

## Words from the editor

—Per Faxneld



Welcome to the Fall 2012 ESSWE Newsletter. This issue begins on a sad note with an obituary for Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, one of the most important names in our field, who left us suddenly and much too soon at the end of this summer. Next comes an important announcement concerning the ESSWE thesis prize, and a two-in-one conference report, followed by the usual Ph.D. project presentations and scholar interviews. Lastly, two upcoming conferences are announced. Just like last year, I will, as Yuletide is upon us, end this editorial with a Christmas poem, the first stanza from Christina Rossetti's "In the Bleak Midwinter" (1872). The beautiful four stanzas following this are about Christ and how to worship him well, but the first stanza's simple and crisp evocation of nature in the cold season seems more appropriate for a non-religious publication such as this.

### *In this Newsletter*

- *Words from the editor* (p. 1)
- *Missing M.A. theses* (p. 2)
- *Obituary: N Goodrick-Clarke* (p. 2-3)
- *ESSWE Ph.D. Thesis Prize* (p. 3)
- *Conference report* (p. 4-6)
- *Ph.D. project presentations* (p. 7-8)
- *Scholar interviews* (p. 9-12)
- *Upcoming conferences* (p. 12-13)

In the bleak mid-winter

Frosty wind made moan,

Earth stood hard as iron,

Water like a stone;

Snow had fallen, snow on snow,

Snow on snow,

In the bleak mid-winter

Long ago.



## Missing M.A. theses in the Spring Newsletter

In the list of completed M.A. theses from Amsterdam University in the Spring issue, three were accidentally omitted (all from 2011). These were:

S.J. Kalverda, "Relations Between Esoteric Others & Modern Identities"

E.M. van Loenen, "Magic and Alchemy in Judaism"

C.M. Daw, "Franz Bardon and Dion Fortune: Man, Woman and Mastery of the Universe in Modern Occultism"

## Obituary: Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (1953–2012)



Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (1953–2012)

It is hard to write an obituary that does justice to someone of the stature, brilliance and manifold human qualities of Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, who died of cancer in Torquay, England, on 29 August. To his relatives and many friends he will be remembered for his warmth and generosity, his enormous charm, his humour, his sparkling personality. To the world of learning he will be remembered for his colossal contribution to the field of western esotericism through his many books and through his initiative in setting up the Exeter Centre for the Study of Esotericism at Exeter University (EXESES) and the corresponding professorship, of which he became the first incumbent. The programme offered by EXESES has made it possible for the first time for students all over the world to take a course by distance-learning leading to an MA in the field of Western Esotericism, with the PhD as an additional option. Since the programme began in the autumn of 2005 many students have successfully completed the course and some have gone on to pursue academic careers in the field.

While Nicholas always seemed destined for an academic career, he had a long journey to his professorship. Born in 1953, he was educated at Lancing College and Bristol University, then went on to St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, where he received a doctorate for the thesis that later became his book *The Occult Roots of Nazism*. The book, first published in 1985, has been continuously in print ever since and has been translated into twelve languages. Initially unable to find a university post, he worked, inter alia, as an inspirational schoolmaster, a banker, and a highly successful fund-raiser for Oxford University. After a brief collaboration with the University of Wales Lampeter, he was appointed to the newly created chair of Western Esotericism at Exeter University in 2005. Meanwhile he was already making an impact as an author. He followed *The Occult Roots of Nazism* with two more books on the interface between esotericism and the far right, namely *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth and Neo-Nazism* (1998) and *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (2002). An entirely different type of book was his *Enchanted City – Arthur Machen and Locality: Scenes from His Early London Years, 1880-85* (1987), reflecting his fascination with topography and history-laden places. He also edited compilations of extracts from the writings of Paracelsus (1999), Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (2004) and (with Clare Goodrick-Clarke) G.R.S. Mead (2005). In addition he translated two books on Swedenborg from German, wrote numerous articles and appeared as a compelling and engaging lecturer in many different settings, including the conferences organized by the New York Open Center.

