMONDS, "Introduction," in *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. KENNETH GRANT & JOHN SYMONDS (London: Arkana, Penguin Books, 1979), 25.

49 See e.g. KENNETH GRANT, *The Magical Revival* (London: Skoob Books, 1991 [1972]), 121; KENNETH GRANT, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (London: Skoob Books, 1992 [1973]).

50 HUGH B. URBAN, "The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity", in *Nova Religio* 7:3 (2004): 12.

51 HUGH B. URBAN, "Unleashing the Beast", 140.

seems far more likely that the original inspiration for the sexual practices of the order lie in the teachings of Paschal Beverly Randolph, conveyed through the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. For example, both Randolph and the O.T.O. entertain the idea that the magician should focus his/her will on the desired outcome at the moment of orgasm; an idea which is not present in Tantra. There are, however, some rather pronounced differences between the sex magical approaches of Randolph and O.T.O. as well. For the former sex magic was to be strictly limited to married heterosexual couples, whereas the latter had no such limitations and even opened up the possibility of homosexual magical practices – something Crowley himself practiced. In contrast to Randolph, and similarly to Tantric contexts, Crowley and O.T.O. included the ritual consumption of the combined male and female sexual fluids.

If Tantra was not the primary inspiration for Randolph, Crowley, or the O.T.O., it was for others. As noted by Hugh Urban,⁵² discourses on sexuality were in no way absent in Victorian England. Rather, they were a preoccupation. Sir Francis Burton (1821-1890) was an important figure in the construction of the idea of a sexualized tantric India. In 1883 he translated the Kama Sutra, a publication that came to be falsely associated with Tantra.⁵³ Another Brit, John Woodroffe (1865-1936) – working as a barrister for the High Court in British India, is regarded as the father of Tantric studies. Under the pen name Arthur Avalon he wrote several volumes on the subject of Tantra, and was to a large degree responsible for producing a moralized, “deodorized”, version of Tantra in both the West and the East.⁵⁴

The contemporary Western views of Tantra as “sacred sex” can largely be attributed to the influence of Pierre Arnold Bernard (1875?-1955) – also known as “the Omnipotent Oom.” Bernard had travelled in India in his youth, but probably came into contact with some Tantric teachings via an Indian yogi in California in the early 1900s. In 1906 he founded the Tantrik Order in America, which focused on the sexual aspects of Tantra.⁵⁵ Although Bernard and this early “Tantric movement” caused much controversy in its time, the sexual techniques introduced by him and the idea of sex as important for spiritual development and enlightenment have proliferated since the second half of the twentieth century.

52 HUGH B. URBAN, “The Omnipotent Oom: Tantra and Its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism,” *Esoterica* 3 (2001): 219. See also Hugh Urban’s essay in the present volume, p. 457-494.

53 *Ibid*, 222-223.

54 URBAN, *Tantra*, 136-147.

55 URBAN, “The Omnipotent Oom,” 218-259.

So, if the sex magical practices of the likes of Randolph, Crowley and Bernard are so different from South Asian Tantric practices, what is this “original Tantra” then? As this is an issue of considerable scholarly debate, and as I am not myself an expert on the subject, I will keep my discussion short. According to David Gordon White, the origin of Tantra lies in the Kaula practices of rural India. The female deities/demonesses identified first as “seizers” and later as Yoginīs were terrible and frightful entities. They needed to be calmed by the sacrifice of foodstuff or they would feast on unborn babies and the vital energies of men instead. In conjunction to this there existed the idea that the truly heroic individual (a *vīra*) could instead make an offering of his vital male fluids, semen, and be rewarded by receiving supernatural powers through the intake of the Yoginīs’ female fluids. Rites where human women represented, and indeed worked as manifestations of, the Yoginīs emerged. These rites culminated in sexual rituals at the end of which the mixed sexual fluids of the male and female practitioner were consumed.⁵⁶

White, and other scholars of Tantra such as Hugh Urban, stress that sexual rites have always been a very small part of Tantra as a whole, and references to such practices are few and far between in classic tantric literature.⁵⁷ It could be argued, as Traditionalist Julius Evola does, that Tantra is more about power than about sex.⁵⁸ The main goal of the Tantric practitioner would then be to achieve bodily supernatural powers, Siddhis (where the word Siddha, the person who has achieved such powers, means perfected being), such as immortality and flight. According to White, ideas about spiritual enlightenment came only in later theological speculations from the twelfth century onwards. These were attempts to sanitize Tantra so that even more orthodox Indians could engage in its practice. Here, the sexual elements, and the importance given to actual women, were sublimated and ideas of the internal feminine power of the male practitioner, the Śakti, and the symbolic reading of the forbidden elements of Tantric practice were instituted.⁵⁹ The act of sexual intercourse became internalized as the symbolic union of the masculine Śiva and the feminine Śakti,

56 DAVID GORDON WHITE, *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 27-93. It should be noted that White’s ideas are in no way uncontested in the scholarly community.

