

TRENDS IN OCCULTISM

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**THE OCCULT AND ITS RELATION  
TO CULTURE**

## WHO AM I

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- ▶ Specialty: Occult philosophy



## SYLLABUS

▶ Week	Topic	Show case
1	The Occult	Aleister Crowley
2	Between science and religion	Alchemy / Astrology
3	The forbidden ritual	The Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn
4	Secrets of the occult	Wicca
5	Ancient trajectories	Alchemy/ Quantum Mystica
6	The east in the west	Traditionalism

## WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO TO FINISH THIS COURSE

- ▶ Attend classes (At least 5 out of six sessions) and be prepared for them. If you can't make it at least 5 times, you will have to do an extra assignment, but trust me, showing up is easier. (30 % of your grade)
- ▶ A final paper about any of the topics we will discuss during the semester. (70 % of your grade)
  - ▶ 7-10 pages
  - ▶ In English
  - ▶ In line with academic conventions (citations, no plagiary, etc.)

## POPULAR IMAGES

- ▶ Satanism
- ▶ Dark powers
- ▶ Necromancy
- ▶ Demonology
- ▶ Exorcism
- ▶ Sex, blood and intoxication rituals
- ▶ Witches
- ▶ Harry Potter





## IN REALITY, THE OCCULT CAN BETTER BE DESCRIBED AS:

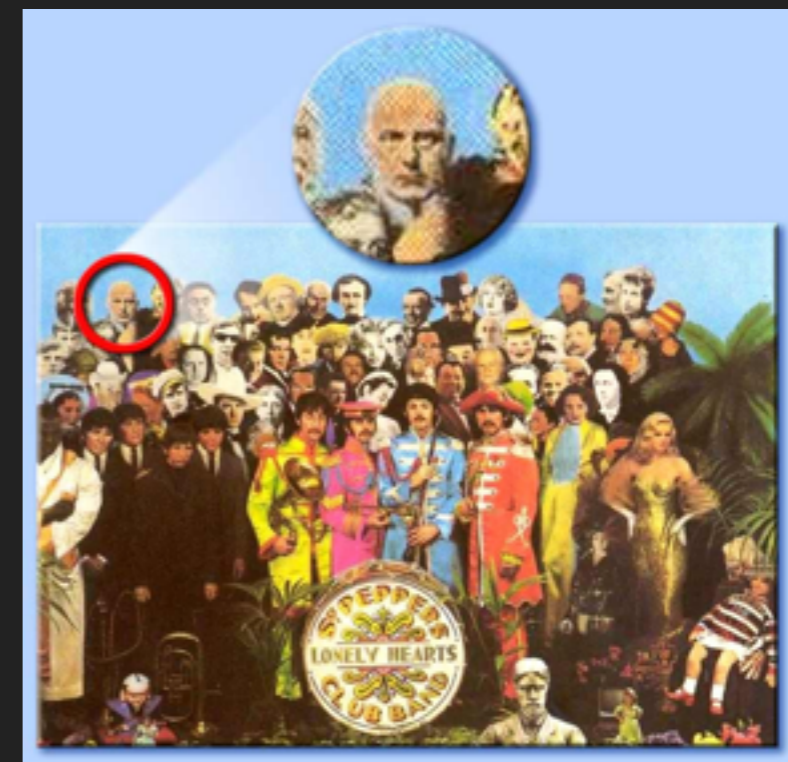
In other words, if the early Church had once needed a concept of “heresy” (gnostic or otherwise) to define its own “orthodox” identity, and Protestantism had needed the concept of a “pagan” opponent (Roman Catholic or otherwise) to define its own identity as true Christianity, the newly developing academic orthodoxies created reified “Others” more suitable to their own needs of self- definition: irrational “superstition” based on human ignorance, credulity, prejudice, and sheer stupidity in the case of Enlightenment philosophers, “alchemy” in the case of modern chemists, “astrology” in the case of modern astronomers, “magic” and “occult philosophy” in the case of scientists in general. In this manner the category of “the occult” emerged during this period as a conceptual waste-basket for “rejected knowledge,” and it has kept functioning as the academy’s radical “Other” to the present day.

