

# POPULAR OCCULTISM

## alexis dolgorukii © 1998

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In all probability, the title of this essay could just as easily be:

"MAGIC???...WHITE???...BLACK???.....NOT!!!!

Now, I am aware that the above sub-title is going to really irritate a lot of people, but I ask that you first read my presentation on this subject before closing your minds to what I have to say.

Let's start with history, which is something which we all know, and upon which we can all at least partially agree. During the 1960's, thanks to the works of J.R.R.TOLKIEN, and to some degree the one major work of E.R. EDDISON (which though it was written very much earlier, only obtained any kind of wide audience during the 60's thanks largely to Tolkien's Immense popularity), there began a tremendous public fascination with what is called "Swords and Sorcery Fantasy" and that fascination has continued and intensified to this day as a visit to any book store will prove. A vast number of films and computer games and arcade games echo this same preoccupation. But this is something almost everyone clearly knows.

Now, going back somewhat further in time, we find that there was a very great impetus given to what I call "Popular Occultism" in the period I define as the last 25 years of the 19th Century and the first 25 years of the 20th century. The primary "movers and shakers" in this impetus were people like Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Eliphas Levi (Alphonse Louis Constant), Theodore Reuss, Franz Hartmann, Rudolph Steiner, Aleister Crowley, A.E. Waite, Gottfried de Peruker, Alice Bailey, Annie Besant, and Charles Webster Leadbeater and far too many others of much less significance to name. Most of the popular novelists mentioned (by implication) in connection with the first paragraph of this essay, must have gotten their primary inspiration from these people.

Because of the very strong impetus provided by these two phenomena, there was a corresponding enormous expansion of public interest in the occult. This has produced both positive and negative results. The positive results are not as obvious as the negative ones. What these results are, and they are not necessarily the conscious intention of most of the participants in the phenomenon, are as follows: The Positive Results are that the power of the "mainstream religions" especially those of the Judeo-Christian complex, has been insensibly weakened and the number of "true believers" in these religions have lessened as many people have moved away from them and into alternative religious movements that, alas, have been primarily influenced not by metaphysical philosophy, but by a simulacrum of metaphysical philosophy as represented in Swords and Sorcery Fiction. That fact, of course, is the negative result. The withering away of mainstream religion is a very positive result as the

mainstream religions have been nothing but the source of oppression and sorrow. But replacing them with a totally imaginary costume drama is distinctly negative.

There is one other negative aspect of "Popular Occultism" that I would like to mention here. That aspect is that unfortunately "Popular Occultism" has been inextricably and undeniably linked to totalitarianism, especially during the Nazi Era. I am currently writing a book called "Hung by the Crooked Cross" which will fully detail these connections. But they exist, they are strong, and they are totally negative. They are utterly contradictory to the knowledge contained in metaphysical philosophy, knowledge that is intrinsic to the Mystery Tradition.

Metaphysics has, as both its primary purpose, and its only legitimate reason for existence, the answering of humanity's existential questions. Religion has never really done this, even though it vociferously claims to do so, and the new alternatives don't do it either. How can they? They are, for the most part, simply the result of some human being's fertile imagination.

"Popular Occultism" and "Swords and Sorcery Fantasies" are really simply identical phenomena. They are entirely creatures of the imagination. They're fun, but they do no one any good. The only thing they accomplish is to distract people from the search for reality and deny them real answers to their basic existential questions.

Now, this does not mean to imply in any way that there was no interest in "the Occult" prior to this time. It is a motif that has always moved beneath the surface layer of human consciousness. But, it was not public and wide-spread until the late 19th century. Of course neither was literacy. Prior to the 19th century only the leisure classes had the time, the education, and the inclination to indulge in hypothetical supposition. Prior to the 18th century the only people who fit that description were Monks and here we find one of the primary sources of "Popular Occultism".