57 Ibid, 13; Urban, *Tantra*.

58 JULIUS EVOLA, *Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti and the Secret Way* (Rochester, V.T.: Inner Traditions International, 1992).

59 WHITE, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 219-257. Again, White’s views here are contested, and some have noted that the opposite development may actually have been the case, with symbolic interpretation preceding sexualized rites.

all occurring internally in the body of the Tantric practitioner. The feminine energy of man came to be represented as the coiled Kuṇḍalinī serpent which could be awakened in meditation and thus activate energy point, chakras; and all this was incorporated as central elements of Tantric philosophy and practice. White calls this theological speculation on Tantra *tantrism*,⁶⁰ whereas he prefers *Tantra* as a term representing the broader field.

It should, of course, be noted that in Tantra just as in Christianity the theological forms were never the most widespread ones. Hugh Urban also notes that it is in the complex interplay between orientalists, scholars, and native Indians, that the view of Tantra and tantrism that is predominant today arose.⁶¹ Thus, this dialogical process created a new form of Tantra which affected philosophies and practices in both the West and South Asia. Tantrism, before being constructed as such in the modern period, was never a singular monolithic category and became such as a result of the meeting of East and West.⁶²

The Sexualized Feminine Divine, Tantra, and Positive Orientalism in the Western Left-Hand Path

When Tantra is appropriated in Western Left-Hand Path contexts, it can be attributed in part to experienced misrepresentations of the feminine in Western religious history, but also to the appeal of a positive orientalism where the “East” is valued for both its exotic qualities and imagined spiritual virtues. The appropriation and positive reappraisal of the feminine in the Left-Hand Path is linked to the idea of antinomianism, discussed earlier. In Western culture the feminine has traditionally been considered impure, worldly, potentially evil, and thus separated from the divine. In Jewish mysticism the character Lilith is sometimes regarded as the first woman who was created equal to Adam.⁶³ However, when she was not willing to submit to Adam she was cast out of or fled from the Garden of Eden and became the mother of numerous demons and things evil, as well as seducing men as a succubus.⁶⁴ In some accounts Lilith is said to have

60 Ibid, 16.

61 URBAN, *Tantra*.

62 Ibid, 40

63 RAPHAEL PATAI, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 218; PINCHAS GILLER, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of Kabbalah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 65.

64 PATAI, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 210.

become the consort of Samael/Satan after she left Adam, and in still others the existence of two Liliths who wage war on each other is proposed.⁶⁵ In the West woman has come to symbolize lust and sin (as lust is regarded a Christian sin), as well as the active agency in enticing man to sin and impurity. This is clearly noted in Abrahamic views on menstruation as well as in the importance of male dominance over all aspects of female sexuality.⁶⁶ In cosmic dichotomy the feminine often represents the dark, negative and passive aspects of the supernatural. At the same time, she is often represented as playing the active part in things evil, or simply more prone to the temptations of the devil.⁶⁷

Similarly, the left side has in many cultures been regarded as the side of evil and wrongfulness, and often also the feminine. The Sanskrit *vāma*, denoting left, adverse, wicked, adverse, opposite etc. is similar to the word *vāmā* which can be translated as woman.⁶⁸ In India the right hand was used when eating and the left hand when cleaning oneself after visiting the toilet. Thus the left hand symbolized impurity, in physical as well as in spiritual matters, and its potential connection to the female has by some been interpreted as suggesting that the woman was seen as impure. In the Western world the left and left-handed people come to symbolize a broad range of undesirable qualities, such as weakness, clumsiness and dishonesty. The word *left* in the English language originates from Old English *lyft*, which meant weak or worthless.⁶⁹ The Italian word for left-handed, *mancino*, has connotations of treacherousness. The Latin word *sinister* translates as *left* or *wrong, perverse*.⁷⁰ Not to forget the fact that we shake hands with our right hand, not our left. Earlier Western psychology did consider the left-handed person to be a bearer of all sorts of unwanted social behaviors

65 SCHOLEM, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 295-296.

66 JONATHAN KLAUANS, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29, 39-40, 104-108.

67 See ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 82.

68 MONIER-WILLIAMS, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (2008 revision), "vāma", <http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier>, accessed 1 December 2010. It should be noted that the word *vāmā* can also be translated as "lovely, dear, pleasant, agreeable, fair, beautiful, splendid, noble", and that an etymological connection between the words *vāma* and *vāmā* has not been established. Such a connection is, however, argued by Western Left-Hand Path groups as it fits their antinomian goals.