In 1985 he married Clare Badham, an English literature scholar working in publishing who went on to become a homoeopathic practitioner and a specialist in the history, symbolism and practice of alchemy, on which she has written two books, *Alchemical Medicine for the 21st*

*Century* (2010) and *The Hermetic Art of Alchemy* (forthcoming) and a number of articles. For some years they ran a publishing house together. Then, when EXESES0 was founded, she joined the faculty as a lecturer on "The Hermetic Art of Alchemy" and "The Esoteric Body". Nicholas and Clare had a rare marriage of hearts and minds, and their silver wedding in Oxford in 2010 was a moving occasion. Their beautiful home, Magnolia at Teignmouth, was the scene of many delightful gatherings and stimulating conversations that always left one inspired and re-charged.

I am one of those who will miss Nicholas intensely as a dear friend over 29 years. I have a diary entry recording the first time we met in July 1983 when I and four others gathered at the Museum Tavern in Bloomsbury, London, to plan the formation of a society where papers on broadly esoteric subjects would be read and discussed. I remember clearly how struck I was by Nicholas' vitality, charisma, eloquence, humour and loud, infectious laugh. Shortly afterwards we held our first meeting at the Plough in Museum Street, where Nicholas read a paper on Arthur Machen. He later contributed papers on the Gothic revival, which was a major interest of his. We could never agree on a name for our initiative, so we just called it "The Society". Others involved in it included Ellic Howe, Robert A. Gilbert, Gerald Suster, the novelist Eric Towers and the masonic scholar John Hamill. Clare, soon to become engaged to Nicholas, was also an active member. We had many very lively and fascinating evenings, and we thought of ourselves as a sort of avant-garde group of scholars of esotericism.

Those were early days for our discipline. In terms of organized study programmes within academe there was only the lone, pioneering department for the History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe within the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes at the Sorbonne, headed by Antoine Faivre. But things were changing gradually, and a few scholars within academe were already beginning to take a serious interest in esoteric subjects. One of them was Frances Yates at the Warburg Institute, who was coming out with books like *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, *The Art of Memory* and *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. A major break-through came in 1999 with the establishment of the programme at Amsterdam University for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents under Prof. Wouter Hanegraaff, followed six years later by the Exeter chair. Another important step was the founding in 2005 of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism with Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke as one of the co-founders. By then he had become recognized as one of the leading scholars in the field, with a world-wide reputation.

Today esotericism is becoming increasingly firmly established as a field of academic study, with its specialist journals, its conferences, its learned societies and a growing number of university programmes devoted to it. Among those who brought this about, Nicholas Goodrick-

Clarke stands high. He would be pleased to know that EXESES0 is being continued in his spirit. We, his friends and colleagues, owe him an enormous debt, and there are many people throughout the world to whom he will always be an inspiration.

—Christopher McIntosh

## ESSWE PhD Thesis Prize

Nominations are invited for the third **biennial ESSWE PhD Thesis prize**, awarded by the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism.

**Prize:** The prize will be given for an outstanding PhD thesis completed since 1 March 2011 on any aspect of Western Esotericism. Candidates for the prize must be members of the ESSWE. The thesis must have been approved formally by the nominee's thesis committee, but the degree need not have been formally awarded.

**Notification & Certification:** The prizewinner will be notified in May 2013 and will receive an award of €500 and a certificate, to be presented at the ESSWE conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, 26–29 June 2013. The ESSWE will contribute to the travel expenses of the winner.

**Publication:** The thesis will also be recommended for publication in the ARIES Book Series, though the final decision on publication will be taken by the ARIES Book Series editorial board.

**Nomination:** Nominations must be made by electronic mail to the Chair of the Prize Committee, Helmut Zander (Université de Fribourg, [helmut.zander@unifr.ch](mailto:helmut.zander@unifr.ch) and [maren.sziede@unifr.ch](mailto:maren.sziede@unifr.ch)) by 1 February 2013. The nominator must be a faculty member at the institution that awards the nominee's PhD degree, or a member of the nominee's thesis committee. Each nominator may make only one nomination. The applications should consist of pdf files of the following material: 1) A letter of nomination 2) The nominee's thesis 3) A separate summary of the thesis, written by the nominee, of no more than ten pages (double spaced) 4) A brief biographical sketch of the nominee 5) Documentation to show that the thesis has been approved

Items 1, 3 and 4 must be in English. Item 2 may be in any one of the following languages: English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish. Item 5 may be in any language, so long as a translation into English is provided if it is not in English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish. *The Prize Committee* consists of: Helmut Zander, Université de Fribourg (Chair), Andreas Kilcher, ETH Zürich, Birgit Menzel, Universität Mainz.

