BEYOND THE YATES PARADIGM: THE STUDY OF WESTERN ESOTERICISM BETWEEN COUNTERCULTURE AND NEW COMPLEXITY[1]

WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF

I. *Two Revolutions*

The study of western esotericism finds itself in the middle of a process of academic professionalization and institutionalization[2]. Before addressing some problems connected with this development, and as an introduction to them, I would like to draw a parallel which may seem surprising at first sight. It is well known that the turbulent period of the 1960s produced, among many other things, the so-called sexual revolution: a complex social phenomenon with wide-ranging effects, including the emergence of the academic study of sexuality and sex-related problems in the context of new disciplines such as gender studies[3]. While this revolution has not led to the sexually liberated culture once predicted by its defenders, it did succeed in breaking the social taboo on sex as a subject of discussion, in the academy and in society as a whole[4]. New disciplines such as gender studies have flourished since the 1960s, and there can be no doubt that any attempt to curtail or suppress scholarly discussion and research related to sexuality would nowadays be rejected by academics as an unacceptable infringement on intellectual freedom.

Parallel to the sexual revolution, the countercultural ferment of the 1960s produced a popular revolution of religious consciousness, with widespread interest in western esotericism as one of its major manifestations[5]. As will be

---

[1] This article is a strongly revised version of a paper presented at Reed College (Portland, Oregon) on April 5, 2000. I would like to thank Antoine Faivre, Hans Thomas Hakl and Olav Hammer for their critical comments on earlier versions.

[2] Faivre & Voss, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions'; Faivre, 'Avant-Propos'; Hanegraaff, 'Introduction'; id., 'Some Remarks'; Neugebauer-Wölk, 'Esoterik'; id., 'Esoterik in der frühen Neuzeit'.

[3] For a historical overview, see Allyn, *Make Love, not War.*

[4] See e.g. Lehigh, 'What you didn't know': in spite of 'the conservative backlash against erotic excess', a lasting legacy of the sexual revolution is a 'cultural candor that hasn't gone away'. An excellent recent example is the Clinton impeachment process, during which even vocal defenders of "moral values" did not shrink from having graphic sexual details published on the Internet.

[5] Note that the emergence of a "new religious consciousness" since the 1960s (e.g. Glock & Bellah, *The New Religious Consciousness*) is not synonymous with the emergence of a new

seen, this development happened to coincide with the emergence of a new, thoroughly academic interest in the so-called "Hermetic Tradition" of the Renaissance. This domain of research had long been neglected by historians, due to its strong connections with "magic" and "the occult" in western culture: domains of human activity which were felt to be particularly unworthy of serious academic research[6]. To some extent this attitude changed after the middle of the 1960s, but while the "Hermetic Tradition" did gain some recognition as a domain of academic investigation, scholarly attention remained limited essentially to early modern history and was dominated by research agendas concentrating on the relevance of hermeticism to the history of science and philosophy. The study of western esotericism generally – from the Renaissance to the present, and from a multidisciplinary perspective including the study of religion and other disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences – remained curiously neglected[7].

The two revolutions of the 1960s and their related fields of research have more in common than one might think. Sex and "the occult" are both subjects invoking strong emotions and feelings of curiosity, and the secret attraction that they hold for many cannot be easily admitted in polite company. The social taboos on both domains have deep roots in dominant traditions of Christian theology; and the witchcraft persecutions of the 16th and 17th centuries furnish particularly clear examples of how closely "sex and the occult" could be linked in the Christian imagination[8]. In the gradual process of seculariza-

popular esotericism, for two reasons. Firstly, the former also includes a wide variety of new religious movements (NRMs) and trends with no particular connection to western esotericism (for example many Christian-evangelical NRMs, eastern missionary movements, and so on); secondly, the emergence of this popular "new religious consciousness" during the 1960s is essentially a social phenomenon, whereas contemporary western esotericism as one of its major subdomains is primarily defined and set apart not by the nature of its social manifestations but by the nature of its beliefs. It is only from the perspective of intellectual history that western esotericism in general, including its contemporary manifestations in the social context of the "new religious consciousness", can be demarcated as a specific domain in the history of religions —which obviously does not mean that social-science theories and approaches cannot or should not be applied to it! (see discussion in Hanegraaff, 'Empirical Method', esp. 112-113, 117-119)

[6] A classic example is George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science* I, 19: 'The historian of science cannot devote much attention to the study of superstition and magic, that is, of unreason ... Human folly being at once unprogressive, unchangeable, and unlimited, its study is a hopeless undertaking'.

[7] In this article I will not address the delicate problem of the definition and demarcation of "western esotericism" (about which see e.g. Hanegraaff, 'On the Construction'; cf. also the contribution by Carole Frosio in this issue of *Aries*), but refer simply to the short description of currents in the colophon of this journal (see under "Editorial Policy").

[8] See e.g. the succinct discussion in Chambers, *Sex and the Paranormal*, 73-93. The connection has not remained limited to the imagination of outsiders: its was perhaps inevitable that not a few occultists in the wake of the Enlightenment would come to focus precisely on the combina-

tion since the 18th century—including the emancipation of scholarly research from the influence of theological doctrine—the 1960s marked a decisive watershed: the moral and religious values of traditional Christianity came to be questioned and revised to a hitherto unprecedented extent, thus paving the way for the essentially secular consciousness of contemporary Europeans and Americans[9]. As part of this process, the taboo on gender studies and other sex-related disciplines was successfully and permanently lifted. In contrast, the taboo on academic research of western esotericism remained firmly in place throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

As far as academic recognition is concerned, the study of western esotericism therefore made a false start during the 1960s, and in what follows I will provide some suggestions about why this happened. My argument rests upon a distinction between three parallel but mutually interacting developments, which will be discussed one by one: firstly the religionist-countercultural approach to religion associated with *Eranos*, secondly the academic study of "the Hermetic Tradition" in the wake of Frances Yates, and thirdly the various mixtures of these two in popular perceptions of hermeticism and western esotericism since the 1960s. I will argue that the academic professionalization of the study of western esotericism requires us to overcome the discipline's double (religionist-countercultural and "Yatesian") heritage, in favor of a new "post-Yatesian" perspective.

II. *Three Currents of Thought*

Eranos, Religionism, and the Counterculture

The first consistent attempts at breaking the academic taboo on western esotericism as a subject of research were made in the countercultural climate of the 1960s[10], and the heritage of these projects is still with us. Martin Green has traced the roots of the "counterculture" back to Ascona in Switzerland before World War II[11], and his thesis is confirmed by recent studies such as Steven

---

tion of sex and magic in their efforts to develop alternatives to established Christianity. This is a major theme in Godwin's groundbreaking *Theosophical Enlightenment*.

[9] Contrary to the so-called "secularization thesis", it has become ever more evident that contemporary secular consciousness is quite compatible with religious belief. On secularization as a process resulting in religious transformation and creative innovation, see Hanegraaff, 'Defining Religion'; for a detailed discussion of New Age religion as based upon a secularized esotericism, see id., *New Age Religion* (part 3).

[10] On the "prehistory" of the discipline see Hanegraaff, 'Introduction', viii-x.

[11] Green, *Mountain of Truth*.

Wasserstrom's *Religion after Religion*[12]. When the famous *Eranos* meetings were first organized in Ascona, in the fateful year 1933, the town was already known for its bohemian atmosphere strongly influenced by the dionysianism of the cultural avant-garde[13]. While the founders of *Eranos* were not sympathetic to this particular perspective (associated with Monte Verità) their own type of counterculturalism had clear connections to Graf Hermann Keyserling's *Schule der Weisheit:* a forum rather similar to *Eranos* in inspiration, and which had run in Darmstadt from 1920 to 1930[14]. *Eranos* was never officially presented as the continuation of the *Schule der Weisheit*; but after it had become impossible for Keyserling to continue his forum due to the National-Socialist takeover, the *Eranos* meetings in neutral Switzerland presented themselves as an obvious alternative[15]. In his *Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen* (1918), Keyserling listed the contemporary currents which inspired his vision of the future of religion:

> Theo- and Anthroposophy, New Thought, Christian Science, the New Gnosis, Vivekananda's Vedantism, the Neo-Persian and Indo-Islamic Esotericism, not to mention those of the Hindus and the Buddhists, the Bahai system, the professed faith of the various spiritualistic and occultist circles, and even the freemasons, all start from essentially the same basis, and their movements are certain to have a greater future than official Christianity[16].

As is well known, an essentially similar mixture has continued to be characteristic of the international phenomenon of popular Jungism, based upon the work and inspiration of the great Swiss psychiatrist whose spirit hovered over the *Eranos* meetings and who has become a godfather of the secularized eso-

---

[12] Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 102. It should be noted that "counterculturalism" as understood here and throughout this article is not linked to any specific political orientation. While the counterculture of the 1960s with its anti-bourgeois sentiments tended to be left wing, *Eranos* participants tended to be politically conservative.

[13] On Eranos see also Holz, 'ERANOS'; and we are awaiting the forthcoming monograph by Hans Thomas Hakl.

[14] Plus one additional meeting in Formentor in 1931. Jung met the organizer of *Eranos*, Olga Fröbe, at Keyserling's *Schule der Weisheit* in 1930. Noll, *Jung Cult*, 94, says that 'many' of the lecturers in Keyserling's school also began to appear in the new venue of *Eranos*. Actually the number remained limited to four: Leo Baeck, Carl Gustav Jung, Erwin Rousselle and Gerardus van der Leeuw.

[15] See Hakl's forthcoming book on *Eranos*: following the meeting in Formentor (Mallorca) in 1931, in 1932 Keyserling needed all his time for his book *Südamerikanische Meditationen*, and in 1933 it was too late. In his book, Hakl concludes: 'Eranos, das 1933 in der neutralen Schweiz begann, kam also gerade zeitgerecht, auch wenn man nicht von einer tatsächlichen Weitergabe derselben geistigen "Fackel" sprechen kann' (Hakl, personal communication).

[16] Keyserling, *Reisetagebuch*, 140 (but note that his positive evalution does not keep Keyserling from criticizing Theosophy on the pages that follow).

tericism nowadays known as New Age[17]. A continuing interest in religious "alternatives" to official Christianity is evident from Jung and *Eranos* to popular Jungism and the New Age movement after the war.