The premise I am about to present to you is that whether we speak of "Theosophy", or The Golden Dawn, or The Orderae Templi Orientalis (O.T.O.), or The Thule Group, or the School for Esoteric Studies, or any other of the truly enormous number of tiny groups all enraptured by the same glamour, what it is with which we are truly dealing is "Popular Occultism"; and it is just as much "Swords and Sorcery Fantasy" as the works of Tolkien or Andre Norton.

"Magic", both "White" and "Black", as we view it today, is while not entirely so, nonetheless largely an invention of Medieval Monks who, in order to combat the challenge to Christianity which was represented by the Ancient and valid "Mystery Tradition" (both the Druidic version and the Greco-Roman version), linked it to Satan and called it Magic.

There is no such thing as "magic".

From that day to this there has not been a word of truth in the whole business of "Popular Occultism". What was truly "Occult" or "hidden" was any kind of thinking that would call down on you the rage of the church. Most valid "occult" writings are terribly disguised discussions of metaphysical hypotheses that differ with Christianity. Those few who dared to speculate on metaphysical philosophy publicly, ended up like Giordano Bruno, murdered by the Church!

That is not meant to imply or infer that the concept of "magic" didn't exist prior to the advent of Christianity, but everyone of any education knew that it was largely the province of ignorance, charlatanry, and superstition; and it's only followers the gullible and ignorant.

Today "Magic" in the form of "Popular Occultism" is still the province of charlatanry and superstition and it still preys on the gullible and ignorant. Though, sad to say, some of the most gullible and ignorant are the practitioners of "Occultism" themselves.

How does it do this? Well, let's review just what it is that "Popular Occultism" has to say about itself. The word "occult" as most people know means to say "obscured" or "hidden". The word is used in astronomy for when one heavenly body gets in front of another the other body is said to be "occulted". In an eclipse, the Moon occults the Sun. But what does "Popular Occultism" do with this? Well it claims that there is a certain body of facts and techniques which are "secret" or "hidden" and that this knowledge, when discovered, confers certain "powers" on the discoverer thereof. "Magic" is the use of these "powers" to do all sorts of things to the benefit of the "Magician."

Is there a word of truth in any of it? Not at all. All knowledge confers a kind of power, but there is nothing under the sun (or moon) which confers the kind of power the "Occultist" fantasizes about.

It should be pretty clear to everyone by now that I have little or no regard or respect for either "Popular Occultism" or its illegitimate off-spring "magic". As that is the case, I think that you all have the right to know why I've spent nearly 40 years studying and researching metaphysical philosophy and The Mystery Traditions which most people seem to think are the same thing as "Occultism". Certainly the Theosophists do, and most certainly do the people who adhere to the many groups and schools that grew out of the Theosophical Movement such as Alice Bailey's "School of Esoteric Studies". But what those 40 years has taught me is that the two things are anything but the same.

Nor are Metaphysical Philosophy and The Mystery Tradition the same thing. Though without The Mystery Tradition we would have no Metaphysical Philosophy.

Now it's obviously time for a definition on my part. What do I mean by "The Mystery Tradition"? It's an important definition too, as what "Popular Occultism" really is, is a total "occultation" of the reality of The Mystery Tradition. Perhaps it

would be a good idea to give a historical picture of how this occultation happened before describing the traditions themselves.

Prior to the conquest by Christianity of the Western World, one has to divide the existential questing of the Humanity of the West in three distinct parts. There was Northern Europe and the Europe of the extreme West in which the spiritual expression of the people was Druidism which was at once a combination of The Mystery Tradition and exoteric or popular religion. In the "Classical World" which is the world which was made up of the Greco-Roman culture, the Egyptian Culture, and the Persian Culture, things were different. In that area, the division between Religion and "The Mystery Traditions" on the subjects of existential questioning and worship were more clearly defined than among the Druidic peoples.

In the Classical world we find there were distinct Mystery Temples served by an extremely special and very specialized Priesthood. This was paralleled by the Temple Cultus which were the Temples and Priesthoods of the various Gods and Goddesses. Service in the Cult Temples and contributions to them were among the most important services of a citizen of these cultures. These Cult Temples were also the PRIMARY SOURCE of charitable work in that period and place. The "Temple Cultus" was exoteric religion and was the belief structure of the common people. It is important to remember that there were only a very few Mystery Temples with their Priesthoods and Mystae. Most of the Cult Temples of the pre-Christian period had absolutely nothing to do with the mysteries.