## Conference report:

### EASR: Ends and Beginnings, Södertörn University College & 1st International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism, Stockholm University, August 2012

–Christian Greer

(Photos on pp. 5–6 by Per Faxneld)

The Summer of 2012 was punctuated with back-to-back conferences at the end of August in Stockholm, Sweden. The first was the 11th annual European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) conference, which also served as a “special conference” of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR). Both scholarly networks were hosted by the Swedish Association for Research in Comparative Religions at Södertörn University College from August 23rd to the 26th. Under the unifying theme of “Ends and Beginnings,” the conference drew over 350 participants from a number of countries and sub-fields (not to mention levels of experience) who presented their research in one of twelve concurrently running panels. While no one could criticize the sheer diversity of topics being discussed (ranging from Ancient Scandinavian Religions to Contemporary Mevlevism), scholars of esotericism were confronted with the inconvenience of having nearly every one of the panels concerning their field scheduled for the same time on the same day.

Another point of criticism concerned the composition of the panels, as the lack of cohesion between paper topics left many wondering how the organization of the panels took place. Aside from these problems though, the

conference was a success with Kocku von Stuckrad's keynote “Scientification of Religion, or: How Secular Science has Given New Life to Religion” and the roundtable discussion of Wouter Hanegraaff's new book *Esotericism and the Academy* both standing as high points. Nonetheless, it was hard for scholars of esotericism not to consider it something of an “opening act” for the 1st International Conference on Contemporary Esotericism that followed the day after the EASR/IAHR conference concluded.

Marking both the publishing of the Contemporary Esotericism anthology and the founding of a scholarly network of the same name, the conference organized by Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm at the University of Stockholm rightly deserved the buzz that it had garnered in the months leading up to it. With keynotes by Christopher Partridge (“Occulture is Ordinary”), Jay Johnston (“Productive Trouble: Gender – Esotericism”), Kocku von Stuckrad (“Rejected Theory in the Study of Esotericism”), and Wouter Hanegraaff (“Entheogenic Esotericism”), in addition to a host of excellent papers by notable junior scholars, one had the feeling of being at one of the classic music festivals of the 1960s where seasoned performers shared the stage with the next generation of virtuosos.

Being just over a decade old, the scholarly community surrounding the study of esotericism (as an organized academic field) remains intimate, yet grows every year by leaps and bounds. This conference made clear the primary reason for this, simply stated, is the unalloyed passion and dedication of those working within the field. Of note, was the way in which this conference provided a platform for younger scholars to showcase how the academic construct of esotericism could be as fruitfully applied to currents within the 20th and 21st centuries as it has been for those of the 18th and 19th centuries. In sum, if the conversations that took place within the conference halls, and continued in the restaurants and pubs afterwards, are any indication, the future of the study of esotericism will be bright.





## Ph.D. projects of ESSWE members

### A Modern Sage: Franklin Merrell-Wolff at the Crossroads of Religion, Philosophy, Psychology and Science

–Dave Vliegthart, University of Groningen



Charismatic leaders play a significant part in the religious discourse of modern Western culture. Following Weber, charisma (“gift of grace”) is an extraordinary quality ascribed to someone whom others believe to have access to an unseen source of authority, such as divine inspiration, revelation or insight. “Modern sage” Franklin Merrell-Wolff (1887–1985) is a good example of such a contemporary religious leader credited with charisma.

After graduating in mathematics, philosophy and psychology from Stanford and Harvard in 1914, Merrell-Wolff

accepts a teaching position at his first university. One year later, though, he walks away from what appears a promising academic career to embark on a spiritual quest, in search of higher knowledge. Key texts from Eastern and Western traditions have led him to believe there is a “third kind of cognition” that is potentially available to us all, but only actually acquired by a few. He joins several esoteric societies, before establishing his own *Assembly of Man*, in 1928. During these years, he has five religious experiences, which supposedly lead to his “Realization,” in 1936. Based on this “transformation in consciousness,” he is able to verify the existence of the transcendental knowledge he had set out to find. Next to perception (knowledge-by-acquaintance) and conception (knowledge about), so he claims, there is such a thing as “introception” (knowledge through identity). He describes this new concept as both a function and a state of cognition, whereby “the light of consciousness turns on itself toward its source.”