Eranos has also been at the origin of a distinct style of religious studies usually referred to as "religionism"[18], and which has achieved enormous popularity in the United States after World War II. This perspective, associated in the United States with Mircea Eliade and the "Chicago School" of religious studies, has come under increasing attack along with the waning of the counterculture after the 1970s[19]; but significantly, its basic discourse has continued to find a wide audience *outside* the academy, due to extremely popular authors such as Joseph Campbell and many lesser writers more or less influenced by Jungism. As Wasserstrom remarks, speaking of the end of the 20th century: 'the so-called New Age is a phenomenon entirely outside the academy, and it is the New Age to which much of the spirit of History of Religions has fled'[20]. The counterculturalism of *Eranos* is therefore of central importance to one of the most influential trends in the 20th-century academic study of religion, on the one hand, and to a new type of popular religiosity, on the other. But to prevent too hasty generalizations, some distinctions need to be made.

In my book on the New Age movement I distinguished between western esotericism on the one hand, and occultism on the other. Occultism I defined as comprising 'all attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted world or, alternatively, by people in general to make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanted secular world'[21]. Occultism in this sense might also be referred to as "secularized esotericism", and is characterized by hybrid mixtures between two worldviews that would logically seem to

[17] See Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 496-513. By popular Jungism I do not primarily mean the academic and therapeutic reception of Jung's analytic psychology but, rather, the international grassroots movement that has 'formed around the symbolic image of Jung' and takes the form, e.g. of 'innumerable workshops, television shows, best-selling books, and video cassettes' (Noll, *Jung Cult*, 6-7).

[18] A general overview and discussion [in Dutch] is provided by J. G. Platvoet, 'Het religionisme'.

[19] See e.g. Allen, 'Is nothing Sacred?'. A good impression of the current religionism-reductionism debate can be gleaned from Idinopulos & Yonan, *Religion and Reductionism*. For a critical discussion (arguing for historico-empirical methodologies as an alternative to both religionism and reductionism) and an application to the study of western esotericism, see Hanegraaff, 'Empirical Method'.

[20] Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 238.

[21] Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 422. Obviously this is an etic definition, not to be confused with various emic meanings including the common use of *l'occultisme* in the wake of Eliphas Lévi (cf. Faivre, 'Questions of Terminology', 8).

exclude one another: a traditional western esoteric worldview rooted in a framework of correspondences and occult causality, on the one hand, and a modern "scientific" worldview based on instrumental causality, on the other. The New Age movement, I argued, is clearly an occultist movement in this sense; other examples include spiritualism, modern theosophy, and the New Thought movement. It is important to recognize, however, that although New Agers tend to interpret Carl Gustav Jung's writings from such occultist perspectives, Jung himself was not an occultist in the above sense. His theory of synchronicity as a "non-causal connecting principle", explicitly based upon a traditional esoteric worldview of correspondences opposed to instrumental causality, reflects his adherence to a traditional type of esotericism with deep roots in German *Naturphilosophie*[22].

Steven Wasserstrom has provocatively argued that the fundamental perspectives of the great *Eranos* protagonists Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin likewise reveal deep roots in and affinities with various traditions of (non-occultist) western esotericism, and he goes as far as concluding that 'they institutionalized, in the academic study of religion, an original esoterism'[23]. Wasserstrom's arguments can be contested in several respects (he certainly overemphasizes Christian kabbalah and his generalizations about the influence of German Romantic illuminism, *Naturphilosophie* and Traditionalism need to be nuanced[24]), but I would argue that this does not fundamentally affect his suggestion that western esotericism is of key importance to understanding the nature and origins of the *Eranos* approach, and hence of religionism. In order to add nuance to the current debate about Wasserstrom's book, I suggest it is helpful here to adopt Colin Campbell's seminal concept of the "cultic milieu"[25]. Richard Noll's controversial presentation of Jung as the founder of a "cult" may be slightly overstated, but the legitimate core of his argument can be readily accepted by interpreting *Eranos* as an early—intellec-

[22] Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 500-501.

[23] Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 36.

[24] Scholem's debt to Christian kabbalah and German Romanticism is very clear (see e.g. Kilcher, *Sprachtheorie*, 331-345; and cf. my review in *ARIES* 22 [1999], 116-117), but the relevance of Christian kabbalah to Corbin and Eliade is marginal at best. For Eliade's debt to Traditionalism and a critique of Wasserstrom's interpretations, see Spineto's discussion in the present issue of *Aries*. Corbin was attracted to German idealism as well as to Swedenborg, rather than to Romantic *Naturphilosophie* (cf. the pertinent discussion in Faivre, 'La question', 90-98; and see esp. his reference to the highly significant clash of opinion between Corbin and Ernst Benz, documented in the *Cahiers de l'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem* 2 [1976], 51-76).

[25] Campbell, 'The Cult, The Cultic Milieu and Secularization'; and cf. discussion in Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 14-18.

tual and academic—example of a modern cultic *milieu*[26]. The participants in such a milieu may have very different personal emphases—Scholem did not share Eliade's attraction to anti-historicist Traditionalism, Christian kabbalah remained marginal to Eliade, German *Naturphilosophie* is of little importance to Corbin, and so on—while yet sharing sufficient common ground to experience their particular spiritual perspectives as broadly compatible and mutually fruitful. Like the cultic milieu of the 1960s and 1970s, which eventually developed into the New Age movement, the cultic milieu of *Eranos* derived its coherence and sense of common purpose essentially from a shared pattern of *culture criticism* directed against the "reductionist" tendencies of the modern academy. The countercultural sentiment is perfectly expressed in Eliade's memories about Corbin's reasons for founding his "Université de Saint Jean de Jérusalem" in 1974. Corbin felt that

> scholars and philosophers who do not share in [the reductionist] fallacy ought to abandon their eagerly accepted subaltern positions in contemporary academia and rebel against the academic and cultural dictatorship of "scientism", "historicism", and "sociologism". Accordingly they should reassemble and constitute, not a new type of "Theosophical Society", but a new type of university[27].

The crucial difference between the *Eranos* cultic milieu (including offshoots such as the Université de Saint Jean de Jérusalem) and the larger cultic milieu of the 1960s and 1970s was that the former espoused a non-occultist spirituality. But this perspective, reflecting both affinity and familiarity with the nature of pre-Enlightenment esoteric traditions, inevitably came to be compromised to the extent that important elements from the highbrow *Eranos* vision were adopted and assimilated by the middle- and lowbrow occultist cultic milieu which would eventually become known as New Age[28].

---

[26] That the contemporary Jungian milieu frequently produces "cult-like" phenomena is hard to deny, in my opinion, and is easily accounted for by interpreting it as a cultic milieu; but one quite understands the irritation among Jungians about Noll's "convenient" comparison between the "Jung Cult" and the notorious *Ordre du Temple Solaire*, in a much-noted *New York Times* article published eleven days after the collective suicide/murder of the Swiss-Canadian cult (Noll, 'The Rose').

[27] Eliade, 'Some Notes on *Theosophia Perennis*', 173. For a recent statement along the same lines, applied to the study of western esotericism, cf. Voss, 'The University'.

[28] These differences may be gauged e.g. by comparing the physicist Wolfgang Pauli's Jungian analysis of the Kepler-Fludd polemic and his application to the problem of the observer-observed relation in quantum physics (see overview and discussion in Westman, 'Nature, Art, and Psyche'; and for the characteristic *Eranos*-perspective see e.g. Quispel, 'Gnosis and Psychology'), with more accessible presentations in books such as e.g. Peat, *Synchronicity*, strongly popularized versions such as Ferguson's New Age manifesto *Aquarian Conspiracy*, ch. 6, and popularizations of even such popularization (see examples in Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 149-150).

I conclude that the counterculture was indeed born at Ascona, but that it took more than one direction from there. These two main lines of development are closely linked to two broad religious currents in 19th/20th-century culture, which have interacted in complex ways but should not be confused.

1. The first current is ultimately rooted in Renaissance hermeticism and western esotericism but emerged by a thorough transformation of the latter under the impact of the Enlightenment and the secularization of western society[29]. This current typically compromises with 19th- and 20th-century materialism and a "mechanistic" worldview based upon instrumental causality, and may etically be referred to as *occultism*. Over the course of its development it has easily assimilated characteristically American currents such as New Thought, and it has continued to flourish in the popular type of mass spirituality nowadays referred to as New Age. While its enthusiasts never got tired of preaching the need for overcoming the gap between science and religion and have continued to proclaim a "scientific religion", occultism has never succeeded, even temporarily, to gain a foothold inside the academic community. Present-day enthusiasts and representatives of occultist counterculturalism may find inspiration in religionist academics such as Jung, Eliade or Joseph Campbell; but they do so on their own terms and do not necessarily appreciate, let alone adopt, these authors' non-occultist perspectives.
2. The second current has, likewise, important roots in Renaissance hermeticism and western esotericism generally; but it is characterized by rejection rather than assimilation of the Enlightenment heritage. By way of counter-Enlightenment and antimodernist trajectories such as Illuminism, German Romanticism and Traditionalism, it leads right into the heart of the *Eranos* approach to the study of religion. Here we are dealing with a spiritual and intellectual tradition of considerable subtlety and intrinsic interest, which provided one important source of inspiration (although obviously not the only one) for some of the previous century's greatest scholars of religion. This tradition has always been intellectual rather than popular, has remained closer to traditional esotericism by favoring Romanticism and Traditionalism over the heritage of the Enlightenment and secular progress, and has remained true to its European—and particularly German – roots. It flourished in the setting of the *Eranos* meetings and is essential to understanding the "religionist" approach to the study of religion associated with scholars such as Jung, Eliade and Corbin. I suggest that Wasserstrom's

[29] See detailed analysis in Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, part III; and cf. Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*.

> presentation of the *Eranos* vision as reflecting 'an original esoterism' may be accepted if—and only if—this is understood as referring to a characteristic modern-esoteric *cultic milieu*. Most certainly the *Eranos* vision cannot be reduced to any single one of the esoteric currents that fed into it; but it indeed represents an *original* – i.e., creative and innovative – syncretism resulting spontaneously from intellectual group dynamics rather than from the ideology of any single current or thinker[30].

Clearly the religionist approach to the study of western esotericism is itself a religious project. More precisely, it is characterized by the study of western esotericism from the spiritual perspective of a certain modern-esoteric cultic milieu. This perspective may be given an occultist slant to the extent that authors representing *Eranos*-style approaches are assimilated in popular non-academic types of counterculturalism. Whenever I refer to countercultural approaches in what follows, the reader should therefore keep firmly in mind that these approaches fall into a wide spectrum containing many shades and gradations between the intellectual and often considerably profound perspectives of the best *Eranos* traditions, and the popular and often intellectually quite shallow ones typical of much New Age literature.