69 Online Etymology Dictionary, "Left", <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=left&searchmode=none>, accessed 30 June 2009.

70 Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid, <http://www.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/lookup.pl?stem=sinist&tending=er>, accessed 30 June 2009.

and qualities, such as homosexuality, incestuous desires, impotence, and mental disorders.

In many ways, Left-Hand Path philosophies present the feminine in ways which have been common in Western religion in general. There is a difference, however, in how these characteristics are valued. In the Left-Hand Path order Dragon Rouge, for example, Lilith – who figures strongly in the order’s material – is portrayed as sexually aggressive and dangerous, but this is not seen as a negative thing.⁷¹ In Tantric vocabulary, it is only the true *vīra* who can manage to approach the dangerous divine feminine unscathed. In his book *Mörk magi* [Dark Magic], long-time Dragon Rouge member Tommie Eriksson writes that “the feminine primal force has been deported to the darkness and the dark goddess has become nothing more than a symbol of death and decay.”⁷² One of the goals of the Dragon Rouge magician is to approach this negative symbol, understand the “true meaning” of it, and thus reevaluate it. Dragon Rouge vocabulary includes many references to the sexualized feminine divine. For example, the starting point of the black magician’s road to self-deification entails the magician symbolically “stepping into the womb of Lilith.”⁷³ When the magician’s development reaches its climax the womb is represented as the staring eye of chaos, through which the magician steps out. By stepping into the “Womb of Lilith” the magician in essence impregnates him- or herself, and by stepping out through the “Eye of Lucifer” he/she gives birth to him-/herself as a god. Symbolic representations of Lilith’s womb are also displayed prominently in the alchemical sigil of the order. The sigil portrays achieved divinity as the union of the male and female in the form of a stylized Śiva-Liṅgam (also termed the Eye of Lucifer). Official Dragon Rouge material holds that the darker aspects of spirituality are feminine: “She represents the gate to the dimensions of magic. She is Mother Earth and through her womb life is born and dies. She is the gate to the underworld and the goddess that the witch and the warlock step down into in order to be initiated. She is the realm of death and the mother to all life.”⁷⁴

The feminine aspect of the divine is so important to Dragon Rouge largely because it is felt that this is an area of the human experience which has been neglected and demonized by the dominant religion in the West, Christianity. When this religion is criticized, it is often on the grounds of it

71 See GRANHOLM, *Embracing the Dark*, 140-141.

72 TOMMIE ERIKSSON, *Mörk magi* (Sundbyberg: Ouroboros produktion, 2001), 6. My translation.

73 DRAGON ROUGE, *Magikurs 2, brev 6*, 2-3. Unpublished internal document.

74 DRAGON ROUGE, *Magikurs 2, brev 3*, 3. Unpublished internal document. My translation.

having legitimated the repression of women and presenting her as an evil and dangerous other.⁷⁵ This rhetoric needs to be understood in the context of contemporary Sweden and the importance attributed to the notion of equality between the sexes in this country. As in all of contemporary the West, the aspiration in Sweden has since the mid 1900s been to forge a society where individuals of both sexes have equal opportunities and possibilities. The Scandinavian societies have been forerunners in the ideology of equality and Sweden has taken a particularly active role in the process. In addition, this discourse of women's liberation is to be understood in the context of the reappraisal of the feminine aspects of the divine. As most groups with neopagan influences, the order has a notion of the dichotomy of masculine vs. feminine, with the former representing civilization and the latter representing nature. When the order at the same time strives for a reappraisal of nature, the feminine quite naturally assumes a prominent position and becomes something to be revered.

As stated earlier, a form of orientalism where the exotic and far away – in space and/or time – is a foundational aspect of Western esoteric discourse. Considering this, and the centrality of antinomianism for Left-Hand Path spiritualities it is easier to understand why Tantra appears so attractive to a group such as Dragon Rouge. Tantra provides an avenue for “double rebellion.” As I have shown, the turn to the feminine divine in groups such as Dragon Rouge is to a high degree motivated by antinomian concerns. The common demonization of the feminine in Western culture provides ample opportunity for utilizing the feminine in antinomian pursuits. The feminine divine represents aggressive sexuality and power, which is dangerous, but if approached in the right manner it can be a great asset for one's magical development. Tantra provides a religious tradition which has models for this aggressive and dangerous sexualized feminine divine, at the same time as it provides the added allure of being an exotic other. Indian feminine deities in Tantric contexts such as Kālī, Durgā, and Tārā are often represented as dangerous, and as apparent reversals of the passive feminine in Western contexts. Dragon Rouge, for example, has adopted a view on spiritual gender from (Western representations of) Vāmācāra Tantra, and uses the Indian example to reinterpret Western demonic femininities. In comparing Lilith with Kālī similarities can be found, and the interpretation that the former can represent the same positive qualities as the latter can be made. This can furthermore be used in discourses where the dominant religious traditions can be criticized on the grounds of repressing