My project revolves around Merrell-Wolff’s *Introceptualism*, a metaphysical outlook on life based on his alleged Realization. Through polemical comparisons of his (epistemological and ontological claims about) introception with seminal concepts from Eastern and Western traditions, Merrell-Wolff constructs his own eclectic ideology. He positions this ideology at the crossroads of religion, philosophy, psychology and science – though it is obvious the religious dimension occupies the dominant position in his system. More specifically, he draws parallels with Advaita Vedanta and Tibetan Dzogchen Buddhism, as seen through the orientalist eyes of modern Theosophy (first road), German Idealism (second road), analytical psychology (third road) and pure mathematics and quantum physics (fourth road), with a distinct emphasis on the notion of non-dual consciousness.

The primary research question of my project is this: what do Franklin Merrell-Wolff and his Introceptualism teach us about the typically modern methods and theories (in the ideologies) of charismatic leaders of new religious movements in the religious discourse of modern Western culture(s)? The purpose of my project is twofold. One, by looking closely at the way a typical contemporary charismatic religious leader tries to construct a unique identity for himself and his ideology, I expect to contribute to our understanding of the methods and theories of modern Western religious discourse in general. And two, by building my case study around the unknown example of Franklin Merrell-Wolff, whose life and teaching are fascinating in their own right, I want to introduce my peers to someone who, in my opinion, deserves more attention from the academic community.

## Occultism and Modernity: Arturo Reghini's Quest for a Roman Traditionalism.

—Christian Giudice, University of Gothenburg



My thesis aims to analyse the interaction between occultism and different facets of modernity in early twentieth-century Italy, focusing on the figure of Arturo Reghini (1878-1946) as a case study. Freemason, occultist, mathematician, Traditionalist thinker, author and journalist, Reghini has been a thoroughly neglected figure of the Italian esoteric milieu of his times, and while minimal scholarly attention has been granted to his works in Italy, to most international scholars he remains but a minor representative of the Traditionalist environment, when compared to the study dedicated to colleagues such as René Guénon (1886-1951) and Julius Evola (1898-1974). Yet there has been nobody who has acquainted himself more thoroughly with the great variety of occult manifestations of 1910s and 1920s Italy than Reghini. With the help of Isabel Cooper-Oakley (1853/4-1914) he established the first branch of the Theosophical Society in Rome and the *Biblioteca Teosofica* in Florence; he proved to be one of the most active figures of conservative and liberal Freemasonry until its ban in 1925 by the Fascist regime; he preserved strong ties with supporters of Anthroposophy and followers of Neapolitan occultist Giuliano Kremmerz (1861-

1930) and, of course, influenced Traditional thinkers such as Guénon, Evola and Guido de Giorgio (1890-1957).

Though a staunch supporter of the revival of Ancient Roman traditions and arts which took place between the unification of Italy and the conquest of papal Rome in 1870 and Benito Mussolini's (1883-1945) Lateran Accords with the Vatican in 1929, Reghini was also involved in the most stimulating avant-garde movements of the early decades of the century, most notably the Florentine *Scapigliatura* and the Futurist movement, simultaneously striving for the re-enchantment of his country and contributing to the cutting-edge ideas of modern cultural and social developments. It is on the fine line between the rational and the irrational, between disenchantment and re-enchantment, that I will structure my thesis, Reghini being a formidable example of an occultist embodying both of these great tensions: the yearning for a re-enchanted Italy, which would rediscover its greatness by revitalizing its ancient pagan roots through an occult *restitutio ad pristinum*, and the urgency of looking ahead, participating in avant-garde movements and being, as it were, a man of his times.