Frances Yates and the Hermetic Tradition

As far as academic research is concerned, the idea of a "Hermetic Tradition" dates back to 1938, when the great Renaissance specialist Paul Oskar

[30] This is the only point on which I would challenge Spineto's excellent discussion of Eliade and Traditionalism in the present issue of *Aries*. Spineto explains very convincingly that 'Traditionalist concepts and terms are integrated by Eliade within a different conceptual framework', that Eliade criticized the Traditionalists on various points, and that he can in no way be considered a dogmatic follower of Guénon, Evola or Coomaraswamy. Compared to any doctrinal-Traditionalist perspective Eliade therefore emerges as not a Traditionalist but as somebody who took from Traditionalism what he could use while disregarding the rest (and the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of any other western-esoteric influence on the major *Eranos* representatives). This does not mean, however, that Eliade could not *emically* have considered himself as in essential accord with Traditionalism – i.e. according to his own idiosyncratic understanding of its essence rather than according to any doctrinal Guénonian, Evolian or Coomaraswamian opinion. That this was indeed the case is strongly suggested by Quinn's recently published recollections of his encounters with Eliade, which he writes were marked by 'an instantaneous and mutual understanding of the qualitative type that needs no further explication to the intuitive' (Quinn, 'Mircea Eliade', 149). I am not convinced by Spineto's suggestion that Quinn's perception of Eliade as a kindred Traditionalist spirit reflected merely wishful thinking (Quinn, according to Spineto, 'wished to see his "mentor" as a Traditionalist, and ... this desire was so strong that he did not even note the clear elements of criticism in Eliade's references to Coomaraswamy'). I suggest that what they shared was not necessarily any doctrinal conviction, but merely a strong attraction to the general spiritual perspective of the Traditionalists. I would argue that as such, they both felt at home not only in the same cultic milieu, but also shared a similar Traditionalist emphasis within that milieu.

Kristeller wrote an Italian article in which he called attention to the remarkable popularity of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the culture of the 15th and 16th centuries[31]. At first Kristeller's suggestion was picked up mostly by Italian Renaissance specialists, and in 1955 a pioneering edition of some hermetic writings from the Renaissance was published in Rome[32]. In Italy at least, the study of Renaissance hermeticism had now become part of academic research agendas, but there can be no doubt that the decisive international breakthrough of "the Hermetic Tradition" as a historiographical concept came in 1964, with Frances Yates' famous *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition.* Yates had simply adopted her concept of "the Hermetic Tradition" from Italian Renaissance historiography; but as a gifted and imaginative writer she was able to present it to her readers in a manner that struck them as a revelation. An entire forgotten tradition, which had been marginalized and suppressed by mainstream historiography, suddenly seemed to have been brought to light.

In mainstream academic discussions up to the present, the influence of Yates' work has remained limited largely to its relevance to the history of science and philosophy. In an influential article published in 1967[33], she went beyond her book on Bruno in making far-reaching claims about the Hermetic Tradition as an essential, almost causal factor in the emergence of the scientific revolution, and this led to vehement academic debates all through the 1970s and beyond[34]. Nowadays the extreme idea of the Hermetic Tradition as a causal factor in the emergence of modern science is no longer accepted by historians, although weaker versions remain widely current; but the debate fueled by Yates' provocative theses had the highly positive effect that the importance of the "hermetic" dimension in the 17th-century scientific and intellectual discourse is now generally recognized[35]. As a result we now have a considerable body of solid research—either or not directly indebted to Yates'

---

[31] Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino e Lodovico Lazzarelli'. For the bibliographic materials on which Kristeller based himself, see his monumental *Supplementum Ficinianum* II, lvii-lviii, cxxix-cxxxi. Outside the academic context references to "the hermetic tradition" occur already earlier; see e.g. Evola, *La tradizione ermetica.*

[32] Garin et al., *Testi umanistici.*

[33] Yates, 'The Hermetic Tradition'.

[34] The debate began already a year before (McGuire & Rattansi, 'Newton and the Pipes of Pan') but gathered momentum from 1970 on, due to Mary Hesse's sharp rejection of Yates' views (Hesse, 'Hermeticism and Historiography'). Since 1977 participants in the debate commonly referred to the "Yates thesis", but this thesis is actually an invention by Yates' critic Robert S. Westman rather than by Yates herself (see Westman, 'Magical Reform'; and cf. Schmitt, 'Reappraisals' and Copenhaver, review).

[35] See the balanced overviews and discussions by Copenhaver, 'Natural Magic', and Cohen, *Scientific Revolution*, 169-183.

writings—focusing on the relations between western-esoteric currents and the development of modern science; and in many ways the critical debate which has developed in this domain may be taken as a model for other disciplines[36].

Frances Yates was not a religionist and had no relations with *Eranos* and its "cultic milieu". However, she created a grand narrative about "the Hermetic Tradition" which happened to be tailor-made, as will be seen, for the spiritual agendas of counterculturalists. This grand narrative has two main characteristics, both of which are deeply problematic.

1. Firstly, "the Hermetic Tradition" emerges from Yates' writings as *a quasi-autonomous traditional counterculture or undercurrent* fighting a battle on two fronts: against Christianity, on the one hand, and against a rationalist/scientific worldview, on the other. Already soon after her book on Bruno, specialists warned against the danger of simplification inherent to such a perspective[37]; and the progress of research has demonstrated that these warnings were justified. At closer scrutiny, none of Frances Yates' main protagonists of "the Hermetic Tradition" can really be reduced to a "hermeticist" or "magus". Marsilio Ficino was a devout Christian neo-platonist with great interest in the hermetic writings, but he was also strongly influenced by scholastic philosophy and much else beside[38].

[36] I certainly do not intend to state, or even suggest, that all this research emerged straight from Yates' writings or was crucially indebted to her approach. What I am claiming is that such research became part of a broad trend of revisionist history of science and philosophy, which has owed its breakthrough to academic respectability to Yates more than anyone else. Again, if I concentrate on the "Yates paradigm" in the rest of this article, this is not to claim that her approach is still basic to current research in the history of science and philosophy (although this may well be the case indirectly: for example, even a recent authoritative discussion of Bruno's scientific thought such as Gatti, *Giordano Bruno*, cannot avoid arguing with Yates from the very first page and throughout the book). Rather, the central importance of the Yates paradigm in my discussion derives from the fact that it remains predominant in how "the Hermetic Tradition"—and, by implication, western esotericism generally—tends to be perceived by scholars in other disciplines of the humanities as well as by the general public.

[37] See e.g. the irritated remarks by Eugenio Garin (one of the Italian pioneers in the field) about the lack of rigor and precision in current discussions about "hermeticism", and about Yates' tendency to stretch her concept of "the Hermetic Tradition" to an extent where it becomes as all encompassing as elusive (Garin, 'Divagazioni ermetiche'). About the general problematics of tripartite "reason-faith-gnosis" typologies, cf. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, 517-521; id., 'On the Construction', 19-21, 42; and Van den Broek & Hanegraaff, 'Introduction', vii-x (adopted by, e.g., Coudert, *Impact of the Kabbalah*, xiii-xiv). As I argued on these occasions, such a tripartite typology can be a useful heuristic tool as long as it is used strictly as an ideal-typical construct; understood as a description of historical developments it can only lead to gross simplifications.

[38] See Copenhaver's series of articles 'Scholastic Philosophy', 'Renaissance Magic', 'Iamblichus, Synesius...', and 'Hermes Trismegistus'; but cf. Hanegraaff, 'Sympathy or the Devil', about Ficino's *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* as a crypto-commentary on *Asclepius* 23-24/37-38.

Cornelius Agrippa was not just a "Renaissance magus" but also a humanist theologian and a sceptical philosopher[39]. Hermetism and magic are certainly of great importance in Giordano Bruno, but he was equally interested in questions of strict philosophy of science related to Copernicanism[40]. Likewise, the complexity of a figure such as John Dee (one of Yates' favorites) suffers from being reduced to the straitjacket of "the Renaissance magus"[41]. Ironically, one of the purest examples of a Christian hermetist in the Renaissance, Lodovico Lazzarelli, had been central to early pre-Yates discussions of the hermetic tradition, but was almost completely neglected by Yates herself and forgotten by her followers[42]. In short: there was certainly much interest in the hermetic *philosophy* and related currents during the Renaissance, and Yates rightly called attention to this, but there was no such thing as an autonomous or quasi-autonomous "Hermetic *Tradition*".

2. Secondly, Yates' approach is characterized by a heavy emphasis on *modernist narratives of secular progress*[43]. Much of the fascination of her writings relied on the intriguing paradox of an essentially non-progressive and scientifically backward tradition of "magic" that nevertheless – according to Yates – had been the essential impulse and motor of the scientific revolution and thus of social and cultural progress[44]. Her background assumption is that "magic" is essentially conservative and static while "science" is progressive (whereas actually "magical" traditions are subject to historical change and development no less than science, philosophy or religion). And this assumption is closely linked to her view of the relation between Middle Ages and Renaissance: like most of her contemporaries, Yates greatly underestimated the continuities between the two, in favor of a sharp opposition between the stagnant "Dark Ages" (with their 'old dirty magic'[45] and superstition) and the Renaissance as the triumphant dawn of progress and science. Within this modernist framework, her crucial innovation was to suggest that genuine science emerged not simply by "breaking free from

[39] See e.g. Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*.

[40] See Gatti, *Giordano Bruno*.

[41] Compare Peter French's thoroughly Yatesian *John Dee* with the much more complex thinker emerging from e.g. Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

[42] See Hanegraaff, 'Sympathy or the Devil' and (in more detail) Hanegraaff & Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli* (forthcoming).

[43] This modernist framework is evident from the first sentence of *Giordano Bruno* ('The great forward movements of the Renaissance...') to the final chapter (with typical Enlightenment rhetoric on p. 432: '... the seventeenth century represents that momentous hour in the history of man in which his feet began to tread securely in the paths which have since led him unerringly onwards to that mastery over nature in modern science ...').

[44] See esp. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 432-455; and id., 'Hermetic Tradition'.

[45] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 80.

magic" on its own terms, but that the essential step leading towards it had been made by the "magi" themselves[46]. This thesis has led to vehement debates, to which I referred above. For our present purposes, we only need to note that Yates' thesis is controversial *only* as long as it is seen in the context of a modernist narrative. In "post"-modernist frameworks[47], which are not wedded to ideologies of progress, it loses its explosive connotations. Today we no longer need to legitimate the study of hermeticism by presenting it as "progressive": while the complex relationship between hermeticism and the rise of modern scientific thinking is obviously of great historical interest, western-esoteric currents deserve serious attention whether they happen to be progressive or not.