The best thing I can say about the Cult Temples were that they served the same purpose that Churches do today. They provided a place for devotion and prayer, and they presided over various festivals and "Holy Days". The Mysteries were something else again.

So then what were the "Mystery Temples", and where were they?

Well, The Druids had centers for the study of the "mysteries" at Glaeston (Glastonbury) and Karnac in Brittany. These two are known to all. There were other centers in Ireland, Northern Spain (Galicia), Wales, Scotland, Germany, Scandinavia, and at a few centers in the Slavic Lands. Where ever the Celtic peoples were found, so too were the Druids and the Druidic "Mysteries". In the Classical milieu (i.e. The Mediterranean Basin) the Mystery Centers were: Eleusis, in Greece, Delphi in Greece, Samothrace, in Greece, Dordona in Ionia, Sais and Heliopolis in Egypt, and prior to the advent of Zoroastrianism, the Mazdazdians had a center in Babylon. After the advent of Zoroastrianism that school was moved to Shiraz, in Persia, where it eventually became associated with the Sufi order.

How did these Mystery Schools differ from the Cult Temples?

Well, primarily it was a matter of direction, purpose served, and orientation. The Cult Temples were places of worship, the Mystery Temples were the providers

of various degrees of knowledge. What kind of knowledge? This is important to our discussion because it is from the public perception of the nature of the knowledge so carefully dispensed by the mystery Priesthoods, and the almost total lack of either knowledge of, or comprehension of, HOW they dispensed that knowledge and to whom, that the myth of "occultism" arises. What happened is that the Mysteries became "magical" which is exactly what they weren't.

I think it should be pretty clear that what were called "Cult Temples" were the ancient equivalent of our modern Churches. They served the cults or myths of the Gods and Goddesses, they were centers of worship and veneration of those "Divinities", and they were the only providers of social services in that period. They were the Religious Institutions or Churches of their time and place.

So then, what were the "Mysteries" if they were other than "occultism" has made them seem?

The Priests and Priestesses who served in the Mystery Temples were selected through a process that was elitist and exclusionary in the extreme. The candidates were chosen from among those who presented themselves at the Temples with the desire to become "Mystae" or "initiates" in the wisdom of those temples. Some of the wisest and greatest of the Human Race served in these temples, and some like Plato and his Grandfather Solon were initiates into most of the "mysteries". These Priests were not "magicians", they were scholars, they were the anthropologists, and the scientific cosmologists and particle physicists of their times, they were also the only historians of their times! The "mysteries" they guarded and dispensed so carefully were simply the comprehension of the nature of the human condition, the nature of the greater reality outside of the human condition, and the nature of the inter-relationships between the two.

It was their methodology which led to the problems that exist today regarding "occultism".

The knowledge and understanding they possessed were not then, and are not now, attainable by the ordinary person. In reaction to that fact, the "Mystery Temples" dispensed their knowledge in carefully "graded" doses, and the entire content of their data-base was kept rigidly secret from all but the highest level of their Priest-Initiates. Why? Well because knowledge of things one is incapable of comprehending is dangerous and more so to the person who gains that which is utterly beyond them than to anyone else. "A Little knowledge is a dangerous thing". And so the content of their instructions was held rigidly secret by those who received it. That is the only reason why they were called the "Mysteries", because they were hidden or secret.

Their teachings were, in fact, available on a very low level to all who applied in the form of dramatic presentations which demonstrated symbolically certain truths or facts about the human condition. By people's reactions to those demonstrations, the Priests knew who might be appropriate for further instruction. The Mystae were first and foremost scholars. Their knowledge and

wisdom were the only source of "power" they possessed and that is equally true of their successors to this day. They are not magicians, they are not alchemists, they are simply knowledgeable!