The chapters of the thesis will be of a tripartite nature: firstly, they will cover chronological sequences of Arturo Reghini's life, charting the evolution of his thought, his affiliations with the *Schola Italica*, which claimed an unbroken lineage to Pythagoras (ca. 570 BC – ca. 495 BC) and his school, and publications on masonic symbolism and political ideals, summed up by the words *Imperialismo Pagano* in the eponymous article of 1914. Secondly, the occult milieu in Italy will be thoroughly scrutinized, each chapter focusing on a different movement and Reghini's tie to each one. Thirdly, drawing from the particular occult stirrings researched, I will be considering the wider scope of the relationship between key concepts in the study of modernity (such as the crisis of the Italian modern man and of the Catholic church in Italy, the clash between tradition and avant-garde or that between universalism and nationalism) and their relation to early twentieth-century Italian occultism.



## Scholar interviews

–Per Faxneld

*In every issue of the newsletter a senior and a junior scholar of Western Esotericism are interviewed. They are asked the same questions, and we will be able to partake in both their personal perspectives and insights gleaned from their up-and-coming or nestorial position in the field, respectively.*

### Francisco Santos-Silva

Post-doctoral student and lecturer in  
Philosophy of Religion, Universidade Nova de  
Lisboa



**How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?** I would have to say that I don't remember a time when I was not interested in Western Esotericism; it

probably started with a love of the fantastic from a very young age, be it *Conan the Adventurer* cartoons on TV, or playing Dungeons & Dragons from the early age of 12, ideas of magic have always been present in my life. Living in a very homogeneously Catholic country (Portugal) there were certainly few religious choices, and when I got to early adolescence and started questioning the handed down faith I started looking for alternatives, and seeing as I had a big love for the fantastic I spent my teenage years jumping from Druidism to Wicca to Thelema to Ceremonial Magic. This was helped by having parents who were early adopters of new technology and having access to the internet from an early age in the mid-90s.

After a while I realised that I kept jumping around this kind of magical-related religious movements because I actually was not comfortable in any religion, and had to come to the conclusion that I was enjoying them more as intellectual pursuits than as actual answers to my existential problems, I admitted my atheism but kept studying these subjects from a more disinterested perspective. The fascination is still there, but now as an endlessly interesting field of study, much as I wouldn't seek spiritual insight from music or literature.

**What do you feel are the major challenges for our field at present and in the future?** One of the good things about this field is the fact that it is full of challenges, because it is so new and there is still so much to do. Firstly, the field is still in the process of getting on its own two feet and standing on solid ground; the challenge to get the field more widely accepted is still with us, even if that moment seems to be getting closer.

Secondly, there is a need for the field to break free from its place of origin. The Northern and Central European, Anglo-Saxon bias is still very present because this is a new field that started in that part of the world. Most scholars are conversant in English and their own Northern European languages but there is a need to recognise the presence and development of Western Esotericism at the margins. These margins are not only the margins of Europe but also the presence of Western Esoteric ideas in the post-

colonial world. We seem to forget that Brazil for example was a colony of the West from 1500 to 1815, this is longer than the US. The same happens in most African countries and in Asia, so we should be extending our studies to the margins of Europe and to the places where Europe left its mark, not only in languages, food and religion but also in exporting elements of Western Esotericism.

Thirdly, there is a definite need to interdisciplinarity as a way to have the appropriate tools to be able to achieve a well-rounded notion of the effect and influence of Western Esotericism in the world stage, as a way to make the field show its importance and wide-ranging impact on ideas and ways of life.

**What is your most fun memory so far from your time in the field?** There have been plenty, many of which are clouded in a haze of alcohol and good conversation. I have to say that any new scholars in the field really, desperately need to attend conferences and socialize post-conference, one of the great things about the field is the fact that it is full of young people, and people who are young at heart, creating of the most accepting and fun working and conference environments that I have had the pleasure to attend. If you are attending bigger conferences on religion, such as the AAR or the IAHR, just tag along with the Western Esotericism crowd and you'll have a good time.

**What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?** Plenty! I am a kind of pop-culture addict, particularly when it comes to the geekier side of things, comic-books, films, science fiction and fantasy literature and so on. I also have an indie record company called Chifre, so I end up spending much of my time at concerts, festivals and having meetings. In academic terms I teach Philosophy of Religion at the University, which has led to a renewed interest in that subject.

**What are the worst things about having this as your speciality?** This must be a common answer, but the biggest problem is explaining what exactly I am working on to people who know little about the subject. It's a mix of embarrassment (because they will inevitably think you're crazy) and frustration (because even after you try to explain you aren't, they never seem convinced). Another thing that seems to happen, at least in Portugal, is the immediate opening up of people who start telling you things such as: "I speak to spirits" or "have you played with a Ouija board?".