So in Yates' writings we have, firstly, the picture of the "Hermetic Tradition" as a quasi-autonomous counterculture of magic and mysticism, pitted against the dominant powers of church and rationality; and secondly, we have a modernist set of assumptions about science and progress, which underlies her presentation of this Hermetic Tradition. The combination of these two results in a "grand narrative" about hermeticism, which I will refer to as the "Yates paradigm". This paradigm may be presented explicitly or assumed implicitly, and it can be encountered in diluted versions with or without mention of Frances Yates.

In itself this narrative is quite compatible with the academic enterprise. We are simply dealing with a research paradigm from the 1960s which now, several decades later, needs to be replaced under the pressure of new research (which relativizes the simplistic picture of autonomy and continuity) and new theoretical perspectives (many of which, following the collapse of the great ideologies, criticize modernist assumptions to various extents[48]). It should be superfluous to add that even if Yates' books now need to be criticized on many points, they are deservedly considered classics of the academic study of western esotericism. To her great and lasting credit, Frances Yates opened up the doors for a new field of academic research, while making highly original con-

[46] Yates, 'The Hermetic Tradition', 272: 'the Hermetic attitude toward the cosmos and toward man's relation to the cosmos ... was, I believe, the chief stimulus of that new turning toward the world which, appearing first as Renaissance magic, was to turn into seventeenth-century science'. And on p. 273 she writes about the Hermetic texts, Neo-Platonism, Pythagoro-Platonic and Kabbalistic currents, astrology and alchemy that 'these were the Renaissance forces which turned men's minds in the direction out of which the scientific revolution was to come'.

[47] Here I use the term "post-modern" in a limited sense only, i.e. as referring to an approach which questions the grand narratives underpinning modernist ideologies.

[48] For example, compare Yates's approach to Renaissance magic with poststructuralist perspectives such as developed in e.g. Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic* (and cf. my review in *ARIES* 22 [1999], 118-129).

tributions to it herself. But while Yates herself wrote as a historian and never moved beyond the pale of scholarship, her grand narrative could very easily be interpreted in a non-academic fashion congenial to countercultural agendas of spiritual reform. This process now needs to be looked at in somewhat more detail.

Eranos meets Hermeticism:
Countercultural approaches to Western Esotericism.

In the wake of Theodore Roszak's well-known manifesto published in 1968[49], the counterculture has been associated mostly with the youth culture of the 1960s. However, it is important to emphasize not only that (as we have seen) counterculturalism is a phenomenon with much earlier roots, but also that, far from having vanished during the 1970s, it has – again, like the sexual revolution—become a permanent feature of contemporary culture. To understand countercultural interpretations of hermeticism and western esotericism, it cannot be sufficiently stressed that this phenomenon is not only – and not even primarily—a scholarly one reflected in learned writings, but relies on popular sentiments which are widely diffused throughout our culture and manifest in a variety of ways. We have to think of popular media such as journals, pulp fiction, best-selling "mystery" books, TV documentaries, multifarious websites, and so on. Essentially such media use historiography in the interest of popular mythology; and their central theme is that of the *suppressed alternative tradition.* I will argue that the Hermetic Tradition has become one recurring element in this popular type of counterculturalism, unfortunately to the detriment of its academic reputation.

The popular success of Frances Yates' book on Bruno has much to do with its perfect timing: published in 1964, it fell in fertile soil among those who sympathized with countercultural agendas of spiritual reform. It is easy to see why: Yates' master-narrative made "the Hermetic Tradition" look precisely like a *traditional counterculture* rebelling against the forces of the establishment. The Renaissance magi had emphasized personal religious experience against the dogmas of the Church; and they had tried to bring "the imagination to power" (*l'imagination au pouvoir*) against the cold "reign of quantity" associated with mechanistic science. The dominant powers of church and science had joined forces in suppressing the Hermetic Tradition, and thus the heroic attempts at social and spiritual reform by Pico della Mirandola, Bruno, Dee, the Rosicrucians and their spiritual heirs had been cruelly suppressed. In the context of such a narrative, Giordano Bruno—burned at the stake in 1600

[49] Theodore Roszak, *Making of a Counter Culture.*

—emerges as the supreme martyr of a magical/mystical "enchanted" worldview, pitted against the sinister dogmatism and closed-mindedness of the establishment.

From a countercultural perspective the subversive implications of such a narrative are irresistible: it implicates all the forces of the Establishment – whether religious or scientific – in what looks like a huge historical conspiracy against the spiritual counterculture of the west. That counterculture could now be given a name: the Hermetic Tradition; or alternatively (and even more attractively) the Hermetic Tradition could be presented as one link in a larger chain of *gnosis* – together with other suppressed alternatives such as gnosticism, the Cathars, or the Templar tradition. In such a context, Yates' paradoxical interpretation of magic as a force of progress added a touch of genius. It suggested that the hermeticists and defenders of magic had not been locked in the mentality of a superstitious past but had been the *real* champions of progress all along! In ridiculing them as obscurantists and suppressing them as heretics, the establishment had actually been suppressing free inquiry and experiment. And apparently the implied pattern of suppression had not stopped at the end of the Renaissance: didn't the very novelty of Yates' argument reveal a centuries-long "conspiracy of silence" about the existence and significance of the Hermetic Tradition? Mainstream historiography had dismissed hermetic magic as mere pseudo-science, it had ignored the hermeticists or caricatured them as superstitious simpletons, and it had suppressed the evidence that many of the greatest scientists had been profoundly interested in the occult sciences[50]. In short: Yates' master-narrative exposed mainstream accounts of science and progress as ideological constructs by means of which the establishment had attempted—and was still attempting—to suppress and silence its rivals.

All the basic elements of such a narrative can actually be found – explicitly formulated or clearly implied – in Yates writings themselves. But crucial to countercultural interpretations of Yates' work was the addition of an *extra* element: the suggestion that the magical and "enchanted" worldview of "the Her-

[50] The "conspiracy of silence"-aspect can be accepted as essentially correct (cf. Van den Broek & Hanegraaff, 'Preface', vii-ix). Interpretations of hermetic magic and alchemy as "pseudo-science" (see, e.g., the perspectives of Shumaker, *Natural Magic*, or Vickers, 'On the Function of Analogy') are problematic, in my view, not because these phenomena are actually "real" science but because they are rooted in religious worldviews which are misunderstood if one anachronistically judges them according to the criteria of modern science (see e.g. the excellent discussions on this point in Simon, *Sciences et savoirs*). That great scientists such as Newton and Boyle were highly interested in hermetic pursuits such as alchemy is no longer in any doubt (see e.g. Dobbs, *Janus Face of Genius*; Principe, *Aspiring Adept*); but obviously one should be wary of popular exaggerations suggesting, e.g., that "Newton was really an alchemist".

metic Tradition" might now be revived by way of a "new renaissance", and that scholars should see it as their task to stimulate such endeavors of cultural and spiritual reform. This idea is widespread in all types of counterculturalism —from the highbrow *Eranos* vision to its popular-occultist derivations—, but it is *not* to be found in the writings of Frances Yates. Throughout her book on Bruno, Yates emphasized that the authority of the Hermetic Tradition had been based upon a huge error in dating; and accordingly she claimed – quite mistakenly, by the way – that Isaac Casaubon's correct dating of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1614 had essentially spelt the end of the Hermetic Tradition[51]. She would have found it an odd idea that hermeticism—based on noble and beautiful but evidently untenable assumptions—would or could be revived in modern society; Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition might have pointed the way towards "genuine science", but their central beliefs were mistaken and their worldview belonged to the past.

This is where countercultural interpretations were more optimistic. The idea of the Hermetic Tradition as a counterculture suppressed and marginalized by the mainstream was adopted, and so was the idea of its progressive nature. But while Yates emphasized the hermetic "will to operate" combined with an optimistic view of man as the two crucial elements pointing the way towards the development of "genuine science", countercultural interpretations added an extra element: the magically "enchanted" worldview of hermeticism itself. They suggested that the suppression of the Hermetic Tradition, and the ensuing conspiracy of silence, had caused western culture to get trapped in the spiritual dead alley of excessive rationalism and the mechanization of the world picture. Genuine progress now required a "re-enchantment of the world"[52] and a rediscovery of the sacred[53]. The goal was a "new renaissance"

[51] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, esp. 398-399. In a review (*Isis* 55 no. 180 [1964], 389-391) Allen G. Debus remarked that the first half of the 17th century was actually marked by a heightened interest in the occult philosophy, and Yates herself later accepted this criticism as justified ('Hermetic Tradition', 272). Debus suggested that the tradition did 'collapse' after 1660, but in fact Ralph Cudworth's criticism of Casaubon in his influential *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) caused the authority of the *Corpus Hermeticum* to remain partly intact even during the 18th century (see Assmann, '"Hen kai pan"', 38-52, esp. 44-45), and the early Enlightenment actually witnessed an unprecedented flood of popular hermetic literature in some countries (Kemper, 'Aufgeklärter Hermetismus', esp. 149).

[52] For programmatic statements see e.g. Morris Berman, *Reenchantment of the World* and *Coming to our Senses* (with discussion of Yates and the Hermetic Tradition in ch. 7, "Science and Magic").

[53] See Hanegraaff, 'Defining Religion', esp. 364-368 and 373-375 for a discussion of how the concept of "the sacred" – derived essentially from Eliade—has developed as a popular alternative for "religion" in popular consciousness since the 1960s, and how this reflects a pattern of culture criticism directed against the disenchanted secular world.

of cultural and spiritual renewal, in which man would overcome his alienation from nature and the sacred, and science would no longer be divorced from spirituality. The leading ideas of the *Eranos*-tradition (expressed not only by the founding members, of course, but also by authors in the same tradition such as e.g. Joseph Campbell, James Hillman, Robert Avens[54]) were tailor-made for an approach to hermeticism and western esotericism along these lines. Yates' Hermetic Tradition was already congenial to religionism due to its emphasis on personal religious experience, the power of myths and symbols, and the religious imagination; and from a religionist-countercultural perspective it was natural to add the idea of "the sacred" as basic to a trans-denominational spirituality (easily combined with the esoteric concept of a *philosophia perennis*), and the ideological subtext of a battle against the values of the modern world in the name of spiritual reform.