Wouter Hanegraaff (2012)

## THE OCCULT; A TALE OF TWO EPOCHS

1. The period until the enlightenment in which the occult formed an integral part of everyday perception.

2. The period since the enlightenment in which the occult became a strong force in counter-culture



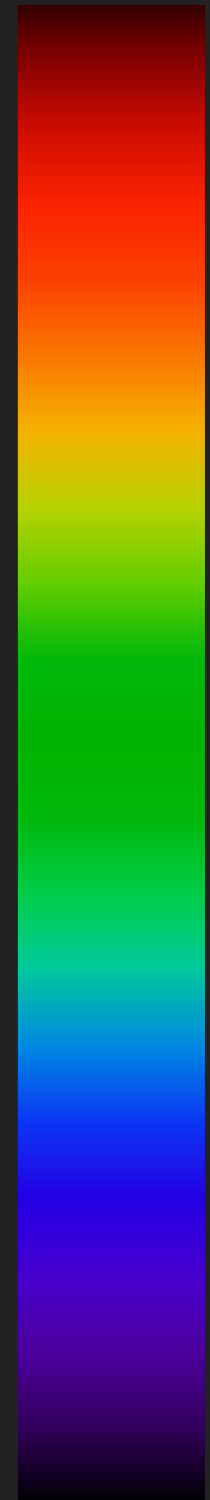
## THE OCCULT SCIENCES

- ▶ Astrology
- ▶ Alchemy
- ▶ Magic
  - ▶ Cabala
  - ▶ Necromancy



## THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD VIEW

- ▶ Supernatural
  - ▶ Forces which intervene in the natural world (Miracles) but are themselves not, or no longer, part of it. (God/Jesus, and sometimes Angels, Saints and Mother Mary)
- ▶ Preternatural
  - ▶ A part of the natural world which does not always answer to the laws of nature. The preternatural was thought to be filled with hidden and occult forces which both humans and demons could use to effect change in the natural world. (see: Newman 2004; Daston & Park 1998)
- ▶ Natural
  - ▶ That which follows the laws of nature without doing anything out of the ordinary. In this period these laws were generally believed to be the laws laid down by Aristotle.



## THE GREAT DEMONOLOGY DEBATE

- ▶ The medieval and early modern debate on the limits of occult effects remained highly theoretical.
  - ▶ It largely, especially in the case of alchemy, served as a benchmark for defining the limits of demonic activity.
  - ▶ The occult sciences, especially magic and astrology, restricted human freedom. This stood at odds with church doctrine and the idea of final judgement.



## ARISTOTLE AND THE GROWTH OF OCCULT INTEREST

- ▶ The introduction of Aristotelian philosophy in the Latin West (from the 11th century) provided Europeans with a complete picture of the natural world and thus allowed for the classification of all that falls outside of that image.
  - ▶ A growth in theoretical demarcation of miracles.
  - ▶ A growth in the interest in all that stood outside of the natural, but wasn't yet a miracle.
  - ▶ A growing interest in the natural world



## THE FALL OF ARISTOTLE & THE WASTE BUCKET OF HISTORY

- ▶ Modern science took as its primary stand that everything is natural. Failure to explain, derives from faulty theories, not from divine or occult intervention.
- ▶ That, which was formally regarded as occult, now became part of scientific inquiry and an integral part of the natural world.
  - ▶ Chemistry
  - ▶ Astronomy
  - ▶ Psychology

## THE OCCULT REVIVAL: COUNTERCULTURE

- ▶ In the rational, highly structured victorian era, the occult popped up again. This time not as a mainstream understanding of the world around us, but a part of counterculture.
  - ▶ The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn
  - ▶ Aleister Crowley
  - ▶ Rene Guenon and Traditionalism
  - ▶ Fascism
  - ▶ spiritualism