**What are the best things about having this as your speciality?** Definitely the fact that the field is wide open.

There is so much to be done and much of what is to be done is completely fascinating. It feels like the last frontier in the Humanities.

## Massimo Introvigne

Managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), Turin, Italy; currently serving as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



**How did you come to be interested in Western esotericism?** It's a long story. At age nine I started being interested in religions other than my own, Roman Catholicism. I used some of the pocket money my parents gave to me to buy installments of the lavishly illustrated Larousse's *Religions of the World*. The six collected volumes are still in my library. From the world religions I gradually expanded my interests to esoteric themes. During the high school years I read René Guénon. I was never, strictly speaking, a Guénonian or a Perennialist, but was fascinated by Guénon's writings. In 2007, when I was finally able to find Guénon's grave in Cairo, I was quite moved by the experience. And when I started my work as a social scientist, I always had the idea of an encyclopedia of all religious and spiritual groups active in Italy, based on the direct observation of as many of them as possible. Later, thanks to my collaboration with PierLuigi Zoccatelli – a scholar who knew this world first-hand and a co-author of our *Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy*, the third edition of which has now been printed – I was able to come into direct contact with many groups from different traditions. Another

colleague who facilitated contacts with esoteric groups internationally was J. Gordon Melton, whose influence was very apparent in *Il cappello del mago* ("The Magician's Hat"), a book I published in 1990 and which was intended as a worldwide survey of what I decided to call, in analogy to new religious movements, "new magical movements", i.e. esoteric groups organized as movements. During the same years, I developed a friendship with Antoine Faivre, from whom I learned a lot about the history of Western esotericism and theoretical approaches to it.

**What do you feel are the major challenges for our field at present and in the future?** The old challenge was to make our field, so to speak, respectable. You may remember the old novel by Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, published in 1988. The novel is very entertaining, but you get the impression that esotericism is the province of the lunatic fringe. I know Umberto Eco and have discussed the matter with him several times. He still maintains that, in his own words, "Guénon is not much more respectable than Otelma the Magician" – Otelma being a self-styled occult master who appears often on Italian television and for Eco is the epitome of the occult charlatan. By the way, while Otelma has some unpleasant histrionic attitudes, he is by no means stupid and holds two academic degrees in History and Political Science. Many academics, particularly in Europe (perhaps less in the United States), still share Eco's quite low opinion of esotericism. However, many have different opinions and this battle is in the process of being won. But we have been accustomed for so many years to fight for establishing the legitimacy of the academic study of the field that, when it is finally established, we may become a bit disoriented. In fact, the great challenge will be to structure a full program for studying the history and contemporary features of Western esotericism, skipping the part about why studying esotericism is not something suspicious and strange, and taking for granted that now many colleagues and students regard this study as quite normal and mainline.

**What is your most fun memory so far from your time in the field?** Perhaps it has to do with when I first met Antoine Faivre. It was in San Leo, the fortress where Cagliostro was imprisoned and died in 1795, and the conference had been organized by Umberto Eco. I was introduced by Eco to Faivre and we decided to go together to visit some place, perhaps Rimini – this was June 1991, more than twenty years ago. At one stage I started looking at Faivre with some embarrassment. He noticed it, and told me in typical Faivre style that I should relax and not be embarrassed that I was in presence of an older and more senior scholar who I had known and admired before only through his books. In fact, my problem was that Faivre had a big hole in his trousers, and other people were noticing it, although he did not.

Finally, I found the courage to tell him, and it was his turn to be embarrassed.