Countercultural approaches along such lines have mostly presented the Hermetic Tradition within the wider context of a history of *gnosis*. From the suppression of the gnostics in late antiquity and of the Cathars and the Templars in the middle ages, a continuous line could be drawn to the suppression of the Hermetic Tradition in the Renaissance. A history of gnosis understood as the spiritual counterculture of the West became synonymous, therefore, with a history of suppressed alternative traditions[55].

III. *Two Academic Chairs*

Western Esotericism at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, 5e section.

Against the backgrounds sketched above, let us now look at how the study of western esotericism has developed in the academy. It is significant that we owe

[54] Campbell's counterculturalism emerges very clearly in e.g. the fourth volume of his "Masks of God" series, *Creative Mythology*; and his ideas achieved mass popularity due to a series of TV interviews with Bill Moyers (see Campbell & Moyers, *Power of Myth)*. Among Hillman's many and influential books, of particular importance is his *Re-visioning Psychology* (with a long final chapter on the Hermetic Tradition, dependent not just on Yates but on the Warburg school generally). Like Hillman, Avens looks at what he calls "gnosis" from a psychological perspective: 'Gnosis is an ancient name for depth psychology' (*The New Gnosis*, 5).

[55] The countercultural interpretation of gnosis, hermeticism and western esotericism has been expressed in many forms. A characteristic example of a popular TV documentary, which largely relies for its attraction on countercultural sentiments, is Tobias Churton's Channel 4 production *The Gnostics* (also published in book form in 1987). Best-selling "mystery" books such as Baigent & Leigh's *Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* or Picknett & Prince, *Templar Revelation* typically rely on the myth of the suppressed alternative with an emphasis on Christian heresy. More serious examples include American journals such as *Alexandria* and the (recently discontinued) popular periodical *Gnosis*; or publishers such as David Fideler's Phanes press or Hillman's Spring publ. (which also brings out a journal by the same name).

the world's first university chair specifically devoted to the study of this domain to the personal initiative of Henry Corbin—one of the central figures of the *Eranos* approach, and undoubtedly the most explicitly esoteric intellectual of the three scholars analyzed by Wasserstrom. Corbin was *Directeur d'Études* (i.e. professor) at the prestigious French institute for the study of religions, the 5th section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris, at a time when, in 1964, the Chair for "history of scientific ideas in modern europe" hitherto held by Alexandre Koyré became vacant. Since there were no suitable candidates in that field, the Chair had to be taken by someone from another area of specialization. The choice fell on François Secret, a scholar who had already a great reputation as a historian of Christian kabbalah. Secret was appointed in the same year, and the Chair now had to be given a new title. When this subject was discussed during a meeting of the members of the 5th section, Henry Corbin suggested that (given Secret's area of specialization) the Chair might appropriately have the term "esotericism" in its title. The result was a vote for the title "History of Christian Esotericism"[56]. It may be noted here that Secret, unlike Corbin, was not a scholar with religionist leanings but a representative of the strict historical school. Much later—in 1979—he was invited to give a lecture at *Eranos*, but he proved not to be congenial to that milieu and was not invited again[57].

In 1979, a year after Corbin's death, Secret was succeeded by the present chairholder, Antoine Faivre, and the title of the chair was changed to "History of esoteric and mystical currents in modern and contemporary Europe". Like Secret, Faivre is a scholar in the French academic tradition, with its strong emphasis on detailed almost "positivist" historiography[58]. Originally trained as a Germanist, he had written important studies on 18th- and early 19th-century Christian theosophy, illuminism and Romantic *Naturphilosophie*[59]: his research interests were therefore perfectly congenial to those of the *Eranos* milieu, and Faivre became a regular participant of the *Eranos* meetings as well as of Corbin's *Université de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*[60]. Now it is somewhat bizarre that while Steven Wasserstrom recognizes that serious academic scholarship may well coincide with personal "esoteric" commitment in the case of figures such as Corbin or Eliade, he all but ignores Faivre's scholarly oeuvre

[56] Antoine Faivre, personal communication to the author.

[57] Nor was he interested in being invited again: he did not feel comfortable in the *Eranos* milieu (Faivre, personal communication).

[58] On this tradition, see Ivan Strenski, 'Ironies'.

[59] See esp. Faivre, *Eckartshausen*; id., *Kirchberger*.

[60] He gave lectures at Eranos in 1973 and 1974, and contributed to the *Cahiers* of the Université de Saint Jean de Jérusalem in 1975, 1976, 1978, 1984 and 1986.

and simply presents him as 'an esotericist' whose books are written 'from an esoteric perspective, naturally'[61]. This reflects insufficient familiarity with Faivre's academic oeuvre, the bulk of which is in French and has only begun to be translated into other languages during the last decade. Somewhat ironically, while Faivre is undoubtedly a product of the *Eranos* cultic milieu no less than of French Germanistic studies, his approach to research is actually closer to Scholem than to either Corbin or Eliade. While Wasserstrom correctly characterizes Eliade as essentially 'a gifted generalist and popularizer' whose work was 'largely derivative, most accomplished not at original research but rather at a kind of *haute vulgarisation*'[62], Faivre's lasting contributions are the result of detailed research based on original source materials. And while Faivre has never tried to hide his sympathy for Christian theosophy and German *Naturphilosophie*, in his writings one does not find anything like the numerous passionate and virulently polemic defenses of an esoteric worldview typical of Corbin's writings. Of particular importance is the fact that in Faivre's writings, as in those of Scholem, one does not find the sentiments of anti-historicism, which are so conspicuous in Corbin and Eliade. In sum: both Scholem and Faivre have occasionally passed beyond the strict boundaries of empirical historiography if the occasion called for it, and both participated in a cultic milieu that may be qualified as "esoteric" in the precise sense defined above, but it remains true that both remained academic scholars of esotericism rather than esotericists using the study of historical currents as a vehicle for promoting their own particular beliefs.

The Hidden Flowering of the Study of Western Esotericism

Briefly after the first chair for western esotericism was founded in Paris, Frances Yates' book on Bruno was beginning to cause widespread interest in "the Hermetic Tradition", among academics and among the general public. The following years were marked by experimentation and an unprecedented expansion of the universities, and one might have expected the study of hermeticism and western esotericism to have profited from this. Contrary to such expectations, however, the academic institutionalization of western esotericism as a field of research did not take place: the Paris chair would remain an isolated phenomenon for almost three decades and a half. Against the background of the preceding discussions it is now possible to analyze what happened, and why. To that end, I distinguish between five different categories of scholars who have been involved in the study of western esotericism since the

[61] Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 321-322 nt 42.
[62] Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 13.

1960s: (1) historians of science and philosophy, (2) generalists in the humanities, (3) countercultural-religionists, (4) esoteric universalists, and (5) specialists of specific subjects and currents.

Firstly, Yates' work did cause a new academic interest in hermeticism; but as we have seen, the effect remained mostly limited to the disciplines of *history of science and philosophy*. In this context Yates' approach was subjected to critical debate, eventually leading to more nuanced views. The study of hermeticism in relation to the history of science and philosophy has continued to flourish and produce new studies of high quality[63]. However, this happy development has hardly led to the establishment and recognition of hermeticism as a separate domain of research, with its own chairs and departments, journals, publication series and so on[64]. Scholars in this field usually do their work in the context of general departments for history of science, medicine, philosophy, and so on, and publish their research in journals belonging to these disciplines. As a result they are typically working in a situation of intellectual isolation as far as the general field of western esotericism is concerned, and not infrequently their immediate colleagues look at their area of specialization with a mixture of surprise and suspicion.

Secondly, a limited number of scholars since the 1960s have seen hermeticism and western esotericism as their general area of specialization, and have approached this domain from a variety of disciplines in the humanities (such as intellectual history, history of religions, art, literature, music, and so on); hence, I refer to them as *generalists [of western esotericism] in the humanities*[65]. Even more clearly than in the case of my first category, the near-absence of academic structures has typically caused such generalists to remain in a situation of relative isolation. Due to a lack of standard introductory

[63] See e.g. research reflected in the collective volumes by Righini Bonelli & Shea, *Reason, Experiment, and Mysticism* (1975); Heinekamp & Mettler, *Magia Naturalis* (1978); Vickers, *Occult and Scientific Mentalities* (1984); Merkel & Debus, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance* (1988); Debus & Walton, *Reading the Book of Nature* (1988); Osler, *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution* (2000). Some of the better known specialists are Allen G. Debus, Walter Pagel, Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, Cesare Vasoli, Wayne Shumaker, Richard Westfall, Paolo Rossi, A. Rupert Hall, Brian Copenhaver, and William Newman; but any such list risks omitting a number of important names.

[64] Mention should be made, however, of the journal *Ambix*, published by the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry.

[65] Again, any list is bound to be incomplete, but some examples of generalists in the study of western esotericism as intended here are Antoine Faivre, James Webb, Joscelyn Godwin, Arthur Versluis, Gerhard Wehr, Christopher McIntosh, Jean-Pierre Laurant, and the author of this article. Of course not all these authors cover all periods from Renaissance to present in their actual research; but even if they concentrate on a more specific area, nevertheless they clearly perceive their contributions as part of the study of western esotericism in such a general sense.

courses or textbooks (not to mention academic curricula), most of them have developed essentially as autodidacts, forced to make the field their own by a time-consuming process of trial-and-error. As a result their ways of looking at the field and their personal emphases have shown considerable variety, and this makes it risky to generalize about them. Nevertheless, I venture to suggest that – whether or not they were conscious of the fact—generalists have tended to understand western esotericism as a relatively self-contained phenomenon, and have focused on its supposed specificity and "internal history" rather than on its complex interdependence with "mainstream" developments[66]. Psychologically this is understandable, but it has had the unfortunate effect that outsiders, in turn, have tended to perceive the field of western esotericism as a kind of "island": something which might be of concern to those who happened to find its manifestations interesting in and for themselves, but which had no obvious scholarly relevance to others.

Thirdly, many scholars of such a generalist type have additionally understood hermeticism and western esotericism from perspectives congenial to broadly *countercultural-religionist* agendas. They typically saw western esotericism not as just another domain of academic research but felt that it should be a source of inspiration for spiritual reform in the academy and in the general society[67]. Some of these scholars belong partly or even primarily to the previous category, but additionally express themselves in a countercultural-religionist manner from time to time. The influence of Eliade's "Chicago School" on religious studies in the United States has created at least some room for such countercultural-religionist approaches to western esotericism in regular academic settings; but the more outspoken representatives of this approach have tended to be working outside or on the outer margins of the academy—not infrequently, they are associated with "alternative" academic or semi-academic ventures inspired by countercultural ideals. Writings belonging to this third category fill the entire spectrum typical of countercultural religionism, in many gradations from subtle interpretations in the best *Eranos* traditions to typical New Age literature far removed from genuine academic research.