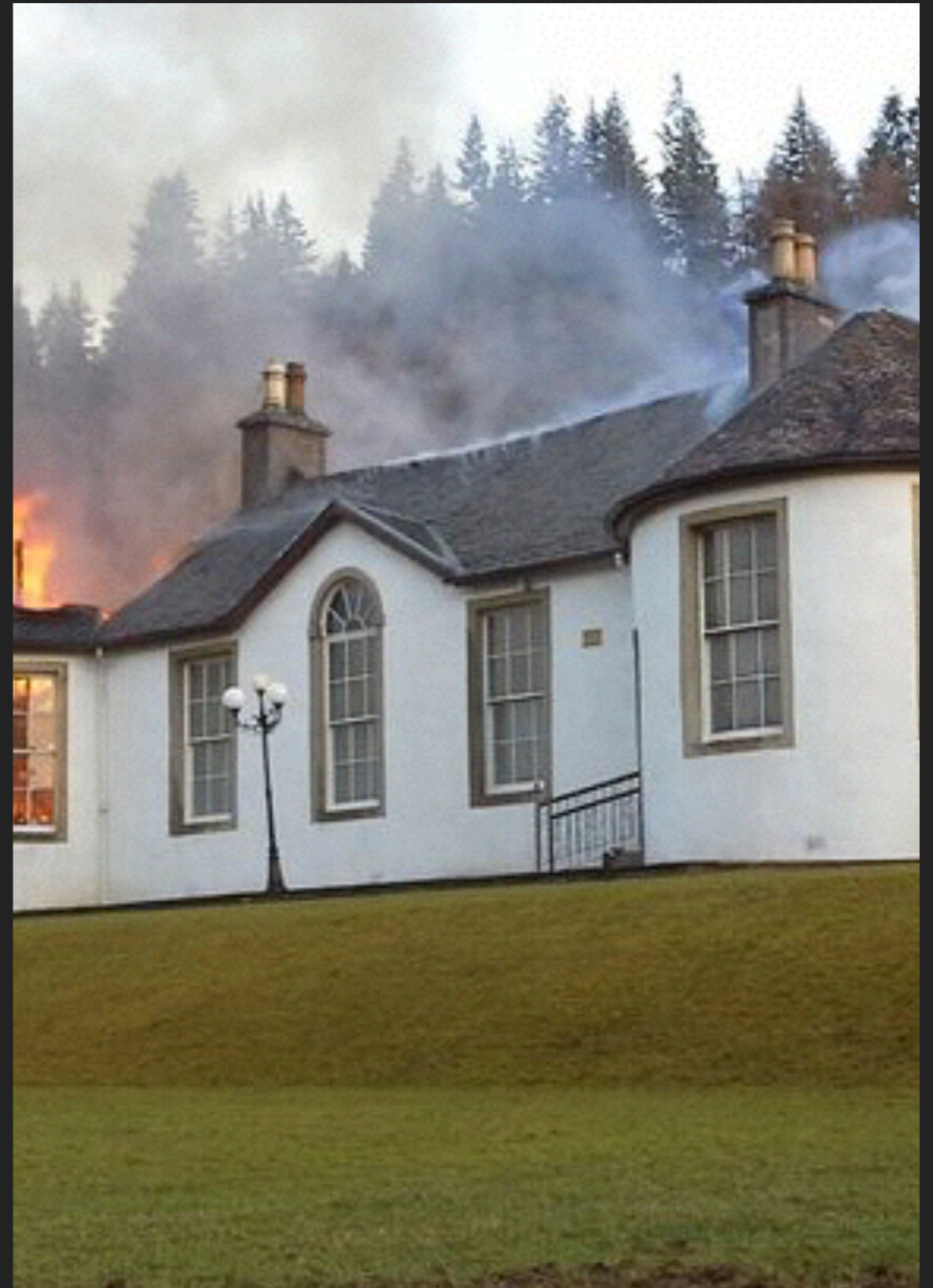
## ALEISTER CROWLEY (1875-1947)

- ▶ Grew up amongst the Plymouth Brethren.
- ▶ After his father died, his mother came to believe that the young Crowley was the Beast from revelations and Crowley adopted the identity as his own.
- ▶ Member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn
- ▶ Founder of the church of Thelema



## THE RITUAL AT BOLESKINE

- ▶ in the late 19th century Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (head of the HOGD) translated a manuscript copy of a 15th century Jewish mystical work by Abramelin, or Abraham the Jew
- ▶ In 1899 Crowley decided to preform the Abramelin ritual at Boleskine. The ritual was supposed to take several months and Crowley never finished it.



## CROWLEY IN EGYPT; DO WHAT THY WILLT, SHALL BE THE WHOLE OF THE LAW

- ▶ While in Egypt with his wife Rose, the couple preformed a ritual through which Rose became possessed by a spirit, Aiwass, who dictated the "Book of the Law" to Crowley.
- ▶ Aiwass would evolve to become Crowley's guardian angel and later, Satan himself (Mac Gillavry 2014).
- ▶ The Book of the Law later became the founding document of Crowley's new religion; Thelema.

## CROWLEY AND VICTOR NEUBERG IN ALGIERS

- ▶ In the desert in Algiers Crowley and Neuberg, his student, preformed a ritual which cumulated in Neuberg sodomising Crowley.
- ▶ The ritual was aimed at the destruction of the individual in order to become totally free. After the ritual, Neuberg went mad and Crowley took everything to radical new heights.



## THE ABBY OF THELEMA 1920-1923

- ▶ Sicily
- ▶ The abby was supposed to be a magical commune in which believers preformed rituals and received magical initiations
  - ▶ Sacrifices
  - ▶ Sexual magic
- ▶ It fell in disrepair when Crowley was thrown out of Italy by Mussolini's fascist government.





## CROWLEY AND HIS PLACE IN COUNTER CULTURE

- ▶ Crowley reacted against the restricted and prudish Victorian and Georgian eras.
- ▶ By taking on the cloak of everything which society disapproved of (the beast 666, the devil, occultism, rampant sexuality, etc.) he left his mark as the great liberator and a visionary for the future.
- ▶ In reality, Crowley was very much a child of his era and his elitist ideas were probably never meant to extent his own ego.

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