**What are your interests aside from Western esotericism?** Religious pluralism, and of course new religious movements. However, I am also interested in the interaction between religion, esotericism, and popular culture. I collect vampire books and comics, and I noticed years ago that those who had studied the vampire mythology seriously – including Faivre himself and Gordon Melton – often came from the academic study of esotericism. In 2001, Wouter Hanegraaff, Joscelyn Godwin and others edited a festschrift for Faivre. My chapter was "Antoine Faivre, Father of Contemporary Vampire Studies". He was extremely pleased with it, and told me that the 18<sup>th</sup>-century discussion of whether vampires really existed, which involved pretty much everybody from Voltaire to Empress Maria Theresa of Austria and Pope Benedict XIV – who had a great interest in supernatural phenomena, but did not believe in vampires – was the last serious discussion of magic in the history of European culture. I have also studied and collected comics and the ancestors of comics, the dime novels, illustrated 16-page stories, mostly about detectives. A paper I very much enjoyed writing is about some stories of Nick Carter – a fictional detective whose weekly adventures between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th were published simultaneously in some fifteen languages, and reached the astonishing figure of 75 million copies sold internationally – where he confronts a magical arch-villain called Irma Plavatsky, who is obviously patterned after how the American yellow press (the equivalent of contemporary tabloids) depicted Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Finally, I am interested in the relationship between esotericism and art, although here there are more learned experts such as Marco Pasi and PierLuigi Zoccatelli, and I confine myself to certain periods and currents I have particularly studied, including the great Lithuanian painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis, whose relationship with esotericism is a very controversial matter, and the Pre-Raphaelites. I enjoyed the recent exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London, although there were almost no references to the connections some of them had with esotericism and Theosophy.

**What are the worst things about having this as your speciality?** We all found it funny being regarded as strange or not respectable for taking esotericism seriously, but sometimes enough was enough. Because I studied Satanism and the OTO, I have been called a Satanist and a Crowleyan quite often, as a cursory Google search would easily show. The Internet seems particularly conducive to spread the craziest rumors. There is even a video on YouTube claiming that I, Pope Benedict XVI (who is of course a secret Satanist) and leaders of the OTO were responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Once, I and PierLuigi Zoccatelli – who has been

similarly attacked – decided to react, and on April Fool's Day 2001 we issued a false press release, claiming that we took over the oldest Italian Catholic publisher LDC, maintaining the same acronym but changing the meaning from "Library of Christian Doctrine" to "Library of Crowleyan Doctrine", and that Zocatelli had also purchased Crowley's Abbey of Thelema in Cefalu, Sicily. We were extremely surprised to see how many people on the Internet took the press release seriously, in spite of the date of April 1 not being the only key to understand that it was a joke. The last sentence was that "Zocatelli also thanks Gringotts, the highly respected London bank, which served as financial advisor for this deal". Of course, Gringotts Bank in London is Harry Potter's bank, operated mostly by goblins.

**What are the best things about having this as your speciality?** It's all about having fun. This field may be controversial, but is never boring. Some time we create the fun ourselves, as when Zocatelli and I invented an ultra-secret esoteric society and started posting on the Internet about it, and ended up receiving messages from leaders of various small occult groups assuring us that they since many years belonged to this secret group (that in fact we had just invented). But mostly the fun came to us quite naturally. We may or may not succeed in establishing this as a whole, systematic academic field. But, at the end of our journeys, we are sure that we will be able to tell our children and grandchildren that at least we had a lot of fun.

## Upcoming conferences:

### Ways of Gnosis: Mystical and Esoteric Traditions from Antiquity to the Present Time, 10-13 April 2013, Library for Foreign Literature & Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russia.

Organized by The All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature & Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism *in collaboration with* Institute "Russian Anthropological School" of the Russian State University for the Humanities (Moscow), the Research Centre for Esotericism and Mysticism at Russian Christian Academy for the Humanities (St. Petersburg), the Scientific-Educational Centre "Free Philosophical Society" *and supported by* the

European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE).

#### *Call for papers*

One of the most important elements of mystical and esoteric traditions is the phenomenon of gnosis, defined as prophetic knowledge with soteriological value for its bearers. The gnostic worldview, its symbols and motives can be found in masterpieces of Western art and literature. Over the past two millennia, Western spiritual culture has been consistently influenced by gnostic thought, and it is now difficult to imagine the history of Western art, literature, science, philosophy and religion without gnosis, that has certain parallels in structure and ideas with some Eastern cultures (for example, India).