---

[66] This perspective may sometimes be bound up with a realist (or naively realist) approach, which fails to recognize the nature of "western esotericism" as an etic construct (see Hanegraaff, 'On the Construction').

[67] Among the more serious examples, see e.g. the French savant Pierre Riffard (see his *L'ésotérisme*; and cf. my analysis in 'On the Construction', 22-26) and the French-Rumanian author Basarab Nicolescu (*Science, Meaning, and Evolution*). In Germany, a clear example is Ralph Liedtke (*Die Hermetik*). A typical American case is Tuveson, *Avatars of Thrice-Great Hermes* (cf. my analysis in 'Romanticism', 253-256).

Fourthly, there have been those who were interested not so much in hermeticism specifically, as in "esotericism" generally—but who understood this term in a sense different from the one that we have been using here. According to this "traditionalist" understanding (which turns out to be implicitly assumed in many religionist studies of "esotericism" as well), the esoteric means the "inner" dimension or universal essence of religion *per se*[68]. As a result, the actual object of research is not actually esotericism in the sense of a number of specific currents in western culture, but some kind of universal esoter*ism*, understood as equivalent to concepts such as a *sophia perennis*, "Tradition", "spirituality", or "the sacred" generally.

My very description of these first four developments (for the fifth, see below) already suggests why the study of hermeticism and western esotericism failed to gain the academic recognition that might have been expected in the wake of Yates' writings. Since the differences between the four developments – and between the last three in particular – were not evident to most academics, the predictable result was that everything referred to as "esotericism" came to be tarred with the same brush. If countercultural/religionist approaches were accepted in the academy at all (a development which took place mainly in the United States, but has always remained alien to western Europe universities), they tended to understand "esotericism" as more or less synonymous with "spirituality", "the sacred", or even "religion" in general—thus blurring from the outset the specificity of western esotericism as a *separate* domain consisting of a definite number of specific historical currents. On the other hand, to the extent that western esotericism *was* presented as a separate field of study, academics were bound to suspect religionist agendas implying apologies for esotericism rather than an academic study of it; and as a result, they would tend to reject it. In many cases their suspicions were correct, but in other cases they were mistaken: to this day, scholars studying western esotericism from an academic perspective may encounter opposition because they are incorrectly assumed to be apologists. Finally, even if this does not happen, the field still runs the risk of being perceived as some self-enclosed and out-of-the-way pursuit with little or no relevance to problems of general importance to academics.

Essentially my conclusion is a simple one: the only generally-available paradigm for the study of western esotericism – Yates' grand narrative—was simply too vulnerable to countercultural (re)interpretation to be suitable as the

[68] For an excellent example, see many contributions to the French *Dictionnaire critique de l'ésotérisme*, as analyzed by Carole Frosio in the present issue of *Aries*.

basis for mainstream academic institutionalization[69]. As a result, the academic study of western esotericism had no option but to develop "invisibly" and fragmentedly, carried by the cumulative effort of individual scholars working in relative isolation rather than as an internationally organized discipline. This brings me to my fifth and final category of *specialists in specific subjects and currents*. Perhaps the most important fact about the modern study of western esotericism is that it *has* in fact been flourishing for decades, in the sense that a remarkably great (and increasing[70]) numbers of scholars in a wide variety of disciplines have been quietly studying and publishing about currents and phenomena that actually belong to this field but were simply not conceptualized as such. Historians of medicine might study the writings of Paracelsus, historians of chemistry might contribute to our knowledge of alchemy, historians of philosophy might write about philosophers such as Ficino or Pico, historians of art and literature might study the occult in late 19th-century symbolism, and so on and so forth. Many of these scholars have never perceived themselves as "scholars in the field of western esotericism", and some do not wish to be so perceived at all. Their reservations are quite understandable: after all, they have never had much to gain by such associations, but had much to lose by it—to be perceived as a "student of esotericism" might raise eyebrows among their colleagues and could seriously discredit their reputation. The challenge we are now faced with is to develop the study of western esotericism into a generally recognized and professional field of academic research, so that these specialists not only can feel safe to join forces with generalists, but may also expect to reap some real benefits from doing so.

A Second Academic Chair at the University of Amsterdam.

In September 1999, the Paris chair of western esotericism was finally joined by a second one at the University of Amsterdam, connected with the world's

[69] It is only during the 1990s that an alternative paradigm has presented itself, in the form of Antoine Faivre's oft-quoted definition of western esotericism as a "form of thought" characterized by four intrinsic and two non-intrinsic characteristics (see e.g. Faivre, *Access*, 10-15). Of course the discussion remains wide open, and eventually this paradigm might be replaced in turn.

[70] Nobody who attempts to systematically keep track of international published research in western esotericism can fail to be impressed by the sheer amount of current activity in this field, frequently of excellent academic quality. When I speak with scholars from an older generation, they frequently mention the difference in this respect between the period of the 1960s and 1970s —when they were isolated pioneers whose interests ran against the current of the times—and recent years. Personally I believe that the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 symbolically demarcates the emergence of a new post-ideological academic mentality, which is critical of the "grand narratives" and hence instinctively receptive to innovative projects such as a critical and unbiased study of western esoteric currents.

first complete subdepartment, under the title "History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents"[71]. Very significantly, the official documents explicitly stipulate that research and teaching in the context of the new subdepartment will not be based on any religion or worldview, i.e., that it will take place from a metaphysically neutral perspective. This entails a deliberate choice to leave behind the countercultural-religionist heritage of the study of western esotericism, and establish the discipline on strictly academic foundations. In addition, the subdepartment's teaching curriculum and research program ("Western Esotericism and Modernization") explicitly aim to move beyond Yates' grand narrative—not only in its countercultural manifestation but in its original academic-historical guise as well[72]. As we have seen, Yates' guiding idea of a quasi-autonomous "Hermetic Tradition" separate from Christianity, rational philosophy and science has proved impossible to uphold; and likewise, her modernist assumptions about progress are highly problematic. The Amsterdam subdepartment reflects the move towards a new approach to the academic study of western esotericism, which replaces the grand narratives of modernity by a fine-grained discourse emphasizing complexity and historicity, and refuses to draw sharp and impermeable barriers between "esotericism" on the one hand, and mainstream currents of western culture on the other. The great advantage of such an approach is that it takes western esotericism out of the isolation of a "traditional counterculture" and can demonstrate its considerable relevance to research going on in other academic disciplines. This approach reflects a general trend, which may in fact be perceived in an increasing number of recent studies pertinent to the domain of western esotericism. As such, it is a natural development from the first two categories discussed above (and the second one more in particular) while providing a general paradigm capable of encompassing those belonging to the fifth). In the next section I will argue that it represents a fruitful alternative to the countercultural-religionist and universalist perspectives of the past (i.e., my third and fourth categories).

IV. *Two Perspectives*

The Future of the Counterculture.

Students of western esotericism have often complained about the "narrow-minded" hostility of the "academic establishment" against their field of inter-

[71] The subdepartment now consists of one full professor (W.J. Hanegraaff) and two lecturer/researchers (J.-P. Brach and O. Hammer). The existence in the same city of the world-renowned *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica* provides excellent conditions for fruitful collaboration, which will be formalized in the context of an Amsterdam Platform for Hermetic Studies.

[72] See public inauguration speech (18.1.2000): Hanegraaff, *Het einde van de hermetische traditie*.

est; but my discussion implies that actually, with respect to much that has been going on under the umbrella of "the study of esotericism" academics were perfectly justified in being suspicious. Regardless of the intrinsic interest and intellectual quality they may sometimes have, religionist-counterculturalist approaches to the study of western esotericism (as to the study of religion generally) are ultimately based upon spiritual rather than academic agendas. More specifically, their aim is to reform the academy – and ultimately western culture as such – by grounding research in esoteric assumptions instead of studying esotericism from a perspective of critical neutrality. Since this agenda runs counter to the very nature of the academic enterprise, the religionist-countercultural study of western esotericism was rightly rejected by academics.

Since this point is often misunderstood, I would like to emphasize that it does not necessarily imply a negative judgment about religionism as such. Authors such as Jung, Eliade and Corbin have produced a fascinating corpus of writings that may be criticized in various respects but deserve our serious consideration even if we do not agree with them; and even if their followers do not always manage to match the profundity of the founding fathers, their publications may still have much of interest to offer. The point I am making may be best explained by a comparison taken from sports. Religionist scholars who approach the study of western esotericism on the basis of spiritual agendas, but still wish to be accepted in the academy are like badminton players who wish to be accepted on a tennis court, but refuse to accept the rules of tennis. If tennis players tell them that they should follow the rules of the game they are supposed to be playing on this particular court, the badminton players interpret this as a sign of narrow-mindedness and hostility. But of course the tennis players are right. If you want to play tennis you have to accept the rules of the game; if you are not prepared to do that, you should go elsewhere. This does not mean that the tennis player considers his sport to be superior to badminton; all it means is that he is there to play tennis, not badminton. My point is that a religionist study of esotericism may be a legitimate intellectual pursuit in principle, but that the academy is based on the rules of a different game. These rules include a strict separation between faith and scholarly understanding, and a continuing practice of argumentative criticism as basic to the growth of knowledge[73].

In sum: there may well be a sunny future for countercultural-religionist approaches to western esotericism, but I believe that this future lies outside the boundaries of the academy. Obviously this does not mean that academic schol-

[73] See discussion in Hanegraaff, 'Empirical Method'.

ars of western esotericism cannot make use of whatever they happen to find valuable in religionist writings; and we have seen that it is possible for some scholars to have a double career, participating in religionist contexts as well as in academic ones (likewise a scholar of religion may adopt some ideas taken from a confessional theologian; or a historian who also happens to be a Christian or a Muslim may write about his beliefs in a confessional journal). But to the extent that they wish to be accepted in the academy, students of western esotericism will have to accept the rules which are basic to the academic enterprise instead of trying to change them.

Beyond the Yates Paradigm.

The new approach to the study of western esotericism as I see it currently taking shape may best be defined by way of contrast with the Yates paradigm. It does not look at western esotericism as a quasi-autonomous "counter-culture" but as *a neglected dimension of the general culture* of the time; and it looks at the secularization and modernization of esotericism as a continuous process of creative *innovation* (as opposed to the modernist—and unhistorical—notion that secularization/modernization implies a *decline* of religion and magic). This means approximately the following.