75 DRAGON ROUGE, *Philosophy*, <http://www.dragonrouge.net/english/philosophy.htm>, Accessed 30 June 2009.

the feminine, and given added legitimacy for positive reinterpretations of existing Western notions and traditions. The exotic other, viewed in the light of positive orientalism, becomes a lens through which the familiar can be seen in new ways.

Western Left-Hand Path groups are not uniform in their use of Tantra. Some groups and individuals, such as Dragon Rouge, Kenneth Grant, and the former Church of Satan and Temple of Set member Nicholas and Zeena Schreck, make much use of Tantra. In other groups, such as the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set, Tantra receives almost no treatment, at least on an official level. I will here focus primarily on the appropriation of Tantra in Dragon Rouge and the publications of Kenneth Grant.

Kenneth Grant builds on Aleister Crowley's magical system and, as said earlier, presents the latter as very knowledgeable concerning Tantra. Grant is the single-most significant individual in the Left-Hand Path when it comes to cementing the idea that the Western Left-Hand Path is largely analogous to, or even a direct descendant of, Indian Vāmācāra Tantra.⁷⁶ In *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* he distinguishes between "Vama Marg" and "Dakshina Marg," in a move central to Western esoteric discourses where the former is presented as the esoteric and the latter as the exoteric aspects of Tantra.⁷⁷ Most of Grant's "Typhonian Trilogies" are abundant with references to Tantra. His *Cults of the Shadow* (1975) deals predominantly with groups and "traditions" that are either Tantric or which Grant interprets as having a close affinity to Tantra. Interestingly enough, the only chapter in the book which does not refer to Tantra in any way is chapter six which deals with Aleister Crowley. In addition to Aleister Crowley, Grant regards the artist-magician Austin Osman Spare's ideas as having an affinity to Tantra, and even existing in "straight line" of tradition related to it.⁷⁸ Grant's fascination with Tantra appears to have developed sometime in the late 1960s, as the Carfax Monographs, published between 1959 and 1963, do not mention the subject. A possible influence from Tantra can be glanced on a 7" vinyl record of Aleister Crowley reading his poetry released in 1970. The B-side of the record contains Grant and associates, performing under the name of "Chakra," singing the song "Scarlet Woman."⁷⁹ Grant depicts Tantra as a dark, ancient, and potentially

76 KENNETH GRANT, *Cults of the Shadow* (London: Skoob Books, 1994 [1975]), 199. See also NICHOLAS SCHRECK & ZEENA SCHRECK, *Demons of the Flesh* (London: Creation Books, 2002).

77 GRANT, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God*.

78 GRANT, *Cults of the Shadow*, 199, footnote 7.

79 See HENRIK BOGDAN, *Kenneth Grant – A Bibliography – from 1948* (Gothenburg: Academia Esoterica Press, 2003), 25.

very dangerous form of esoteric religiosity which has manifested in various forms in many pre-Christian cultures, and even in legendary centers of esoteric wisdom such as Atlantis. Thus, Tantra becomes something of *the* perennial religion, prior to and elevated from all other traditions.

In Dragon Rouge as well, Tantra has a very prominent position, to the degree where Vāmācāra Tantra is presented as one of the four foundational pillars of the order's magical system. In the introductory correspondence course of magic the order makes available for its members, Tantra is one of the first subjects discussed.⁸⁰ The subject receives treatment even before Kliphothic Kabbalah – which is after all the model for the order's initiatory structure – and the Old Norse runes. Furthermore Kuṇḍalinī-meditation is prescribed as one of the most basic techniques of dark magic,⁸¹ several books on Tantra are on the list of recommended reading, and articles on Tantric subjects are published frequently in the members' paper of the order.