The international academic symposium "Ways of Gnosis" plans to examine this phenomenon from different points of view (phenomenological, hermeneutical, and historical); to show its real significance in Eastern and Western mystical and esoteric traditions; to investigate the meeting of worldviews in "Alexandrian gnosis" and the interrelation of "gnostic" currents to each other; to point out the influence of different aspects, symbols, and images of gnostic traditions in daily life; to show the historical continuity of gnostic ideas in the European cultural tradition; to compare different forms of gnosis in Eastern and Western culture; to elucidate different approaches to the phenomenon of gnosis, and, finally, to demonstrate the role of gnostic doctrines in the history of Russian culture.

This symposium brings together two regular conferences previously held separately – "Russia and Gnosis," organized by the Library for Foreign Literature (Moscow) and "Mystic and Esoteric Movements in Theory and Practice," the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Esotericism and Mysticism (ASEM). Thus, the symposium simultaneously hosts the Sixth International Conference "Mystic and Esoteric Movements in Theory and Practice" and the tenth "Russia and Gnosis" conference. There will be one joint plenary session and one joint thematic session; however, the two conferences will otherwise have separate programs.

During the symposium, Masonic relics and manuscripts from the Russian collection of the "Museum of Freemasons' Symbols and History" will be exhibited by the "Free Philosophical Society", which will also organize a round-table discussion about "Traditions of Freemasonry and Its Implications for Today".

Working languages: Russian and English. Translation into English will be provided for those not fluent in Russian.

Applications should be sent to the following E-mail: [symposium04.2013@gmail.com](mailto:symposium04.2013@gmail.com) before *February 20, 2013* (*January 15, 2013*, if you require our assistance with documents for the Russian visa formalities).

The sum of the participation fee for non-residents of Russia and other countries of Commonwealth of Independent States is variable:

- 1) The fee for participants requiring aid of the org. committee in acquiring a Russian visa will be 40 Euro. The application and certain documents (list is provided separately upon request) must be sent in before January 15, 2013.
- 2) The fee for participants organizing their own arrival is 30 Euro. The application deadline in this case is *February 20, 2013*.

President of the Organizing Committee: Ekaterina Genieva, Head of the Library for Foreign Literature (Moscow).

Members of the Organizing Committee: Georgy Dergachev, Birgit Menzel, ASEM President Sergey Pakhomov, Alexander Petrov, Irina Protopopova, Alexander Rychkov, Roman Svetlov, Yuriy Zavorodniy, Vadim Zhdanov.

Organizing Committee Secretaries: Yuriy Khalturin, Darya Lotareva, Alexander Rychkov, Kateryna Zorya.

For more information, see the conference website: [http://asem.ucoz.org/news/call\\_for\\_papers\\_ways\\_of\\_gnosis\\_phenomenology\\_and\\_hermeneutics\\_of\\_mystical\\_and\\_esoteric\\_traditions/2012-08-13-26](http://asem.ucoz.org/news/call_for_papers_ways_of_gnosis_phenomenology_and_hermeneutics_of_mystical_and_esoteric_traditions/2012-08-13-26)

## **ESSWE 4, The Fourth International ESSWE Conference: Western Esotericism and Health, 26-29 June 2013, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.**

Issues relating to health (understood in a broad sense) can be seen as an intrinsic part of the field of esotericism, but surprisingly little attention has been given to how health is understood and construed in esoteric discourses. The conference is thus as an attempt to fill an important lacuna in the study of Western esotericism. Suggested topics include (but are not limited to), esoteric notions and discourses on

health, sexuality and well-being, "occult" causes for disease, "occult medicine", notions of therapeutic benefits of magic and meditation, alchemical approaches to health, alternative forms of medicine, etc.

Keynote lecturers include:

Catherine L. Albanese (University of California)

Peter Forshaw (University of Amsterdam)

James R. Lewis (Tromsø University)

Mark Sedgwick (Aarhus University)

Andrew Weeks (Illinois State University)

Alison Winter (University of Chicago)

Papers are invited in English. Proposals for 20 minutes' papers (title and short abstract of approximately 250 words) should be sent to Henrik Bogdan ([henrik.bogdan@religion.gu.se](mailto:henrik.bogdan@religion.gu.se)), with your name and academic affiliation, by January 15, 2013.

Conference Chairman: Henrik Bogdan (University of Gothenburg)

Conference Committee: Egil Asprem, Henrik Bogdan, Olav Hammer, Kennet Granholm, Per Faxneld, Asbjørn Dyrendal and Jesper Aa. Petersen.