- With respect to the period before the Enlightenment, western esotericism can be seen simply as a hitherto neglected dimension of Christian culture. By studying pre-Enlightenment esotericism we are not uncovering a countertradition distinct from Christianity; rather, we are discovering that Christian culture as such is a far more complex phenomenon than one might infer from traditional church histories (based on simple church-sect or orthodoxy-heresy oppositions)[74].
- During the pivotal 18th century, it is likewise simplistic to imagine a movement of "esotericists" pitted against the defenders of "reason"[75]. Again, the key term is historical complexity; and again, the study of western esotericism challenges the simplicity of grand narratives of modernity and secular progress.
- And finally, from the 18th century up to the present, western esotericism develops as a still poorly understood dimension of the emerging secular and pluralistic society of the west; and here as well, serious study of eso-

[74] This approach is equivalent to the way in which the study of Jewish "mysticism" since Gershom Scholem has transformed our understanding of Jewish religion as such (for Jewish "mysticism" as equivalent to Jewish "esotericism" in Scholem's work, see Dan, 'In Quest', 62-63).

[75] See e.g. McIntosh, *Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, and the important recent volume by Neugebauer-Wölk, *Aufklärung und Esoterik*.

teric and occultist currents brings home the lesson that the relations between "religion" and "secularization" are far more complex than one might infer from old-fashioned modernist views.

Academic study of western esotericism along these lines turns out to be anything but an out-of-the-way pursuit relevant merely to some scholars interested in the weird beliefs of outsiders, marginal currents or the "lunatic fringe". On the contrary, by questioning a traditional historiography based on modernist ideologies, the study of western esotericism has the potential of revolutionizing our understanding of western religion and culture in general.

The new perspective outlined here seems to be something that is "hanging in the air". It has been gathering momentum during the 1990s, and is reflected in a rapidly increasing number of publications coming from various disciplines. As just one example, let me quote some pertinent remarks by Moritz Baßler and Hildegard Châtellier, in an interesting French/German volume on esotericism and mysticism in the decades around 1900. They begin by stating that

> Mystical, occultist, esoteric and spiritualistic discourses were an important part of this cultural compost [of the decades around 1900], and they played a crucial role as enzyms, at least, in what came to be the fertile soil of modernity. That the academic historiography of modernity ... still tends to marginalize the influence of these discourses as somehow painful and inappropriate, is a phenomenon that needs to be studied itself. ...

And they continue with admirable precision:

> One can never sufficiently warn against the unclear impression of an unbroken historical continuity of [esoteric] thought into the period of modernity. In contrast, what needs to be emphasized is that we are dealing with *semantic* continuities that merely evoke the illusion of a "grand" continuity, i.e., of a Tradition, whereas actually the functions of these semantics get completely reorganized in the context of a fundamentally changed society. Nobody will therefore ... try to construe a new "grand narrative", suggesting for example that "essentially it has been occultism that has made modernity possible"; rather, we must emphasize the complexity of each historical fact as a point of intersection [*Knotenpunkt*] between endless discourses each with their own specific constellations[76].

In other words: Baßler and Châtellier reject the idea of a more or less autonomous tradition (whether called "hermetic" or "esoteric"), as well as the quasi-Yatesian narrative of esotericism as motor of modernization and progress. Instead, they emphasize the simultaneity and complex interaction of esoteric and non-esoteric discourses, and the discontinuities of history linked to processes of modernization.

[76] Baßler & Châtellier, 'Einleitung', 23, 25.

V. *One Final Comparison*

I began this article by contrasting the sexual taboos demolished in the wake of the counterculture of the 1960s, and the persistence of the academic taboo on studying western esotericism. The comparison provides me with a suitable closing metaphor. Sex may no longer be a taboo in academic discussion, but this does not mean that a professor of gender studies is expected to consider the practice of sex as part of his or her professional duty. Practicing sex is one thing while studying it is another; and neither of the two is expected to take the place of the other. Esotericism has remained a taboo in academic discussion because its countercultural-religionist representatives have too frequently refused to draw such distinctions, and insisted that only practitioners—people personally engaged in an esoteric quest—are able to adequately study esotericism. Accordingly, they held that the very nature of the academy needed to change, in order to make the study of esotericism possible.

The religionist assumption underlying such a viewpoint is that the study of western esotericism should elucidate and explain the "real nature" and essence *sui generis* of esotericism, and that it falls short of its mission if it does not evoke and transmit the very experiential knowledge claimed by esotericists themselves. This is equivalent to saying that an academic study of sexual symbolism should cause the reader to experience sexual bliss. Obviously academic research has another mission. Whether we are speaking of sex or of esotericism: those who wish to experience "the real thing" are well advised not to turn to academics but to practitioners. But those who want to understand how and why these important domains of human experience and expression have played – and are still playing – a significant role in western culture are well advised not to ask the practitioners but turn to academics.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1961) is professor of History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities.

Bibliography

Allen, Charlotte, 'Is Nothing Sacred? Casting out the Gods from Religious Studies', *Lingua Franca*, November 1996, 30-40.

Allyn, David, *Make Love, not War: The Sexual Revolution, an Unfettered History*, Boston—New York—London: Little, Brown & Co. 2000.

Assmann, Jan, '"Hen kai pan": Ralph Cudworth und die Rehabilitierung der hermetischen Tradition', in: Neugebauer-Wölk, *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, 38-52.

Avens, Robert, *The New Gnosis: Heidegger, Hillman, and Angels*, Dallas: Spring 1984.

Baigent, Michael, Richard Leigh & Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, London: Jonathan Cape 1982 (rev.ed. London: Arrow 1996).

Baßler, Moritz & Hildegard Châtellier (eds.), *Mystique, mysticisme et modernité en Allemagne autour de 1900/Mystik, Mystizismus und Moderne in Deutschland um 1900*, Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg 1998.

Baßler, Moritz & Hildegard Châtellier, 'Einleitung', in: Baßler & Châtellier, *Mystique*, 23-26.

Benz, Ernst, 'Le thème de la Jérusalem céleste chez les Kabbalistes chrétiens: F.-C. Oetinger fondateur de la théosophie chrétienne allemande', *Cahiers de l'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem* 2 (1976), 51-76.

Berman, Morris, *The Reenchantment of the World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1981.

—, *Coming to our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West*, New York etc.: Simon and Schuster 1989.

Broek, Roelof van den & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1998.

—, 'Introduction', in: Van den Broek & Hanegraaff, *Gnosis and Hermeticism*, vii-x.

Campbell, Colin, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5 (1972), 119-136.

Campbell, Joseph, *Creative Mythology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976.

Campbell, Joseph & Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, New York: Doubleday 1988.

Chambers, Paul, *Sex and the Paranormal*, London: Blandford 1999.

Churton, Tobias, *The Gnostics*, London: George Weidenfels & Nicholson Ltd 1987.

Clulee, Nicholas H., *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion*, London & New York: Routledge 1988.

Cohen, H. Floris, *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 1994.

Copenhaver, Brian P., Review of Westman and McGuire, *Annals of Science* 35 (1978), 527-531.

—, 'Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in *De Vita* of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly* 37:4 (1984), 523-554.

—, 'Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: *Ennead* 4.3-5 in Ficino's *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*', in: Giancarlo Garfagnini (ed.), *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone* II, Florence: Leo S. Olschki 1986, 351-369.

—, 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the *Chaldaean Oracles* in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?', in: James Hankins, John Monfasani & Frederick Purnell (eds.), *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, Binghamton 1987, 441-455.

—, 'Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance', in: Merkel & Debus, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, 79-110.

—, 'Natural Magic, Hermeticism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science', in: David C. Lindberg & Robert S. Westman (eds.), *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge 1990.

Coudert, Allison P., *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698)*, Leiden – Boston –Köln: E.J. Brill 1999.

Dan, Joseph, 'In Quest of a Historical Definition of Mysticism: The Contingental Approach', *Studies in Spirituality* 3 (1993), 58-90.

Debus, Allen G., Review of Yates, *Isis* 55 no. 180 (1964), 389-391.

Debus, Allen G & Michael T. Walton (eds.), *Reading the Book of Nature: The Other Side of the Scientific Revolution*, Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers 1998.

Dobbs, Betty Jo Teeter, *The Janus Face of Genius: The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991.

Eliade, Mircea, 'Some Notes on *Theosophia Perennis*: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Henry Corbin', *History of Religions* 19 (1979), 167-176.

Evola, Julius, *La tradizione ermetica: Nei suoi simboli, nella sua dottrina e nella sua "Art Regia"*, Bari 1931.

Faivre, Antoine, *Kirchberger et l'Illuminisme du dix-huitième siècle*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1966.
—, *Eckartshausen et la théosophie chrétienne*, Paris: Klincksieck 1969.
—, *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* II, Paris: Gallimard 1996.
—, 'Avant-Propos: L'ésotérisme et la recherche universitaire', in: Faivre, *Accès* II , 11-42.
—, 'Questions of Terminology proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe', in: Faivre & Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 1-10.
—, 'La question d'un ésotérisme comparé des religions du livre', in: *Henry Corbin et le comparatisme spirituel* (Cahiers du Groupe d'Études Spirituelles Comparées 8), Paris: Archè-Edidit 2000, 89-120.
Faivre, Antoine & Karen-Claire Voss, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions', *Numen* 42 (1995), 48-77.
Faivre, Antoine & Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds.), *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, Peeters: Louvain 1998.
Ferguson, Marilyn, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*, London etc.: Paladin Grafton books 1982.
French, Peter, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus*, London & New York: Ark 1987.
Garin, Eugenio, 'Divagazioni ermetiche', *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 31 (1976), 462-466.
Garin, E., E. Brini, C. Vasoli & C. Zambelli (eds.), *Testi Umanistici su l'Ermetismo: Testi di Ludovico Lazzarelli, F. Giorgio Veneto, Cornelio Agrippa di Nettesheim*, Roma: Fratelli Bocca 1955.
Gatti, Hilary, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press 1999.
Glock, Charles Y. & Robert N. Bellah (eds.), *The New Religious Consciousness*, University of California Press: Berkeley—Los Angeles—London 1976.
Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1994.
Green, Martin, *Mountain of Truth: The Counterculture begins in Ascona, 1900-1920*, Hanover N.H.: Univ. Press of New England 1986.
Hanegraaff, Wouter J., 'Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7:2 (1995), 99-129.
—, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden – New York – Köln: E.J. Brill 1996 [US paperback Albany: State University of New York Press 1998].
—, 'Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection', in: Van den Broek & Hanegraaff, *Gnosis and Hermeticism*, 237-268.
—, 'Introduction: The Birth of a Discipline', in: Faivre & Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, vii-xvii.
—, 'On the Construction of "Esoteric Traditions"', in: Faivre & Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 11-61.
—, 'Defining Religion in Spite of History', in: Jan G. Platvoet & Arie L. Molendijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests*, Leiden – Boston—Köln: E.J. Brill 1999, 337-378.
—, 'Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism', *Theosophical History 7:6 (1999), 223-232 [also:* Esoterica *I:1 www.esoteric.msu.edu]*
—, 'Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols', *Esoterica* I:*2 (1999), www.esoteric.msu.edu*
—, Review of Kilcher, *ARIES* 22 (1999), 113-117.
—, Review of Tomlinson, *ARIES* 22 (1999), 118-129.
—, *Het einde van de hermetische traditie*, Amsterdam: Vossiuspers AUP 1999.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. & Ruud M. Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli: The Hermetic Writings and related documents*, Louvain: Peeters 2001 (forthcoming).