Interestingly, neither Grant nor Dragon Rouge pay much attention to the more explicitly sexual practices of Tantra, and focus more strongly on the pursuit of power. In this, they differ from most other Western appropriations of the idea of Tantra. Nicholas and Zeena Schreck's discussion of Tantra in their *Demons of the Flesh* is, on the other hand, strongly focused on the sexual aspects, but this is to be expected in a book dedicated to sex magic. In all three contexts Tantra, in its *vāmācāra* variant(s), is presented as something which only the truly brave and spiritually strong can use. In this sense, the discourses found in these Left-Hand Path philosophies are similar to "traditional" Tantric rhetoric⁸² in that they stress that the teachings are for an enlightened elite, not for the masses. In Dragon Rouge, Tantra, and particularly the Kuṇḍalinī, are strongly linked to sexual energies. However, sexual intercourse is regarded as just one manifestation of the internal life-force that the Kuṇḍalinī represents, and not the primary one in a Dragon Rouge context. Thus, explicitly sexual practices are not considered necessary. Sex rituals are discussed, but are secondary to other magical techniques and never practiced in group settings.⁸³

There are several differences between Western Left-Hand Path appropriations of Tantra and Tantra in its South Asian contexts. As presented by White, the use of sexual fluids is essential in Indian Tantra. In the Western

80 DRAGON ROUGE, *Magikurs 1, brev 1*, 3. Unpublished internal material.

81 *Ibid*, 15.

82 WHITE, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 24-25.

83 There is one exemption from this. In the year 2000 one of the Swedish Dragon Rouge lodges organized a practical course on sex magic, for heterosexual couples. It is not known how many, if any, couples participated.

Left-Hand Path, sexual fluids are hardly ever mentioned. Also, whereas sex polarity is essential in Indian contexts, as the women participating in the rituals are manifestations of the Yoginīs, the situation is different in the Left-Hand Path. The idea is that the opposing forces of male and female exist within each practitioner, and so sexual rituals may be employed with different sex partners, same sex partners, as solitary practice, or even as abstinence from sexual practices (as a form of sublimation of sexual energies).

Conclusion & Discussion

In a way, the Western Left-Hand Path appropriation of Tantra as represented by Kenneth Grant and Dragon Rouge is more in the vein of “Tantrism,” i.e. theological speculation on Tantric practices. Nowhere is the consumption of sexual emissions mentioned, and the individual practice of Kuṇḍalīni-meditation, in integrating the internal feminine Śakti with the internal masculine Śiva through methods other than sexual stimulation, is the predominant approach. However, sexual practices in the form of hetero-, homo-, or autoerotic nature are definitely not discarded as immoral or wrong in any way. Far from it; sex is regarded as very suitable tool for magical work, and even more so, as an important avenue for enjoyment – which is regarded as having a value in itself. One could argue that the approach of Dragon Rouge, and other Western Left-Hand Path groups and individuals, is an attempt to escape the hypersexualized discursive reality of the modern West described by Michel Foucault. Sex is important both as enjoyment and as a possible path to magical enlightenment, but intercourse and other acts associated with sexual stimulation are not the only expressions of the sexual energies, or “life force,” of the human being. One could see the practices as a synthesis of the Kaula-practices of medieval India and their “deodorized” forms as presented by e.g. Woodroffe. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is a critique and an opposition to modern Western appropriations of Tantra, presented as more “traditional” and “authentic” than that of “New Age Tantrism”.

It should be noted that Left-Hand Path spiritualities generally stress the importance of basing practice in solid scholarship. Thus, an author such as Tommie Eriksson of Dragon Rouge, while earlier referring mostly to authors such as Julius Evola and Robert E. Svoboda, is very much aware of and knowledgeable about the works of scholars such as Hugh B. Urban and David Gordon White. It should also be noted that the Left-Hand Path is highly eclectic and infused with individualist discourses. The impression one gets of an order like Dragon Rouge is quite different if reading

works by founder Thomas Karlsson, who is primarily influenced by rune mysticism and Kabbalah, than by reading works by Tommie Eriksson, more influenced by Evolian Traditionalism (albeit bereft of the worst fascist excesses) and Tantric scholarship. It is by reading works by all of the central ideologists, and the synthesis provided in the general material, that one arrives at a complete (or at least less restricted) interpretation of an organization such as Dragon Rouge. Tantra and “tantrism” are indeed at the centre of Dragon Rouge, but if only focusing on material by Tommie Eriksson it will seem to be more at the centre than if reading the totality of the order’s material and engaging in discussion with its members.

One way of approaching the Western Left-Hand Path appropriations of Tantra would be to see it as a critique of both negative orientalism and the modern West and its problematic discourses on sexuality, both the restrictive and the ones that overemphasize the centrality of sexual intercourse. At the same time Left-Hand Path groups are often engaged in positive orientalist discourses that cast a longing gaze to the exotic orient, a feature so central to much esoteric discourse.

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