Heinekamp, Albert & Dieter Mettler, *Magia Naturalis und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaften* (Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft 7), Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag 1978.

Hesse, Mary, 'Hermeticism and Historiography: An Apology for the Internal History of Science', in: Roger H. Stuewer (ed.), *Historical and Philosophical Perspectives of Science*, Minneapolis 1970.

Hillman, James, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, New York etc.: Harper Colophon 1975.

Holz, Hans Heinz, 'ERANOS: Eine moderne Pseudo-Gnosis', in: Jacob Taubes (ed.), *Religionstheorie und politische Theologie II: Gnosis und Politik*, Wilhelm Fink/Ferdinand Schöning 1994, 249-263.

Idinopulos, Thomas A. & Edward A. Yonan (eds.), *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*, Leiden – New York – Köln: E.J. Brill 1994.

Kemper, Hans-Georg, 'Aufgeklärter Hermetismus: Brockes' *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* im Spiegel seiner Bibliothek', in: Neugebauer-Wölk, *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, 140-169.

Keyserling, Hermann, *Das Reisetagebuch eines Philosophen*, Darmstadt – Baden-Baden: Holle Verlag 1956.

Kilcher, Andreas, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma: Die Konstruktion einer ästhetischen Kabbala seit der frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart – Weimar: J.B. Metzler 1998.

Kristeller, Paul Oskar, *Supplementum Ficinianum* II, Florence 1937.

—, 'Marsilio Ficino e Lodovico Lazzarelli: Contributo alla diffusione delle idee ermetiche nel rinascimento', *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiori di Pisa, Lettere Storia e Filosofia* 2:7 (1938), 237-262.

Lehigh, Scot, 'What you didn't know about the Sexual Revolution', *The Boston Globe*, 10-17.8.2000.

Liedtke, Ralf, *Die Hermetik: Traditionelle Philosophie der Differenz*, Paderborn etc.: Ferdinand Schöningh 1996.

McGuire, J.E. & P.M. Rattansi, 'Newton and the Pipes of Pan', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* 21 (1966), 108-143.

McIntosh, Christopher, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment*, Leiden – New York – Köln: E.J. Brill 1992.

Merkel, Ingrid & Allen G. Debus (eds.), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, Washington – London – Toronto: Folger & Associated University Presses 1988.

Neugebauer-Wölk, Monika (ed.), *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1999.

—, 'Esoterik im 18. Jahrhundert – Aufklärung und Esoterik: Eine Einleitung', in: Neugebauer-Wölk, *Aufklärung und Esoterik*, 1-37.

—, 'Esoterik in der frühen Neuzeit: Zum Paradigma der Religionsgeschichte zwischen Mittelalter und Moderne', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 27:3 (2000), 321-364.

Nicolescu, Basarab, *Science, Meaning, & Evolution: The Cosmology of Jacob Boehme*, New York: Parabola Books 1991. Noll, Richard, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994.

—, 'The Rose, the Cross and the Analyst', *New York Times* 15.10.1994.

Osler, Margaret J. (ed.), *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

Peat, F. David, *Synchronicity: The Bridge between Matter and Mind*, Toronto etc.: Bantam Books 1987.

Picknett, Lynn & Clive Prince, *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ*, London: Corgi Books 1998.

Platvoet, J.G., 'Het religionisme beleden en bestreden: Recente ontwikkelingen in de Angelsaksische godsdienstwetenschap', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 48:1 (1994), 22-38.

Poel, Marc van der, *Cornelius Agrippa: The Humanist Theologian and his Declamations*, Leiden – New York – Köln: E.J. Brill 1997.

Principe, Lawrence M., *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and his Alchemical Quest*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998.

Quinn, William W., 'Mircea Eliade and the Sacred Tradition (A Personal Account)', *Nova Religio* 3:1 (1999), 147-153.

Quispel, Gilles, 'Gnosis and Psychology', in: Robert A. Segal (ed.), *The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Psychology and Contemporary Culture*, Chicago & LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court 1995, 10-25.

Riffard, Pierre, *L'ésotérisme*, Paris: Robert Laffont 1990.

Righini Bonelli, M.L. & William R. Shea (eds.), *Reason, Experiment, and Mysticism in the Scientific Revolution*, New York: Science History Publications 1975.

Roszak, Theodore, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, New York: Doubleday & Co 1968.

Sarton, George, *Introduction to the History of Science* I, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege 1953.

Schmitt, Charles B., 'Reappraisals in Renaissance Science', *History of Science* 16 (1978), 200-214.

Servier, Jean (ed.), *Dictionnaire critique de l'ésotérisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1998.

Shumaker, Wayne, *Natural Magic and Modern Science: Four Treatises 1590-1657*, Binghamton 1989.

Simon, Gérard, *Sciences et savoirs aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion 1996.

Strenski, Ivan, 'The Ironies of *Fin-de-Siècle* Rebellions against Historicism and Empiricism in the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, Fifth Section', in: Arie L. Molendijk & Peter Pels (eds.), *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion*, E.J. Brill: Leiden/Boston/Köln 1998, 159-179.

Tomlinson, Gary, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 1993.

Tuveson, Ernest Lee, *The Avatars of Thrice Great Hermes: An Approach to Romanticism*, Lewisburg – London – Toronto: Bucknell University Press/Associated University Presses 1982.

Vickers, Brian (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1984.

Vickers, Brian, 'On the Function of Analogy in the Occult', in: Merkel & Debus, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, 265-292.

Voss, Karen-Claire, 'The University as a Space of Possibility', *Rencontres Transdisciplinaires* 12 (1998).

Wasserstrom, Steven M., *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*, Princeton University Press: Princeton 1999.

Westman, Robert S., 'Magical Reform and Astronomical Reform: The Yates Thesis Reconsidered', in: Robert S. Westman & J.E. McGuire, *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution*, Los Angeles: Williams Andrews Clark Memorial Library 1977, 1-91.

—, 'Nature, Art, and Psyche: Jung, Pauli, and the Kepler-Fludd Polemic', in: Brian Vickers (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press 1984, 177-229.

Yates, Frances A., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London & Chicago: Routledge and Kegan Paul/University of Chicago Press 1964.

—, 'The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science', in: Charles S. Singleton (ed.), *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance*, Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins Press 1967, 255-274.

Au-delà du "paradigme Yates":
l'étude de l'ésotérisme occidental entre contre-culture et nouvelle complexité

L'auteur cherche ici à s'expliquer pourquoi, depuis les années soixante et jusqu'à une date récente, l'étude de l'ésotérisme occidental n'est pas devenue une spécialité académique reconnue et à part entière, en dépit de l'intérêt pour l'hermétisme suscité dans le monde savant par le succès de l'ouvrage de F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno et la tradition hermétique* (1964). Son argumentation prend en compte trois facteurs, à la fois parallèles et interactifs : l'approche "religioniste" et contre-culturelle du phénomène religieux associée au Cercle Eranos, l'étude académique proprement dite de "la tradition hermétique" à la suite de Yates, enfin leurs différentes combinaisons au sein des interprétations de l'hermétisme et de l'ésotérisme occidental qui ont eu cours dans le public depuis les années soixante. En ce qui concerne le premier facteur, l'auteur estime que la récente interprétation d'Eranos comme reflétant "une forme originale d'ésotérisme", due à Steven Wasserstrom, peut se révéler acceptable dans la mesure où on l'exploite à la lumière du concept séminal de *cultic milieu*, introduit par Colin Campbell; en ce sens, les approches "religionistes" de l'ésotérisme occidental propres au milieu Eranos sont effectivement susceptibles de relever davantage de l'ésotérisme lui-même que de considérations d'ordre strictement académique. Quant au second aspect, il apparaît que le traitement réservé par Yates à "la tradition hermétique" s'est érigé jusque très récemment en paradigme dominant de l'étude de l'ésotérisme occidental; ce "paradigme Yates" se révèle déficient en ce qu'il présente l'hermétisme (ainsi, conséquemment, que l'ensemble de l'ésotérisme occidental) comme un contre-courant relativement autonome et auto-référent, présentation fondée de surcroît sur des présupposés "modernistes" très discutables. Le troisième point consiste à montrer que l'origine du rejet, par le monde savant, de l'étude de l'ésotérisme occidental réside pour l'essentiel dans l'incapacité du "paradigme Yates" à résister à certaines réinterprétations contre-culturelles vulgarisées, dont l'esprit se trouve entièrement opposé à celui de la démarche universitaire. En conclusion, l'auteur affirme la nécessité, dans la perspective de l'étude académique de l'ésotérisme occidental, de surmonter les racines "religionistes" et contre-culturelles de celle-ci, aussi bien que l'influence perdurante du "paradigme Yates". Il défend l'idée selon laquelle une telle ligne de recherche se manifeste en fait déjà depuis la dernière décennie, et il termine en recensant les caractéristiques de cette nouvelle approche. Ce faisant, il insiste sur le fait que l'ésotérisme occidental n'a jamais constitué un contre-courant presque autonome, plus ou moins à l'écart des développements propres à la culture officielle, mais qu'il doit au contraire être considéré comme une dimension jusqu'ici négligée de la société chrétienne, comme d'ailleurs de la société sécularisée elle-même. Sous ce rapport, nous dit-il, l'étude du domaine en question est susceptible de venir révolutionner notre compréhension de la culture occidentale dans son ensemble.